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- Identification Of Cosmic Dust Particles

and more Important Topics...

India-EU

Free Trade Agreement



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Message



An officer with a right mindset is an officer that a nation aspires for. A right mindset doesn't necessarily comprise unlimited jargon of knowledge rather a right amount of knowledge and its appropriate execution. Especially, when it comes to UPSC and State PSCs preparation, the crux is not to accumulate the knowledge but its effective implementation and utilization in tackling any situation. The situation here can be anything from UPSC CSE Prelims to the major issues that need to be addressed. The journey is hard but it is worth.

Perfect 7 has been part of many UPSC and State PSCs aspirants in their journey of becoming well reputed officers serving nationally and internationally. The magazine itself had gone through constant ebb and flows of change and improvements. Now, that the magazine is in its monthly era, I hope it becomes your perfect preparation partner and guides you through this ever learning endeavor of Civil Services Preparation.

With Best wishes.

Vinay Singh
Founder
Dhyeya IAS

Team Perfect 7

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PERFECT



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Indian Society & Art and Culture

1

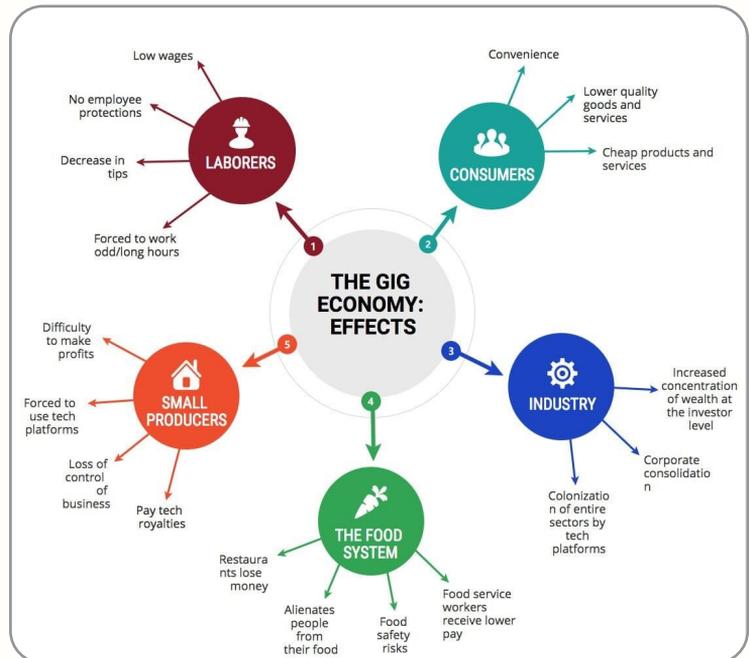
India's Gig and Platform Economy: From Vulnerability to Legal Recognition

Context:

India's rapidly growing gig and platform workforce has emerged as a crucial driver of the country's digital and urban economic system. Fueled by a young population, widespread digital adoption, and rapid urbanization, gig work, encompassing delivery, ride-hailing, and other app-based services, has provided easy employment opportunities for millions. However, despite contributing significantly to the growth of the digital economy, these workers have long been subject to precarious working conditions, low wages, and minimal social security. Following recent strikes by delivery workers on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve 2025–26, demanding a ban on the unsafe 10-minute delivery model, fair wages, and legal recognition, and subsequent intervention by the Union Labour Minister, quick-commerce and food delivery platform companies decided to discontinue the 10-minute delivery model. Nevertheless, these protests underscore the urgent need to strike a balance between the interests of platform companies and the rights and welfare of their workforce.

Prior to this decision, in a letter to Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT) had raised several demands,

including a ban on the unsafe 10-minute delivery model, fair and transparent wages, regulation of companies under the recently notified labour codes, and recognition of their right to organize and collectively bargain.



The Rise of the Gig Economy and Emerging Challenges:

- India's gig economy, consisting of platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, Zepto, Ola, and Uber, has grown exponentially in recent years. These platforms offer flexible work options, contributing to economic inclusion

and providing livelihood opportunities, particularly for the youth. The workforce, predominantly urban and digitally connected, has enabled these platforms to cater to the rising demand for convenience services in the country's fast-paced cities.

- However, alongside this growth, a set of structural challenges has emerged. Workers face uncertain incomes, often relying on variable incentives, with a low base pay insufficient to cover rising living costs. The work is largely controlled by opaque algorithms, which dictate assignments, delivery timings, and incentives. This results in workers covering hundreds of kilometres daily with minimal remuneration. The 10-minute delivery model, implemented by platforms such as Blinkit, Swiggy, and Zepto, intensifies the pressure, pushing workers to complete deliveries within extremely short timeframes, often compromising their health and safety.
- Moreover, these workers are typically excluded from statutory labour protections. They lack access to health insurance, accident cover, pension schemes, or maternity benefits, reflecting their position in the informal or unorganised sector. Strikes on high-demand dates such as December 25 and December 31 amplify the visibility of these challenges. On Christmas Day 2025, around 40,000 delivery workers participated in the strike, delaying or disputing 50–60% of orders in major cities like Delhi, Karnataka, Hyderabad, and Mumbai. Companies attempted to maintain operations by deploying third-party services, offering additional incentives, and reactivating inactive IDs. These events underscore the growing tensions between platform companies and workers, highlighting the limits of a gig economy built on precarious employment.

Legal Recognition through the Code on Social Security, 2020:

- Recognising the critical role of gig and platform workers, the Code on Social

Security (SS), 2020, one of four major labour codes implemented in India's recent labour reforms, formally brings these workers under the ambit of legal protection and social security for the first time.

- Prior to this reform, gig workers were considered part of the informal or unorganised sector, falling outside the scope of traditional labour laws such as the Payment of Wages Act (1936), Minimum Wages Act (1948), Employees' Provident Fund Act, and Employees' State Insurance Act. The SS Code provides formal legal recognition, defining key terms:
 - **Aggregator:** A digital intermediary connecting buyers and service providers.
 - **Gig worker:** A person engaged in work outside a traditional employer-employee relationship for remuneration.
 - **Platform worker:** Someone undertaking work through online platforms under a non-traditional employment arrangement.
 - **Platform work:** A work arrangement facilitated through an online platform to solve specific problems or provide services in exchange for payment.
- This recognition addresses a long-standing gap, allowing gig workers to claim statutory rights and entitlements while institutionalising protections that were previously absent. Legal recognition also ensures that these workers are acknowledged in national labour statistics, facilitating better policy formulation and welfare delivery.

Social Security, Welfare, and Portability of Benefits:

- The Code institutionalises social security benefits for gig and platform workers through multiple mechanisms. A dedicated Social Security Fund has been established, requiring aggregators such as Amazon, Flipkart, Swiggy, and Zomato to contribute 1–2% of their annual turnover, capped at 5% of payments due to workers. This fund finances welfare schemes covering health,

accident, maternity benefits, and pensions, shifting the responsibility from individual workers to a structured, statutory framework.

- One of the most significant reforms is the portability of benefits. Workers registered on the e-Shram portal receive a unique Aadhaar-linked ID, allowing them to maintain continuity of benefits while moving across platforms or jobs. Previously, workers lost their entitlements when switching jobs, leading to a lack of security and continuity. Now, whether a worker juggles multiple platforms or changes employment, their benefits remain intact, fostering stability in an otherwise precarious employment sector.
- The national database created through e-Shram enables targeted welfare delivery, supports skill development, and aids in policy-making. Additionally, the SS Code provides for grievance redressal mechanisms, such as toll-free helplines or facilitation centres, addressing complaints of wage exploitation, unsafe working conditions, or denial of benefits. These measures mark a shift from an unregulated gig economy to one that is increasingly structured and worker-centric.

Transforming the Gig Economy: From Informal to Protected:

- The reformative measures under the SS Code signify a paradigm shift in India's gig economy. Gig and platform workers, once largely invisible and vulnerable, now have access to legal recognition, social security benefits, and welfare schemes, marking a critical step towards formalisation. By providing portable benefits, a dedicated welfare fund, and a national registration framework, the Code ensures that these workers are no longer left at the mercy of platform algorithms or corporate discretion.
- However, legal recognition alone is insufficient. The strikes on New Year's Eve 2025–26 illustrate the urgent need for enforcement of labour provisions, regulation of unsafe delivery models, and

oversight of algorithmic management. Platform companies must engage in fair and transparent wage-setting, respect workers' rights to organise, and internalise safety and welfare considerations into operational frameworks. Simultaneously, policymakers must ensure effective implementation of social security measures, monitor aggregator compliance, and expand coverage to include new forms of platform work.

- The gig economy represents the future of work in India's urbanised and digitalised landscape. Ensuring that this sector grows in a fair, safe, and inclusive manner is critical not only for worker welfare but also for sustaining economic growth, urban services, and consumer trust. The Code on Social Security, 2020, provides the legal scaffolding; now, effective enforcement, corporate responsibility, and worker empowerment will determine the extent to which India can achieve a resilient, formalised, and equitable gig ecosystem.

Conclusion:

India's gig and platform workforce is an integral component of the country's digital economy, providing flexible employment and driving economic activity. Yet, long-standing vulnerabilities—low pay, unsafe working conditions, and absence of social security—have left millions exposed. The Code on Social Security, 2020, with its provisions for legal recognition, social security benefits, welfare funds, portable entitlements, and grievance redressal, represents a landmark reform aimed at transforming the sector. The recent strikes underline the urgency of translating legal provisions into practice, regulating unsafe work models, and ensuring fair remuneration. For India, the challenge lies in balancing the flexibility and innovation of platform-based work with the rights, protection, and dignity of its workers. By formalising the gig economy and protecting its workforce, India can not only secure the livelihoods of millions but also build a future-ready, inclusive, and resilient economic ecosystem.

Short Issues

Haryana Improve in Sex Ratio at Birth

Context:

Haryana, once among India's worst performers in terms of sex ratio at birth (SRB), has witnessed a remarkable improvement over the last decade. From 834 girls per 1,000 boys in 2011, the state's SRB rose to 923 in 2025, approaching the national average of 933. This turnaround reflects a combination of legal enforcement, administrative monitoring, community engagement, and innovative policy interventions.

Key Measures Undertaken:

- **Strict Enforcement of PNDT and MTP Acts**
 - » Haryana registered 1,375 FIRs between 2015 and 2025 against medical practitioners and owners of ultrasound centres.
 - » District-wise action targeted urban centres such as Faridabad (126 FIRs), Sonipat (115), and Gurugram (112), along with Tier II districts including Ambala, Hisar, and Kurukshetra.
- **Inter-State Raids**
 - » To prevent residents from seeking illegal sex-determination tests outside the state, 218 raids were conducted in Uttar Pradesh, 89 in Delhi, 83 in Punjab, and 26 in Rajasthan in 2025.
 - » Coordination with neighbouring states proved crucial in overcoming logistical and intelligence-related challenges.
- **Technological and Administrative Innovations**
 - » **RCHID (Reproductive and Child Health ID):** A 12-digit unique ID for every pregnant woman improved registration rates by 37 percentage points.
 - » **Monitoring programmes:** Initiatives such as Saheli, involving ASHA and anganwadi workers, specifically monitored pregnant women with daughters, reducing trimester-wise

abortion rates by 57 percentage points within one year.

- » Regular inspections, WhatsApp-based communication with ultrasound centres, and quarterly review meetings ensured accountability.
- **Incentives and Community Participation**
 - » Informers reporting illegal practices were rewarded, with total payouts amounting to approximately Rs.5 crore over 10 years.
 - » Police decoys, often women with a personal stake in gender equity, were deployed to detect illegal operations.
- **Legal and Penal Action**
 - » Violations resulted in cancellation of licences, seizure of equipment, and prosecution of medical personnel.
 - » Special task forces tracked the illegal sale of MTP kits and portable ultrasound machines in the black market.

About Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB):

- The sex ratio at birth (SRB) is defined as the number of male births per 100 female births, with the natural biological norm being around 105 males per 100 females (approximately 105:100).
- Deviations from this ratio, particularly lower female births, often indicate sex-selective practices such as prenatal sex determination and selective abortion.

Scheme to Improve Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB):

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)**
 - » Launched in 2015 to improve SRB and promote the survival, protection, and education of the girl child.
 - » Follows a multi-sectoral approach integrating awareness generation, health interventions, education, and legal enforcement.
 - » Works in convergence with schemes such as Poshan Abhiyaan and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

Conclusion:

Haryana's experience provides a blueprint for states grappling with skewed sex ratios. Sustained political will, strong inter-departmental coordination, technology-driven monitoring, and active community participation can effectively counter gender-based discrimination and promote the welfare of the girl child. Continuous vigilance and innovation remain essential to consolidate gains and extend progress to lagging districts.

Sacred Piprahwa Relics

Context:

On 3 January 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Grand International Exposition of Sacred Piprahwa Relics, titled "The Light & The Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One", at the Rai Pithora Cultural Complex in New Delhi.

About the Piprahwa Relics:

- The Piprahwa relics are a collection of ancient artefacts, including bone fragments and gem relics, widely believed to be associated with Bhagwan Buddha. They were first discovered in 1898 at Piprahwa, near the India–Nepal border, at a stupa site archaeologically linked with ancient Kapilavastu, where the Buddha spent his early life before renunciation.
- These relics include sacred relic deposits, reliquaries, and a collection of gemstones. During the colonial period, a portion of these artefacts was taken abroad, with some pieces later resurfacing in private collections overseas.

Significance of the Exposition:

- **Historic Reunification and Repatriation**
 - » The exposition brings together repatriated relics along with authentic archaeological materials preserved in Indian institutions such as the National Museum and the Indian Museum.
 - » This marks the first time in over a

century that these dispersed relics have been assembled at a single venue.

- **Cultural and Spiritual Heritage**

- » The event underscores India's deep civilisational association with Buddhism and its role as the birthplace of the religion.
- » It reflects a renewed effort to preserve and promote India's spiritual and cultural traditions.
- » The Prime Minister emphasised that the wisdom and teachings of Buddha are timeless and universal, and that the relics are not merely historical artefacts but an integral part of India's living heritage.

- **Public Engagement**

- » The exhibition seeks to strengthen the connection between India's youth and their cultural roots.
- » Through curated displays and immersive multimedia experiences, visitors are encouraged to engage with the life, teachings, and legacy of the Buddha.



Strategic and Diplomatic Dimensions:

- The repatriation and exhibition of the Piprahwa relics form part of India's broader cultural diplomacy efforts, reinforcing its leadership role in global Buddhist heritage and soft power outreach.
- The return of these artefacts involved coordinated government action, institutional collaboration, and innovative public–private partnership models, reflecting evolving

approaches to heritage repatriation.

Conclusion:

The inauguration of the Grand International Exposition of Sacred Piprahwa Relics by Prime Minister Narendra Modi represents a landmark cultural moment. It symbolises India's commitment to preserving and celebrating its ancient civilisational heritage.

'PANKHUDI' Portal

Context:

On January 8, 2026, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) launched PANKHUDI, an integrated digital portal aimed at streamlining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and private partnerships for the welfare of women and children.

About the PANKHUDI Portal:

- PANKHUDI is a single-window digital platform designed to facilitate non-monetary, transparent, and outcome-oriented contributions to government initiatives for women and child welfare.
- The portal enables individuals, NRIs, NGOs, corporate entities, CSR contributors, and government agencies to directly engage with welfare programmes without procedural complexity. It also allows contributors to monitor progress and outcomes, thereby enhancing trust, accountability, and efficiency.

Key Features:

- **Single-Window Interface:** Integrates voluntary, institutional, and CSR contributions on a common digital platform.
- **End-to-End Digital Workflow:** Enables registration, identification of initiatives, proposal submission, approvals, and tracking of implementation.
- **Non-Cash Contributions Only:** Ensures financial transparency, auditability, and prevents misuse.
- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Facilitates outcome

tracking through defined approval and reporting mechanisms.

Thematic Focus Areas:

- The portal supports initiatives across key social development sectors:
 - » Nutrition and Health
 - » Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
 - » Child Welfare, Protection, and Rehabilitation
 - » Women's Safety, Empowerment and Livelihood Support
- These focus areas are vital for improving human development indicators and promoting social equity.

PANKHUDI PORTAL

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Supports & strengthens implementation of Ministry of Women & Child Development's **flagship missions** through a **structured & transparent digital mechanism**

Supported Missions: **Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0, Mission Vatsalya, Mission Shakti**



Support to Flagship Missions:

- PANKHUDI strengthens the implementation of MWCD's flagship schemes:
 - » Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0
 - » Mission Vatsalya
 - » Mission Shakti
- It enhances convergence among central and state governments, implementing agencies, civil society, and the private sector.

Significance for Governance and Social Development:

- Strengthens digital governance through transparent, technology-driven welfare delivery.
- Enhances public-private collaboration by facilitating CSR and NGO participation.
- Improves accountability through real-time, outcome-based monitoring.
- Boosts social infrastructure by supporting over 14 lakh Anganwadi centres, child-care institutions, and women support facilities.

Conclusion:

The PANKHUDI portal marks a significant step towards inclusive, collaborative, and accountable welfare governance. By leveraging digital tools and stakeholder partnerships, it improves service delivery and contributes to the holistic development of women and children, reinforcing India's commitment to participatory and transparent governance.

Report on India's Road Accident Crisis

Context:

India ranks first globally in annual road accident fatalities. Recently, a joint report by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and SaveLIFE Foundation identified the top 100 districts with the highest severity of road accident deaths. Maharashtra's Nashik Rural tops the list, followed by Pune Rural, Patna, and Ahmednagar.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Accident and Fatality Data (Top Districts, 2023–24):**

| District | Crashes | Fatalities |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| Nashik Rural | 4,336 | 2,678 |
| Pune Rural | 4,886 | 2,781 |
| Patna | 3,120 | 2,222 |
| Ahmednagar | 4,807 | 2,433 |

- **Distribution of Fatalities:**

- » 59% of fatalities occur without any traffic violation, highlighting road engineering issues as a major contributing factor.
- » 53% of deaths occur between 6 PM and 12 AM, indicating risks linked to poor visibility and enforcement gaps.
- » 80% of victims are transported outside the government 108 ambulance system, often through private means.
- **Location-Specific Concentration:**
 - » Most accidents occur at identified crash-prone locations, specific road stretches, or near certain police stations.
 - » Crash-prone sites account for 58% of fatalities, while critical corridors account for 42%.
- **Accident Types and Causes:**
 - » Rear-end, head-on, and pedestrian collisions account for 72% of fatalities.
 - » Traffic violations include speeding (19%), rash driving (7%), and dangerous overtaking (3%).
 - » Key engineering flaws include damaged crash barriers, faded road markings, poor signage, unprotected hard structures, and inadequate illumination.
- **Regional Insights:**
 - » Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of severe districts, followed by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Rajasthan.
- **Infrastructure Context:**
 - » India's road network spans 63.45 lakh km, including 1.46 lakh km of National Highways, 1.8 lakh km of State Highways, and over 60 lakh km of other roads.
 - » 63% of crash fatalities occur on non-National Highways, underscoring deficiencies in local road design, policing, and hospital preparedness.

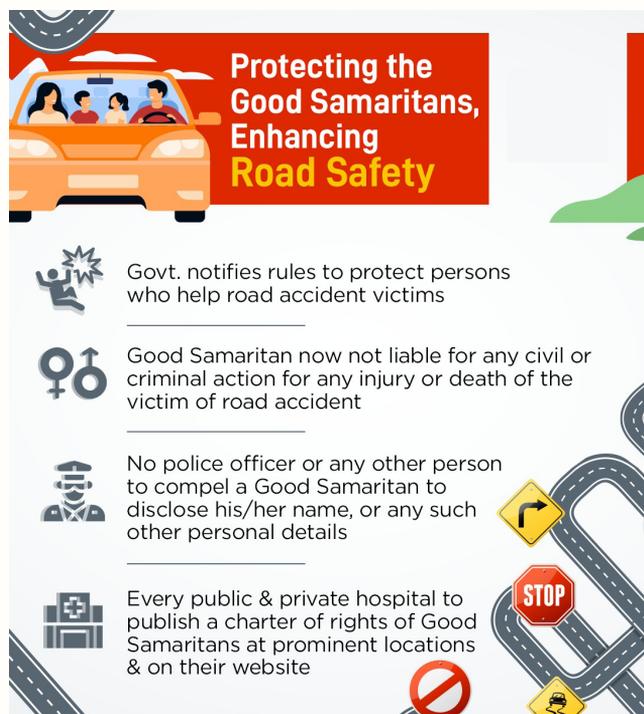
Key Recommendations:

- **Engineering Interventions:**
 - » Conduct Road Safety Surveys on each corridor by NHAI and State PWDs.
 - » Address the top 20 recurring engineering

issues at crash-prone locations using IRC and MoRTH guidelines.

▪ **Policing and Enforcement:**

- » Upgrade critical police stations with adequate manpower and enforcement capacity.
- » Focus on site-specific interventions in crash-prone areas.



Protecting the Good Samaritans, Enhancing Road Safety

-  Govt. notifies rules to protect persons who help road accident victims
-  Good Samaritan now not liable for any civil or criminal action for any injury or death of the victim of road accident
-  No police officer or any other person to compel a Good Samaritan to disclose his/her name, or any such other personal details
-  Every public & private hospital to publish a charter of rights of Good Samaritans at prominent locations & on their website

▪ **Emergency Response and Health Systems:**

- » Audit 108 ambulance services for compliance with the National Ambulance Code.
- » Target 75% of hospitalisations through the 108 ambulance system.

▪ **Budget and Scheme Utilisation:**

- » The report stresses that no new schemes are required; better utilisation of existing schemes is essential.
- » Align budgets across engineering, enforcement, and health systems, with emphasis on coordination and accountability.

Way Forward:

- India's road safety challenge is primarily systemic rather than scheme-deficient.

- Strengthening engineering quality, enforcement, and emergency response can prevent a significant number of fatalities.
- These measures align with the Stockholm Declaration (2020) target to halve road traffic deaths by 2030.

Conclusion:

The concentration of road accidents in specific districts and locations provides a clear opportunity for targeted interventions. Road safety requires a holistic and integrated approach, combining infrastructure improvements, effective policing, responsive emergency services, and sustained public awareness, rather than fragmented measures.

Social Security Expansion in India

Context:

In a landmark development in India's labour and social security landscape, over 1.03 crore new workers have registered under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) as part of a focussed effort to expand social security coverage among the country's formal and informal workforce. This surge is a direct outcome of the Scheme to Promote Registration of Employers and Employees (SPREE) scheme.

Background:

- The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) is a statutory social security organisation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, established to provide comprehensive benefits including medical care, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, disability and dependent benefits to workers and their families under the ESI Act, 1948.
- Traditionally, social security coverage in India has been limited, especially for workers in the unorganised and small enterprise sectors. Addressing this gap has been a persistent policy priority — one elevated by reforms under the Code on Social Security,

2020 and subsequent schemes such as SPREE Scheme.



About The SPREE Scheme:

- The Scheme to Promote Registration of Employers and Employees (SPREE) was introduced on July 1, 2025, aiming to bring unregistered employers and workers under the social security umbrella.
- The scheme offered a one time opportunity for those inadvertently left outside ESIC coverage to register without retrospective liabilities or punitive actions for past non compliance.
- Under SPREE, entities and employees who had not previously enrolled could register digitally through portals such as the ESIC portal, Shram Suvidha, and MCA portal, with registration taking effect from the date declared by the employer.
- By January 11, 2026, the scheme had recorded registrations of roughly 1.17 lakh new employers and 1.03 crore new employees under ESIC.

Significance of the Milestone:

- **Expansion of Social Security Coverage:** This massive enrolment reflects a significant broadening of India's social security net,

potentially extending healthcare, sickness benefits, maternity leave, and disability cover to millions of previously unreached workers.

- **Formalisation of Workforce:** The inclusion of such a large cohort under the ESIC framework signals progress towards formalising the workforce — a key objective of labour reforms aimed at balancing flexibility with protection.
- **Reforms and Compliance Incentives:** By removing fears of backward liabilities and punitive penalties, SPREE encouraged voluntary compliance, aligning with modern regulatory approaches that prioritise incentivised registration over punitive enforcement.
- **Alignment with Labour Code Reforms:** The expansion dovetails with India's new Labour Codes, consolidating multiple legacy laws into unified frameworks for employment, social security, and welfare. These reforms emphasise comprehensive worker benefits, streamlined compliance, and broader coverage, aligning labour market regulation with evolving work patterns.

Conclusion:

The registration of 1.03 crore new workers with ESIC represents a milestone in India's journey towards universal social security coverage. It underscores the impact of targeted policy interventions and social security reforms in formalising employment and protecting worker welfare. By leveraging digital portals, removing retrospective burdens, and incentivising voluntary compliance, the ESIC has markedly broadened its reach — a step with far reaching implications for labour welfare and economic inclusion in India's rapidly transforming job market.

Somnath Swabhiman Parv

Context

Recently, India celebrated the Somnath

Swabhiman Parv (1026–2026), a landmark commemoration marking 1,000 years since the first major attack on the historic Somnath Temple in Gujarat.

About the Somnath Temple:

- The Somnath Temple is a Hindu shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, located at Prabhas Patan near Veraval in the Gir Somnath district of Gujarat, along India's western coast.
- It is revered as the first among the twelve Jyotirlingas (Dwadasha Jyotirlinga) sacred shrines where Shiva is worshipped in the form of a radiant column of light.
- The name Somnath means "Lord of the Moon", linked to ancient mythological traditions in which Chandra (the Moon God) worshipped Shiva to regain his lost lustre.

Historical Background:

- The temple site has been a prominent pilgrimage centre since ancient times, with references in classical texts such as the Skanda Purana and Bhagavata Purana.
- Its history is marked by repeated cycles of destruction and reconstruction. The first major recorded attack occurred in 1026 CE by Mahmud of Ghazni, initiating a pattern in which the shrine was destroyed by invaders and rebuilt by successive generations.
- Over the medieval period, multiple rulers and dynasties destroyed and reconstructed the temple, transforming it into a powerful symbol of faith, resilience, and cultural continuity.

Modern Reconstruction:

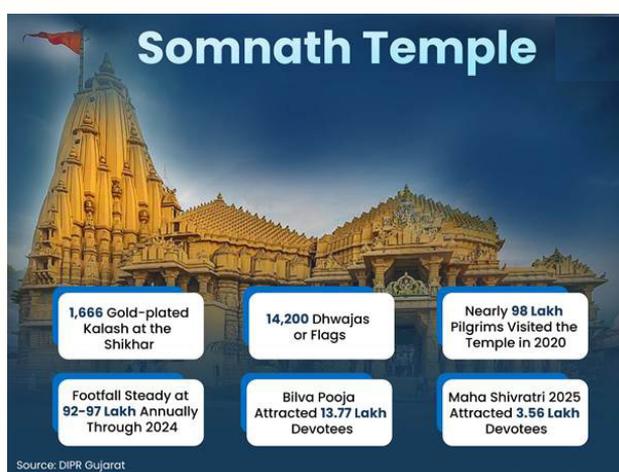
- The modern reconstruction of the temple was initiated under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel after India's independence.
- The rebuilt temple was completed and consecrated in May 1951.

Architecture:

- The Somnath Temple is constructed in the Chaulukya (Māru-Gurjara) architectural

style, characteristic of Gujarat's temple traditions.

- The structure features intricate stone carvings, a towering shikhara (spire) rising about 155 feet, and essential temple components such as the garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) and mandapas (assembly halls).
- The temple complex faces the Arabian Sea and is located near the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the Kapila, Hiran, and Saraswati rivers—enhancing its sacred geography and pilgrimage significance.



Significance of the Millennium Commemoration:

- **Civilisational Symbolism**
 - » The Swabhiman Parv highlights the enduring spirit of Indian civilisation, demonstrating how a sacred site repeatedly destroyed has been repeatedly restored through collective resolve and devotion.
 - » This narrative resonates with broader themes of spiritual resilience, cultural pride, and national identity, making the commemoration significant beyond its religious dimensions.
- **National Integration**
 - » Events such as the Shaurya Yatra and the widespread participation in devotional activities illustrate how the commemoration transcends regional

religious observance to emerge as a symbol of national unity and cultural affirmation.

Conclusion:

The Somnath Swabhiman Parv encapsulates a millennium of unbroken faith, cultural resilience, and spiritual continuity. Beyond its architectural grandeur, the Somnath Temple stands as a profound civilisational symbol, reflecting India's enduring capacity to overcome adversity, renew faith, and preserve its heritage across centuries.

Lancet Report on India's Healthcare System

Context:

Recently, a Lancet Commission report on India's health system highlighted that while Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is now achievable, significant gaps remain in governance, quality, equity, and accountability. The report presents a rights-based, citizen-centred roadmap to ensure accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare for all Indians.

About Universal Health Coverage (UHC):

- Universal Health Coverage (UHC) ensures that all individuals and communities receive essential health services, preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative without facing financial hardship. It emphasises equity, quality, affordability, and accessibility, ensuring that no one is denied care or pushed into poverty due to healthcare costs.
- UHC is a key target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.8, reflecting the global commitment to "health for all."
- India's major UHC initiatives include the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), and digital platforms such as e-Sanjevani.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Shift in Barriers:** Earlier barriers to UHC—such as underfunding, lack of political will, and inadequate infrastructure—have largely been addressed. The report identifies current challenges as uneven quality of care, fragmented service delivery, inefficient spending, and weak governance mechanisms.
- **Rights-Based, Citizen-Centred Approach:** The Commission advocates a healthcare system in which access to healthcare is treated as a citizen entitlement. It emphasises community participation in planning, delivery, and monitoring, and calls for public access to health system performance data to strengthen transparency and accountability.
- **Primary Health Care as the Foundation:** The report stresses that UHC must be anchored in comprehensive primary healthcare. Strengthening primary care reduces dependence on expensive tertiary facilities and improves long-term management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and mental illness.
- **Human Resources and Equity Gaps:** Although the number of doctors, nurses, and ASHA workers has increased, unequal geographical distribution, variations in training quality, and the voluntary status of ASHAs continue to limit effective service delivery.

Key Recommendations:

- **Strengthen Public Provision and Financing:** Prioritise publicly financed and publicly provided healthcare as the backbone of UHC.
- **Integrated Service Delivery:** Ensure continuity of care across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
- **Community Engagement:** Empower citizens and local governance institutions to participate actively in planning and accountability.
- **Data Transparency:** Publicly disclose health system performance indicators.

- **Human Resource Reforms:** Address workforce shortages, maldistribution, and training quality.
- **Empower ASHAs:** Recognise and regularise ASHAs as integral healthcare providers within the formal system.

Significance:

- The report positions India as a potential model for UHC among low- and middle-income countries. It underscores that achieving UHC is not merely a technical exercise but also a political and institutional challenge requiring strong leadership, accountability, and sustained citizen participation.

About the Lancet Commission:

- Established in 2020, the Commission brings together leading experts from India and abroad, including scholars from Harvard Medical School, to reimagine India's health system.
- Its findings are based on a survey of over 50,000 households across 29 states, along with extensive secondary data, with the objective of advancing UHC by 2047 in line with India's vision of "Viksit Bharat."

Conclusion:

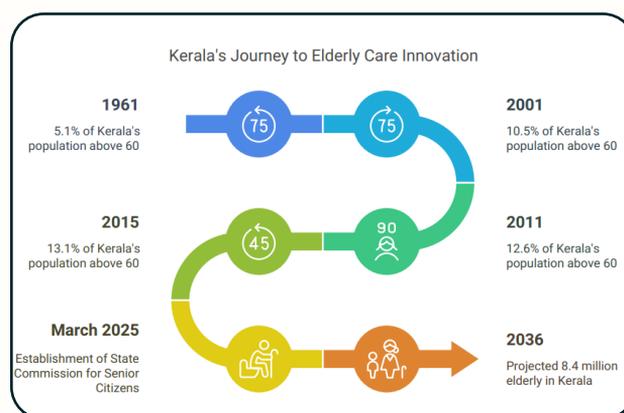
India's progress in expanding healthcare coverage is significant; however, persistent gaps in quality, equity, and accountability must be addressed. A citizen-centred, rights-based, and transparent healthcare system, supported by strong governance and empowered communities is essential to realise Universal Health Coverage by 2047.

Ageing Challenge of Kerala

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has flagged the demographic transition in Kerala as a critical challenge to the state's fiscal sustainability, urging urgent reforms in pension systems, healthcare financing, and labor policy. In

its latest report, State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2025-26 – Demographic Transition in India: Implications for State Finances, the RBI categorizes Kerala as an "ageing state." The share of the population aged 60 and above has already crossed the 15% threshold, currently standing at approximately 18.7% and projected to rise to 22.8% by 2036. This demographic shift, coupled with a declining working-age population, poses significant long-term fiscal and socio-economic challenges.



Kerala's Demographic Transition and Fiscal Implications:

- Kerala's ageing population reflects one of the most advanced demographic transitions in India. The state's working-age population share, currently at about 62%, is expected to decrease to 59.5% by 2036, shrinking the labor force that sustains economic growth and tax revenue.
- The RBI's report emphasizes that ageing impacts state finances through a "dual squeeze":
 - » **Slower Revenue Growth:** Driven by diminished labor force participation.
 - » **Higher Mandatory Spending:** Increased demand for elderly-related expenditures, such as pensions, healthcare, and social security.
- Currently, states in advanced demographic stages devote a significant share of social sector expenditure to pensions, nearly 30% on average. This often "crowds out" capital

outlays intended for development and infrastructure.

Key Reform Recommendations:

To address the fiscal and socio-economic pressures posed by an ageing population, the RBI recommends a multi-pronged policy response:

- **Pension System Reforms:** With rising pension liabilities consuming fiscal resources, Kerala must reassess its pension structures to ensure long-term sustainability. Rationalizing these commitments could free up fiscal space for developmental priorities.
- **Healthcare Financing Reforms:** The RBI highlights the need to prioritize healthcare financing. This includes strengthening preventive health systems, expanding insurance coverage, and promoting efficient delivery through public-private partnerships (PPPs) to alleviate pressure on public resources.
- **Workforce Policy Adjustments:** Extending retirement ages, introducing flexible work arrangements, and focusing on reskilling older workers can help mitigate the contraction of the labor pool. These measures may boost labor participation among older cohorts, softening fiscal stress while enhancing productivity.
- **Migration and Labor Supply:** Kerala's demographic model could benefit from policies that encourage interstate migration, specifically from states with surplus labor, to bolster its workforce and broaden the tax base.

Conclusion:

Kerala's demographic transition presents a compelling case for structural fiscal and social reforms. The RBI's recommendations on pension restructuring, healthcare financing, and workforce enhancement aim to ensure that the state's ageing population does not lead to fiscal fragility. Balancing social support for the elderly with sustainable long-term growth will require bold policy action and inter-sectoral

coordination, potentially positioning Kerala as a global model for managing demographic change.

‘Diamond Triangle’ of Odisha Added to UNESCO Tentative List

Context:

UNESCO has included Odisha's 'Diamond Triangle', comprising the Buddhist sites of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitgiri, located in Jajpur and Cuttack districts, in India's Tentative List for consideration as a World Heritage Site. These sites were major centers of Vajrayana Buddhism between the 5th and 13th centuries AD. These represent the rich history and architecture of Buddhism. The nomination was prepared and submitted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), India's nodal agency for the World Heritage Convention, through India's Permanent Representative to UNESCO.

Background:

- The UNESCO Tentative List is an official inventory of heritage sites that a country intends to nominate for World Heritage inscription.
- Inclusion in the Tentative List is mandatory, and a site must remain on it for at least one year before being considered by the World Heritage Committee.
- India currently has around 70 sites on the Tentative List across cultural, natural, and mixed categories, including Ekamra Kshetra (Bhubaneswar) and Chilika Lake.

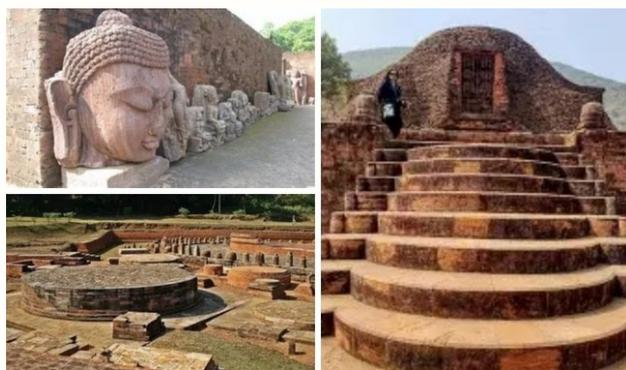
About the ‘Diamond Triangle’:

- The 'Diamond Triangle' represents one of the most significant Buddhist landscapes in eastern India:
 - » **Ratnagiri** – Meaning “Hill of Precious Gems”, it is the largest Buddhist complex, spread over 18 acres, located on the Assia hill range along the Kelua River.

- » **Udayagiri** – Meaning “Hill of the Rising Sun”.
- » **Lalitgiri** – Meaning “Red Hill”.

Archaeological Significance:

- The sites contain remains of stupas, monasteries (viharas), relic caskets, sculptures, and statues of Lord Buddha and other Buddhist deities.
- They are believed to have witnessed the propagation of all three major schools of Buddhism:
 - » Hinayana
 - » Mahayana
 - » Vajrayana
- This makes the region unique in reflecting the evolution of Buddhist philosophy and practice over several centuries.



Significance of the Inclusion:

- **Cultural Importance:** Highlights Odisha’s role as a major centre of Buddhist learning and monastic life.
- **Global Recognition:** Enhances international visibility of India’s Buddhist heritage beyond well-known sites such as Bodh Gaya and Sarnath.
- **Tourism and Economy:** Has the potential to boost heritage tourism, generate local employment, and promote regional development.
- **Conservation Push:** Brings greater scrutiny, funding opportunities, and accountability for site preservation.
- **Soft Power:** Strengthens India’s cultural diplomacy through its shared Buddhist

heritage.

About UNESCO:

- **Established:** 16 November 1945
- **Headquarters:** Paris, France
- **Members:** 194 countries
- **Purpose:** To promote peace through cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication
- **India and UNESCO:**
 - » Member since 1946
 - » ASI serves as the nodal agency for World Heritage matters

Conclusion:

The inclusion of Odisha’s Diamond Triangle in UNESCO’s Tentative List marks an important milestone in India’s heritage conservation journey. By showcasing a rare confluence of all three Buddhist traditions, these sites possess strong potential for World Heritage inscription. With sustained institutional support and effective conservation efforts, the Diamond Triangle can emerge as a globally recognised symbol of India’s rich Buddhist legacy and cultural continuity.

Polity & Governance

New Constitutional Clarity on Reservation and Merit By Supreme Court

Context:

The Supreme Court of India's recent verdicts on reservation, delivered within weeks of each other have provided long-awaited clarity on a contentious issue in public employment who is entitled to compete for General (unreserved) category seats, and under what conditions. These judgments are especially significant for aspirants of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), State Public Service Commission (PSC), SSC and other competitive examinations, where disputes over cut-offs, relaxations, and category migration have frequently led to litigation and uncertainty.

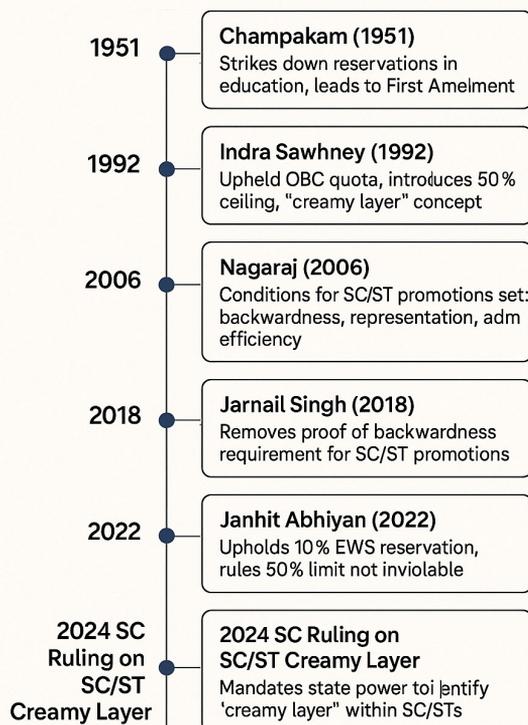
By addressing two different factual scenarios, the Court has reaffirmed a consistent constitutional principle: merit governs open competition, while reservation remains a targeted corrective mechanism. For General category candidates, these rulings redefine fairness, transparency, and predictability in recruitment processes.

Constitutional and Legal Foundations:

- India's constitutional framework balances formal equality with substantive justice.
 - » Article 14 guarantees equality before the law.
 - » Article 16(1) ensures equality of opportunity in public employment.
 - » Article 16(4) permits reservation for backward classes inadequately represented in services.
 - » Article 15(4) allows special provisions

for socially and educationally backward classes.

Judicial Verdicts Impacting Reservation Policy



- The Constitution does not treat reservation as an exception to equality, but as a means to achieve real equality in a deeply stratified society. At the same time, it preserves the idea that unreserved posts must be filled purely on merit, without any category-based

advantage. The Supreme Court's recent rulings reaffirm this dual commitment, social justice without erosion of meritocracy.

Historical Evolution of Reservation Policy:

- **Roots in Social Reform:** Reservation policies predate Independence. Social reformers like Jyotirao Phule and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy highlighted caste-based exclusion from education and state power. In 1902, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur introduced reservations in administration among the earliest affirmative action measures in India. During colonial rule, caste exclusion was addressed through communal representation, culminating in the Communal Award (1932). The subsequent Poona Pact between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ensured reserved representation within a unified electoral framework.

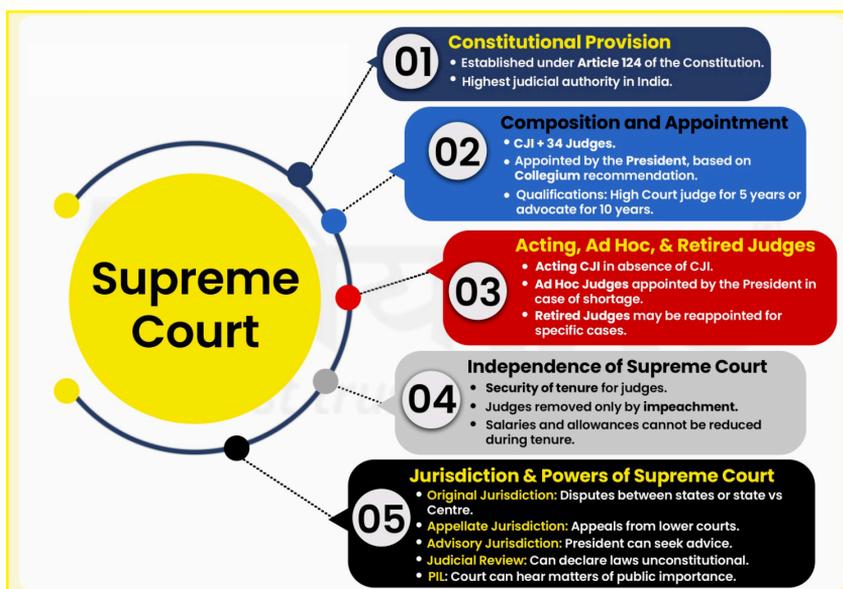
- **Constitutional Vision Post-1950:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emphasized that reservation was not a permanent entitlement, but a temporary corrective to bring marginalized groups to an equal starting point. Initially, reservations were confined to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

- **Mandal Commission and Judicial Intervention:** The Mandal Commission (1979) identified OBCs as socially and educationally backward, leading to 27% reservation in central services in 1990. This expansion intensified debates on merit and fairness, particularly among General category youth. The Supreme Court responded in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992) by laying down critical guardrails:

- » Reservation capped at 50%
- » Introduction of the creamy layer

principle

- Crucially, meritorious reserved candidates selected without concessions should not be counted against reserved quotas
- This doctrine remains central to current jurisprudence.



New Dimensions: EWS Reservation:

- The 103rd Constitutional Amendment (2019) introduced 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among those not covered by SC/ST/OBC quotas. This marked a philosophical shift from purely caste-based disadvantage to economic vulnerability, while still preserving open competition for General seats.

About The Two Recent Supreme Court Verdicts:

- **Rajasthan High Court Recruitment Case (December 19, 2025)**
 - » **Facts:** Recruitment to clerical posts in the Rajasthan judiciary. Cut-off marks for several reserved categories were higher than the General cut-off. Some SC/OBC/EWS candidates scored above the General cut-off but below their own category cut-off. They were excluded from shortlisting solely due to their category.

- » **Supreme Court's Ruling:** The General (open) category is not exclusive to unreserved candidates. Any candidate who meets the General cut-off without availing any relaxation must be included in the open list from the very first stage. The Court rejected the argument that this amounted to “migration” or “double benefit”.
- » **Key Principle:** Merit-based inclusion in the open category is not a reservation benefit.
- **Karnataka / IFS Cadre Allocation Case (January 6, 2026):**
 - » **Facts:** An SC candidate cleared the IFS preliminary examination using relaxed cut-off marks. In the final merit list, he ranked higher than a General category candidate. He claimed entitlement to a General (unreserved) insider cadre.
 - » **Supreme Court's Ruling:** The IFS examination is a single, integrated selection process. Once a candidate avails any relaxation at any stage, they cannot later claim unreserved status. Final merit cannot erase earlier concessions.
 - » **Key Principle:** Relaxation at the entry gate cannot be erased by later performance.

Harmonising the Two Judgments:

- Though factually distinct, the verdicts reinforce a coherent constitutional doctrine.
- Reserved category candidates can be included in the General category if:
 - » They meet all General standards
 - » They do not avail any relaxation (age, marks, attempts, cut-offs)
 - » Their selection is based purely on merit
- Reserved category candidates CANNOT be included if:
 - » They use any concession at any stage
 - » Even if they later outperform General candidates
 - » This dual framework balances merit-based equality with affirmative justice.

Implications for General Category Aspirants:

- **Open Category Is Truly Open:** General seats are not reserved for the unreserved. They are open to anyone who qualifies purely on merit. This reinforces Articles 14 and 16 by preventing arbitrary exclusion based on social identity.
- **Protection Against “Double Benefit”:** A long-standing grievance among General aspirants was that candidates who used relaxations later occupied General seats. The Court has decisively ruled against this practice, ensuring that reservation benefits do not spill over into open competition.
- **Higher Competition, Clearer Rules:** Competition for General seats may increase, but only from candidates who genuinely qualify without assistance. The rules are now transparent and predictable.
- **Administrative and Institutional Clarity:** Recruiting agencies must:
 - » First prepare a merit-only open list
 - » Then fill reserved seats
- Avoid category-wise silos that violate constitutional equality. This reduces post-result litigation and enhances trust in recruitment systems.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's latest verdicts do not dismantle reservation, nor do they privilege merit at the cost of social justice. Instead, they clarify the rules of engagement. They reaffirm merit as the governing principle of open competition, reservation as a targeted corrective, not an all-purpose advantage and equality of opportunity, not mechanical equality. The Constitution guarantees fair competition, not insulation from competition. Together, these judgments strengthen the delicate constitutional balance between social justice and meritocracy, which lies at the heart of India's democratic governance and public service recruitment.

Short Issues

Census of India 2027

Context:

The Government of India has formally notified the schedule for the first phase of the Census of India 2027, marking a major step in preparing updated demographic and socio economic data after the 2011 Census. The first phase, the Houselisting and Housing Census (HLO) will be conducted between April 1 and September 30, 2026, across all States and Union Territories.

Focus of the First Phase:

- **Phase I**, the Houselisting and Housing Census focuses on collecting information on:
 - » Housing conditions and structural characteristics of dwellings.
 - » Ownership of assets and basic amenities such as drinking water, lighting, sanitation, cooking fuel, and electricity.
 - » Household composition, floor and roof materials, access to services, and related indicators.
- This phase does not enumerate individuals; it prepares a robust sampling and operational frame for the second phase.

Digital Transformation:

- Census 2027 will be India's first predominantly digital census. Data collection will be facilitated through mobile applications and supported by a central monitoring and management system to improve data quality, timeliness, and transparency.
- The move to digital tools is expected to reduce errors, enhance supervision, and enable real time monitoring of field activities.

Significance:

- **Updated Data Ecosystem:** After delays caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, the Census will provide a much needed updated headcount, household data, and socio economic indicators for policy planning

across sectors.

- **Evidenced Policymaking:** House listing data helps refine sampling frames for detailed population enumeration and informs decisions on housing, utilities, health, education, and infrastructure.
- **Foundation for Social Indicators:** Accurate house listing sets the stage for comprehensive population coverage, including detailed demography, caste enumeration, literacy, migration, and economic activity in the second phase.

CENSUS OF INDIA 2027

Cabinet approves scheme of **Conduct of Census of India 2027** at a cost of **Rs.11,718.24 crore.**

The Census of India would be conducted in **two phases:**

- **Houselisting and Housing Census** – April to September, 2026
- **Population Enumeration (PE)** – February 2027*

It will also capture **Caste data electronically in second phase, i.e. Population Enumeration (PE)**



Census in India:

- The Census in India is a decennial (every 10 years) enumeration of the population, mandated by the Census Act, 1948. It is conducted by the Registrar General & Census Commissioner under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- Being a Union subject under the Constitution, the Census provides comprehensive socio-economic data critical for governance, planning, and policy formulation.
- **Constitutional & Legal Basis:**
 - » Article 246 (7th Schedule, Entry 69): Census is a Union subject.
 - » Census Act, 1948 & Rules, 1990:

Provides the legal framework, ensures confidentiality, and penalizes non-compliance.

History:

- First non-synchronous census: 1872.
- First synchronous (decennial) census: 1881.
- Post-Independence: Conducted in 1951, 1961... up to 2011.

Conclusion:

The first phase of Census 2027, scheduled from April 1 to September 30, 2026, marks the beginning of India's largest administrative and statistical exercise with a digital thrust and self enumeration option. The success of this phase will lay the foundation for the subsequent population enumeration and provide updated data critical for governance, development planning, and socio economic reforms.

EC's Stand Before the Supreme Court on SIR

Context:

Recently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) informed the Supreme Court of India that it possesses both the constitutional authority and the duty to undertake a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. It further asserted its responsibility to ensure that no foreign nationals are included in the voter lists. This submission was made in response to legal challenges against the ongoing revision exercise.

Background:

- The poll panel is currently conducting a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in several states, beginning with Bihar, with the objective of updating and cleaning voter lists.
- Multiple petitions have been filed before the Supreme Court questioning the constitutional validity and scope of this exercise. A key issue raised is whether the

ECI is empowered to assess citizenship status during the revision of electoral rolls.

EC's Stand Before the Supreme Court:

- The ECI informed the Court that it has a clear constitutional mandate to prepare and revise electoral rolls, which necessarily includes verifying that only Indian citizens are registered as voters.
- It emphasised that the Constitution is "citizen-centric", noting that key constitutional offices and powers—such as those of the President, Prime Minister, and judges—are reserved exclusively for Indian citizens. Therefore, electoral rolls must reflect only eligible voters.
- The Commission argued that its authority flows from Articles 324 and 326 of the Constitution, read with Section 16 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which permits verification of citizenship status during electoral roll revisions.
- The ECI rejected comparisons between the SIR exercise and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), clarifying that SIR is limited to ensuring accuracy of voter rolls and does not amount to the creation of a citizenship register.

Legal and Constitutional Aspects:

- Article 324 of the Constitution vests the Election Commission with powers of superintendence, direction, and control over elections, including the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. Article 326 provides for adult suffrage for citizens, making citizenship a prerequisite for voter eligibility.
- The ECI has countered claims that only the Union government can determine citizenship, clarifying that its role is confined to verification for electoral purposes and does not involve adjudication of citizenship disputes.

Conclusion:

The ECI's submission reinforces the integrity of India's electoral process by underscoring

the principle that only citizens are entitled to participate in democratic decision-making. It also clarifies the constitutional scope and duties of the Election Commission amid ongoing debates over citizenship verification during electoral roll revisions.

Supreme Court Reaffirms Strict Bail Norms under UAPA

Context:

On 5 January 2026, the Supreme Court of India denied bail to student activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots “larger conspiracy” case. While the apex court granted conditional bail to five other co-accused, the ruling underscores heightened judicial scrutiny in cases involving anti-terror laws, particularly the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Background of the Case:

- The 2020 Northeast Delhi riots, which erupted amid protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries.
- Investigations conducted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act alleged a “larger criminal conspiracy” aimed at orchestrating violence across the national capital.

Supreme Court Observations:

- **Denial of Bail:** The Court observed that prima facie material under the UAPA indicates the involvement of Khalid and Imam in activities affecting public order and security. Bail under Section 43D(5) of the UAPA is exceptional, and prolonged incarceration alone does not justify release.
- **Differentiated Treatment:** The five co-accused granted bail were found to have peripheral roles, whereas Khalid and Imam were alleged to have played central roles in planning and mobilisation.
- **Future Bail Applications:** The Court clarified

that fresh bail applications may be filed after one year or after the examination of protected witnesses, thereby ensuring procedural fairness.



Major arrests under UAPA

- 
2020 Delhi riots case
 Student activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam were arrested under UAPA over alleged conspiracy related to the February 2020 communal riots in Delhi.
- 
Engineer Rashid Case (Jammu & Kashmir)
 Baramulla MP Engineer Rashid was arrested by the NIA on 9 August 2019 in a terror-funding case under UAPA, days after the abrogation of Article 370, and remains in Tihar Jail, Delhi.
- 
Bhima Koregaon (BK-16) case
 16 lawyers, academics and activists were arrested under UAPA for alleged involvement in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon unrest.
- 
AQIS-linked cases
 Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad arrested Zeeshan Ali, for allegedly propagating material linked to Al-Qaida in the Indian and inciting violence online.
- 
PFI case in Bihar
 The NIA arrested Mahboob Alam, a state-level leader of the banned Popular Front of India, in a conspiracy case involving alleged unlawful activities.

Precedents on Bail under UAPA:

- **Union of India v. K.A. Najeeb (2021):**
 - » The accused had spent over five years in custody, with 276 witnesses yet to be examined.
 - » The Supreme Court granted bail citing prolonged incarceration despite the restrictive nature of Section 43D(5).
- **Bhima Koregaon Case – Shoma Sen (April**

2024):

- » Bail was granted on the ground of extended pre-trial detention.
- » The Court reaffirmed that Article 21 requires any deprivation of liberty to be reasonable, just, and proportionate.
- **Sheikh Javed Iqbal Case (July 2024):**
 - » A Nepali national was incarcerated for over nine years under the UAPA, with only two witnesses examined.
 - » Bail was granted on the ground of violation of the right to a speedy trial.

Legal Reasoning and Constitutional Considerations:

- **UAPA and the Strict Bail Regime:**
 - » The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 establishes a stringent framework for bail.
 - » Section 43D(5): Prohibits bail if prima facie evidence suggests the allegations are true.
 - o Significantly restricts early release, placing emphasis on prosecutorial assessment.
 - » Judicial Position: Bail under the UAPA is not routine and requires careful judicial scrutiny of evidence and the accused's alleged role.
- **Article 21 — Personal Liberty vs. Statutory Constraints:**
 - » Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.
 - » The Court held that constitutional protections cannot automatically override statutory restrictions in matters concerning national security and terrorism.
 - » Prima facie findings under the UAPA may justify continued detention, reflecting a balance between individual liberty and public safety.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's refusal to grant bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam highlights the rigorous bail standards under the UAPA and illustrates the judiciary's effort to balance

constitutional liberties with national security considerations. The ruling is likely to shape ongoing debates on anti-terror legislation, pre-trial detention, and the scope of judicial discretion in India.

Illegal Betting & Gambling in India

Context:

On January 16, 2026, the Union Government of India took a decisive step against unauthorized online betting and gambling by blocking 242 illegal websites and links, taking the total number of such platforms removed to approximately 7,800 since enforcement actions intensified after the passage of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025.

Legal Context:

- The crackdown follows the enactment of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, which came into force after being passed by both houses of Parliament and receiving presidential assent in August 2025.
- Under this law, real money gaming, defined as any online game involving monetary stakes regardless of whether the outcome is based on skill, chance, or both, is prohibited in India. The Act also bans associated advertisements and financial transactions linked to such platforms and empowers authorities to take enforcement actions.
- Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides the legal mechanism for blocking access to unlawful online content, including betting and gambling sites, on the directions of the government or authorised agencies.

Rationale behind the Crackdown:

- The government has justified this policy on multiple grounds:
 - » **Consumer Protection:** Real money gaming platforms have been linked to

financial losses, addiction, and social harm, particularly among young users and vulnerable groups.

- » **Public Health and Safety:** Reports and official statements have highlighted instances of addiction and distress caused by uncontrolled gaming experiences.
- » **Regulatory Gaps:** Many illegal platforms are offshore or unregistered, escaping GST compliance and Indian legal oversight. Their operations pose challenges related to money laundering, illicit fund transfers, and lack of consumer recourse.
- » **Protecting Households and Savings:** Stakeholders, including policymakers, have cited concerns about families losing savings and financial instability due to risky online betting platforms.

Punishment and Fine

- 3 years imprisonment and fine up to ₹1 crore for providing money game services.
- 2 years jail and fine of up to ₹50 lakh for those running advertisements of games.
- 3 years jail and fine up to ₹1 crore for facilitating money transfer for money games.
- Those playing online games will be considered victims, there is no provision for punishment.

Regulatory Authority

A regulatory authority will be formed under the law, which will regulate the gaming industry.

Challenges in Regulation:

- Despite these actions, combating illegal betting and gambling online faces structural and technical hurdles:
 - » **URL Switching and Evasion:** Illegal operators frequently shift domain names and hosting locations to evade detection and blocking, making enforcement iterative and complex.
 - » **Offshore Jurisdictions:** A significant number of platforms are based outside Indian jurisdiction, complicating legal enforcement and digital policing.
 - » **Financial Flows:** Using intermediary “mule” accounts and digital wallets, funds can be swiftly moved out of reach of Indian authorities, raising issues of money laundering and financial regulation.

Conclusion:

The recent blocking of 242 illegal online betting and gambling sites is a landmark enforcement action under India’s Online Gaming Act, 2025, reflecting the government’s broader strategy to curb financial harm, addiction, and social damage associated with real money gaming. Yet, the persistence of illegal operators and offshore platforms highlights the ongoing challenges in digital governance, requiring sustained enforcement, cross sector cooperation, and innovative regulatory mechanisms to balance consumer protection with technological evolution.

‘Romeo Juliet Clause’ under POCSO Cases

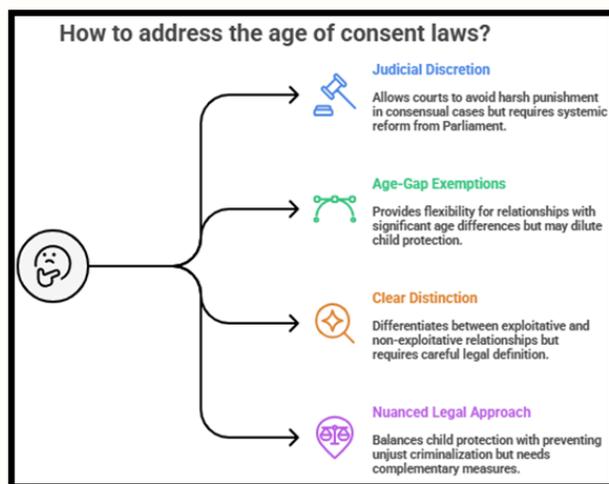
Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India urged the Union Government to consider introducing a “Romeo Juliet clause” within the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. The suggestion arose while the Court was hearing an appeal against a bail-related order of the

Allahabad High Court in a case registered under the POCSO Act.

What Is the POCSO Act?

- The POCSO Act is a stringent child-protection statute enacted to prevent, investigate, and punish sexual offences involving persons below 18 years of age. It mandates child-friendly procedures at all stages of the criminal justice process and prescribes strict penalties to safeguard minors from sexual abuse and exploitation.
- However, the Act criminalises all sexual activity involving persons under 18, irrespective of consent. This has led to situations where consensual adolescent relationships between individuals close in age fall within its ambit, even in the absence of exploitation, coercion, or abuse.



About the 'Romeo Juliet Clause'

- A "Romeo Juliet clause" is a legal exemption intended to protect consensual romantic or sexual relationships between adolescents who are close in age from being prosecuted under strict statutory rape laws. It is premised on the recognition that not all consensual interactions among teenagers are exploitative and that blanket criminalisation may result in unjust outcomes.
- Such provisions exist in several jurisdictions,

notably in the United States, where laws typically specify an age-difference threshold within which consensual relationships between minors—or between a minor and a slightly older partner—do not attract criminal liability.

Significance for Law and Policy:

- **Balancing Protection and Autonomy**
 - » The Court's suggestion reflects the need to balance child protection with respect for adolescent autonomy and context-sensitive justice.
 - » Blanket criminalisation risks stigmatizing normal teenage relationships and overburdening the criminal justice system with non-exploitative cases.
- **Addressing Misuse of the Law**
 - » Judicial observations regarding the misuse of POCSO provisions, often to settle familial disputes or enforce social norms—highlight the unintended consequences of an overly rigid legal framework.
- **Legislative Responsibility**
 - » While the Supreme Court may interpret the law and recommend reforms, only Parliament has the authority to amend the POCSO Act to formally incorporate such an exemption.
 - » This underscores the principle of separation of powers, wherein the judiciary advises and interprets, but lawmaking remains the prerogative of the legislature.

Challenges and Considerations:

- **Defining Age Thresholds:** Determining an appropriate age-gap limit (such as two to three years) is crucial to prevent ambiguity and misuse.
- **Safeguards Against Exploitation:** The exemption must be carefully crafted to ensure that genuine cases of abuse, coercion, or manipulation are not shielded under the guise of consent.

- **Social and Cultural Sensitivities:** Diverse societal attitudes toward adolescent relationships in India may influence both the implementation and public perception of such a provision.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's call for introducing a Romeo Juliet clause in the POCSO Act reflects a progressive judicial concern to ensure that protective legal frameworks do not inadvertently criminalise consensual adolescent behaviour. The issue brings to the forefront critical debates on youth autonomy, misuse of protective laws, judicial-legislative roles, and the need for a balanced, humane, and context-aware child protection regime.

Government Unveils Two More Credit-Linked Plans

Context:

The Government of India has unveiled two additional credit-linked interventions under the Export Promotion Mission (EPM) to improve access to affordable finance for Indian exporters and strengthen the country's competitiveness in global trade.

About the Export Promotion Mission:

- The Export Promotion Mission (EPM) is a flagship initiative aimed at creating a comprehensive, digitally driven export promotion system to address structural bottlenecks in India's export ecosystem.
- It replaces multiple fragmented schemes with a single, outcome-based and adaptive mechanism, enabling swift responses to global trade challenges and the evolving needs of exporters.
- EPM has a total outlay of Rs. 25,060 crore for the period FY 2025–26 to FY 2030–31.
- The mission places special emphasis on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), first-time exporters, and labour-intensive sectors such as

textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and marine products.

- The government has described the initiative as a strategic shift from a web of standalone schemes towards a unified, outcome-based framework to help exporters adapt to changing global trade dynamics.

Sub-Schemes under EPM:

- EPM comprises two integrated sub-schemes:
 - » **Niryat Protsahan:** Focuses on improving access to affordable trade finance through interest subvention, collateral support, export factoring, and other credit enhancement measures.
 - » **Niryat Disha:** Targets non-financial enablers such as export quality support, participation in international trade fairs, global branding, logistics facilitation, and export readiness.

The Union Cabinet approved the Export Promotion Mission (EPM),
 a flagship initiative to strengthen India's export competitiveness

₹25,060 crore

(FY 2025–26 to FY 2030–31)

Key Features:

- Consolidates fragmented export schemes into one outcome-based and adaptive mechanism.
- Anchored through collaboration among the Department of Commerce, Ministry of MSME, Ministry of Finance, and other key stakeholders.
- Operates through two integrated sub-schemes:
 - NIRYAT PROTSAHAN** – Focuses on affordable trade finance for MSMEs through:
 - Interest subvention
 - Export factoring
 - Collateral guarantees
 - Credit cards for e-commerce exporters
 - Credit enhancement support
 - NIRYAT DISHA** – Focuses on non-financial enablers including:
 - Export quality and compliance support
 - International branding & packaging assistance
 - Trade fairs & market access
 - Export warehousing and logistics
 - Trade intelligence and capacity-building

Implementation:

Managed digitally by DGFT through an integrated platform linked to existing trade systems.

Expected Impact:

- Affordable trade finance access for MSMEs
- Enhanced export readiness & compliance
- Improved market access & visibility for Indian products
- Boost in exports from non-traditional districts & sectors
- Employment generation in manufacturing, logistics & allied services




New Credit-Linked Interventions:

- **Interest Subvention Scheme**
 - » A Rs.5,181 crore interest subvention scheme has been introduced to reduce the cost of export financing.
 - » It provides exporters with an interest

subsidy on pre-shipment and post-shipment rupee export credit extended by lending institutions.

- » The measure aims to lower borrowing costs, improve working capital availability, and support exporters, particularly MSMEs facing tight global financing conditions.
- **Collateral Support for Export Credit**
 - » The second intervention earmarks Rs.2,114 crore for collateral support, enabling exporters to access credit guarantee coverage to overcome traditional collateral requirements.
 - » Implemented in partnership with the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE), it offers guarantee coverage of up to 85% for micro and small exporters and 65% for medium exporters.
 - » This initiative seeks to ease access to finance for exporters who otherwise face difficulties due to the absence of adequate collateral.

Significance of the Measures:

- **Improved Access to Export Finance:** Reduces high borrowing costs and collateral constraints, particularly for MSME exporters.
- **Support to Small and First-Time Exporters:** Encourages broader participation in global trade and diversification of India's export base.
- **Digitally Driven, Outcome-Based Approach:** Enhances transparency, efficiency, and ease of access by replacing fragmented schemes with a unified digital framework.

Conclusion:

The introduction of two new credit-linked interventions under the Export Promotion Mission strengthens India's export ecosystem by improving access to affordable finance, empowering MSMEs and first-time exporters, and enabling Indian exporters to better navigate evolving global trade challenges.

Governor Controversies in Tamil Nadu and Kerala

Context:

Recent developments in Tamil Nadu and Kerala have sparked intense political debates over the role of the Governor in state legislatures. In Tamil Nadu, Governor R.N. Ravi refused to read the customary opening address in the Legislative Assembly and walked out instead. In Kerala, Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar altered portions of the government-prepared policy speech, prompting the Chief Minister to read the omitted sections in the House. These events have brought to the fore tensions between constitutional provisions, established conventions, and political practice.

Events in Tamil Nadu and Kerala:

- **Tamil Nadu:**
 - » The Governor cited alleged inaccuracies in the DMK government's speech and certain procedural issues as reasons for his refusal to deliver the address.
 - » Chief Minister M.K. Stalin condemned the act, asserting that the Governor is constitutionally obligated to deliver the Cabinet-approved speech under Article 176 of the Constitution.
 - » He further emphasized that the Legislative Assembly had unanimously adopted a resolution treating the address as officially read.
- **Kerala:**
 - » Portions of the policy speech referring to fiscal autonomy and pending central legislation were modified or omitted by the Governor.
 - » Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan criticised the alteration as a violation of established procedural norms and reaffirmed that the Cabinet-approved text alone constitutes the official policy declaration of the government.
 - » The Speaker of the Assembly supported this position, underscoring the need to

adhere to long-standing constitutional conventions.

Constitutional Provisions:

- The Governor's role in legislative addresses is primarily governed by Article 176 of the Constitution, which mandates a special address at the commencement of each legislative year and after general elections.
- The Constitution envisages the Governor as a nominal head who functions on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers under Article 163.
- While Article 175 empowers the Governor to send messages to the House, unilateral deviations from the Cabinet-approved address are generally regarded as constitutionally improper in practice. Courts have tended to view such actions as procedural irregularities rather than substantive illegality.

Constitutional Conventions and Political Practice:

- By convention, the Governor is expected to read the address prepared by the elected government without alteration, as it reflects the government's policy priorities and legislative agenda.
- The subsequent debate on the Motion of Thanks enables legislative scrutiny and ensures executive accountability, reinforcing the parliamentary principle of responsible government.
- Any refusal to read the address or alteration of its contents disrupts this institutional balance and raises broader concerns regarding federal norms and Centre-State relations.

Conclusion:

These incidents underscore the fragile interface between constitutional text, conventions, and political practice in India's federal system. They highlight the need for greater clarity regarding the scope of the Governor's discretionary powers and reaffirm the primacy of elected state

governments in articulating public policy. The controversies in Tamil Nadu and Kerala are likely to influence future debates on federalism, the role of Governors, and the constitutional propriety of legislative addresses in India.

Kill Switch, Insurance as Tools to Fight Digital Arrest

Context:

Digital arrest scams are a growing cyber threat in India's rapidly digitising economy. Fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials via video calls, coercing victims into transferring money under the threat of arrest or asset seizure. To combat this, a high-level inter-departmental committee (IDC) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is exploring technological tools like a kill switch and insurance mechanisms to safeguard customers and banks.

About Digital Arrest:

- A digital arrest is an online extortion method where fraudsters:
 - » Impersonate officials from CBI, ED, or Police.
 - » Accuse victims of criminal or financial wrongdoing.
 - » Conduct fake interrogations via video calls.
 - » Threaten imprisonment or asset seizure unless victims transfer money.
 - » Fraudsters often disappear after collecting funds through cryptocurrency, wire transfers, or digital wallets.

Reasons for Rising Digital Arrests:

- Explosion of digital transactions.
- Low cyber awareness among users.
- Technological sophistication, including AI-generated voices and deepfakes.
- Weak global enforcement exploiting jurisdictional gaps.
- Psychological manipulation leveraging fear of authority.

About Kill Switch:

- The proposed kill switch is an emergency feature integrated into UPI or bank apps. If a user suspects fraud, pressing it instantly freezes all transactions, preventing funds from being moved to mule accounts. It represents a real-time, proactive safeguard against coercive scams.

Insurance against Fraud:

- An insurance mechanism is also being considered. A fraud insurance pool, supported by banks and insurers and regulated by IRDAI, could spread systemic risk, similar to terrorism insurance models, making coverage affordable and effective.

Government & Institutional Response for digital arrest:

| Initiative | Description |
|--|--|
| Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) | Coordinates with banks, telecoms, and fintech firms to track cybercrime patterns. |
| Blocking Spoofed Calls | Telecom service providers (TSPs) block fake international numbers used in scams. |
| National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal | Citizens can report scams online at cybercrime.gov.in . |
| CERT-In Guidelines | Advises public to verify calls, avoid sharing personal data, and not install suspicious apps. |
| Inter-Ministerial Committee (May 2024) | Tackles transnational cybercrime networks operating from Southeast Asia. |

Conclusion:

Digital arrest scams expose vulnerabilities in India's digital economy. Kill switches, insurance pools, and coordinated institutional measures can mitigate both individual and systemic risk. Proactive, multi-stakeholder strategies are essential to safeguard citizens, strengthen

financial resilience, and combat the evolving cyber threat landscape.

Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Context:

Recently, A two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India recently delivered a split verdict on the constitutional validity of Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (PCA, 1988). This section mandates prior approval from the appropriate government before initiating any inquiry or investigation against public servants for alleged offences committed in the discharge of official duties.

Background:

- The Prevention of Corruption Act was enacted in 1988 to consolidate laws dealing with bribery and criminal misconduct by public servants. Its genesis can be traced to the Santhanam Committee (1962-64), which recommended strengthening anti-corruption legislation in India.
- **Key features of PCA, 1988:**
 - » Public servant includes government employees, judges, and persons performing public duties.
 - » Public duty is defined as a responsibility affecting government, public, or community interest.
 - » Punishable offences include bribery, criminal misconduct, and undue advantage without consideration.
 - » Section 19 provides prior sanction from the government before prosecuting a public servant in court.

About Section 17A:

- Enacted through the 2018 amendment, Section 17A was intended to distinguish between:
 - » Intentional corruption
 - » Decisions taken in good faith that may result in unintended errors

- It requires prior approval from the appropriate government before initiating an inquiry or investigation into offences related to recommendations or decisions made by public servants. The objective was to protect honest officers from frivolous complaints and prevent a “play-it-safe” syndrome in bureaucracy.

What is Section 17A?

Section 17A, added to the Prevention of Corruption Act in 2018, requires prior government approval to investigate all serving and retired public servants for offences tied to official recommendations or decisions

TOP COURT SPLIT ON PROVISION

Justice BV Nagarathna

- Section 17A is contrary to binding precedents of the Supreme Court, further noting that the mechanism is fundamentally incompatible with fair investigation.
- Mandating prior approval even before the initiation of an inquiry undermines the rule of law and enables the executive to exercise control over investigative agencies in a manner previously disapproved by the court



Justice KV Viswanathan

- Striking down Section 17A could lead to policy paralysis as fear of criminal investigation could drive honest officers into a “play-it-safe” mode
- Provision could be constitutionally sustained if complaints are first subjected to independent screening, preventing frivolous or motivated complaints while ensuring that genuine cases of corruption are not stifled at inception



Earlier Judicial Rulings:

- Vineet Narain v. Union of India (1998):** Struck down an executive order requiring prior approval before investigation.
- Dr. Subramaniam Swamy v. CBI (2014):** Invalidated Section 6A of DSPE Act, which required prior sanction for senior officers, as violative of Article 14.
- These rulings emphasised that equal treatment under law should not be compromised by blanket protection for public servants.

About Current Split Verdict:

A PIL filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) challenged Section 17A. The Supreme Court division bench delivered conflicting opinions:

- Justice K.V. Viswanathan**
 - Upheld the need for prior approval to protect honest officers.
 - Suggested approval should come from an independent authority (Lokpal/Lokayuktas) rather than the government itself.
 - Warned that lack of protection could lead to bureaucrats avoiding decisive action.
- Justice B.V. Nagarathna**
 - Declared Section 17A unconstitutional.
 - Argued it is “old wine in new bottle”, repeating provisions struck down in previous cases.
 - Held that Section 19 already provides adequate protection and Section 17A fails the test of intelligible differentia and rational nexus under Article 14.
- The matter will now be referred to a larger Bench for a conclusive decision.

Way Forward:

- The verdict highlights the need for systemic reforms:
 - Swift disposal of corruption cases to ensure deterrence.
 - Penalties for false or malicious complaints to prevent vexatious litigation against honest officers.
- A balance between bureaucratic accountability and protection of honest public servants remains central to India's governance and anti-corruption framework.

Condemnation of ‘Institutional Humiliation’

Context:

The Rajasthan High Court recently condemned

the police practice of publicly parading arrestees and circulating their photographs on social media, terming it “institutional humiliation.” The Court directed the authorities to immediately remove such photographs within 24 hours and to implement safeguards to prevent the recurrence of such practices. The case arose after multiple petitions reported that arrestees were photographed in humiliating conditions and that their images were widely circulated through social media platforms and newspapers.

Key Highlights of the Court Judgment:

- **Right to Dignity under Article 21**
 - » The Court emphasised that Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees not only the right to life but also the right to live with dignity, honour, and self-respect.
 - » Arrest does not suspend fundamental human rights; accused persons continue to enjoy constitutional protections until proven guilty.
- **Institutional Humiliation Defined**
 - » Forcing arrestees to sit at police station entrances, partially disrobing them, photographing them, and circulating these images amounts to institutional humiliation.
 - » Such actions can cause irreparable damage to an individual’s reputation, social standing, and psychological well-being, even if the accused is subsequently acquitted.
- **Legal and Constitutional Violations**
 - » No provision under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), the Police Act, or the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita authorises such practices.
 - » The Court described these actions as arbitrary and illegal, reflecting unbridled caprice and undermining the rule of law and constitutional morality.
- **Directions to Authorities**
 - » Immediate removal of photographs and related content from all web portals, social media platforms, and newspapers.

- » Submission of affidavits and compliance reports by the Superintendent of Police, Jaisalmer, and the Commissioner of Police, Jodhpur.
- » Implementation of institutional safeguards to prevent future violations.
- **Impact on Vulnerable Groups**
 - » Unmarried women and young individuals are particularly vulnerable to social stigma, adverse marital consequences, and psychological trauma.
 - » The judgment underscores the need for sensitive and humane handling of accused persons, especially prior to judicial adjudication.

Significance:

- **Strengthening Fundamental Rights**
 - » Reinforces that the rights to dignity, honour, and privacy remain intact throughout criminal proceedings.
 - » Upholds the presumption of innocence, a foundational principle of the criminal justice system.
- **Digital Age Implications**
 - » Addresses the dangers posed by digital dissemination of sensitive content, recognising the permanent and far-reaching nature of online humiliation.
 - » Marks a significant step toward ethical policing and responsible digital governance.
- **Institutional Accountability**
 - » Holds police authorities accountable for human rights violations, prioritising the rule of law over arbitrary exercise of power.
 - » Sets a precedent for other states to review and reform policing practices relating to the treatment of arrestees.

Conclusion:

The Rajasthan High Court’s judgment highlights the critical intersection of criminal law, human rights, and digital ethics, reaffirming that constitutional protections extend well beyond the courtroom. By categorising the practice as

institutional humiliation, the Court has sent a strong message against the misuse of police powers and the dangers of public shaming in the digital era.

Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) Safety Technology in India

Context:

The Government of India is planning to launch Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) safety technology to reduce road accident fatalities and improve traffic management. In a recent meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee, Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, stated that the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has allocated the 30 GHz radio frequency specifically for the development of this system.

Significance:

- V2V is a wireless communication technology under the Intelligent Transport System (ITS) framework. It enables vehicles to "talk" to each other by sharing real-time information such as speed, location, acceleration, and braking.

Key Benefits:

- **Collision Prevention:** It alerts drivers to "black spots," obstacles, parked vehicles, heavy fog, or sudden braking by nearby vehicles.
- **Fatality Reduction:** The technology is expected to significantly reduce road accident deaths in India, a country that currently leads the world in traffic-related fatalities.

Background:

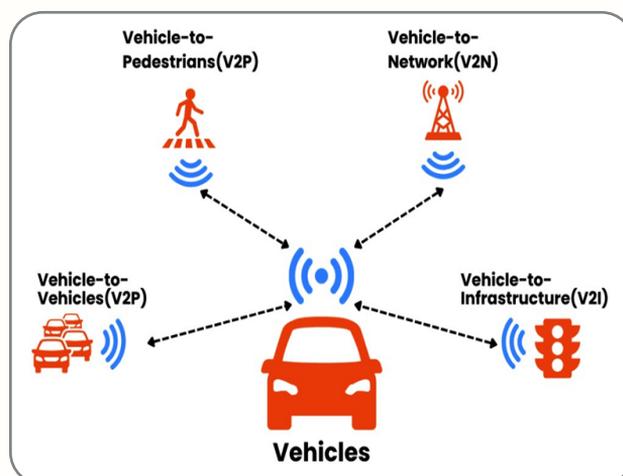
- The need for such an intervention is highlighted by stark statistics:
 - » **Global Share:** India recorded 1,68,491 road accident deaths in 2022, accounting for 11% of global fatalities despite having only 1% of the world's

vehicles.

- » **Human Error:** Driver error is a primary factor, responsible for approximately 78% of accidents, necessitating technological support to minimize risks.

Implementation:

- **On-Board Units (OBUs):** These units will be installed in vehicles to facilitate seamless V2V communication.
- **Phased Rollout:** Initially, the technology will be deployed in new vehicles, with long-term plans to retrofit older models.
- **Global Precedent:** Similar systems are already successfully implemented in the US, Germany, Japan, and China.



Challenges in Implementation:

- Despite its promise, V2V faces several hurdles:
 - » **Data Privacy and Security:** The collection of extensive vehicle and driver data raises risks regarding misuse and cyberattacks.
 - » **Technology Penetration:** Achieving uniform adoption is difficult due to India's vehicle diversity, the cost of equipment, and frequency limitations.
 - » **Regulatory Framework:** Robust guidelines are required to ensure system reliability and prevent accidents caused by miscommunication or technical glitches.

Complementary Measures: The 4Es Approach:

- V2V technology is not a standalone solution; it must be integrated with India's existing 4Es approach to road safety:
 - » **Education:** Awareness campaigns, National Road Safety Month, and specialized driving institutes.
 - » **Engineering:** Road safety audits, black spot rectification, and mandatory features like Airbags, ABS, and speed limiters.
 - » **Enforcement:** Implementation of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 and e-challan monitoring.
 - » **Emergency Care:** Good Samaritan protection, enhanced accident compensation, and highway ambulance facilities.
- Additional initiatives such as the Vehicle Scrapping Policy, Bharat New Car Assessment Program (BNCAP), and automated fitness certification further strengthen this infrastructure.

Way Forward:

While V2V technology represents a revolutionary step in reducing road fatalities, its effectiveness depends on a robust regulatory framework, widespread technological adoption, and public awareness. Coupled with infrastructure improvements and the 4Es approach, V2V can transform Indian roads from high-risk zones into safer corridors, marking a critical move toward smart mobility.

Supreme Court Stays UGC's 2026 Equity Regulations

Context:

On 29 January 2026, the Supreme Court of India stayed the implementation of the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, citing potential ambiguities

and the risk of societal division. The 2012 UGC equity regulations were ordered to remain in force until further directions. The matter has been listed for a detailed hearing before a three-judge bench on 19 March 2026.

Background:

- The 2026 Regulations were formulated following petitions filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, students who died by suicide due to alleged caste-based discrimination.
- The regulations aim to establish robust mechanisms to address discrimination in higher education institutions (HEIs), promote inclusivity, and protect vulnerable groups.
- Key features include the creation of Equal Opportunity Centres (EOCs) and Equity Committees across universities, colleges, and deemed universities.

UGC Regulations 2026

But why is there a ruckus?

In a major ruling on Thursday, the Supreme Court placed an interim stay on new UGC regulations aimed at promoting equality in higher education institutions (HEIs). The court deemed the definition of discrimination in these regulations "vague" and "controversial."

| | | UGC Rule 2012 | UGC Rule 2026 |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Objective: | | Preventing Discrimination in Higher Education | Promote equality, dignity, safety and inclusion |
| main focus: | | Focused on ST-SC students | ST, SC, OBC, gender, minorities and persons with disabilities |
| Who included: | | mainly students | Students, teaching faculty and non-teaching staff |
| Grievance Authority: | | anti-discrimination officer | multi-member equality committee |
| How to lodge complaint: | | written and offline | Online portal and offline medium |
| Time limit for action: | | up to 60 days | Committee meeting within 24 hours and proceedings within 7 days |

The bone of contention: the definition of 'caste-based discrimination'

The petitions challenged Regulation 3(c) of these new rules, notified on January 23, 2026. The main points of contention are the following:

- Allegations of exclusion: new rules in the Act, 'caste-based discrimination' was limited only to SC, ST and OBC communities.
- Neglect of General Category: If a General Category student faces harassment due to his caste identity, he will have no recourse for redressal under the new rules.
- Constitutional violations: The rules have been termed as arbitrary and against the basic spirit of the Constitution.

Key Provisions of the 2026 Regulations:

- **Equity Committees & EOCs:**
 - » HEIs must set up EOCs and Equity Committees to address complaints of discriminatory conduct.
 - » Committees include faculty, staff, students, civil society representatives,

and ensure representation of SC, ST, OBC, PwDs, and women.

- **Grievance Redressal:**
 - » Institutions must operate 24×7 helplines and online portals.
 - » Complaints are to be addressed within 15 working days, with action taken within 7 days.
 - » Protection against retaliation is mandatory for complainants and witnesses.
- **Compliance & Penalties:**
 - » Non-compliance may lead to denial of UGC grants, academic recognition, or scheme participation.
 - » A national monitoring committee will oversee implementation.

Key Legal Issues:

- **Definition of Caste-Based Discrimination:** The regulations define discrimination narrowly for SC, ST, and OBC students while other sections suggest broader coverage, creating legal inconsistencies.
- **Exclusion of General Category Protection:** Petitioners argued that the rules arbitrarily prevent general category students from accessing grievance redressal, potentially violating Articles 14, 15(1), 19(1)(a), and 21 of the Constitution.
- **Vagueness and Misuse:** The Court highlighted that vague language could invite misuse and confusion in academic settings.

Supreme Court Observation:

- **Ambiguities in definitions:** Clause 3(1)(c) on caste-based discrimination may overlap with Clause 3(1)(e), risking misuse.
- **Segregation risks:** Provisions allowing separate hostels or mentorship groups could violate Articles 14, 15, and constitutional fraternity principles.
- **Coverage gaps:** Exclusion of ragging and regional discrimination could limit effectiveness.
- **Equity balance:** Potential bias against general category students raised by petitioners.

Significance:

- Promotes inclusive education aligned with Articles 14, 15, and 21.
- Strengthens institutional accountability and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Represents a step toward a casteless and equitable campus environment.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's stay reflects the challenge of enforcing affirmative action in higher education while maintaining social cohesion and constitutional balance. The final verdict will shape India's approach to campus equity, inclusivity, and social justice for years to come.

Menstrual Health is Fundamental Right: Supreme Court

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India declared that access to menstrual health and hygiene in schools is an integral part of the fundamental right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Key Judicial Findings:

- **Menstrual Health as a Fundamental Right**
 - » The Court held that menstrual health and hygiene management (MHM) is a fundamental component of the right to life under Article 21, as it encompasses dignity, privacy, health, and bodily autonomy.
 - » The judgment emphasised that the lack of access to menstrual hygiene measures results in stigma, humiliation, and exclusion, thereby undermining substantive equality.
- **Connection with the Right to Education**
 - » Since the Right to Education under Article 21A is an extension of the right to life, meaningful access to education requires the removal of barriers, such

as the absence of menstrual facilities that disproportionately affect adolescent girls.

Substantive Equality

- » The Court adopted a substantive equality approach under Article 14, noting that treating unequals equally may perpetuate structural exclusion and systemic disadvantage.

Top court's directions

- Centre to frame national policy on menstrual hygiene management
- Policy must ensure free or subsidised menstrual absorbents for girl students
- States to ensure separate, functional toilets for girls in schools
- Conduct regular sensitisation programmes on menstrual health in schools
- Curriculum should include age-appropriate menstrual health education
- Govts must ensure dignity, privacy and bodily autonomy of menstruating persons in all educational institutions
- Special attention to marginalised and economically weaker sections
- Periodic monitoring and compliance mechanisms must be put in place
- Centre, states to implement the directions within 3 months

Directions Issued:

- **Free Sanitary Napkins:** All States, Union Territories, and schools, both government and private must provide free biodegradable sanitary napkins to girls.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management Facilities:** Schools must establish functional, gender-segregated toilets equipped with water, soap, and adequate privacy, including disability-friendly access. Facilities must include safe disposal mechanisms, such as covered bins and incinerators or other eco-friendly systems.
- **Awareness and Education:** School curricula should integrate menstrual health education, along with teacher sensitisation programmes, to address social stigma and ensure dignity.
- **Compliance and Accountability:** States and Union Territories are required to implement these measures within a stipulated

timeframe, with consequences, including de-recognition of non-compliant private schools.

Significance:

- **Gender Justice and Public Health:** The judgment recognises menstrual health as a multi-dimensional right, encompassing health, education, dignity, privacy, and gender equality.
- **Breaking Taboos:** By mandating awareness and education, the ruling challenges deep-rooted social taboos surrounding menstruation and fosters a more inclusive school environment.
- **Equity in Education:** Access to adequate menstrual hygiene facilities reduces absenteeism and dropout rates among girls, thereby enhancing participation and retention in education.

Policy Implications:

- The judgment supplements existing schemes such as Samagra Shiksha, the Swachh Bharat Mission, and the Menstrual Hygiene Policy for School-Going Girls by framing them as constitutional obligations.
- The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has urged the Government to ensure strict monitoring and effective implementation of the Court's directions.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's ruling that menstrual health in schools is integral to the right to life represents a progressive and transformative development. By firmly embedding menstrual hygiene within the framework of fundamental rights, encompassing dignity, health, education, and equality, the judgment seeks to address long-standing gaps in public health, gender equity, and access to education.



International Relations



Post-Globalisation Geopolitics: Donroe Doctrine, Venezuela Crisis and Future of Rules-Based Order

Introduction:

On 3 January 2026, international politics witnessed a major paradigm shift that not only altered the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere but also raised serious questions about the relevance and credibility of the Rules-Based International Order (RBIO) constructed after the Second World War. The detention of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro under Operation Absolute Resolve, carried out by the United States, was not merely an episode of regime change in a sovereign state; rather, it signalled the emergence of a new phase in American foreign policy.

The articulation of the “Donroe Doctrine” by President Donald Trump made it clear that 21st-century great power politics is increasingly abandoning the normative framework of liberal internationalism and reverting to the hard realities of realism and spheres of influence.

Operation Absolute Resolve:

- The military operation conducted in Caracas was described by the United States as a national security mission. Over the preceding months, the growing US naval presence in the Caribbean and the de facto maritime encirclement of Venezuela had already indicated Washington’s shift from diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions towards direct military intervention.
- The principal justification offered for the

intervention was the dismantling of a so-called “narco-terrorist regime.” According to the Trump administration, the Maduro government was not merely authoritarian but functioned as a criminal nexus deeply embedded in global narcotics trafficking networks. US interventions was the absence of rhetoric related to “democracy promotion.” Instead, the operation was explicitly framed around the protection of American citizens, highlighting a significant ideological shift in US foreign policy.

VENEZUELA AT A GLANCE

A South American Nation on the Caribbean Coast

It borders Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana, with a coastline on the Caribbean Sea.





A Natural Resource Titan

Holds the world's largest proven crude oil reserves and is rich in gold and natural gas.

Home to Natural Wonders

Features Angel Falls, the world's highest waterfall, and Lake Maracaibo, South America's largest lake.



The Donroe Doctrine:

- The Donroe Doctrine represents a hybrid of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and Donald

Trump's "America First" worldview. While the original Monroe Doctrine sought to prevent European interference in the Americas, the Donroe Doctrine advances this logic further.

- Its key pillars include:
 - » **Revival of Regional Hegemony:** The United States views the Western Hemisphere as its exclusive sphere of influence, perceiving the presence of external actors such as China and Russia as direct threats to its national security.
 - » **Militarisation of Intervention:** Diplomatic engagement and economic sanctions are increasingly replaced by direct military action as legitimate policy instruments.
 - » **Symbolic Geopolitics:** The renaming of the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America" is not merely semantic but conveys a strategic assertion of US dominance over its near maritime environment.
- By prioritising unilateralism over multilateralism, the doctrine signals America's willingness to act independently of institutions such as the United Nations or NATO when core interests are perceived to be at stake.

The Fentanyl Crisis: A New Security Discourse and the Expansion of 'WMD'

- One of the most powerful narratives underpinning the crisis is the growing threat posed by fentanyl and synthetic opioids. According to the World Health Organization, fentanyl is a highly potent synthetic opioid used as a painkiller and anaesthetic, but its lethality lies in the fact that it can be 30 to 100 times more powerful than heroin or morphine. In the United States, more than 69 percent of overdose deaths are linked to fentanyl.
- By categorising fentanyl and its chemical precursors as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), the Trump administration has fundamentally altered the global security

discourse. Traditionally reserved for nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons, the WMD label now extends to narcotics, thereby opening the door to military action against any state accused of facilitating their production or trafficking. This represents a classic case of securitisation, wherein a public health issue is transformed into an existential military threat.

OPERATION ABSOLUTE RESOLVE

Inside the stunning US military OP that captured Nicolás Maduro inside Venezuela



Energy at the Core of Geopolitics: Oil Reserves and Economic Dominance

- Oil has always been central to Venezuela's geopolitical significance. With over 300 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, Venezuela possesses the largest reserves in the world, surpassing even Saudi Arabia.

Yet, due to mismanagement and US sanctions, production under the Maduro regime declined to approximately one million barrels per day.

- The announcement of the return of US oil companies and the reconstruction of Venezuela's energy infrastructure following Operation Absolute Resolve evokes memories of post-Iraq War energy diplomacy. While the Trump administration argues that oil revenues would be used to rebuild Venezuela itself, the broader geopolitical implications are significant:
 - » **Exclusion of China and Russia:** Venezuela's oil sector had been heavily leveraged against Chinese and Russian loans. China alone is owed nearly \$60 billion, largely repayable through oil exports, while Russia's Rosneft held extensive stakes in Venezuelan oil assets. US control undermines these arrangements.
 - » **Influence over Global Oil Prices:** Increased Venezuelan production could weaken the influence of OPEC and particularly Russia-led OPEC+ on global energy markets.

International Law and the Relevance of the United Nations

- The events of 3 January constitute a direct challenge to the foundational principles of international law, particularly sovereignty and non-intervention. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter explicitly prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.
- Global reactions have been divided. China, Russia, Iran, and Cuba condemned the action as aggression and a violation of international law, whereas several Western allies justified it as a security exception.
- The inability of the UN Security Council to act, owing to the US veto highlights a structural failure of the multilateral system. This situation reflects a regression towards a 19th-century logic of "might is right," where

international law constrains weaker states but remains negotiable for major powers.

Strategic and Ethical Challenges for India:

- For India, the Venezuela crisis presents a complex diplomatic dilemma. India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by strategic autonomy and opposition to external intervention in domestic affairs.
 - » **Moral Dilemma:** Supporting the US action would dilute India's long-standing normative commitment to sovereignty, while opposing it could strain growing defence and technological partnerships with the US, including initiatives such as iCET and Indo-Pacific cooperation.
 - » **Energy Security:** Indian refineries such as Reliance and Nayara are capable of processing Venezuelan heavy crude. A stabilised Venezuelan oil sector under US oversight could provide India with an alternative to Russian crude and enhance energy diversification.
 - » **Future of Global Order:** As a proponent of a multipolar world, India views unilateral doctrines like the Donroe Doctrine as challenges to a rule-based, inclusive international system.
- India's likely response lies in a blend of strategic restraint and active diplomacy, avoiding overt alignment while quietly safeguarding its energy and geopolitical interests.

Conclusion:

The detention of Nicolás Maduro appears to end of the post-Cold War liberal consensus that shaped global politics for over three decades. The crisis underscores the dangers of a world where international institutions fail to constrain great powers, leading to renewed competition over spheres of influence. The future of global politics will increasingly be defined by the tension between the imperatives of security and the principles of sovereignty.

Short Issues

Bulgaria Joins Eurozone

Context:

Recently, on January 1, 2026, Bulgaria officially joined the Eurozone, becoming the 21st member of the European Union (EU) to adopt the euro.

About the Eurozone:

- The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 established the European Union and laid the foundation for:
 - » The European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)
 - » Adoption of a common currency, the euro
 - » Creation of a unified central banking system, the European Central Bank (ECB)
 - » Formation of a common economic region
- The eurozone refers to EU member states that have fully adopted the euro as their official currency.
- Out of 27 EU members, 21 now use the euro, while the remaining six retain their national currencies.

Other territories using the euro:

- Microstates such as Andorra, Monaco, Vatican City, and San Marino (through formal agreements).
- Kosovo and Montenegro, which use the euro unilaterally despite not being EU members.

Why Do Countries Join Eurozone?

- **Economic Benefits:**
 - » **Price transparency:** Enables consumers to compare prices across member states, enhancing competition.
 - » **Ease of transactions:** Simplifies cross-border trade and investment.
 - » **Price stability:** The ECB targets inflation close to 2%, helping stabilise domestic markets.
 - » **Lower interest rates:** A common monetary policy can reduce borrowing costs.
 - » **Elimination of currency exchange costs:** Facilitates trade, travel, and tourism.

- » **Insulation from external shocks:** Membership in a large currency bloc provides economic resilience.
- **Strategic and Socio-Economic Benefits:**
 - » Access to a single market with free movement of labour, goods, services, and capital.
 - » Tourism boost: Adoption of the euro simplifies travel and spending.
 - » Symbolic value: As the world's second-largest reserve currency, the euro reinforces European identity and integration.



Eligibility for Eurozone Membership:

- All EU members are required to adopt the euro, except Denmark, which has a formal opt-out.
- Countries must meet the convergence criteria, including:
 - » Economic alignment with eurozone members (inflation, public debt, fiscal deficit, and interest rates).
 - » Legal and institutional alignment, particularly central bank independence.
 - » Social, political, and economic readiness to ensure smooth integration.
- Bulgaria implemented legal and policy reforms to meet these requirements.

Transition plan:

- From January 1, 2026, transactions are permitted in both the Bulgarian lev and the euro.
- From February 1, 2026, the euro becomes the sole legal tender.

Implications for Bulgaria and the EU:

- **Economic**
 - » Improved access to eurozone markets, capital, and investment.
 - » Greater economic stability and lower transaction costs.
 - » Boost to tourism and cross-border commerce.
- **Political and Strategic**
 - » Strengthens Bulgaria's integration into the European Union.
 - » Reduces potential economic leverage historically exercised by Russia through currency and trade links.
- **Risks**
 - » Domestic political opposition and cultural ties with Russia may generate internal friction.
 - » Possible short-term inflationary pressures during the transition from the lev to the euro.

Conclusion:

Bulgaria's adoption of the euro represents a major milestone in EU integration. While it promises economic stability, price transparency, and enhanced regional influence, it also tests domestic political consensus and geopolitical sensitivities. Bulgaria's experience reflects the broader challenges of euro adoption in politically complex and economically diverse countries.

United States of America– Venezuela Relations

Context:

On January 3, 2026, under "Operation Absolute Resolve," U.S. military and special forces conducted a coordinated air and ground

operation near Caracas. In this operation, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife were arrested and taken to New York to stand trial on charges related to drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. The action is considered the most direct US military intervention in Latin America since the 1989 US invasion of Panama.

Recent Military Escalation:

- Tensions escalated sharply in late 2025 through a series of actions:
 - » **Operation Southern Spear (September 2025):** A U.S. maritime "anti-narcotics" campaign in the Caribbean and Pacific, involving lethal interdictions of vessels alleged to be engaged in drug trafficking.
 - » **Airspace Closure (29 November 2025):** The U.S. declared Venezuelan airspace closed to all civilian traffic.
 - » **Naval Blockade (December 2025):** A "total naval blockade" on Venezuelan oil tankers, justified by Washington as a measure against what it described as a "narco-terrorist regime."



Development of relations and Background of the dispute:

- U.S.–Venezuela relations were largely cooperative during the second half of the twentieth century, driven by oil trade and Cold War alignments. This relationship deteriorated sharply after Hugo Chávez assumed office in 1999, declared Venezuela a socialist state, and adopted an openly "anti-imperialist" foreign policy.
- Tensions deepened after Venezuela accused

the United States of backing the failed 2002 coup attempt against Chávez—allegations that were later partially retracted. Diplomatic strains continued with the expulsion of ambassadors in 2008 and again in 2014, when Caracas accused U.S. diplomats of promoting internal unrest.

- Although relations briefly improved following President Barack Obama’s outreach in 2009, they soon deteriorated once again. A major rupture occurred during the 2019 presidential crisis, when the United States recognised opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s interim president, prompting the Maduro government to sever diplomatic ties.
- U.S.–Venezuela relations have remained tense since the rise of socialist leadership in Caracas. Washington has accused the Maduro regime of authoritarian governance, electoral manipulation, systemic corruption, and links to international drug-trafficking networks. In response, the United States imposed extensive individual, financial, and sectoral sanctions, particularly targeting the state-owned oil company PDVSA. These measures severely weakened Venezuela’s economy and pushed the country closer to strategic partners such as China and Russia.

International Law and Legal Concerns Surrounding U.S. Military Intervention:

- From the perspective of international law, the U.S. actions raise serious concerns:
 - » **Violation of UN Charter Article 2(4):** The use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of a sovereign state is prohibited.
 - » **Sovereignty and Non-Intervention:** The capture of a sitting head of state without UN Security Council authorisation challenges established norms of state sovereignty.
 - » **Absence of Self-Defence Justification:** The United States did not face an imminent armed attack, weakening any claim

under Article 51 (self-defence).

- » **Extraterritorial Law Enforcement:** Maduro’s removal raises significant questions under international human rights law and established extradition norms.

Conclusion:

The U.S.–Venezuela confrontation of January 2026 underscores critical debates in contemporary international relations, including the limits of military intervention, respect for state sovereignty, and the geopolitics of energy security. As Venezuela navigates internal political uncertainty amid intense external pressure, this episode is likely to have lasting implications for diplomatic norms and power dynamics in the Western Hemisphere.

US Withdraws from Over 60 Global Organisations

Context:

Recently, the United States announced its withdrawal from 66 international organisations, including 31 UN-linked bodies and 35 non-UN organisations such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The White House framed this decision as a measure to protect national sovereignty and reduce engagement with institutions perceived as inefficient or inconsistent with US interests.

Rationale Behind the Move:

- The decision reflects the “America First” doctrine, which emphasises that multilateral commitments should align with domestic priorities and taxpayer interests.
- US officials argued that participation in global bodies often constrains national policymaking and does not always yield measurable benefits. Supporters of the move view it as a reassertion of sovereignty and autonomy in international affairs.

Global and Strategic Implications:

- **Multilateralism at Risk:** The withdrawal weakens institutions addressing climate change, public health, and development, potentially leading to fragmentation in global governance.
- **Climate Diplomacy and ISA:** Exiting climate platforms undermines US influence in global climate negotiations. Withdrawal from the ISA disrupts collaborative renewable energy initiatives and may create space for other powers, such as China, to expand their influence.
- **Power Dynamics:** Reduced US engagement creates a leadership vacuum in multilateral institutions, allowing the EU, China, and emerging economies to shape norms and standards, potentially altering global decision-making frameworks.

Challenges and Criticisms:

- Critics argue that the move undermines international cooperation, weakens responses to shared global crises, and may erode US credibility. The claim of organisational inefficiency is viewed as subjective, overlooking the long-term benefits of collaboration such as data sharing, standard-setting, and conflict resolution.
- Humanitarian and development-focused agencies may face funding and capacity constraints, adversely affecting low-income countries dependent on international support.

Indian and Regional Perspective:

- For India, the US withdrawal from the ISA and climate-related bodies is a diplomatic setback but also presents an opportunity to strengthen South–South cooperation.
- India's leadership in renewable energy and climate coalitions remains intact, although the country may need to recalibrate partnerships with other major stakeholders.

Conclusion:

The US exit highlights the tension between sovereignty-driven foreign policy and global responsibility. While the move reinforces domestic priorities, it risks weakening multilateral frameworks essential for addressing transnational challenges. For India and the wider international community, it underscores the importance of strategic autonomy, sustained multilateral engagement, and adaptive diplomacy in an evolving geopolitical landscape.

Saudi Arabia's Attack on Yemen

Context:

Recently, Saudi Arabia carried out airstrikes on strategic locations in Yemen, including port infrastructure, marking a fresh escalation in the protracted Yemeni conflict. The strikes have attracted international attention as they reflect not only Saudi Arabia's security concerns but also the deepening regional fault lines within the Gulf and the fragile state of ongoing peace efforts in Yemen.

Background:

- Yemen has been engulfed in civil war since 2014, when the Iran-backed Houthi rebels overthrew the internationally recognised government. In 2015, Saudi Arabia led a coalition, which included the United Arab Emirates, to restore the Yemeni government and counter Houthi influence.
- Over time, the conflict evolved into a complex proxy war involving regional rivalries, multiple local factions, and a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing millions and leaving large sections of the population dependent on external aid.

Immediate Triggers of the Saudi Airstrikes:

- Saudi Arabia justified the recent attacks by citing national security threats, asserting that weapons shipments and military assets operating within Yemen could destabilise its borders. Reports also suggest

that the strikes were linked to concerns over arms transfers involving southern Yemeni factions, particularly the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which is backed by the UAE. This development marks a significant shift, as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, previously aligned in Yemen, now differ over the country's political future.



Diverging Regional Interests:

- The airstrikes underline growing fractures within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):
 - » Saudi Arabia prioritises a unified Yemen under the internationally recognised government to prevent long-term instability along its borders.
 - » The UAE, by contrast, has supported the STC, which seeks greater autonomy or even independence for southern Yemen.
 - » These divergent interests have weakened the anti-Houthi coalition and complicated peace negotiations, thereby reducing the prospects for a coherent and unified political settlement.

Humanitarian and Regional Implications:

- Renewed military action risks aggravating Yemen's humanitarian crisis, already among the worst in the world. Damage to ports and critical infrastructure threatens the flow of food and fuel supplies in a country heavily reliant on imports.
- At the regional level, instability in Yemen directly affects the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb maritime corridor, which are

vital for global trade and energy security. Continued escalation could also embolden non-state actors and expand Iran's strategic influence in the region.

Way Forward:

- Saudi Arabia's attack on Yemen highlights the fragility of regional security arrangements and the limitations of military solutions. A sustainable peace process requires:
 - » De-escalation among Gulf states, particularly between Saudi Arabia and the UAE
 - » Inclusive peace negotiations involving all Yemeni stakeholders under United Nations mediation
 - » Prioritisation of humanitarian access, ceasefire enforcement, and post-conflict reconstruction
- Without renewed diplomatic momentum, Yemen risks sliding deeper into instability, with far-reaching consequences for regional security and global trade.

Strategic Importance of Somaliland

Context:

Somaliland, a self-declared republic since 1991 after breaking away from Somalia, has re-entered global focus following Israel's recognition in December 2025, becoming the first UN member state to formally recognise Somaliland's independence. Though long unrecognised internationally, Somaliland's strategic geography, particularly its proximity to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait has made it a critical node in evolving Red Sea and Horn of Africa geopolitics.

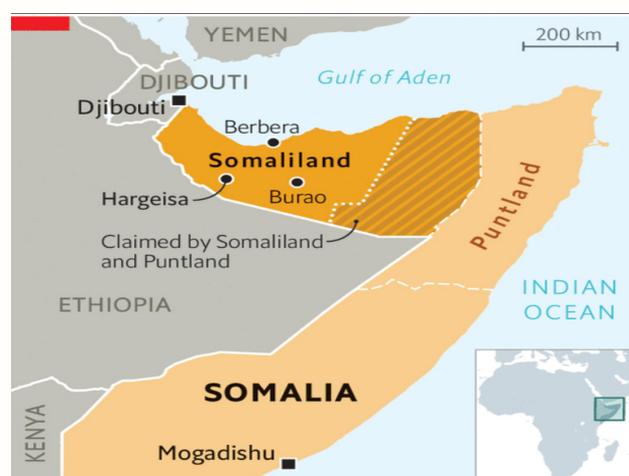
About Somaliland:

- Somaliland, officially the Republic of Somaliland, is a self-declared sovereign state located in the Horn of Africa. While it functions as a fully independent entity with its own government, currency, and

military, it is internationally recognised as an autonomous region of Somalia.

Significance of Somaliland:

- Somaliland lies along the Gulf of Aden, overlooking one of the world's most vital maritime choke points connecting the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.
- Nearly 12% of global trade passes through this route, making stability and access critical for energy supplies, commercial shipping, and naval operations.
- Rising attacks on Red Sea shipping by Yemen's Houthi rebels have further heightened the region's strategic importance.



Berbera Port and Military Infrastructure:

- At the core of Somaliland's strategic value is the Berbera Port and airfield, developed since 2016 by the United Arab Emirates under a long-term concession.
- Recent upgrades have enabled the port to host large naval vessels, drones, and military aircraft, transforming it from a primarily commercial hub into a potential military logistics base. Analysts note a gradual shift from trade-centric interests to broader security and force-projection objectives.

Israel and UAE Interest:

- For Israel, Somaliland offers a strategic

vantage point to monitor and potentially counter Houthi activities in Yemen, thereby expanding surveillance and operational reach across the Red Sea region. This move also complements Israel-UAE security cooperation under the Abraham Accords.

- The UAE, while refraining from formal recognition, has not opposed Israel's move, prioritising strategic access and security interests over potential diplomatic costs.

Regional and Global Reactions:

- Somalia condemned the recognition as a violation of its sovereignty and cancelled agreements with the UAE.
- Turkey, a key Somali ally, expressed concern that fragmentation could undermine its military and economic investments.
- Egypt opposed moves that could weaken its Red Sea security interests.
- China opposed the development due to Somaliland's ties with Taiwan and its alignment with Israel.
- The United States defended Israel's right to recognition but remained cautious about following suit, balancing regional alliances and broader geopolitical considerations.

Conclusion:

As insecurity in the Red Sea intensifies and great-power rivalries deepen, Somaliland's future is likely to be shaped less by its democratic credentials and more by how regional and global powers balance security imperatives with norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's India Visit

Context:

Recently, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz concluded his two-day official visit to India, coinciding with 25 years of the India-Germany Strategic Partnership and 75 years of diplomatic relations. The visit took place ahead of the India-EU Summit scheduled later this month

and amid heightened geopolitical churn marked by the Russia-Ukraine war and ongoing global supply-chain realignments. As Germany is the largest economy in the European Union and India's biggest trading partner in Europe, the visit carried strategic significance extending well beyond bilateral ties.

Key Outcomes of the Visit:

- The visit was marked by outcome-oriented engagement, with the signing of 19 agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), reflecting deeper strategic, economic, and geopolitical convergence.

Strategic and Defence Cooperation:

- Signing of a Joint Declaration of Intent (JDoI) on a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap.
- Emphasis on co-development, co-production, technology partnerships, and faster defence export clearances.
- Ongoing cooperation in submarines, counter-UAS systems, helicopter platforms, joint military exercises, and security consultations.

Strategic relevance:

- Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and defence indigenisation.
- Helps reduce India's overdependence on Russian defence supplies.
- Combines India's skilled workforce with Germany's advanced defence technologies.

Higher Education and Global Skills Partnership:

- Adoption of a comprehensive roadmap for higher education cooperation, with Germany invited to establish campuses in India under NEP 2020.
- Launch of a Global Skills Partnership (JDoI) to facilitate mobility of healthcare professionals.
- Expansion of German language education across schools, universities, and vocational institutions.

- Establishment of an Indo-German Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Renewable Energy.

Economic and Trade Relations:

- Bilateral trade crossed USD 50 billion in 2024, accounting for over 25% of India-EU trade.
- Strong two-way investments in SMEs, startups, artificial intelligence, digitalisation, and supply-chain diversification.
- Institutional support through the German-Indian CEO Forum.
- Strong push for the early conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Critical and Emerging Technologies:

- Enhanced cooperation in semiconductors, critical minerals, telecommunications, AI, health, and the bioeconomy.
- **Key initiatives include:**
 - » Semiconductor Ecosystem Partnership
 - » Critical Minerals Cooperation Framework
 - » Indo-German Digital Dialogue Work Plan (2026-27)
- **Strategic objective:** To build trusted supply chains, ensure digital sovereignty, and reduce dependence on China-centric technology ecosystems.

Climate, Energy, and Sustainability:

- Establishment of an India-Germany Centre of Excellence in Renewable Energy.
- Collaboration on green hydrogen mega-projects, urban mobility, and climate action.
- Germany's commitment of €10 billion till 2030 under the Green and Sustainable Development Partnership.

Indo-Pacific and Global Geopolitics:

- Reaffirmation of commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, UNCLOS, and international law.
- Cooperation under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- Discussions on key global issues, including:
 - » The Ukraine war (support for a UN Charter-based peace)

- » The Gaza conflict (support for a two-state solution)
- » Terrorism (strong condemnation of attacks in India)
- Renewed support for UN Security Council reforms and coordination through the G4 framework.

Conclusion:

German Chancellor Merz's visit underscores India's rising importance in Europe's strategic calculus. While cooperation across economic, defence, technological, and climate domains continues to deepen, the visit also highlighted the complexities of aligning interests in a rapidly evolving multipolar world. Overall, the outcomes significantly strengthen India-Germany relations and position India as a key pillar of Europe's long-term engagement with the Global South and the Indo-Pacific.

Protest in Iran

Context:

Iran has been witnessing nationwide protests since December 28, 2025. The protests spread across all 31 provinces of the country and took place at more than 512 locations in around 180 cities, including major cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz and Qom. The demonstrations, continuing into January 2026, represent one of the largest uprisings in the country's recent history, combining economic grievances, political dissent, and generational activism.

Causes of the Protests:

The protests are rooted in a complex interplay of political, economic, social, and ideological factors:

- **Political and Governance Issues:**
 - » **Authoritarianism and human rights abuses:** Citizens demand accountability from a government criticized for political repression and systemic corruption.
 - » **Mandatory hijab enforcement and**

religious persecution: Sections of the population, particularly younger generations, have expressed dissent against strict religious codes and gender-based restrictions.

Iran: Four decades of defiance

Every major wave of popular protest since the Shah's overthrow in 1979 has sparked renewed talk of regime change – only to be met, each time, with a brutal response by the authorities



Opposition supporter during clashes with security forces in Tehran on Dec 27, 2009

1980

1979: Post-revolution protests
Less than two weeks after Islamic Revolution, thousands of women march in Tehran against decree mandating hijab. **Mandatory veiling is enforced nationwide in following years**



1990

July 1999: Student protests
Tehran University students protest closure of reformist newspaper *Salam*. Police raid dormitories, triggering demonstrations in multiple cities. **Security crackdown leaves several students dead and hundreds jailed**



2010

2009: Green Movement
Millions protest disputed presidential election results that returned **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** to power. Security forces and *Basij* militias crush rallies after weeks of unrest, killing dozens and arresting thousands

2019: "Bloody November"
Fuel price hike sparks nationwide protests. State imposes internet blackout for first time as *IRGC* and police suppress demonstrations, killing hundreds, according to rights groups



2020

2022-23: Mahsa Amini uprising
Death of 22-year-old **Jina Mahsa Amini** (right) in police custody triggers mass protests demanding women's rights and political change. **Hundreds killed, over 20,000 arrested, several protesters executed during months of unrest**



2025-26: Economic unrest
Currency collapse and economic mismanagement spark nationwide protests, with chants questioning legitimacy of Supreme Leader **Ali Khamenei**. **Around 2,000 people reportedly killed in security crackdown amid threats by U.S. President Donald Trump to intervene**

- » **Internet censorship and blackouts:** Government attempts to control the flow of information have fuelled public distrust and catalysed online activism.
- » **Ethnic and ideological tensions:** Marginalized ethnic and religious groups have amplified their grievances alongside broader calls for reform.
- **Economic Grievances:**
 - » **Currency crisis:** The Iranian rial has

experienced severe depreciation, contributing to high inflation and rising costs of essential goods.

- » **Economic mismanagement:** Decades of fiscal mismanagement, coupled with international sanctions, have exacerbated shortages of food, energy, and water.
- » **Impact on ordinary citizens and merchants:** Bazaar merchants have led strikes and shop closures, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with prevailing economic policies.
- **Generational and Social Factors:**
 - » **Gen Z activism:** Young Iranians, influenced by global social movements, have emerged as prominent participants, challenging both cultural norms and political authority.
 - » **Urban protests and student movements:** Cities such as Tehran have witnessed rooftop demonstrations, marches, and digital campaigns spearheaded by students and urban youth.

Implications:

- **Domestic Implications:**
 - » Persistent unrest threatens political stability and may challenge the durability of theocratic governance.
 - » Economic disruptions, strikes, and trade interruptions have intensified domestic hardship.
 - » Generation-driven protests underscore growing demands for social liberalization and political reform.
- **Regional and Global Implications:**
 - » The protests may influence Iran's foreign policy posture in West Asia, particularly with respect to proxy engagements in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.
 - » Rising internal instability could affect global oil markets, given Iran's strategic role in energy exports.
 - » International actors may reassess engagement strategies, balancing human rights concerns with geopolitical

interests.

Implications for India:

- India maintains strategic interests in Iran, particularly the Chabahar Port, which is crucial for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Prolonged unrest could disrupt infrastructure projects and trade logistics.
- Diplomatically, India must navigate a calibrated approach—preserving ties with Iran while sustaining strategic relationships with Israel and the United States.

Global Implications:

- **Regional security:** Heightened tensions risk spillover effects across the Middle East, especially amid U.S. and Israeli involvement.
- **Energy markets:** Iran's pivotal role in oil exports could influence global prices during periods of instability.
- **Human rights:** The state's crackdown has drawn international criticism, raising concerns over authoritarian responses to popular dissent.

Conclusion:

The 2025–26 Iranian protests, the largest since the 2022 Mahsa Amini movement represent a convergence of economic crisis, political dissatisfaction, and generational discontent. While primarily domestic in origin, the unrest carries significant regional and global ramifications, challenging the balance between state sovereignty, human rights, and geopolitical interests. For India, prudent diplomacy and close attention to energy security and trade interests remain essential.

Pax Silica Initiative

Context:

India has recently been invited to join the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative. The initiative is a strategic partnership aimed at building a secure and resilient global supply chain for critical technologies, including silicon, semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, and

artificial intelligence (AI).

About Pax Silica:

- Pax Silica is a United States–led strategic initiative launched in December 2025 to develop secure, resilient, and innovation-driven supply chains for foundational technologies such as silicon, semiconductors, AI infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals, and logistics.
- The initiative seeks to reduce “coercive dependencies”, particularly on single-source suppliers such as China and to diversify technological supply networks among trusted partners. The name combines Pax (peace and stability) and Silica (the material foundational to silicon chips).



Geopolitical Context:

- Pax Silica forms part of a broader U.S. strategy to strengthen allied cooperation in critical technologies and reduce overreliance on dominant producers in key sectors, notably China.
- Participating economies include Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Israel, the UAE, and Australia.
- India's inclusion signals deeper integration

into global technology governance frameworks and underscores its emerging role in shaping resilient and trusted supply chains.

Implications for India:

- **Boost to the Technology Ecosystem:** India's participation could catalyse investments in semiconductor manufacturing, AI platforms, critical mineral processing, and advanced supply-chain infrastructure, while aligning domestic capabilities with evolving global demand.
- **Strategic Diversification:** Engagement with Pax Silica diversifies India's geopolitical partnerships, deepening cooperation with the United States and other like-minded economies while remaining consistent with its principle of strategic autonomy.
- **Economic Integration and Innovation:** The initiative can accelerate India's integration into high-value technology ecosystems, strengthening supply-chain resilience and enhancing its standing as a destination for innovation and advanced technological development.

Conclusion:

India's invitation to the Pax Silica initiative represents a significant endorsement of its position in the global technology and critical supply-chain landscape. It reflects international confidence in India's capacity to contribute to secure and diversified technology networks while advancing its own ambitions in AI, semiconductors, and digital innovation. As global competition over supply chains intensifies, India's role as both a collaborative partner and a sovereign technological actor is set to expand further.

Phase Two of Gaza Peace Plan

Context:

Recently, A U.S. backed peace plan to end the Gaza war has entered its second phase

even as unresolved political and security disputes persist between Israel and Hamas over key issues such as disarmament and post war governance. The plan aims to shift from immediate conflict cessation to longer-term governance, reconstruction, and stabilization of Gaza.

Background:

- The Gaza conflict is part of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian dispute originating in 1948, following the establishment of Israel and the displacement of Palestinians. Gaza became a flashpoint after Hamas took control in 2007, leading to an Israeli and Egyptian blockade.
- The recent escalation began on 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched large-scale attacks on Israel, killing over 1,200 people and taking hostages. Israel responded with Operation Iron Swords, causing widespread casualties and destruction in Gaza.



About Phase One:

- Phase One, launched in October 2025, aimed to:
 - » Establish a fragile ceasefire
 - » Allow humanitarian aid into Gaza
 - » Secure the release of hostages

- Most hostages were returned, except the remains of Ran Gvili, creating tension over the timing of Phase Two. Ceasefire violations persisted, with reports of casualties on both sides. Humanitarian access remained limited, and shortages of food, medicine, and fuel worsened the humanitarian crisis.

About Phase Two:

- Phase Two introduces a 15-member Palestinian technocratic committee to govern Gaza, led by Ali Sha'ath, focusing on day-to-day administration, reconstruction, and civilian services. Oversight is provided by a "Board of Peace", chaired by U.S.
- President Donald Trump, with international figures guiding the process. An International Stabilisation Force is also proposed to train Palestinian police and secure the territory.

Challenges:

- **Disarmament:** Hamas refuses full demilitarization, Israel's core demand.
- **Withdrawal:** Israel has not provided a timeline for complete troop withdrawal.
- **Humanitarian crisis:** Over 2 million Palestinians lack food, clean water, and medical care; 90% remain displaced.
- **Political mistrust:** Deep-rooted grievances hinder reconciliation and governance.

Conclusion:

Phase Two represents a critical shift from short-term ceasefire to long-term governance and stabilization. However, its success depends on sustained international mediation, mutual trust, and addressing security and political disputes. Without these, reconstruction and peace in Gaza may remain fragile, underscoring the complexities of resolving protracted conflicts.

Responsible Nations Index

Context:

Recently, India has been ranked 16th among 154 countries in the Responsible Nations Index

(RNI) 2026. The RNI is a new global framework that evaluates how responsibly nations exercise power toward their citizens, the environment, and the international community.

About the Responsible Nations Index (RNI):

- The RNI has been developed by the World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), IIM Mumbai, and the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre. It is India's first globally anchored, ethics-based, and sustainability-focused ranking framework.
- Covering 154 countries, the index evaluates national behaviour using internationally sourced and transparent data, focusing on how countries treat their citizens, manage the environment, and contribute to global peace and stability.
- Its underlying premise is that prosperity without responsibility is unsustainable, making the index a critical analytical tool in contemporary international relations.

Structure and Methodology:

- The index is built on three core pillars:
 - » **Internal Responsibility:** Assesses a nation's obligations toward the dignity, well-being, and empowerment of its citizens.
 - » **Environmental Responsibility:** Examines ecological protection and sustainable development efforts.
 - » **External Responsibility:** Evaluates a country's conduct and contributions within the international system.
- These pillars are assessed across seven dimensions: quality of life, governance, social justice, economic performance, environmental protection, peacekeeping, and international economic relations.

Key Insights from the 2026 Rankings:

- **Top performers:** Singapore tops the inaugural index, followed by Switzerland and Denmark.
- **India's position:** India ranks 16th, ahead of major economies such as the United States

(66th), China (68th), France, and Japan (38th).

- **Economic power vs responsibility:** The report highlights that wealth and economic strength do not automatically translate into responsible conduct. Several developing nations outperform richer countries in areas such as social welfare and environmental stewardship.
- **Other major economies:** Japan (38), the United Kingdom (25), Brazil (81), South Africa (88), and Mexico (70). North Korea is ranked 146th.



Significance:

- **Redefining leadership:** The index shifts global discourse from a power-centric to a responsibility-centric understanding of leadership.
- **Encouraging accountability:** By highlighting gaps in governance and sustainability, the RNI urges nations to reform social systems, strengthen environmental policies, and promote peaceful diplomacy.
- **Promoting ethical governance:** Aligned with the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("the world is one family"), the index reflects values of global solidarity, justice, and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion:

By redefining national success in terms of responsibility rather than dominance,

the Responsible Nations Index encourages governments worldwide to prioritise ethical governance, social equity, and sustainable development, principles that align closely with India's long-term policy vision.

India-UAE Relations

Context:

Recently, on 19 January, the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was on a very brief visit to India. During the visit, he held a meeting with Indian PM in New Delhi. The discussions focused on expanding cooperation across nuclear energy, artificial intelligence (AI), defence, counter-terrorism, and economic ties, reflecting the deepening strategic partnership between the two countries.

Key Areas of Cooperation from the 2026 Meeting:

- **Energy Security:** The leaders welcomed a 10-year LNG supply agreement under which ADNOC Gas will supply 0.5 million tonnes per annum of liquefied natural gas to Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) starting in 2028, reinforcing the UAE's role as a critical energy partner for India.
- **Nuclear Cooperation:** Both sides agreed to explore collaboration in advanced nuclear technologies, including large nuclear reactors and Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). This cooperation is facilitated by India's SHANTI law, which enables international collaboration in the civil nuclear sector.
- **AI and Digital Infrastructure:** Cooperation in AI, data, and digital ecosystems was prioritised. Discussions included establishing a supercomputing cluster in India, UAE investments in data centres, and the concept of Digital Embassies to ensure digitally sovereign infrastructure. The UAE also expressed support for India's AI Impact Summit 2026.
- **Defence and Counter-Terrorism:** The meeting resulted in a Letter of Intent on a Strategic Defence Partnership. Both leaders unequivocally condemned terrorism and agreed to enhance cooperation through international mechanisms such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to counter terror financing and money laundering.
- **Trade, Investment, and MSMEs:** Beyond the shared goal of achieving US\$200 billion in bilateral trade, both sides reviewed strategic investments, including UAE participation in the Special Investment Region at Dholera. Initiatives such as Bharat Mart, Virtual Trade Corridor, and Bharat Africa Setu were highlighted to strengthen MSME linkages across regions.
- **Space, Food Security, and Cultural Ties:** India and the UAE agreed to deepen cooperation in the space sector, build resilient food supply chains, and enhance people-to-people ties, including plans to establish a "House of India" in Abu Dhabi.



About India-UAE Relations:

- **Historical and Diplomatic Foundations:** India and the UAE have maintained diplomatic relations since 1972, supported

by regular high-level engagements and growing strategic convergence. Over time, the relationship has expanded beyond traditional trade to encompass energy, investment, security, technology, culture, and diaspora linkages.

- **Comprehensive Strategic Engagement:** The partnership has been elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, reflecting shared interests in regional stability, economic growth, and cooperation in global governance. India's prominence in the Gulf region and the UAE's role as a gateway to the Middle East and Africa have further strengthened this engagement.
- **Economic and Trade Integration:** Economic ties have accelerated following the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022, which reduced tariffs and expanded market access. The UAE has emerged as India's third-largest trading partner and second-largest export destination, with bilateral trade exceeding US\$100 billion in recent years. Both countries aim to double trade to US\$200 billion by 2032.

Conclusion:

The concise yet substantive meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed underscores the multi-dimensional India-UAE partnership spanning economy, technology, security, and culture. The emphasis on nuclear cooperation, AI collaboration, and counter-terrorism highlights a mature strategic alliance that supports regional stability and shared prosperity. Further consolidation of this partnership is expected under India's BRICS 2026 chairmanship, enhancing its global and regional influence.

Spain joined the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

Context:

Recently, Spain formally joined the Indo-Pacific

Oceans Initiative (IPOI), an India-led framework for maritime cooperation, signalling a new chapter in India-Spain strategic engagement. The move coincides with the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Spain in 2026, further underscored by the launch of the India-Spain Dual Year of Culture, Tourism and Artificial Intelligence, reflecting the multifaceted nature of bilateral ties.

About IPOI:

- Launched by India in November 2019 at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) is a non-treaty, voluntary framework fostering practical cooperation among like-minded states for a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- Its thematic pillars include maritime security, maritime ecology, disaster risk reduction, science and technology cooperation, and trade and connectivity, among others.
- The initiative builds on India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and emphasises shared responsibility for maritime stability, sustainable development, and capacity building without forming formal military alliances.



Significance of Spain Joining IPOI:

- **Strategic Convergence:** Spain's accession signals alignment with India's Indo-Pacific vision and support for freedom of navigation and respect for international law.
- **Multilateralism:** Reinforces cooperative,

inclusive approaches to regional challenges rather than alliance-based security frameworks.

- **EU Dimension:** Strengthens India's engagement with European countries in Indo-Pacific affairs, complementing India-EU strategic cooperation.
- **Maritime Governance:** Opens avenues for collaboration in maritime sustainability, disaster response, and capacity-building.

About India-Spain Relations:

- **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - » India and Spain established diplomatic relations in 1956.
 - » An Indian mission opened in Madrid in 1958, and the first resident Indian Ambassador was appointed in 1965.
 - » Relations have remained cordial and stable, anchored in shared democratic values and respect for a rules-based international order.
- **Economic and Trade Relations:**
 - » Spain is India's 7th largest trade partner in the European Union.
 - » Bilateral trade (2017-18): US\$ 5.66 billion, with India enjoying a trade surplus.
 - » India's major exports: textiles, organic chemicals, iron & steel, seafood, automobiles, leather.
 - » India's major imports: mechanical appliances, electrical machinery, chemicals, plastics, mineral fuels.

Conclusion:

Spain's accession to the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative marks a milestone in India-Spain relations and in the broadening of global cooperation for a stable Indo-Pacific. It underscores growing alignment on security, multilateralism, and maritime governance, while reinforcing India's role as a key agenda-setter in regional cooperation. As bilateral engagements expand across economic, cultural, and security domains, Spain's participation in the IPOI elevates shared interests in maintaining a free,

open, and rules-based regional order.

Free Trade Agreement between India and European Union

Context:

Recently, India and the European Union (EU) have finalised a landmark Free Trade Agreement (FTA) after nearly two decades of negotiations.

Key Features of the Deal:

- **Tariff Elimination on Goods**
 - » Tariffs on approximately 96-99% of trade by value will be phased down or eliminated over time.
 - » Duties on EU-made automobiles could be reduced from up to 110% to around 10%, subject to quota limits.
 - » Tariffs on products such as wine, beer, and olive oil will see significant reductions.
- **Services Liberalisation**
 - » European firms will gain enhanced market access in sectors such as financial services and maritime services.
- **Exclusions and Safeguards**
 - » Certain sensitive agricultural products, such as sugar and selected dairy items, remain excluded to protect domestic interests.

Background:

- The idea of an India-EU FTA was first proposed in 2007 but stalled for several years due to differences over market access, tariff levels, and non-tariff barriers. A significant gap in expectations on both sides delayed progress for over a decade. Negotiations resumed in 2022 with renewed political momentum, culminating in a political agreement in 2026.

Benefits and Implications:

- **For India:**
 - » **Export Expansion:** Indian sectors such as textiles, leather, chemicals, gems

and jewellery, and marine products will gain improved access to EU markets, potentially leading to a substantial increase in exports.

- » **Enhanced Competitiveness:** Reduced EU tariffs will make Indian products more competitive in European markets, helping reverse trade share losses to competitors such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.
- » **Deeper Integration into Global Value Chains:** Improved access to advanced European inputs and technologies could strengthen India's manufacturing capabilities and export performance.
- » **Services and Investment Flows:** Indian firms will benefit from better access to EU services markets, while European investment is likely to increase in India's expanding economy.

nearly 1.4 billion people.

- » **Export Growth and Duty Savings:** EU exporters are expected to save up to €4 billion annually in duties as trade barriers are reduced.
- » **Services Gains and Regulatory Cooperation:** European firms stand to benefit from stronger intellectual property protections and eased market entry in financial and professional services.

Strategic and Geopolitical Impact:

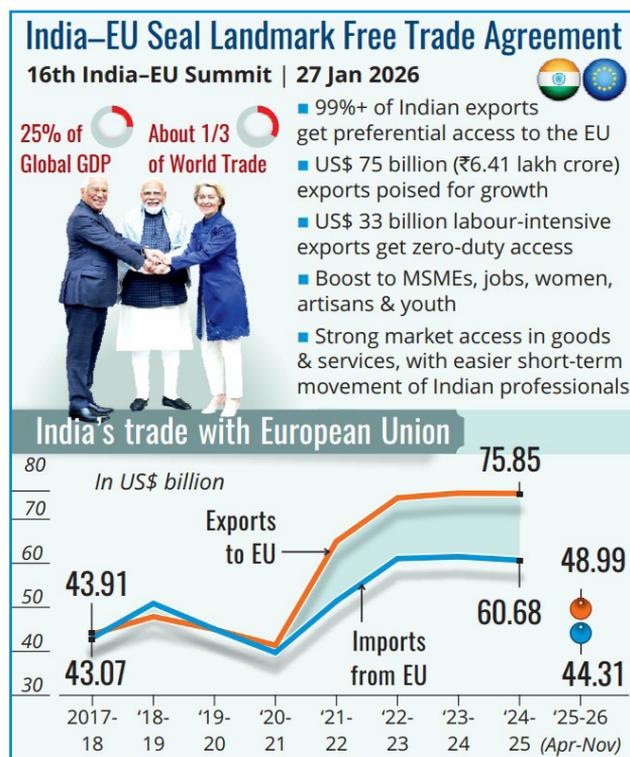
- The agreement strengthens India's trade diversification strategy amid global trade tensions and rising protectionism in several major economies.
- It signals a deepening strategic partnership between India and the EU at a time of significant geopolitical uncertainty.

Challenges and Considerations:

- **Ratification Process:** The agreement requires approval by EU member states and Indian authorities before it can enter into force.
- **Agricultural Sensitivities:** Limited liberalisation in agriculture reflects domestic political, economic, and social considerations.
- **Adjustment Pressures:** Certain Indian industries may face short-term competitive pressures from EU imports, necessitating supportive policy measures.

Conclusion:

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement represents a historic milestone in trade and diplomacy. It enhances India's export potential, competitiveness, and global economic integration, while opening the EU to one of the world's fastest-growing markets. Once ratified, the agreement has the potential to reshape trade flows, economic strategies, and geopolitical alignments over the coming decade.



- **For the European Union:**
 - » **Access to India's Large Market:** The EU gains tariff relief and expanded access to a rapidly growing consumer market of

4

Environment & Ecology



Water Conservation and Security: The Need for Policy, Innovation and Behavioural Change

Context:

The latest report released in January 2026 by the United Nations University – Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), titled “Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means”, signals a major shift in the global discourse on water security. The report moves beyond the traditional and temporary notion of a “water crisis” and places the far more severe concept of “Water Bankruptcy” at the centre of analysis.

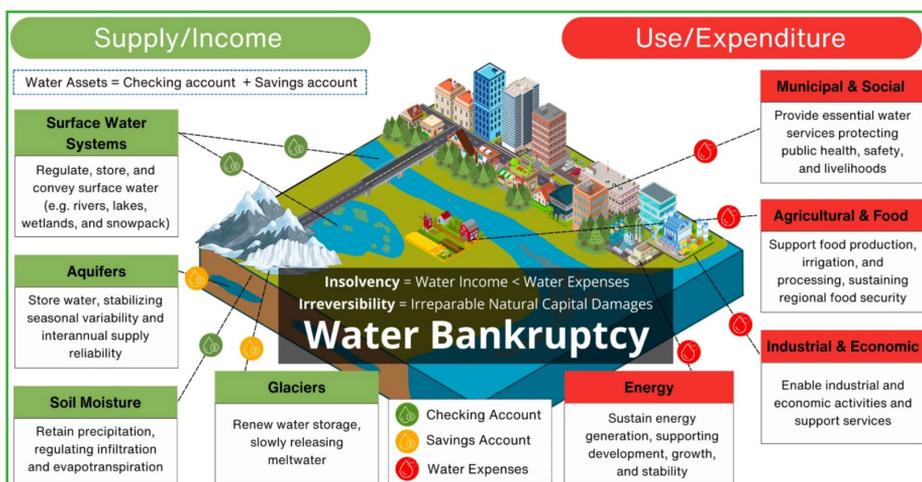
Water bankruptcy arises when a nation’s annual water extraction consistently exceeds its natural recharge capacity, leading to irreversible depletion of ecological resources. India, the world’s largest user of groundwater, accounts for over 25% of global groundwater extraction. The report thus serves as a serious warning for India.

Concept of Water Bankruptcy:

- The UN report explains this concept through two key principles:
 - » **Hydrological Insolvency:** This condition is analogous to economic bankruptcy.

Just as an individual who spends more than their income falls into a debt trap, societies that consume more water than their hydrological income (rainfall and natural sources) begin to deplete their groundwater principal capital. This amounts to exploiting the water sustainability of future generations.

- » **Irreversibility:** The most dangerous aspect of water bankruptcy is its



irreversible nature. When excessive extraction causes geological aquifers to collapse or centuries-old glaciers to disappear entirely, their restoration becomes impossible. This represents a permanent loss of ecological capital that cannot be recovered even through

economic investment.

Groundwater Dependency and Crisis in Indian Context:

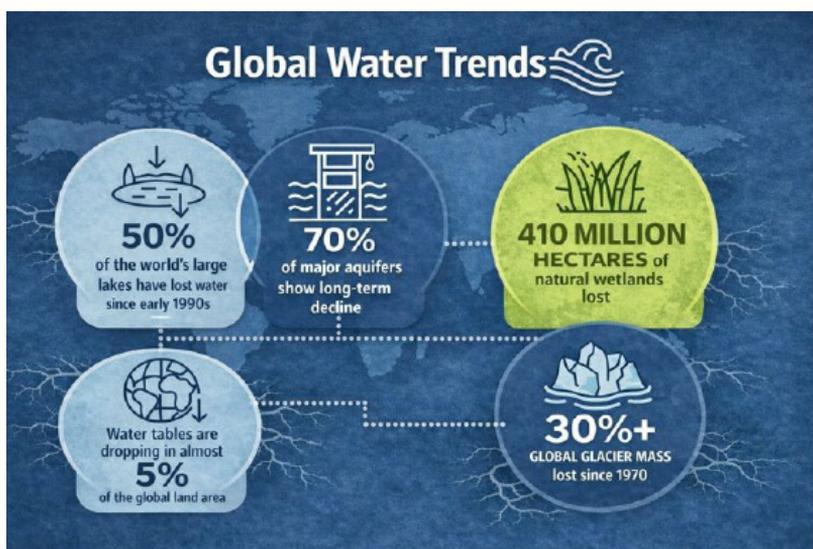
- India's water security and economy are fundamentally dependent on groundwater. Nearly 62% of irrigation requirements are met through groundwater. About 85% of rural drinking water supply and nearly 50% of urban water demand, amid rapid urbanisation, rely on groundwater sources.
- Rising population, agricultural intensification and unregulated industrial expansion have pushed India's groundwater reserves into a critical condition. The Indo-Gangetic plains, once considered water-abundant, are now being identified as global water-stress hotspots. Groundwater levels here are declining by several metres annually, posing a direct threat to India's food security.

Multidimensional Causes of the Water Crisis:

- Spread of Pollution:** Unregulated discharge of industrial effluents, excessive use of fertilisers in agriculture, and naturally occurring arsenic and fluoride have severely affected groundwater quality. Even where water is physically available, contamination renders it unfit for use.
- Human-Induced Drought:** Easy access to modern drilling technologies and electric pumps has increased groundwater extraction rates far beyond natural recharge levels. This has led to the Tragedy of the Commons, where public resources are destroyed for individual gain.
- Food Security versus Water Security:** Nearly 90% of India's total water extraction is used in agriculture. Excessive reliance on water-intensive crops such as rice and sugarcane

has pushed the country towards water stress. Crop diversification and a transition towards millets are essential solutions.

- Circular Water Economy:** Instead of a "use and discard" mindset, the principles of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle must be adopted. In urban India, 100% treatment of wastewater represents a form of "recovered income" capable of balancing the water bankruptcy ledger.



India's Policy, Preventive and Corrective Initiatives:

India has adopted a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to water management. Through the Ministry of Jal Shakti, the central government provides technical and financial assistance to states, supported by a multi-tier governance framework.

- Model Groundwater (Regulation and Control of Development and Management) Bill:** As water is a state subject, the central government has proposed a model legal framework to regulate indiscriminate groundwater extraction and make rainwater harvesting legally mandatory. As of January 2026, 21 states and Union Territories have adopted the model bill, marking a significant achievement in cooperative federalism.
- Jal Shakti Abhiyan:** Catch the Rain (JSA-

CTR): Launched on 22 March 2021 on World Water Day, this nationwide campaign promotes awareness and collective action for water conservation. It focuses on:

- » Water conservation and rainwater harvesting
- » Identification, geo-tagging and inventory of all water bodies
- » Establishment of Jal Shakti Kendras in all districts
- » Focused afforestation
- » Public awareness generation
- **Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB)**
 - » Launched in September 2024 to transform water conservation into a mass movement.
 - » Focuses on rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge, borewell recharge and recharge shafts.
 - » Designed as a scalable and sustainable local-level model integrated with advanced monitoring systems.
 - » By January 2026, nearly 4 million artificial recharge and storage structures had been completed.
- **Mission Amrit Sarovar:** Launched on 24 April 2022 to create water bodies in every district. Acts as a local buffer against water bankruptcy by enhancing water storage and recharge.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal):** With a total outlay of Rs.6,000 crore, this is among the world's largest community-based groundwater management programmes. It focuses on the most water-stressed regions of seven states: Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Its innovative feature is outcome-based incentives. By 30 December 2025, 6,271 Digital Water Level Recorders (DWLRs) and 8,201 rain-gauging stations had been installed, enabling data-driven management.
- **Scientific Foundation: NAQUIM 2.0:** The National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme (NAQUIM 2012–2023) aimed to:

- » Characterise aquifers based on hydrogeological properties
- » Assess groundwater availability and quality
- » Prepare detailed aquifer maps
- » Develop sustainable groundwater management strategies
- Under NAQUIM 2.0, high-resolution aquifer maps are now available down to the Panchayat level. The programme also offers location-specific solutions for challenges such as saline intrusion in coastal areas and urban waterlogging.

Way Forward:

- The UN's warning and India's proactive efforts converge on a single conclusion, management is no longer an option but a condition for survival. India must focus on:
 - » **Hydrological Auditing:** Preparing annual water budgets at the Panchayat and municipal levels to balance recharge and consumption.
 - » **Technology Integration:** Using IoT and Artificial Intelligence for micro-irrigation and real-time leakage monitoring.
 - » **Ecological Restoration:** Protecting river catchments and wetlands that act as natural sponges for aquifer recharge.
 - » **Global Cooperation:** Leading regional water diplomacy in South Asia for scientific management of shared aquifers.

Conclusion:

Groundwater lies at the heart of India's water security, sustaining agriculture, drinking water supply, ecosystems and economic activities. However, over-extraction, declining quality and climate variability have made sustainable groundwater management imperative. While India has undertaken multiple policy initiatives, ultimate success depends on behavioural change. A secure water future is the foundation of India's sustainable and prosperous future.

Short Issues

Report on Himalayan Climate Funding Gap

Context:

A recent report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) highlights that India, along with other countries in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region, faces a substantial climate finance gap in addressing the impacts of climate change. India alone requires nearly USD 102 billion annually to meet climate adaptation and mitigation needs in its Himalayan regions.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Scale of Climate Finance Requirement:**
 - » The HKH region, spanning eight countries (India, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar)—requires approximately USD 768.7 billion per year to address climate impacts and build resilience.
 - » India's share of this requirement is estimated at around USD 102 billion annually.
 - » China's requirement is significantly higher, at nearly USD 605 billion per year; together, India and China account for over 92 percent of the region's total climate finance needs.
- **Long-Term Finance Gap:**
 - » The cumulative regional climate finance gap for the period 2020–2050 is estimated at nearly USD 12 trillion, with an average annual requirement of about USD 768.68 billion.
 - » This underscores the scale of investment needed for climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building across fragile mountain ecosystems.
- **Drivers of Climate Vulnerability:** The Himalayan region is particularly vulnerable to climate change due to:
 - » Accelerated glacial melt
 - » Biodiversity loss
 - » Increasing frequency of extreme weather

events

- » Rising water insecurity
- These factors pose serious risks to ecosystems, local livelihoods, and downstream populations dependent on Himalayan water systems.

Implications for India:

- **Himalayan Ecosystem at Risk:**
 - » The Himalayas serve as a vital freshwater source for billions of people across South Asia and are central to India's agricultural productivity and economic stability.
 - » Climate-induced changes such as glacial retreat and erratic rainfall patterns threaten water security, food systems, and disaster preparedness in the country.
- **Funding Shortfall and Development Pressures:**
 - » Despite substantial financial needs, existing climate finance flows remain far below required levels, constraining India's capacity to implement large-scale adaptation and mitigation measures.
 - » Limited domestic fiscal space and competing development priorities further intensify the challenge, underscoring the need for innovative financing instruments and enhanced international cooperation.

About ICIMOD:

- The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), established on 5 December 1983 and headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal, is an intergovernmental organisation serving the countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya region.
- Its mission is to generate and share knowledge that informs regional policy, investment, and action, enabling member countries to pursue greener, more inclusive, and climate-resilient development pathways.

Conclusion:

The ICIMOD report underscores a stark climate finance gap in the Hindu Kush Himalaya, with India's annual requirement alone estimated at around USD 102 billion. Bridging this gap will require a combination of domestic resource mobilisation, strengthened international climate finance, and innovative funding mechanisms to protect Himalayan ecosystems and enhance climate resilience for millions who depend on them.

Need for National Climate Plans on Grasslands

Context:

The United Nations has declared 2026 as the International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists, highlighting the global importance of grasslands and the livelihoods they sustain. Despite this recognition, COP30 in Brazil focused overwhelmingly on forests, exemplified by initiatives such as the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF). Grasslands and other open ecosystems received minimal attention, underscoring the urgent need to integrate them into national and global climate agendas.

About Grasslands:

- Grasslands are vast open landscapes where grasses constitute the dominant vegetation, covering between 20% and 40% of the Earth's land surface. They typically occur in "transitional" zones that receive sufficient rainfall to prevent desertification, but not enough to sustain dense forests.
- Despite their critical role in carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood support, grasslands are among the most threatened ecosystems globally.
- Climate negotiations often overlook them in favour of forests, even as grasslands face rapid degradation due to agricultural expansion, invasive species, plantation

conversion, and the suppression of indigenous land management practices. Without explicit recognition, climate mitigation and adaptation strategies remain incomplete.



Global Grasslands Under Stress:

- Australia:** Desert grasslands are increasingly exposed to extreme heat, prolonged droughts, flash floods, and invasive buffel grass. Indigenous groups such as the Indigenous Desert Alliance (IDA) employ culturally appropriate fire management, invasive species control, and round-the-clock monitoring to sustain these fragile ecosystems.
- Brazil:** The Cerrado savannah, vital to eight of Brazil's twelve major river systems, is losing habitat at nearly twice the rate of the Amazon due to agriculture, mining, and fire suppression. Securing land rights for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities is essential, making grassland conservation a matter of social justice as well as ecology.
- Grasslands deliver ecosystem services comparable to forests including carbon storage, water regulation, and biodiversity support, yet remain undervalued in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Grassland Conservation:

- Effective grassland conservation requires integration across key UN frameworks:
 - » **UNFCCC:** Focused on climate change mitigation and carbon management.
 - » **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** Focused on biodiversity conservation.
 - » **UNCCD (Convention to Combat Desertification):** Focused on land degradation neutrality.
- Reports by organisations such as WWF and IUCN advocate an ecosystem-based approach that includes grasslands within NDCs and bridges institutional silos between these conventions. UNCCD COP16, for example, recognised rangelands as complex socio-ecological systems and called for secure land tenure and increased investment in their sustainable management.

Grasslands in India:

- In India, grasslands fall under the jurisdiction of nearly 18 ministries, resulting in fragmented and often conflicting policies. The Ministry of Environment tends to view grasslands as potential sites for afforestation, while the Ministry of Rural Development has, at times, classified them as “wastelands” suitable for conversion.
- Recognising grasslands as carbon sinks and biodiversity-rich ecosystems can significantly strengthen India’s climate action beyond a forest-centric approach.

Way Forward:

- Recognise grasslands as distinct ecosystems with significant carbon and biodiversity value.
- Integrate grasslands into national climate plans and NDCs.
- Ensure land rights and management authority for indigenous and local communities.
- Promote coordination among UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD frameworks.
- Prioritise science-based policy and civil society engagement over narrow fossil fuel

and agribusiness interests.

Conclusion:

Protecting grasslands is both a climate imperative and a social justice necessity. Through multilateral cooperation, integrated policymaking, and empowered local stewardship, these vital yet neglected ecosystems can receive the recognition and protection they urgently deserve.

Rise in Photo Tourism and Its Impact on the Galaxy Frog

Context:

A recent scientific study has reported that seven individuals of one of the world’s rarest frog species, the galaxy frog (*Melanobatrachus indicus*) have disappeared from their known location in the Western Ghats in Kerala and are now presumed dead. The study attributes this disappearance primarily to the unregulated rise in photo tourism, wherein wildlife photographers disturbed and degraded the fragile microhabitat of these tiny amphibians.

Study Findings:

- A research paper titled “Unethical wildlife photography imperils the Western Ghats endemic galaxy frog...”, published in *Herpetology Notes*, documents that seven galaxy frogs observed in 2020 were not found during follow-up surveys conducted between 2021 and 2022.
- The study observed that photographers often handled frogs with bare hands, repositioned them for better photographic backgrounds, and exposed them to intense camera flashes for prolonged periods. Such practices can lead to dehydration, physiological stress, and the transmission of diseases in amphibians.

About Photo Tourism:

- Photo tourism is a form of travel in which photography is the primary motivation.

Travellers plan their itineraries specifically to capture distinctive images, such as wildlife, landscapes, or architectural features.

- Unlike conventional tourism where photography is incidental photo tourism revolves around camera opportunities, influencing destination choice, timing, and on-site behaviour.



About the Galaxy Frog:

- The galaxy frog is an extremely rare and diminutive amphibian, measuring about 2–3.5 cm in length, and is endemic to the wet evergreen forests of the southern Western Ghats.
- It is named for its striking appearance—dark skin dotted with pale blue and orange speckles resembling a star-studded night sky.
- The species is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and is evolutionarily distinct, being the sole member of its genus.

Why Photo Tourism Became a Threat:

- The galaxy frog was declared a flagship species of Mathikettan Shola National Park in 2021, which increased interest among wildlife photographers.
- While wildlife photography can enhance conservation awareness, unregulated and unethical practices can severely damage fragile habitats.
- Amphibians require stable moisture and temperature conditions to survive.
- Even minor disturbances such as overturning logs or leaf litter can disrupt feeding and breeding cycles, rendering

habitats unsuitable.

Ecological and Conservation Implications:

- Frogs serve as important indicator species, as their sensitivity reflects the overall health of ecosystems.
- Declines in frog populations often signal broader environmental degradation.
- The disappearance of seven individuals demonstrates that poorly regulated photo tourism can directly threaten highly vulnerable species.

Conclusion:

The presumed loss of these seven rare galaxy frogs highlights a counterintuitive conservation risk: activities intended to promote awareness—such as wildlife photography tourism—can inadvertently accelerate species decline if not governed by strong ethical norms and effective regulation. This episode serves as a cautionary example for sustainable tourism and biodiversity protection in ecologically fragile regions like the Western Ghats.

Tamil Nadu to Establish Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) for Conservation

Context:

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department informed the Madras High Court that it has initiated the process of establishing Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) in the State. The initiative aims to create a secure environment for vultures, free from major threats particularly toxic veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as diclofenac, which have been responsible for mass vulture mortality.

Background:

- Vultures are carrion-feeding birds that perform a vital ecological function by rapidly consuming carcasses, thereby preventing the spread of diseases and aiding nutrient recycling. India hosts 9 of the world's 23

vulture species, several of which are facing severe conservation threats:

- » **Critically Endangered:** White-rumped, Slender-billed, Long-billed, and Red-headed vultures
- » **Endangered:** Egyptian Vulture
- » **Near Threatened:** Himalayan Griffon, Cinereous Vulture, Bearded Vulture
- Major threats to vulture populations include diclofenac poisoning, lead contamination, electrocution from power lines, habitat loss, and deliberate poisoning.
- The drastic decline of vultures has led to serious ecological and socio-economic consequences, including increased risks of zoonotic disease transmission.

Key Features of Tamil Nadu's Initiative:

- **First Vulture Safe Zone**
 - » The Moyar River Valley in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve has been identified as the first VSZ.
 - » The initiative is being implemented under the Vision Document for Vulture Conservation (VDVC) 2025–2030.
- **Monitoring and Implementation Committee**
- The committee will be chaired by the Field Director of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.
- Members include District Forest Officers from Nilgiris, Gudalur, Coimbatore, and Erode; Deputy Directors from Mudumalai, Anamalai, and Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserves; and a representative from the Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC), Vandalur.
- **Scientific and Legal Measures**
 - » Mapping of vulture nesting sites and carcass disposal hotspots.
 - » Sampling of 800 carcasses over a two-year monitoring period to detect traces of banned NSAIDs.
 - » Joint inspections with the Drugs Control Department to prevent the sale and use of prohibited veterinary drugs.
 - » Collaboration with neighbouring States, particularly Karnataka and Kerala, to ensure coordinated regional

conservation efforts.

Significance:

- **Ecological:** Safeguards scavenger species that are crucial for disease control and ecosystem stability.
- **Conservation:** Supports the recovery of critically endangered vulture species protected under national wildlife laws and international conventions.
- **Scientific:** Generates robust field data to inform conservation policy and habitat management strategies.
- **Inter-State Cooperation:** Promotes coordinated conservation across South India, recognising the wide ranging nature of vulture populations.

Conclusion:

The establishment of Vulture Safe Zones in Tamil Nadu represents a science-driven and policy-backed conservation initiative to arrest the decline of vultures caused by NSAID poisoning and other anthropogenic pressures. By integrating field monitoring, legal enforcement, and inter-state collaboration, the programme seeks to stabilise and revive vulture populations, thereby preserving ecological balance and strengthening biodiversity conservation in the region.

High Seas Treaty

Context:

The High Seas Treaty, formally known as the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), entered into force on 17 January 2026. This marks the first time the global community has adopted a legally binding framework to protect marine life in international waters, vast ocean areas that lie beyond the jurisdiction of any single country.

Background:

- The oceans cover more than 70% of the Earth's surface and nearly two-thirds of this area, the high seas lies beyond national jurisdiction. Historically, these areas lacked a unified legal regime for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, making them particularly vulnerable to:
 - » Destructive fishing practices, including overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing
 - » Shipping-related impacts and pollution, especially plastic waste
 - » Climate-change-induced stresses such as ocean warming and acidification
 - » Emerging threats like deep-sea mining
- After nearly two decades of negotiations, the BBNJ Agreement was adopted in June 2023, opened for signature in September 2023, and ratified by at least 60 countries, thereby triggering its entry into force 120 days after the threshold was reached in September 2025.

Key Features of the High Seas Treaty:

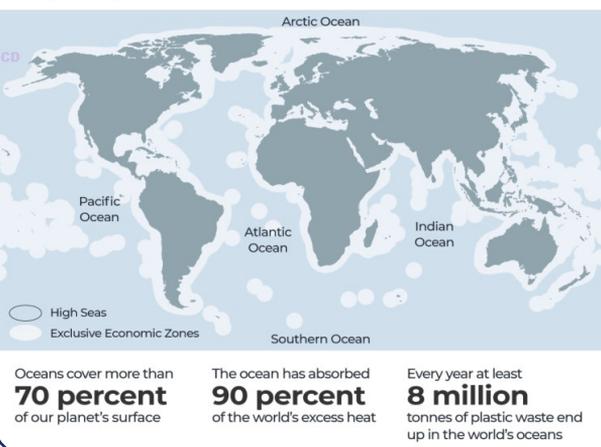
The treaty establishes a comprehensive international legal framework for conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). Its key elements include:

- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):**
 - » A mechanism to establish marine protected areas in the high seas to conserve ecologically significant regions.
 - » At present, only about 1% of high seas waters are protected; the treaty provides tools to substantially expand this coverage.
- **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):**
 - » Parties are required to conduct environmental impact assessments for activities that may harm high seas biodiversity, such as deep-sea mining and large-scale fishing.
 - » This provision aims to prevent, minimise, or mitigate cumulative environmental damage.

ENVIRONMENT

Ocean treaty: Historic agreement reached

UN member states have agreed on a legal framework to protect the world's oceans. The High Seas Treaty places 30 percent of the seas into protected areas by 2030, aiming to safeguard and recuperate marine nature.



- **Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs):**
 - » The treaty provides for the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of marine genetic resources, including digital sequence information.
 - » It emphasises fairness and international cooperation, with particular benefits for developing countries.
- **Capacity Building and Technology Transfer:**
 - » Developing countries are to receive support to participate effectively in high seas governance and scientific research.
 - » This promotes inclusive and equitable participation in marine conservation efforts.
- **Institutional Framework:**
 - » The treaty mandates the establishment of institutional bodies, including a Conference of Parties (COP), a scientific and technical body, and a secretariat to coordinate implementation and decision-making.

Significance:

- **Global Ocean Governance:**
 - » For the first time, international waters—previously governed by a fragmented, sector-specific legal framework—are subject to a unified, legally binding regime centred on biodiversity

conservation and sustainability.

- » This represents a major advance in global cooperation to manage a shared resource critical to planetary health.
- **Conservation and Climate Linkages:**
 - » Healthy oceans play a vital role in carbon sequestration, oxygen production, and the regulation of global climate systems.
 - » Protecting high seas ecosystems directly contributes to global climate mitigation and biodiversity goals, including the 30×30 target of protecting 30% of ocean areas by 2030.
- **Equity and Inclusiveness:**
 - » By emphasising capacity building and benefit sharing, the treaty enables developing countries to participate meaningfully in marine research and conservation.
 - » This is crucial for ensuring both ecological effectiveness and equity in global ocean governance.
- **Scientific Collaboration:**
 - » Ratifying countries are required to cooperate in marine scientific research, share data, and coordinate policy responses to ocean-related threats.
 - » Such collaboration helps bridge knowledge gaps and strengthens evidence-based decision-making on high seas issues.

Impact of Climate Change on Antarctic Penguins

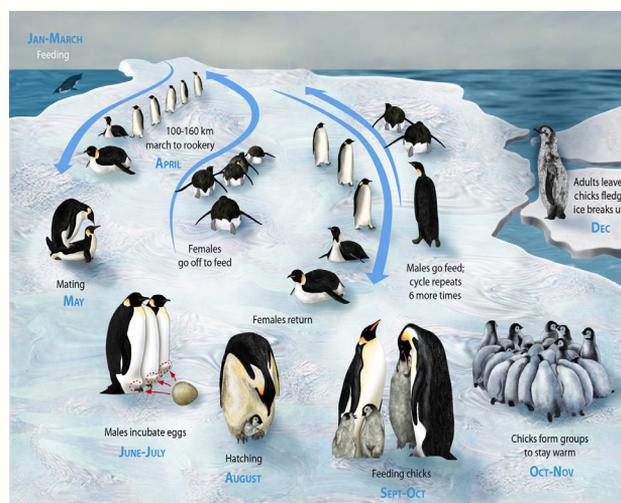
Context:

A decade-long study by Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University has found that Antarctic penguins are advancing their breeding seasons in response to rapid warming. Gentoo, Adélie, and Chinstrap penguins now begin nesting up to 24 days earlier than they did a decade ago. While this behavioural adaptation helps them cope with rising temperatures, it may disrupt food availability and threaten

population stability. Penguins act as sentinel species, indicating broader ecosystem changes in Antarctica.

About Antarctic Penguins:

- Penguins are flightless seabirds adapted to polar marine environments. Adélie, Chinstrap, and Gentoo penguins dominate the Antarctic Peninsula and nearby islands.
- They rely on marine prey such as krill, fish, and squid, and their breeding cycles are closely linked to periods of peak food availability. Changes in sea ice extent and snowmelt patterns strongly influence nesting success and chick survival.



What Has the Study Found?

- Gentoo penguins are breeding an average of 13 days earlier, with some colonies advancing breeding by up to 24 days.
 - » Adélie and Chinstrap penguins are breeding around 10 days earlier.
 - » These shifts represent the fastest recorded phenological change in any bird species.
 - » Local temperatures at breeding sites are increasing by about 0.3°C per year, nearly four times the Antarctic average triggering earlier snowmelt and altering environmental cues.

Why Are Penguins Breeding Earlier?

- Rapid warming accelerates snowmelt and

sea-ice retreat, exposing nesting areas earlier in the season. Environmental cues such as temperature and ice conditions guide penguin reproductive timing.

- While earlier breeding helps penguins adapt to warmer conditions, potential mismatches with prey availability remain a major concern.

Ecological Implications:

- Phenological mismatch:** Chicks may hatch before peak krill availability, reducing survival rates.
- Winners and losers:** Gentoo penguins may benefit from warming conditions, while Adélie and Chinstrap penguins, which are more dependent on sea ice, face population declines.
- Increased competition:** Overlapping breeding seasons may intensify competition for food and nesting space.

Policy and Conservation Significance:

- Penguins are key indicators of Antarctic ecosystem health. Shifts in their breeding calendars highlight the urgent need for:
 - » Long-term monitoring of penguin populations and prey species.
 - » Integration of phenological data into conservation planning.
 - » Global climate mitigation efforts to limit further warming impacts.

Conclusion:

Earlier breeding among Antarctic penguins represents a remarkable adaptive response to climate change but also poses serious ecological risks. Phenological mismatches, increased competition, and declining populations signal that even resilient species are vulnerable, underscoring the need for urgent conservation action and global climate intervention.

Indian Skimmer

Context:

Recently, the Bombay Natural History Society

(BNHS), in collaboration with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), launched a major conservation project aimed at safeguarding the endangered Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) and other riverine bird species across key stretches of the Ganga Basin.

Background:

- The Indian Skimmer is a distinctive riverine bird species, recognised for its unique bill adapted to skim water surfaces to capture fish.
- India supports nearly 90% of the species' global population, making national conservation efforts crucial for its long-term survival.
- The species has witnessed severe population declines due to habitat loss, sand mining, altered river flows caused by dams, predation, and disturbance from human activities and livestock.

Objectives of the Project:

- Protect sandbar nesting habitats that are critical for Indian Skimmers and other riverine birds.
- Systematically monitor riverine bird populations.
- Strengthen community engagement for habitat protection and scientific data collection.



Strategic Approach:

- Community Participation**
 - » The project builds on the successful conservation model of the National

Chambal Sanctuary, where active involvement of local communities significantly improved the nesting success of riverine birds. Local residents will be trained as:

- Nest Guardians — to protect nests and minimise threats.
- River Guardians — to monitor bird populations and assist in data collection.
- » These roles are expected to enhance local stewardship of river ecosystems while providing supplementary livelihood opportunities.
- **Habitat Focus Areas:** The initiative will operate across ecologically important river stretches, including:
 - » The Chambal River
 - » The Upper Ganga near Bijnor and Narora
 - » The Ganga-Yamuna confluence at Prayagraj
 - » The Lower Ganga near the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in Bihar

Species Benefitted:

- In addition to the Indian Skimmer, the project targets other declining riverine bird species that act as indicators of river health, including:
 - » Black-bellied Tern
 - » River Tern
 - » River Lapwing
 - » Great Thick-knee
 - » Little Tern
 - » Little Pratincole

Alignment with National Policies:

- The project aligns with the Namami Gange Programme, India's flagship initiative for Ganga rejuvenation and river biodiversity conservation.
- The programme integrates pollution abatement, maintenance of ecological flows, biodiversity conservation, and community participation under the NMCG framework.
- NMCG has also been instrumental in

implementing several ecological and biodiversity initiatives along the Ganga, including wetland conservation, aquatic biodiversity monitoring centres, and conservation support for endangered species such as the Ganga dolphin.

Significance:

- **Eco-hydrological importance:** Riverine birds like the Indian Skimmer depend on sandbar habitats and dynamic river flows, linking their conservation directly to sustainable river management.
- **Community-led conservation:** By empowering local stakeholders, the initiative promotes grassroots ownership and long-term sustainability of biodiversity conservation efforts.

Conclusion:

The BNHS-NMCG project represents a science-based, community-centric conservation model for high-priority riverine species in the Ganga Basin. By safeguarding critical habitats and strengthening local participation, it exemplifies integrated biodiversity conservation within India's broader river rejuvenation agenda.

Discovery of a New Species of Marine Crustacean

Context:

Researchers from the Cochin University of Science and Technology (Cusat) have discovered a new genus and species of marine crustacean from the Kavaratti Lagoon in Lakshadweep, located in the southeastern Arabian Sea. The microscopic organism, a harpacticoid copepod has been named *Indiaphonte bijoyi*.

Key Details of the Discovery:

- **Taxonomic Identification:**
 - » The organism belongs to the order Harpacticoida, a group of minute

crustaceans commonly found in marine sediments.

- » It is microscopic and forms part of the meiofauna, tiny animals (less than 1 mm in size) inhabiting sediment and playing crucial roles in benthic ecosystems.

- **Naming and Scientific Contribution:**

- » Genus name – *Indiaphonte*: Honours India, reflecting the country’s expanding contributions to marine taxonomic research.
- » **Species epithet – *bijoyi***: Pays tribute to Professor S. Bijoy Nandan, a distinguished marine ecologist, former Vice Chancellor of Kannur University, and Dean of the Faculty of Marine Sciences at Cusat.
- » The species was formally described by Neelima Vasu K. (Cusat) in collaboration with Samuel E. Gómez Noguera of the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Scientific Significance:

- **Unique Morphology:** The new genus exhibits diagnostic features that clearly distinguish it from other known members of the Laophontidae family, including:
 - » Distinctive swimming leg segmentation,
 - » Unique caudal rami (tail appendage) structure, and
 - » Characteristic antenna morphology.
- **Absence of Sexual Dimorphism:** Unlike most harpacticoid copepods, *Indiaphonte bijoyi* shows an absence of sexual dimorphism, meaning males and females exhibit similar external morphology, a rare trait within this group.

Role in Marine Ecosystems:

- Despite their minute size, harpacticoid copepods play vital ecological roles. They:
 - » Recycle nutrients within marine sediments,
 - » Graze on microalgae, and
 - » Serve as foundational links in aquatic food webs.



Why the Discovery Matters for India’s Marine Science?

- **Underexplored Marine Diversity:**
 - » The southeastern Arabian Sea and Lakshadweep lagoons are biodiversity-rich yet remain poorly studied at the microscopic and meiofaunal levels. This discovery highlights the need for more intensive scientific exploration of these habitats.
- **Enhancing Global Taxonomy:**
 - » The identification of an entirely new genus, not merely a new species underscores India’s growing role in global biodiversity research, particularly in marine taxonomy, which is fundamental to understanding life on Earth.
- **Conservation Implications:** Documenting such microscopic taxa is essential for:
 - » Marine ecosystem assessments,
 - » Climate change impact studies, and
 - » Sustainable resource management, especially in fragile coral reef and lagoon ecosystems.

Conclusion:

The discovery of *Indiaphonte bijoyi* represents more than a taxonomic milestone; it is a significant contribution by Indian researchers to global marine biodiversity knowledge. Through meticulous fieldwork and rigorous taxonomy, Cusat scientists have expanded our understanding of marine meiofaunal diversity in the Indian Ocean, an achievement with far-reaching implications for ecology, conservation science, and biodiversity studies.

Global Water 'Bankruptcy' Begins

Context:

A recent report by the United Nations University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health has sounded an alarm on the onset of a new era of "global water bankruptcy," in which freshwater resources are being depleted to the point of irreversible scarcity. The report underscores the urgent need for sustainable water management in the context of climate change and rapidly rising demand.

What Is Global Water Bankruptcy?

- Unlike earlier concepts such as water stress or water crisis, water bankruptcy refers to the irreversible depletion of freshwater resources caused by excessive withdrawals from rivers, aquifers, and glaciers that far exceed natural recharge rates. It highlights that the crisis is not merely one of water availability, but of fundamentally unsustainable water management practices.

Key Global Findings:

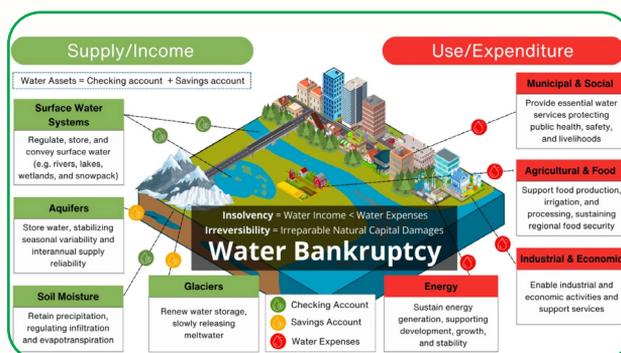
- 6.1 billion people live in water-insecure or critically water-insecure regions.
- 4 billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year.
- The increasing occurrence of "Day Zero" events in cities signals the near-collapse of municipal water systems.
- Climate change intensifies droughts, evaporation, wildfires, and soil salinisation, while human activities, such as groundwater over-extraction and wetland destruction further exacerbate the crisis.

Policy Recommendations:

- Recognise water bankruptcy explicitly in global and national policy debates.
- Establish a global monitoring framework for freshwater resources.
- Restrict development projects that further degrade local water supplies.
- Promote sustainable land and water

management practices, including ecosystem restoration, efficient irrigation, and urban water conservation.

- Integrate water planning into broader climate resilience and adaptation strategies.



India and the Risk of Water Bankruptcy:

- Sustainable water management has emerged as a critical national priority for India.
- Nearly 600 million Indians face high-to-extreme water stress.
- India supports 18% of the global population but possesses only 4% of the world's freshwater resources.
- By 2030, water demand is projected to exceed supply by 70%, posing serious risks to food security, urban stability, and economic growth.

Key Government Frameworks and Schemes:

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti (established in 2019) anchors India's water governance through several initiatives:
 - » **Jal Jeevan Mission (extended to 2028):** Nearly 80% of rural households now have functional tap water connections.
 - » **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** Promotes community-led groundwater management across seven states.
 - » **Jal Shakti Abhiyan – Catch the Rain:** Focuses on rainwater harvesting and the rejuvenation of water bodies.
 - » **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):** Encourages micro-irrigation under the "Per Drop More Crop"

approach.

- » **National Water Policy (under revision):** Emphasises climate resilience and integrated water governance.

Sustainable Water Management Strategies:

- **Circular Water Management:** Mandating cities to recycle at least 20% of consumed water.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Revival of traditional water systems such as johads, stepwells, tanks, and wetlands.
- **Agricultural Reforms:** Crop diversification toward less water-intensive crops like millets and pulses.
- **Smart Technologies:** Use of IoT sensors, AI-based leak detection, and GIS mapping for efficient water management.

Key Challenges:

- **Groundwater Depletion:** India is the world's largest user of groundwater, with irrigation accounting for 80–90% of extraction.
- **Water Pollution:** Nearly 70% of surface water sources are contaminated.
- **Climate Change:** Erratic monsoons and retreating Himalayan glaciers intensify water insecurity.
- **Fragmented Governance:** Weak coordination across institutions hampers effective water management.

Conclusion:

The UN report makes it clear that water scarcity is no longer merely a condition of stress or crisis—it is becoming irreversible in many regions. Sustainable management practices, integrated policymaking, and enhanced global cooperation are essential to avert widespread human suffering and ecological collapse.

Delhi's Winter Pollution

Context:

A recent meta-analysis commissioned by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in the National Capital Region has

identified secondary particulate matter as the single largest contributor to Delhi's winter air pollution. According to the report, secondary particulates account for 27% of winter PM_{2.5} pollution, surpassing traditionally blamed sources such as vehicular emissions and crop residue burning.

Key Findings of the Meta-Analysis:

- The CAQM report synthesised multiple source-apportionment studies on Delhi's air pollution. The major contributors to winter pollution were identified as:
 - » **Secondary particulate matter:** 27%
 - » **Transport emissions:** 23%
 - » **Biomass burning:** 20% (including crop residue and municipal solid waste burning)
 - » **Dust:** 15%
 - » **Industry:** 9%
- The report does not identify new pollution sources but aims to harmonise varying methodologies used in earlier studies to arrive at a more unified assessment for policy action.

What is Secondary Particulate Matter?

- Secondary particulate matter is not emitted directly. It forms in the atmosphere through chemical reactions involving primary pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and ammonia (NH₃).
- **In Delhi's context:**
 - » SO₂ from coal combustion and brick kilns forms sulphuric acid (H₂SO₄).
 - » NO_x from vehicles and power plants forms nitric acid (HNO₃).
- These acids react with ammonia, largely originating from fertiliser use and livestock excreta to form ammonium sulphate and ammonium nitrate aerosols, which constitute a large fraction of PM_{2.5}.
- Studies indicate that 25–60% of PM_{2.5} consists of such sulphates and nitrates, making secondary particulates a dominant pollutant.

Health and Environmental Impacts:

- Secondary particulates are especially dangerous due to their fine size (PM_{2.5}), allowing them to penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream.
- They are linked to asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, cardiovascular disorders, ophthalmic diseases, and acute respiratory infections. Their formation is influenced by meteorological conditions, making them difficult to control through source-specific bans alone.

Policy Implications and Way Forward:

- The findings highlight the limitations of focusing only on visible sources like stubble burning or traffic curbs. Effective mitigation requires:
 - » Reducing precursor gases (NO_x, SO₂, NH₃) through cleaner fuels, industrial controls, and sustainable agricultural practices.
 - » Developing robust emissions inventories and source apportionment studies, which CAQM plans to undertake with 2026 as the base year.
 - » Strengthening air quality forecasting through improved Early Warning and Decision Support Systems.

Conclusion:

The CAQM report underscores that Delhi's air pollution problem is as much a chemical and systemic challenge as a local emissions issue. Addressing secondary particulate formation demands coordinated action across energy, transport, agriculture, and urban governance to achieve durable improvements in air quality.

India's River Deltas Sinking at Alarming Rates

Context:

A recent study published in Nature has confirmed that several of India's major river

deltas are sinking at alarming rates in many cases, faster than regional sea levels are rising. Land subsidence in these deltas is primarily driven by human activities, placing millions of people at heightened risk of flooding, permanent inundation, and displacement.

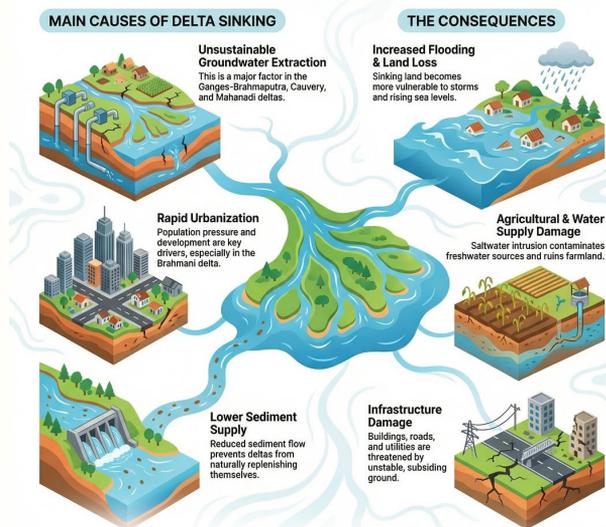
About River Deltas:

- Deltas are fertile, fan-shaped landforms built by river sediment deposited where a river slows down upon entering a larger body of water, such as an ocean or lake.
- Named after the Greek letter Delta (Δ), they feature rich soil and crucial ecosystems. Deltas are typically densely populated, supporting millions through agriculture, fisheries, and trade; however, they are highly vulnerable to subsidence, flooding, and climate change. Key examples include the Nile, the Mississippi, and the Ganga-Brahmaputra (the world's largest) deltas. Common types include arcuate (fan-shaped), bird's foot, and cusped.

Importance of Deltas:

- River deltas cover just 1% of the world's land area but support 350–500 million people and 10 of the world's 34 megacities. They provide crucial services, including agriculture, fisheries, ports, and maritime trade.
- However, deltas are low-lying ecosystems, often situated less than two meters above sea level, making them highly vulnerable to climate-driven threats such as storm surges, rising seas, and shifting rainfall patterns.

Sinking Deltas: The Human Impact



Key Findings of the Study:

- Land subsidence, the gradual sinking of the Earth's surface has emerged as a key risk factor. Between 2014 and 2023, over half of the world's studied deltas experienced subsidence rates exceeding 3 mm per year.
- In 13 deltas, including India's Brahmani, Mahanadi, and Ganga-Brahmaputra, sinking rates exceeded the global mean sea-level rise (approx 4 mm/year).
- The Brahmani and Mahanadi are among the fastest-sinking, with large areas subsiding by over 5 mm per year. This subsidence, combined with sea-level rise, significantly increases flood risks even in the absence of extreme climate events.

Human Activity & Groundwater Extraction:

- Excessive groundwater extraction is the primary driver of subsidence in Indian deltas. Overuse for agriculture, industry, and domestic needs causes underground sediments to compact, resulting in irreversible surface-level decline.
- Additionally, upstream dams and levees reduce sediment supply, depriving deltas of their natural replenishment. This mirrors patterns observed in the Nile, Po, and

Mississippi deltas.

Implications for India:

- Indian deltas are described as "unprepared divers," facing high relative sea-level rise but possessing limited adaptation capacity.
- Vulnerable communities particularly rural and Indigenous populations in low-lying areas face increased risks of flooding, land loss, and displacement. Urban centers like Kolkata are also sinking, which heightens infrastructure vulnerability.

Way Forward:

- Urgent measures are required to mitigate these risks:
 - Regulating groundwater extraction.
 - Restoring natural sediment flows.
 - Strengthening flood defenses.
 - Implementing integrated delta management policies.
- Prioritizing climate-resilient planning for vulnerable populations to reduce social, economic, and ecological risks.

Conclusion:

India's river deltas are vital for food security, trade, and livelihoods. Accelerated subsidence due to human activity, combined with rising seas, poses a looming crisis. Evidence-based policy interventions can safeguard these fragile landscapes, protect millions of people, and ensure sustainable development.



Science & Technology



India's AI Vision: Inclusive Development, Sovereign Innovation and Viksit Bharat @2047

Context:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has today become a decisive factor shaping global power balances, economic competition, and social transformation. Countries that adopted AI early, through policy support, investments, and institutional reforms, are now leading in innovation, productivity, and global influence. India, too, stands at the cusp of this transformation.

AI is no longer confined to research laboratories or large corporations; it has entered citizens' lives at every level. The recent roundtable interaction between Prime Minister Modi and Indian AI startups, along with the upcoming India AI Impact Summit 2026, clearly indicates that India views AI not merely as a technological upgrade but as a core national development strategy.

India AI Impact Summit 2026:

- India will host the 'India-AI Impact Summit' in New Delhi on February 19-20, 2026. This will be the first high-level global AI summit to be held in the Global South. The Prime Minister announced this at the AI Action Summit held in France.
- **Key Features:**
 - » The summit is designed as a multilateral platform aimed at advancing responsible, inclusive, and development-oriented artificial intelligence (AI) cooperation. Its

key themes will include AI governance, ethics, data security, transparency, digital public infrastructure (DPI), skill development, and the application of AI in areas of public interest such as health, education, agriculture, climate, and disaster management.

- **Significance:**

- » This initiative showcases India's vision of "inclusive digital development" on a global stage and brings the developmental needs of the Global South to the forefront of the AI agenda. It will also encourage shared standards, best practices, and capacity building for rules-based, human-centric AI. For India, this is also an opportunity to establish leadership in digital public goods, the startup ecosystem, and international technology diplomacy.

India's AI Ecosystem: The Current Landscape:

- India's technology and AI ecosystem is expanding rapidly. The sector's annual revenue is estimated to exceed USD 280 billion, employing over six million professionals. The country hosts more than 1,800 Global Capability Centers (GCCs), over 500 of which are focused on AI.
- The startup ecosystem is equally vibrant: out of nearly 180,000 startups, a significant

share of new ventures is integrating AI into products and services.

- At the global level, India's position has strengthened considerably. According to Stanford University's Global AI Vibrancy Tool (2025), India has emerged as the world's third most competitive country in AI, an outcome of the convergence of talent, research, investment, and policy support.

IndiaAI Mission: The Foundation of India's AI Strategy:

- The central pillar of India's AI journey is the IndiaAI Mission, approved in March 2024 with an outlay of Rs.10,371.92 crore. Operating under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as an independent business division, the mission's vision, "Making AI in India and Making AI Work for India", combines digital sovereignty with public welfare.

Seven Pillars of the IndiaAI Mission:

» IndiaAI

Compute Pillar:

Provides high-end GPUs at affordable costs. More than 38,000 GPUs have already been onboarded.

» IndiaAI

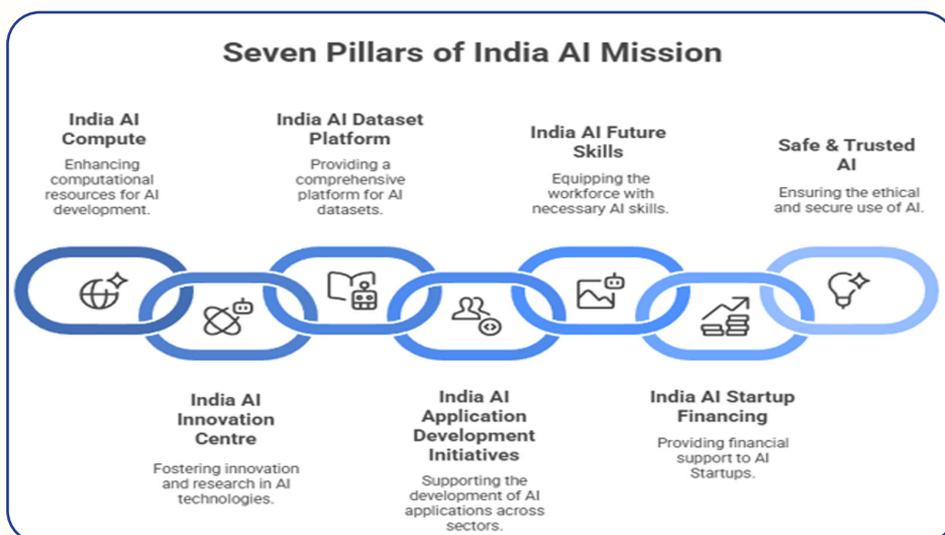
Application

Development Initiative: Focuses on AI applications tailored to India's unique challenges in healthcare, agriculture, climate change, governance, and assistive education technologies (e.g., CyberGuard AI Hackathon).

- » **AIKosh (Dataset Platform):** Develops large datasets for training AI models by integrating data from government and non-government sources, enabling developers to focus on solutions rather

than basic data preparation.

- » **IndiaAI Foundation Models:** Builds India's own large multimodal models using Indian data and languages, ensuring sovereign capability and global competitiveness in generative AI.
- » **IndiaAI Future Skills:** Trains AI-skilled professionals by establishing data and AI labs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- » **IndiaAI Startup Financing:** Provides financial support to AI startups; launched in March 2025.
- » **Safe and Trusted AI:** Ensures responsible AI adoption through strong governance, focusing on machine unlearning, bias mitigation, privacy-preserving machine learning, explainability, auditing, and governance testing.



Applications of AI:

- » **Agriculture:** AI supports farmers through weather forecasting, pest and disease detection, and irrigation advisory systems. Satellite data and soil analysis improve yields and income security.
- » **Healthcare:** AI-based diagnostics, telemedicine, and personalized treatment plans are reducing rural-urban healthcare disparities, saving time and cost while minimizing errors.
- » **Education and Skill Development:**

Personalized learning, multilingual content, and AI-assisted platforms are making education more inclusive. Integration of AI skills under the National Education Policy 2020 is preparing a future-ready workforce.

- **Governance and Justice:** E-courts, AI-based translation, and document analysis are improving access to justice. Multilingual availability of judgments enhances transparency.
- **Weather and Climate Services:** AI strengthens India's disaster prediction and response capabilities. Advanced Dvorak techniques help estimate cyclone intensity.
- **Governance and Judicial Services:** Under Phase III of the e-Courts Project, modern technologies are being integrated to make the justice system more efficient and accessible. Platforms like e-HCR and e-ILR provide online access to judgments in multiple regional languages, enhancing transparency and inclusiveness.

Other Major Government Initiatives and Policy Incentives:

- **AI Centres of Excellence:** Three Centres of Excellence have been established in healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable cities to promote research-driven innovation. Additionally, five National Skill Centres of Excellence prepare youth with industry-relevant AI skills.
- **AI Competency Framework:** Provides structured AI training for government officials, enabling informed policymaking and AI-driven governance aligned with global standards.
- **Sarvam AI:** Smarter Aadhaar Services: The Bengaluru-based company Sarvam AI is transforming advanced AI research into practical governance solutions. In partnership with UIDAI, it uses generative AI to make Aadhaar services smarter and more secure.
- **Bhashini:** A Voice for Digital Inclusion: Bhashini is an AI-powered platform offering translation and conversational tools in multiple Indian languages, enabling citizens

to access digital services regardless of literacy barriers.

- **BharatGen AI:** India's Multilingual AI Model: Launched at the BharatGen Summit on June 2, 2025, BharatGen AI is the first government-funded indigenous multimodal large language model, supporting 22 Indian languages and integrating text, speech, and image understanding.
- **India AI Impact Summit 2026:** India will host the AI Impact Summit in February 2026, showcasing its AI capabilities and promoting innovation across sectors.

Inclusive Social Development and NITI Aayog's Perspective:

- NITI Aayog's October 2025 report, "AI for Inclusive Social Development", presents a practical roadmap to empower India's vast informal workforce. It argues that AI should not replace workers but enhance productivity, safety, and income.
- Through real-life examples—home healthcare aides, carpenters, farmers—the report highlights systemic barriers and aspirations of informal workers. AI, along with IoT, blockchain, robotics, and immersive learning, is positioned as an enabling toolkit to overcome challenges related to language, literacy, payments, skills, and information.
- By 2035, the envisioned future includes voice-first AI interfaces, transparent payments via smart contracts, and continuous skill upgradation through micro-credentials and on-demand learning. At the center of this vision lies the Digital Labour Bridge Mission, driven by state-led implementation, regulatory support, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- The report emphasizes that inclusive digital development requires coordinated R&D investment, targeted skill development, and a robust innovation ecosystem. The success of Aadhaar, UPI, and Jan Dhan demonstrates India's ability to build inclusive and scalable digital public infrastructure.

Challenges:

- **Data Quality and Privacy:** Fragmented data, inconsistent quality, and lack of standardization affect AI accuracy. Protecting citizens' personal data, especially in health, identity, and financial services is a major concern.
- **Algorithmic Bias and Ethics:** AI trained on biased data can reinforce social discrimination based on caste, gender, region, or language, raising concerns about equality and constitutional values.
- **Digital Divide:** Rural and Marginalized Communities: Unequal access to digital infrastructure, connectivity, and literacy limits AI's reach, potentially deepening socio-economic inequalities.
- **Regulatory Balance:** Innovation vs. Control: Policymakers must strike a balance between promoting innovation and ensuring safety, ethics, and public interest.

Conclusion:

India's AI journey conveys a clear message: technology must serve inclusion, empowerment and justice, not efficiency alone. Through the IndiaAI Mission, inclusive policies, and sector-specific applications, India is emerging not only as a technologically capable nation but also as a socially responsible AI power. As the country advances toward the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047, AI stands as a tool that strengthens both economic growth and human values.

Short Issues

Detection of Cosmic Dust Particles

Context:

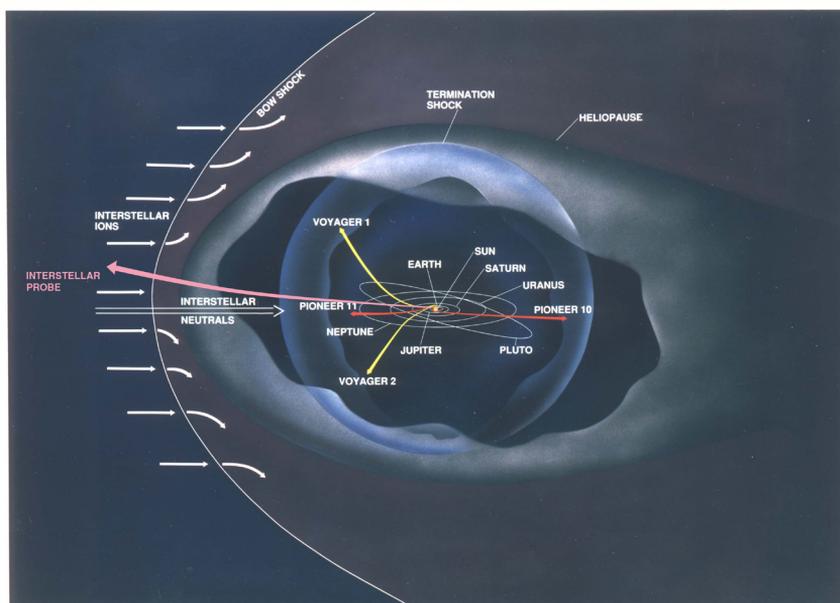
Recently, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has confirmed, based on experimental data, that interplanetary dust particles (IDPs) strike Earth's upper atmosphere at a rate of approximately one particle every 1,000 seconds (≈ 16 minutes). This discovery is based on observations made by the sciDust EXperiment (DEX), India's first indigenous cosmic dust detector, launched aboard the XPoSat mission.

About Dust EXperiment (DEX):

- DEX is a compact 3 kg scientific instrument developed by the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad. It was deployed on the PSLV

Orbital Experimental Module (POEM) during the PSLV-C58 XPoSat mission, launched on 1 January 2024.

- » **Working Principle:** DEX operates using a hypervelocity impact detector, designed to sense microscopic space dust particles entering Earth's vicinity at extremely high speeds.



- » **Detection Data:** Operating at an altitude of approximately 350 km with a 140° wide field of view, DEX recorded dust impacts between January and February 2024. The data confirmed persistent micro-particle impacts occurring roughly every 1,000 seconds, validating continuous dust flux in near-Earth space.

About Interplanetary Dust Particles (IDPs):

- Interplanetary Dust Particles are microscopic fragments originating from comets, asteroids, meteoroids, and other celestial bodies. These particles form part of a thin dust layer in near-Earth space and are occasionally visible as shooting stars when they burn up during atmospheric entry.
- Despite their minute size, these particles travel at hypervelocity speeds, making them capable of causing serious damage to spacecraft, satellites, and future human missions upon impact.

Why This Discovery Matters?

- **Enhancing Space Environment Understanding:** Understanding the density and behaviour of cosmic dust in near-Earth space contributes to a broader understanding of the space environment, often referred to as space weather. Such knowledge is crucial for assessing risks to present and future space assets.
- **Safeguarding Spacecraft and Satellites:** Particles travelling at speeds exceeding 4 km/s can cause hypervelocity impacts, ranging from minor surface erosion to catastrophic structural failure. Accurate data on impact rates and dust flux is essential for designing protective shielding and enhancing the reliability and longevity of spacecraft systems.

Scientific and Strategic Impact:

- **Planetary Science:** Data on IDPs help scientists understand the formation of the

early Solar System and the evolution of planetary atmospheres.

- **Space Weather Monitoring:** Continuous monitoring of dust flux is closely linked to space weather forecasting, which is vital for protecting communication, navigation, and Earth observation satellites.
- **First-of-its-Kind Achievement:** The successful deployment and operation of DEX marks a significant milestone in indigenous space science instrumentation, showcasing India's growing capabilities in advanced space research technologies.

Conclusion:

ISRO's confirmation that interplanetary dust particles strike Earth's upper atmosphere approximately every 16 minutes represents not only a major scientific achievement but also a strategic enabler for future space missions, including human spaceflight and interplanetary exploration. The success of DEX paves the way for improved understanding of the space environment, enhanced spacecraft safety design, and deeper insights into planetary atmospheres across the Solar System, all of which are central to India's long-term space ambitions.

Delhi Declared Rabies a Notifiable Disease

Context:

The Delhi Government has decided to declare human rabies a notifiable disease under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. The move aims to strengthen disease surveillance, ensure timely reporting, and facilitate prompt treatment of this fatal yet preventable disease.

About Rabies:

- Rabies is a viral zoonotic disease, primarily transmitted through dog bites. While it is almost invariably fatal once clinical symptoms appear, it is entirely preventable through timely administration of post-

exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

- The decision aligns with India's broader objective of eliminating dog-mediated human rabies deaths.

Background:

- Rabies has historically been under-reported in India due to weak surveillance systems, resulting in significant data gaps and delayed medical intervention. Despite the availability of anti-rabies vaccines (ARV) and rabies immunoglobulin (RIG), many bite victims fail to receive timely treatment, leading to avoidable fatalities.
- Declaring rabies a notifiable disease will legally mandate all public and private health facilities to report suspected, probable, and confirmed cases to designated health authorities. This will enable accurate data collection, rapid public health response, and identification of high-risk areas, thereby helping to reduce mortality.

Key Provisions of the Move:

- Once the notification is enforced, all healthcare providers in Delhi will be required to immediately report every case of human rabies to the appropriate authorities. The reporting mechanism will be integrated with the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) to enable real-time monitoring and trend analysis.
- Currently, Delhi provides anti-rabies vaccines at 59 health facilities and rabies immunoglobulin at 33 designated centres, significantly strengthening post-exposure care. In addition, the government plans to implement a State Action Plan for Rabies Elimination (SAPRE), adopting a "One Health" approach that integrates public health, veterinary services, and local bodies.

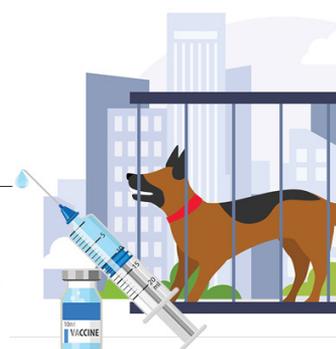
About the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:

- The Epidemic Diseases Act is a colonial-era legislation enacted on February 4, 1897, initially to control the bubonic plague in Bombay.
- The Act empowers state governments

to take extraordinary measures during epidemics, including issuing regulations on public behaviour, conducting inspections, enforcing quarantines, and implementing containment strategies.

Arrangement for Rabies Treatment in Delhi

- **Anti-Rabies Vaccine (ARV)**
Available at 59 health centers in 11 districts of Delhi.
- **Rabies Immunoglobulin (RIG)** Available in 33 hospitals/centers.



Significance and Challenges:

- **Public Health Surveillance:** Mandatory notification will generate robust epidemiological data, enabling evidence-based policymaking, targeted interventions, and efficient resource allocation.
- **Timely Treatment:** Prompt reporting facilitates early administration of PEP, which is critical to preventing rabies-related deaths, and improves coordination between human and animal health systems.
- **Rabies Elimination Goals:** The measure supports national and global targets to eliminate dog-mediated human rabies through integrated vaccination, prevention, and public awareness efforts.
- Challenges include ensuring compliance among private healthcare providers, maintaining uninterrupted vaccine and RIG supply chains, and improving public awareness regarding early reporting of animal bites and timely treatment.

Conclusion:

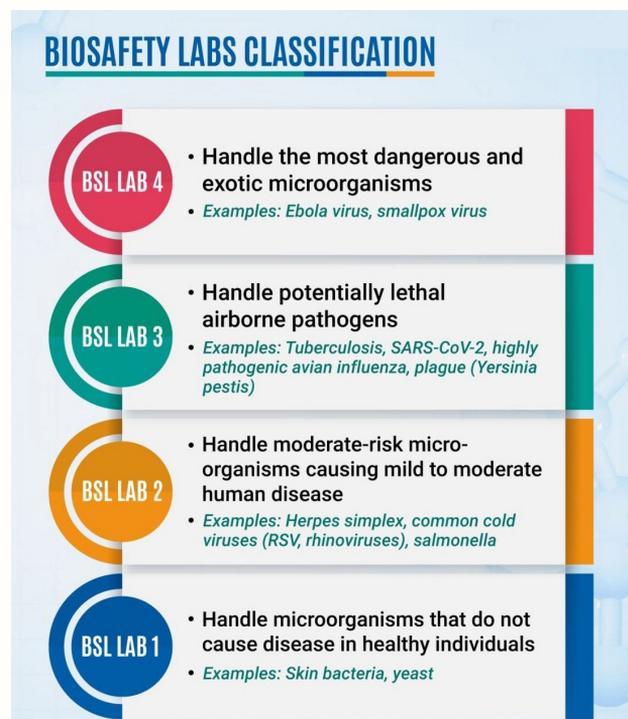
Declaring human rabies a notifiable disease

in Delhi represents a proactive and preventive public health intervention. It strengthens disease surveillance, enables timely medical and administrative responses, and reduces avoidable deaths. The decision reflects evidence-based policymaking, integrated health action, and a strong commitment to safeguarding public health against a lethal yet preventable disease.

India's First State-Funded BSL-4 Laboratory

Context:

Recently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah laid the foundation stone for a high-containment Bio Safety Level-4 (BSL-4) laboratory at the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre (GBRC) in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. The facility has been described as a "health shield" for India, marking a new phase in national health security and biotechnology capacity.



About the BSL-4 Facility:

- BSL-4 represents the highest level of

biosafety containment, designed for research on the world's most dangerous and highly infectious pathogens, for which effective treatments or vaccines may not exist.

- Research activities include pathogen isolation, diagnostics, therapeutic and vaccine development, and rapid outbreak response, all conducted under stringent containment and safety protocols.
- The laboratory will be constructed over 11,000 sq. metres at a cost of Rs.362 crore under the Gujarat State Biotechnology Mission (GSBTM). It will comprise multiple modules, including BSL-4, BSL-3, BSL-2, ABSL-4 (animal), and ABSL-3 facilities.
- It will be the second civilian BSL-4 laboratory in India, after the one at the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, but the first to be fully funded and operated by a state government.

About Pathogens:

- Pathogens are disease-causing microorganisms "including viruses, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and helminths" that invade a host, multiply, and disrupt normal bodily functions, resulting in infectious diseases.

Institutional and Strategic Significance:

- The laboratory will operate under GBRC, which already houses a BSL-2+ facility and was among the first institutions in India to sequence the SARS-CoV-2 genome during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The new facility will function as a national centre for high-containment pathogen research, strengthening India's capacity to manage outbreaks of deadly human and animal diseases, particularly zoonotic infections.

India's Biosafety Laboratory Landscape:

- Prior to this initiative, India had only one civilian BSL-4 laboratory at NIV, Pune. Under the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDL) scheme, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has approved 165 biosafety laboratories, including 154

BSL-2 and 11 BSL-3 labs, to enhance epidemic preparedness nationwide.

Significance for India:

- Strengthens biosecurity, health preparedness, and outbreak containment
- Supports vaccine R&D and the One Health approach, integrating human and animal health
- Reduces dependence on foreign laboratories for high-risk pathogen research
- Enhances India's standing in global biological research and biotechnology leadership

Conclusion:

The establishment of a state-funded BSL-4 laboratory in Gujarat marks a significant advancement in India's biosecurity and biotechnology ecosystem. By enabling high-containment research on deadly pathogens, it will strengthen outbreak response, accelerate vaccine development, and support evidence-based public health policy positioning India as a more resilient and capable actor in global health security.

PSLV-C62/EOS-N1 Mission

Context:

On January 12, 2026, the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) PSLV-C62 mission failed, marking the second consecutive failure for India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) within a year. The mission was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota and carried 16 satellites for domestic and international customers. This failure has raised questions about ISRO's launch reliability and its preparedness for future strategic missions.

About Mission:

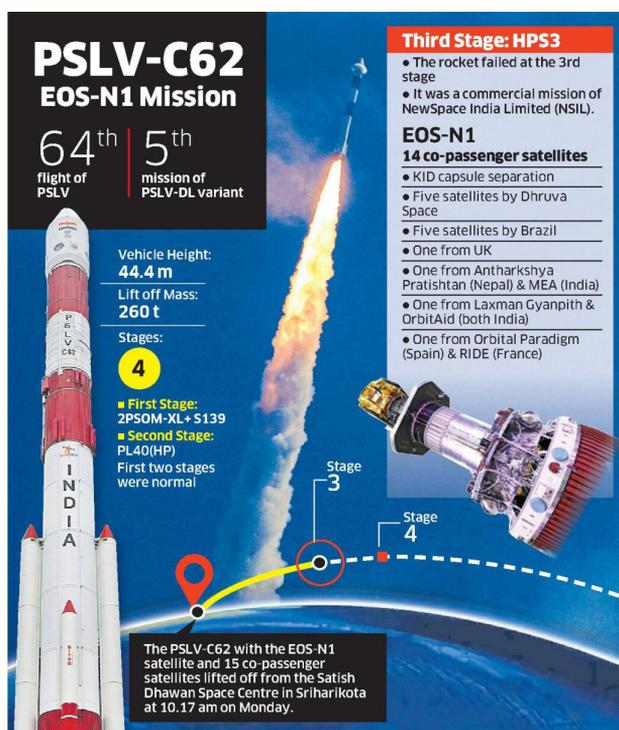
- The primary payload was EOS-N1 (Anvesha), a strategic Earth observation and surveillance satellite developed by DRDO. Secondary payloads included 15 co-passenger satellites, comprising seven

satellites from Bengaluru-based Dhruva Space and others from Brazil, Nepal, and the UK.

- The mission also featured AayulSAT, India's first demonstrator for on-orbit satellite refueling, showcasing ISRO's focus on advanced space technologies and commercial collaborations.

About Launch Vehicle:

- The mission will use the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C62) in its DL configuration (with two solid strap-on boosters).
- This will be the 64th flight of the PSLV, the reliable workhorse of India's space launch fleet.
- PSLV has a long heritage of successful missions, including Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission, and others, cementing India's credibility in space launches.



PSLV-C62
EOS-N1 Mission

64th flight of PSLV | 5th mission of PSLV-DL variant

Vehicle Height: 44.4 m
Lift off Mass: 260 t
Stages: 4

- First Stage: 2PSOM-XL+ S139
- Second Stage: PL40(HP)

First two stages were normal

Third Stage: HPS3

- The rocket failed at the 3rd stage
- It was a commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).

EOS-N1
14 co-passenger satellites

- KID capsule separation
- Five satellites by Dhruva Space
- Five satellites by Brazil
- One from UK
- One from Antharkshya Pratishthan (Nepal) & MEA (India)
- One from Laxman Gyanpith & OrbitAid (both India)
- One from Orbital Paradigm (Spain) & RIDE (France)

The PSLV-C62 with the EOS-N1 satellite and 15 co-passenger satellites lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota at 10.17 am on Monday.

Implications of failure:

- This incident follows the PSLV-C61 failure in May 2025, which also involved a third-stage malfunction. The back-to-back failures have

raised questions regarding quality control, stage reliability, and ISRO's workhorse status of PSLV, which has historically been among the world's most reliable launch vehicles.

- Despite the setback, the mission provides critical insights into solid-fueled stage dynamics and mission risk management, essential for future PSLV and Gaganyaan-related flights.

About Indian Space Research Organisation:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is India's national space agency, established in 1969 under the visionary leadership of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai. It functions under the Department of Space (DoS), which reports directly to the Prime Minister of India, with headquarters in Bengaluru.
- **Mandate and Objectives:**
 - » ISRO aims to harness space technology for national development and advance space science.
 - » Its activities span satellite development, launch vehicle technology, space applications, and planetary exploration.
- **Key Achievements:**
 - » **Aryabhata (1975):** India's first satellite
 - » **PSLV:** Reliable and cost-effective launcher
 - » **GSLV & LVM3:** Heavy-lift capability
 - » **Chandrayaan-3 (2023):** First soft landing near Moon's south pole
 - » **Mars Orbiter Mission (2014):** First success on maiden attempt
 - » **Aditya-L1:** India's first solar mission

Conclusion:

The PSLV-C62/EOS-N1 mission on January 12, 2026 is a key milestone in India's space calendar. It underscores ISRO's commitment to advancing Earth observation capabilities, space technology innovation, and global cooperation, while continuing to build a vibrant space ecosystem that combines scientific, strategic, and commercial objectives.

Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD)

Context:

In recent times, Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD) is emerging as a major public health concern in India.

About MASLD:

- Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD), formerly known as Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD), is a common, often silent, condition characterized by excess fat buildup in the liver linked to metabolic factors like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and insulin resistance.
- Affecting about 30% of adults globally, it is frequently reversible in early stages through weight loss, diet, and exercise, but can progress to cirrhosis, liver failure, or cancer if unmanaged.

About Risk Factors:

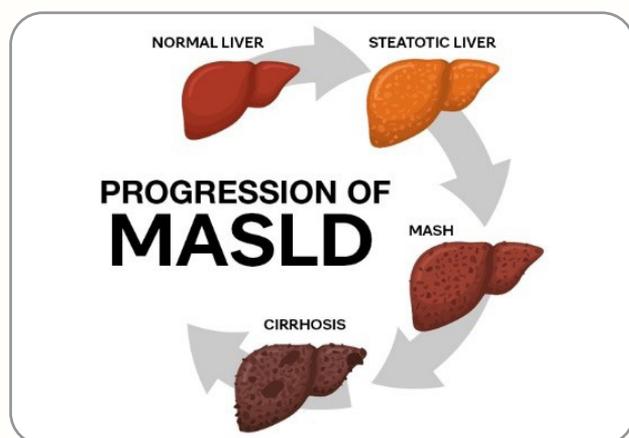
- MASLD affects a substantial proportion of the Indian population. Indian studies suggest that approximately one-third of adults may be affected, with higher rates among those with metabolic syndrome.
- **Key risk factors include:**
 - » Overweight or obesity
 - » Type 2 diabetes
 - » Hypertension
 - » Elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels
 - » Sedentary lifestyle
- The disease is strongly associated with insulin resistance and other components of metabolic syndrome, making early detection critical to prevent progression.

Pathophysiology and Progression:

- MASLD involves fat accumulation in liver cells, which can trigger inflammation and scarring if untreated. It progresses through:
 - » **Steatosis:** Fat deposition without

inflammation.

- » **Steatohepatitis:** Liver cell inflammation.
- » **Fibrosis:** Scar tissue formation.
- » **Cirrhosis:** Advanced scarring, with risk of liver failure and cancer.
- Early MASLD is often silent, and liver function tests may remain normal, complicating diagnosis.



Management and Treatment:

- MASLD is largely manageable through lifestyle changes:
 - » **Diet:** Emphasize whole foods, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins; reduce refined carbs, sugary drinks, and processed foods; prefer multigrain staples.
 - » **Weight management:** 7–10% body weight loss improves liver fat and function.
 - » **Physical activity:** Combine aerobic and strength training; reduce sedentary time and incorporate short active breaks (NEAT).
- Medical management (for diabetes, cholesterol) and bariatric surgery may be used in severe cases.

Public Health Implications:

- MASLD is a growing public health challenge in India due to obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and dietary shifts. Awareness, screening, workplace wellness programmes, and early interventions can reduce risks of cirrhosis, liver cancer, and cardiovascular complications.

Conclusion:

MASLD is preventable and manageable. Its reclassification from NAFLD emphasizes the link between metabolic health and liver function. Early screening, lifestyle modification, and public health measures are key to controlling this silent epidemic.

Nipah Virus

Context:

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has reported that only two confirmed cases of Nipah virus (NiV) disease have been detected in West Bengal since December 2025.

How case reduced:

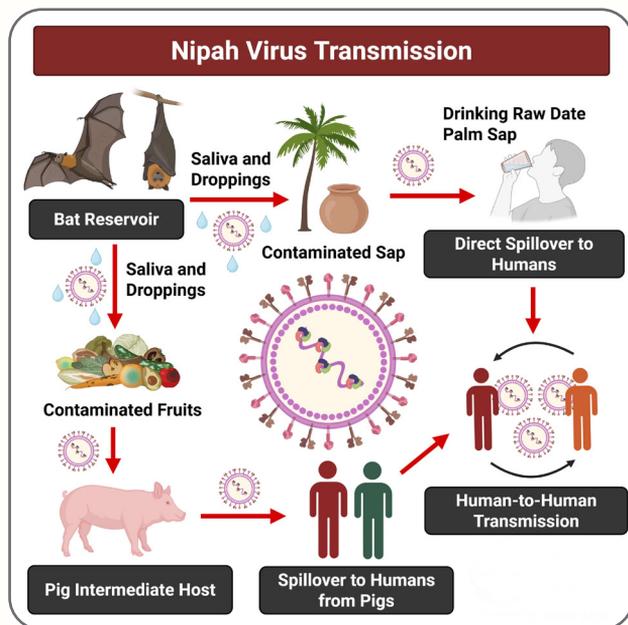
- The Central and West Bengal governments coordinated a rapid public health response in accordance with established NCDC protocols. Measures included:
 - » Enhanced surveillance and active monitoring in affected areas.
 - » Laboratory testing of suspected cases and contacts.
 - » Field investigations to track possible chains of transmission.
 - » Containment and isolation of confirmed cases to prevent spread.

About Nipah Virus:

- **Zoonotic Origin:** First identified in 1998–99 in Kampung Sungai Nipah, Malaysia, NiV is transmitted from animals to humans. Fruit bats (Pteropodidae) are the natural reservoir, and pigs can act as intermediate hosts.
- **Human-to-Human Transmission:** Nipah can spread directly between humans, making it a serious public health concern.
- **Virus Classification:** It belongs to the Henipavirus genus in the Paramyxoviridae family and is a Biosafety Level-4 (BSL-4) pathogen.

Structure and Genome:

- Single-stranded, negative-sense RNA virus.
- Nucleocapsid protected by a matrix protein, with fusion proteins and glycoproteins enabling cell entry.
- Shows a distinct cytoplasmic structure near the endoplasmic reticulum.



Remdesivir in India has improved survival rates, reducing mortality from 91% (2018) to around 33% (2023–25).

Nipah Outbreaks in India:

- India has previously faced NiV outbreaks in:
 - » West Bengal (2007)
 - » Kerala (2018, 2023, 2025)
- These outbreaks underscore the importance of early detection, contact tracing, rapid medical response, and public health preparedness in controlling Nipah virus spread.

Conclusion:

The recent containment of NiV in West Bengal demonstrates effective coordination between state and central agencies, robust contact tracing, and timely surveillance, preventing a wider outbreak despite the virus's high pathogenicity.

Symptoms and Clinical Features:

- Initial symptoms resemble influenza, including fever, muscle pain, sore throat, and respiratory distress.
- Severe cases can progress to acute encephalitis, causing convulsions, disorientation, coma, and death.
- Asymptomatic infections are common, complicating surveillance and containment.

Diagnosis and Treatment:

- **Diagnosis:** Confirmed through RT-PCR, ELISA, serum neutralisation tests, histopathology, and virus isolation in BSL-4 laboratories.
- **Treatment:** There is no approved vaccine for humans or animals. Treatment is primarily supportive care and isolation.
- **Recent Advances:** Use of monoclonal antibodies and antiviral drugs such as

Economic Survey 2025–26: India's Economic Resilience Amidst Global Uncertainty

Introduction:

The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, tabled the Economic Survey 2025–26 in Parliament on 29 January, presenting a detailed assessment of India's macroeconomic performance, sectoral trends, and medium-term policy priorities. The Survey comes at a time of heightened global uncertainty but underscores India's emergence as a stable, fast-growing, and resilient economy.

Growth Amid Global Uncertainty:

- The global economic environment remains fragile, marked by geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation, and financial vulnerabilities. While global growth has held up better than expected, risks remain elevated and their full impact may manifest with a lag.
- Against this backdrop, India's economic performance stands out strongly. According to the First Advance Estimates, India's real GDP growth for FY26 is projected at 7.4 per cent, while Gross Value Added (GVA) growth is estimated at 7.3 per cent, making India the fastest-growing major economy for the fourth consecutive year.
- Growth has been broad-based and demand-driven. Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) grew by 7.0 per cent in FY26, reaching 61.5 per cent of GDP, the highest share since 2012. Low inflation, stable employment, rising real incomes, and a strong agricultural performance supported rural demand, while tax rationalisation and improving labour market conditions

strengthened urban consumption.

- Investment activity also gathered momentum. Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) grew by 7.8 per cent, maintaining a healthy 30 per cent share of GDP. This was supported by sustained public capital expenditure and a revival in private investment, reflected in increased corporate announcements.

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025–26 HIGHLIGHTS



Economic Growth

Economy expected to grow 7.4% in FY26



Services Power

Services contribute 53.6% of GDP



Inflation

Prices under control
Retail inflation: 1.7%
(Apr–Dec FY26)



Government Finances

Fiscal deficit target: 4.4% (FY26)
Improved sharply from 9.2% in FY21



External Strength

Exports: \$825.3 billion
(highest ever)
Remittances: \$135.4 billion
(world's highest)
Forex reserves: \$701.4 billion
Enough for 11 months of imports

- On the supply side, the services sector remained the primary growth engine, with GVA growth of 9.3 per cent in the first half of FY26 and an estimated 9.1 per cent for the full year. This highlights India's increasing

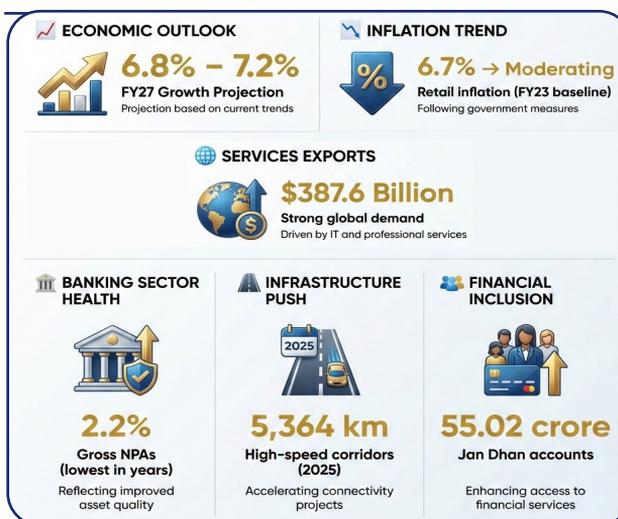
reliance on modern, tradable, and digitally delivered services.

Fiscal Consolidation & Monetary Stability:

- The Economic Survey highlights credible fiscal consolidation as a cornerstone of India's macroeconomic stability. Prudent fiscal management has enhanced policy credibility and reinforced investor confidence, resulting in three sovereign credit rating upgrades in 2025 by Morningstar DBRS, S&P Global Ratings, and R&I.
- The Centre's revenue receipts improved structurally, rising from an average of 8.5 per cent of GDP during FY16–FY20 to 9.2 per cent in FY25. This was driven largely by buoyant non-corporate tax collections, reflecting better compliance and income growth. The number of income tax returns filed rose from 6.9 crore in FY22 to 9.2 crore in FY25, aided by technology-enabled tax administration.
- GST collections remained robust, with gross collections of Rs.17.4 lakh crore during April–December 2025, growing 6.7 per cent year-on-year. High-frequency indicators such as e-way bills also pointed to strong economic activity.
- Public investment remained a key growth driver. The effective capital expenditure of the Centre rose to about 4 per cent of GDP in FY25, up from 2.7 per cent in the pre-pandemic period. Through the Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure, States were incentivised to sustain capital spending.
- India also made progress on debt sustainability. The general government debt-to-GDP ratio declined by about 7.1 percentage points since 2020, even as public investment remained elevated, reflecting a careful balance between growth support and fiscal prudence.
- On the monetary and financial front, India's regulatory framework continued to strengthen. The banking sector's asset quality improved significantly, with gross NPAs at 2.2 per cent and net NPAs at 0.5 per cent in September 2025—multi-

decade lows. Credit growth accelerated to 14.5 per cent year-on-year by December 2025. International validation of regulatory quality came through the IMF–World Bank Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP), which noted India's resilient and well-capitalised financial system.

External Sector and Inflation:



- The Survey highlights India's steady integration into the global economy, even amid global slowdown. Between 2005 and 2024, India's share in global merchandise exports nearly doubled, while its share in global services exports more than doubled.
- In FY25, India's total exports reached a record USD 825.3 billion, driven primarily by services exports. Services exports touched USD 387.6 billion, growing 13.6 per cent and reinforcing India's position as a global hub for IT and business services. Non-petroleum exports also reached historic highs.
- The current account deficit remained moderate, at around 1.3 per cent of GDP in Q2 FY26, supported by strong services exports and record remittances of USD 135.4 billion, making India the world's largest recipient. Foreign exchange reserves rose to USD 701.4 billion by January 2026, providing import cover of nearly 11 months and enhancing external resilience.
- Despite a subdued global investment climate, India attracted USD 64.7 billion

in gross FDI during April–November 2025 and ranked fourth globally in Greenfield investment announcements in 2024.

- Inflation emerged as a major macroeconomic success story. Average headline CPI inflation during April–December 2025 stood at 1.7 per cent, the lowest since the CPI series began. This moderation was driven by declining food and fuel prices. Among major emerging economies, India recorded one of the sharpest declines in inflation in 2025, anchoring macroeconomic stability and supporting consumption.

Sectoral Transformation: Agriculture, Industry, Services and Infrastructure:

The Survey underscores structural transformation across sectors:

- In agriculture, strong monsoon conditions lifted foodgrain production to 3,577.3 lakh metric tonnes in AY 2024–25, while horticulture production reached 362 million tonnes, surpassing foodgrains and emerging as a major growth driver. The livestock and fisheries sectors recorded robust long-term growth. Farmer incomes were supported through MSP, PM-KISAN transfers, and pension schemes, while digital platforms like e-NAM improved market access.
- The industrial sector strengthened despite global headwinds. Manufacturing GVA growth accelerated sharply in FY26. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes attracted over Rs.2 lakh crore in investment, generated large-scale production, and created over 12 lakh jobs. India's innovation capacity improved, reflected in its rise to 38th rank in the Global Innovation Index 2025. The India Semiconductor Mission advanced domestic manufacturing capabilities.
- The services sector continued to dominate, accounting for over 53 per cent of GDP and 56 per cent of GVA, while attracting more than 80 per cent of FDI inflows in recent years.
- Infrastructure investment remained central to India's growth strategy. Government

capital expenditure increased more than fourfold since FY18. Highways, railways, airports, power capacity, renewable energy, digital connectivity, water supply, and space infrastructure all expanded significantly, strengthening India's long-term productive capacity and competitiveness.

Social Development and Employment:

- The Survey highlights progress in human development and inclusion. India operates one of the world's largest school systems, with improving enrolment rates across levels. Higher education expanded rapidly, supported by National Education Policy reforms, flexible credit frameworks, and internationalisation.
- Health outcomes improved markedly, with sharp declines in maternal, infant, and child mortality, far exceeding global averages. Employment indicators remained positive, with over 56 crore people employed in Q2 FY26, and labour reforms extending social security to gig and platform workers. The e-Shram portal strengthened coverage of unorganised workers, especially women.
- Rural development initiatives, poverty reduction, and rising social services expenditure reinforced inclusive growth. Emerging themes such as AI adoption, urban connectivity through regional rapid transit systems, and a strategic shift from import substitution to strategic resilience and indispensability reflect India's forward-looking policy vision.

Conclusion:

The Economic Survey 2025–26 presents a picture of an economy that has combined high growth with macroeconomic stability, deepened structural reforms, and strengthened resilience amid global uncertainty. With controlled inflation, robust public investment, expanding services, improving human development, and a strategic global outlook, India is well-positioned to sustain inclusive, resilient, and globally integrated growth in the years ahead.

Union Budget 2026–27: A blueprint for infrastructure, manufacturing and inclusive development

Introduction:

The Union Budget 2026–27 was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1st February 2026 in the Parliament. Positioned at a critical juncture, midway through the Vision 2047 journey this budget attempts to balance growth imperatives with fiscal discipline, while addressing structural constraints confronting the Indian economy. At its core, the Budget lays out an infrastructure led, reform oriented, and manufacturing driven strategy to sustain high growth trajectories, improve ease of living for citizens, catalyse private investment, and deepen India's role in global supply chains. Its contours reflect continuity with past priorities but also some bold new policy initiatives, especially in technology, data infrastructure, and tax reforms.

The Budget Estimates (BE) for 2026-27 project non-debt receipts at Rs.36.5 lakh crore and total expenditure at Rs.53.5 lakh crore, with net tax receipts of Rs.28.7 lakh crore. Gross market borrowings are estimated at Rs.17.2 lakh crore, with net borrowings from dated securities at Rs.11.7 lakh crore. Fiscal deficit is projected at 4.3% of GDP, while the debt-to-GDP ratio is estimated at 55.6%, slightly down from 56.1% in the Revised Estimates (RE) 2025-26.

Budget

In the Indian Constitution, the term “Budget” is not explicitly used; it is referred to as the Annual Financial Statement under Article 112. It is presented to both Houses of Parliament by the Finance Minister on the recommendation of the President and contains details of estimated receipts and expenditure for the financial year (1 April–31 March).

➤ Key Provisions:

- » **Article 110 (Money Bill):** Defines what constitutes a Money Bill, including taxation, government borrowings, and custody of the

Consolidated Fund. The Finance Bill, part of the Budget, is usually a Money Bill.

- » **Article 113 (Procedure for Estimates):** Differentiates charged (non-votable) and voted expenditures.
- » **Article 114 (Appropriation Bills):** No money can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund without an Appropriation Act.
- » **Article 115 (Supplementary Grants):** Allows Parliament to approve additional expenditure for unforeseen needs or new services.
- » **Article 116 (Vote on Account):** Permits advance grants to keep the government running before full Budget approval.
- » **Articles 117 & 265:** Deal with Financial Bills and establish that taxes can only be levied by law.
- » **Articles 266–267:** Establish the Consolidated Fund, Public Account, and Contingency Fund for regular and unforeseen government expenditures.
- These articles provide the legal and procedural foundation for India's budgetary process, ensuring accountability, parliamentary control, and fiscal discipline. The Budget is inspired by three Kartavyas, reflecting the government's approach to balanced development:
 - » **Accelerating and Sustaining Economic Growth:** The first Kartavya focuses on enhancing productivity and competitiveness across the economy, while strengthening its ability to withstand global uncertainties. This means policies that push manufacturing, infrastructure, innovation, and export competitiveness with an effort to make growth resilient and long-term.
 - » **Fulfilling Aspirations and Building Capacities:** The second Kartavya is centred on people-centric development: creating opportunities, supporting skill building, promoting employment, and empowering

citizens to be active participants in India's growth journey. It emphasises enabling individuals, especially youth, women, and disadvantaged groups to realise their economic and social aspirations.

- » **Ensuring Inclusive Growth (Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas):** The third Kartavya aligns with the government's motto of Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas ensuring that every family, community, region, and sector has access to resources, amenities, and opportunities. This reflects an inclusive approach to development, where benefits of growth are widely shared across India's diverse population.

Key aspects of budget:

- **Macroeconomic Landscape and Fiscal Strategy:** India's macroeconomic backdrop on the eve of the Budget reflects resilience. Real GDP growth was estimated at 7.4% in FY 2025–26, with nominal growth projected at 10% in FY 2026–27. The government reaffirmed its commitment to fiscal consolidation, targeting a fiscal deficit of 4.3% of GDP for FY27, a marginal reduction from the previous year with a medium term aim of stabilising debt ratios around 50% of GDP by 2030.
- » **Capital Expenditure Push:** A cornerstone of the budget remains public capital expenditure, a driver of infrastructure creation and economic multiplier effects. The capex outlay was increased to Rs. 12.2 lakh crore, equivalent to 4.4% of GDP, demonstrating the government's intent to sustain asset creation and crowd in private investment. Capex priorities span transport networks, logistics, waterways, urban infrastructure, and energy systems designed to improve connectivity, reduce logistics costs and facilitate industry competitiveness.
- » **Tax Reforms and Ease of Compliance:** One of the most anticipated features of Budget 2026 was the overhaul of the tax system to make it simpler, more transparent, and conducive to

compliance.



- » **New Income Tax Act and Simplification:** A landmark reform announced is the Income Tax Act, 2025, which will come into effect from April 1, 2026. This replaces the six decade old legislation with a more streamlined code aimed at reducing litigation and easing filing processes. New IT return forms are expected to be more user friendly, with simplified provisions benefitting individuals and businesses.
- » **Tax Relief and TCS Rationalisation:** The Budget introduced several tax relief measures, including:
 - Retention of existing income tax slabs, with relief on compliance rather than rate changes.
 - Reduction in Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on overseas tour packages, education, and medical remittances

under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme to 2%, facilitating smoother global mobility.

- » These moves reflect a delicate balance: maintaining revenue buoyancy while easing compliance burdens, a key aspiration for taxpayers and businesses alike.

▪ **Infrastructure, Connectivity and Logistics:**

- » **High Speed Rail Corridors:** A headline proposal was the launch of seven new high speed rail corridors, connecting major economic clusters such as Mumbai–Pune, Pune–Hyderabad, Hyderabad–Bengaluru, Delhi–Varanasi, and Varanasi–Siliguri. These corridors aim to dramatically compress travel times, improve mobility, and act as growth collectors around urban agglomerations. Such investments are expected to boost industrial linkages, regional development, and job creation in construction, operations, and allied services.
- » **National Waterways and Dedicated Freight Corridors:** The Budget emphasised logistics efficiency through:
 - Operationalisation of 20 national waterways over five years.
 - New Dedicated Freight Corridors linking the east and west (e.g., Dankuni to Surat), reducing freight costs and facilitating seamless goods movement.
 - Collectively, these initiatives aim to reduce logistics costs, currently among the highest in developing economies, and enhance global competitiveness.
- » **Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund:** To encourage private participation in long gestation projects, an Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund was proposed to provide partial credit guarantees, reducing risk perception among lenders

and investors.

» **Manufacturing and Strategic Industries:**

The Budget doubled down on the principle that manufacturing is central to sustainable growth, particularly in strategic and high technology sectors.

▪ **India Semiconductor Mission 2.0:**

- » Recognising the global chip shortage and supply chain fragilities, the government announced India Semiconductor Mission 2.0, building on earlier efforts to attract investment in electronics and semiconductor fabrication.

» **Sectoral Focus Beyond Semiconductors:** Other major manufacturing initiatives include:

- Biopharma SHAKTI programme (Rs.10,000 crore) to develop the biopharmaceutical ecosystem.
- Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme with an enhanced outlay of Rs.40,000 crore.
- Rare Earth Corridors in states like Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu to support mineral processing and advanced manufacturing.

- » These strategic pushes are designed to reduce import dependence, create high value jobs, and integrate India more deeply into global production networks.

» **MSMEs, Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital:** Small businesses form the backbone of India's economy, providing employment, fostering entrepreneurship, and sustaining rural and urban livelihoods.

- » **Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Growth Fund:** To stimulate MSME growth, a Rs.10,000 crore SME Growth Fund was announced, complemented by a Rs.2,000 crore top up to the Self Reliant India Fund.

» **Liquidity Support and Credit Reforms:**

- Mandatory use of TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) for

Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) purchases from MSMEs to improve liquidity.

- Credit guarantee enhancements aimed at reducing financing costs and enabling risk sharing.
- Corporate Mitras in Tier II and Tier III towns to help firms navigate compliance obligations efficiently.
- » These structural interventions seek to enhance access to capital, formalise financing channels, and integrate small firms into larger value chains.
- **Social Sectors: Education, Health and Rural Welfare:** The Budget reaffirmed the government's commitment to social sector investments while embedding technology into development interventions.
 - » **Education and Skill Development:** Establishment of girls' hostels in every district under a viability gap funding model to improve participation in higher education. Support for the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) sector to build creative talent pipelines and link education to employment.
 - » These steps reflect recognition that human capital development is essential for long term economic competitiveness.
 - » **Agriculture and Farmer Support:** Agricultural policy shifted further towards productivity enhancement over subsidies, including technology driven interventions such as Bharat VISTAAR, a decision support platform integrating data resources to help farmers optimise outcomes.
- **Defence, Security and Strategic Autonomy:** In line with national security imperatives, the Budget allocated significant resources to modernise the armed forces.
 - » Defence outlays increased to approximately Rs. 7.85 lakh crore, with a substantial portion earmarked for modernisation, aircraft and naval

assets.

- » This signals India's intent to strengthen its defence industrial base and reduce reliance on imports, consistent with the broader goal of strategic autonomy.
- **Financial Sector and Governance Reforms:** The Budget proposed several measures to deepen financial markets and improve regulatory frameworks:
 - » A market making framework for corporate bonds to enhance liquidity and investor participation.
 - » Incentives for municipal bond issuances to fund urban infrastructure.
 - » Review of FEMA rules to align regulations with evolving global capital flows.
 - » Customs reforms introducing trust based models and longer advance ruling validity.
 - » These reforms aim to catalyse deeper capital markets and improve India's global financial integration.
- **Fiscal Sustainability and Long term Outlook:**
 - » Fiscal discipline remains a central theme. The targeted 4.3% fiscal deficit balances developmental needs with macroeconomic stability. By anchoring fiscal consolidation goals and keeping public debt in check, the Budget seeks to ensure that India's investment led trajectory is sustainable over the long term.

Conclusion:

The Union Budget 2026–27 reflects an intricate balancing act, fostering high growth, enhancing competitiveness and maintaining fiscal responsibility. Its focus on infrastructure, strategic manufacturing, tax reforms, and human capital aligns with India's larger vision of becoming a \$30 trillion economy by 2047. While execution challenges remain, particularly in large scale infrastructure and regulatory implementation, the Budget lays a cohesive roadmap integrating growth, inclusion, and reform.

Short Issues

India's Trade Deficit with FTA Countries Widening

Context:

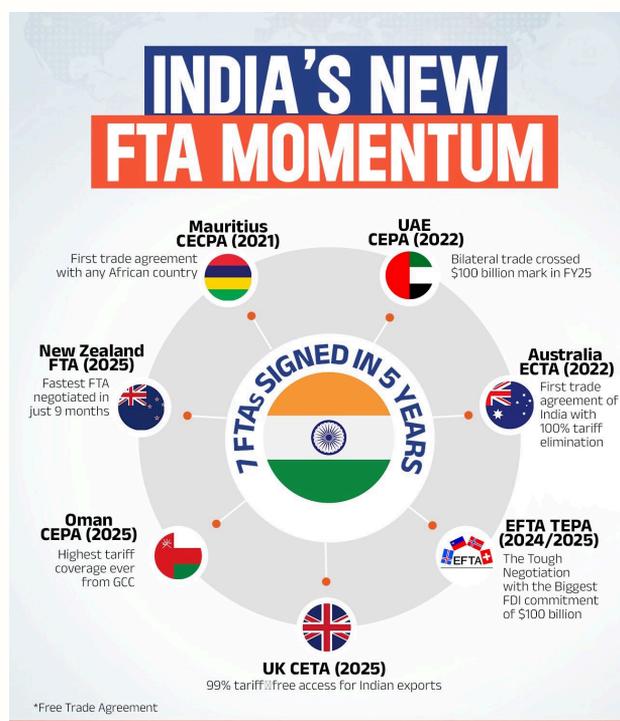
India's economic engagement through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) is a key pillar of its strategy to boost exports, diversify markets, and integrate into global value chains. The NITI Aayog 'Trade Watch Quarterly' report for Q1 FY26 highlights worrying trends in India's trade balance with its FTA partners.

Key Findings:

- **Rising Trade Deficit with FTA Partners**
 - » Between April and June 2025, India's trade deficit with FTA countries widened by 59.2%. Imports rose by 10% to USD 65.3 billion, while exports declined by 9% to USD 38.7 billion.
 - » The expansion in the deficit was largely driven by falling exports to the ASEAN region, India's largest FTA export destination.
- **Decline in Exports to Key FTA Countries**
 - » Exports to ASEAN contracted by 16.9%, with sharp declines recorded in Malaysia (-39.7%), Singapore (-13.2%), and Australia (-10.9%).
 - » Exports to the UAE, India's second-largest FTA partner, declined marginally by 2.1%.
 - » In contrast, modest gains were seen in South Korea (+15.6%), Japan (+2.8%), Thailand (+2.9%), and Bhutan (+10.2%).
- **Structural Divergence in Export Performance**
 - » Petroleum exports witnessed a sharp decline, reflecting global price and demand trends.
 - » Electronics exports surged by 47% year-on-year, accounting for over 11% of total exports. This reflects India's deeper integration into global supply chains, with electronics emerging as a sunrise sector that partially offset weaknesses in traditional export segments.

Implications for India's Trade Strategy:

- **Need for Enhanced Competitiveness:** The report underlines the need to strengthen competitiveness within existing FTAs. Export contraction alongside strong import growth indicates a demand recovery tilted towards imported goods and energy inputs rather than domestically produced, export-oriented manufacturing.
- **Value Chain Integration:** Deeper integration into global value chains (GVCs) is essential to improve export competitiveness, particularly in higher-technology and higher-value sectors beyond electronics.



Way Forward:

- **Trade Policy Calibration**
 - » Recalibrate FTAs with greater emphasis on rules of origin, improved market access for labour-intensive sectors, and export facilitation.
 - » Strengthen diplomatic efforts to accelerate ongoing FTA negotiations and conclude agreements with major

partners to reduce trade barriers.

- **Diversification of Export Base**
 - » Promote sunrise industries such as electronics, IT hardware, engineering goods, and green technologies to diversify the export basket.
 - » Strengthen domestic manufacturing capabilities to reduce dependence on imported critical intermediate inputs.
- **Strengthening Supply Chains**
 - » Build resilient and efficient domestic supply chains in key sectors to lower import dependence and enhance export competitiveness.

Conclusion:

Although India is witnessing a widening trade deficit with its FTA partners, strong growth in electronics exports provides a positive signal. Strategic trade negotiations, targeted policy interventions, and sustained sectoral diversification will be crucial in turning the current trade imbalance into an opportunity for deeper and more sustainable global integration.

GST Compensation Cess

Context:

Recently, the Union Government notified 1 February 2026 as the effective date for a major restructuring of India's tobacco taxation framework. This notification marks the formal end of the GST compensation cess and the beginning of a new tobacco tax regime that combines higher GST rates, additional central excise duties, and a Health and National Security Cess.

Background:

- When the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out in July 2017, the Centre assured states compensation for any revenue losses arising from the transition to a unified indirect tax system. To finance this commitment, a GST compensation cess was imposed on select goods such as tobacco,

pan masala, and luxury items.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre resorted to borrowing to continue compensation payments to states, creating temporary liabilities. These liabilities have since been fully repaid.
- With the compensation period concluded and outstanding obligations extinguished, the cess has outlived its original purpose. Consequently, the government has decided to phase it out, paving the way for a new taxation structure effective from February 1, 2026.

New Tobacco Tax Regime:

- Under the revised framework, tobacco products will continue to be taxed under GST, albeit with higher rates and additional levies. Cigarettes, pan masala, and similar products will attract 40% GST, while bidis will fall under the 18% GST slab.
- A significant reform is the introduction of an MRP-based valuation system, under which taxes will be levied on declared retail prices rather than transaction values, thereby addressing the problem of under-invoicing.
- In addition, central excise duties will be imposed on tobacco products, varying by product category and specifications. Pan masala will attract a Health and National Security Cess, while products such as gutkha and chewing tobacco will be subject to capacity-based excise duties linked to packing machine capacity.
- Regulatory oversight is further strengthened through the Packing Machines Rules, 2026, which mandate disclosure of machine details and monthly duty payments.

Rationale Behind the Shift:

- The new regime is guided by three core objectives.
 - » First, fiscal sustainability is enhanced by replacing a temporary and purpose-specific cess with more predictable excise-based revenues.
 - » Second, public health objectives are

reinforced by maintaining a high tax burden on harmful products, thereby discouraging consumption.

- » Third, administrative efficiency is improved through MRP-based valuation and capacity-linked duties, which reduce opportunities for tax evasion and revenue leakage.

Economic and Social Implications:

- Higher taxation is expected to increase retail prices and potentially dampen consumption, although demand for tobacco products tends to be relatively inelastic due to addiction.
- For states, revenues will now accrue through the divisible pool rather than a dedicated cess, while a portion of the proceeds may be earmarked for health-related programmes. This transition will require careful Centre–State coordination to ensure revenue stability.

Conclusion:

The notification ending the GST compensation cess and introducing a new tobacco tax regime represents a significant shift in India's indirect tax policy. By aligning revenue mobilisation with public health priorities and compliance objectives, the government seeks to establish a more efficient, health-oriented, and fiscally stable taxation framework. The success of this reform will ultimately depend on effective enforcement, complementary public health measures, and sustained vigilance against illicit trade.

India became World's Fourth largest Economy

Context:

Recently, India achieved a landmark economic milestone by surpassing Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy in nominal GDP terms. According to official estimates, India's GDP stood at USD 4.18 trillion, marginally

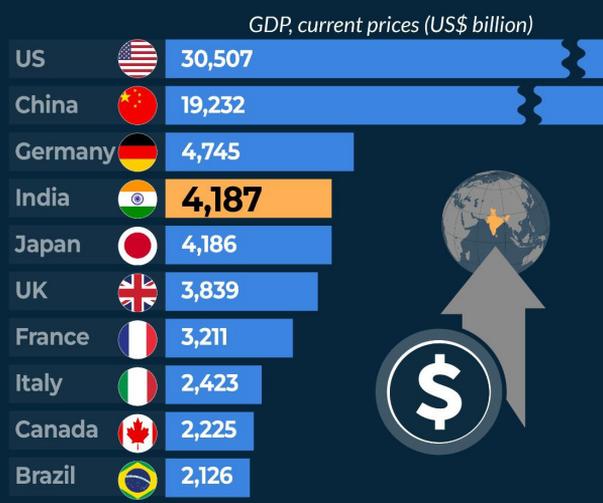
higher than Japan's estimated GDP during the same period. This achievement marks the culmination of years of sustained economic growth and structural reforms.

India's Economic Progress:

- In 2025, India's real GDP growth reached 8.2% in the second quarter of FY 2025–26, highlighting the economy's resilience amid global uncertainties. This rare combination of high growth and moderating inflation has been described as a “Goldilocks phase,” providing favourable conditions for continued expansion without major macroeconomic imbalances.
- While this ranking is based on nominal GDP (measured at current prices in US dollars)—which is sensitive to exchange rate fluctuations and global price movements—it nevertheless represents a symbolic shift in global economic dynamics, reflecting India's growing weight in the world economy.

India now 4th Largest Economy

Overtakes Japan, and could surpass Germany in the next five years



Key Growth Drivers of India:

- **Demographic Advantage:** India's large

and relatively young population offers a substantial demographic dividend, supporting domestic consumption and expanding the labour force.

- **Structural Reforms:** Reforms aimed at improving the ease of doing business, liberalising investment norms, and rationalising taxation have enhanced economic efficiency and boosted foreign direct investment (FDI).
- **Domestic Demand and Consumption:** Robust private consumption—driven by rising incomes and an expanding middle class—has emerged as a key engine of economic growth.
- **Infrastructure and Digitalisation:** Significant investments in physical infrastructure (roads, ports, logistics) and digital public infrastructure have improved productivity, connectivity, and competitiveness.
- **Manufacturing and Exports:** Although services continue to dominate, sustained growth in manufacturing and exports particularly in high-value goods remains crucial for long-term structural transformation.

Challenges and Considerations:

- Despite these positive trends, several challenges could influence India's future trajectory:
 - » **Sustaining High Growth Rates:** To emerge as the world's third-largest economy, India must sustain above-average growth over an extended period.
 - » **Infrastructure and Skill Gaps:** While infrastructure development has progressed, gaps persist in logistics, energy availability, and human capital. Addressing these deficiencies is essential to maintain competitiveness and attract investment.
 - » **Institutional and Regulatory Efficiency:** Further reforms in labour markets, land acquisition, regulatory processes, and financial systems are necessary to strengthen long-term growth prospects.
 - » **Macroeconomic Stability:** Maintaining

price stability, managing fiscal balances, and ensuring financial resilience will remain critical amid global economic volatility.

Geopolitical and Strategic Implications:

- India's rise in the global economic hierarchy carries implications beyond GDP rankings. As India overtakes Japan and moves closer to Germany's economic size, it is likely to gain:
 - » **Greater Influence in Global For a:** A higher GDP ranking strengthens India's voice in institutions such as the G20, IMF, World Bank, and multilateral trade negotiations.
 - » **Enhanced Geopolitical Weight:** Economic scale translates into strategic influence, particularly in shaping global supply chains, regional connectivity initiatives, and multilateral partnerships.
 - » **Increased Investment Attraction:** As one of the fastest-growing major economies, India is well-positioned to attract higher levels of FDI, especially in technology, manufacturing, and renewable energy sectors.

Australia to Scrap Tariffs on All Indian Exports from January 1, 2026

Context:

Australia eliminated tariffs on 100% of its tariff lines for Indian exports with effect from January 1, 2026, marking a major shift in bilateral trade relations between the two democracies. This development takes place under the framework of the India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) and represents a significant deepening of economic integration.

Background:

- The India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) is a preferential trade agreement designed to strengthen

economic engagement between India and Australia.

- The agreement was signed in April 2022 and came into force on 29 December 2022, laying the foundation for progressive tariff liberalisation and enhanced trade facilitation.

Recent Progress and Key 2025 Milestones:

- **Complete Tariff Elimination**
 - » From January 1, 2026, 100% of Australian tariff lines have become zero-duty for Indian exports, up from 96.4% under the existing ECTA framework.
 - » This move ensures full duty-free access for Indian goods in the Australian market.
- **Growth in Bilateral Trade**
 - » In 2024–25, India's exports to Australia grew by approximately 8%, reaching nearly USD 8.58 billion.
 - » Total bilateral merchandise trade stood at around USD 24.1 billion during the same period.
 - » These trends indicate increasing trade diversification and improving competitiveness of Indian exports.
- **Sectoral Gains**
 - » Notable export growth has been recorded in several sectors, including:
 - Gems and jewellery (up by about 16% during April–November 2025)
 - Pharmaceuticals
 - Textiles and apparel
 - Coffee and other agricultural products
 - » These gains are particularly significant for labour-intensive sectors and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Trade Facilitation Measures**
 - » A Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for organic products was signed in 2025, reducing compliance costs and simplifying certification requirements.
 - » Such non-tariff facilitation measures complement tariff liberalisation and

improve overall ease of doing trade.

Transition from ECTA to CECA:

- Building on the success of ECTA, India and Australia are actively working to upgrade the agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), aimed at deeper and broader economic integration.



Status of CECA Negotiations:

- The 11th round of CECA negotiations concluded in August 2025 in New Delhi.
- Key areas under discussion include:
 - » Digital trade
 - » Rules of origin
 - » Services market access
 - » Investment facilitation

Ambitious Targets:

- Both countries have set a target of achieving bilateral trade worth AUD 100 billion by 2030.
- The proposed CECA is expected to cover over 135 service sub-sectors, along with expanded commitments in investment and the digital economy.

Conclusion:

Australia's decision to scrap tariffs on all Indian exports from January 1, 2026, under the India-Australia ECTA represents a landmark in bilateral economic cooperation. The move is expected to accelerate export growth,

particularly in labour-intensive and MSME-driven sectors, while strengthening supply-chain integration. Strategically, it complements India's efforts to diversify export markets and deepen engagement with Indo-Pacific trade networks. Continued negotiations towards a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement are likely to further consolidate economic ties between the two countries.

RBI Report on Bank Frauds: Fewer Cases, Higher Losses

Context:

In its latest Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024–25, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has highlighted a troubling paradox in India's banking system: while the number of reported bank fraud cases has declined, the total amount involved has risen sharply. This divergence reflects evolving fraud typologies, increasing sophistication of financial crimes, and supervisory challenges amid rapid digitisation of banking services.

Key Findings of the RBI Report:

- **Decline in Number, Rise in Value of Frauds**
 - » Total fraud cases (2024–25): 23,879, down from 36,052 in 2023–24
 - » Total amount involved: Rs.34,771 crore, up sharply from Rs.11,261 crore in the previous year
 - The RBI attributed the significant increase in the value of frauds primarily to the re-examination and fresh reporting of 122 cases amounting to Rs.18,336 crore. This followed compliance with the Supreme Court judgment dated March 27, 2023, which mandated adherence to due process before classifying borrowers as fraud.
- **Recent Trends (April–September 2025–26)**
 - » Number of fraud cases: Declined to 5,092 from 18,386 in the corresponding period of the previous year

- » Amount involved: Increased to Rs.21,515 crore from Rs.16,569 crore
 - These trends suggest that large-value frauds continue to dominate the fraud landscape, even as the overall incidence of frauds declines.

Nature of Bank Frauds:

- **By Type**
 - » **Card and Internet Frauds:** Accounted for 66.8% of total fraud cases (by number) in 2024–25
 - » **Advances-Related Frauds:** Contributed 33.1% of the total fraud amount, making them the most significant in value terms
 - While digital frauds dominate numerically, loan-related frauds pose the greatest systemic and financial risk.
- **By Bank Category:**
 - » **Private Sector Banks (PSBs):**
 - Accounted for 59.3% of total fraud cases (by number)
 - Card and internet frauds dominated in volume
 - » **Public Sector Banks (PVBs):**
 - Accounted for 70.7% of the total fraud amount
 - Advances-related frauds dominated both in number and value
 - » The RBI observed that the rise in advances-related frauds across bank groups was largely due to the reclassification of earlier cases, many of which were linked to large corporate loans.

Resilience of the Banking Sector:

Despite the increase in fraud values, the RBI underscored the overall resilience and soundness of India's banking system.

- **Financial Health Indicators:**
 - » Balance sheet growth (SCBs): 11.2% in 2024–25
 - » Credit growth: 11.5%
 - » Deposit growth: 11.1%
- **Profitability and Capital Adequacy:**

- » Return on Assets (RoA): Improved across bank groups
- » Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR):
 - 17.4% (March 2025)
 - 17.2% (September 2025)
- » Well above regulatory minimum requirements
- **Asset Quality:**
 - » Gross NPAs:
 - Declined to a multi-decadal low of 2.2% in March 2025
 - Further improved to 2.1% by September 2025
 - » Urban co-operative banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) also reported improved asset quality and strong capital buffers.

Emerging Challenges Identified by the RBI:

- **Rising Large-Value Frauds:** Increasing concentration of fraud risk in fewer but high-value cases.
- **Digital and Cyber Risks:** Rapid digitisation has heightened exposure to cyber frauds and operational vulnerabilities.
- **Growing Competition from Non-Banks:** NBFCs and fintech firms are intensifying competition in credit markets, raising regulatory and supervisory challenges.
- **Governance and Risk Management Gaps:** Persistent weaknesses in corporate governance, credit appraisal, and post-sanction monitoring mechanisms.

Way Forward:

- The RBI emphasised the need for:
 - » Stronger risk assessment and internal control frameworks
 - » Responsible and secure adoption of digital technologies
 - » Enhanced consumer awareness, education, and protection
 - » Improved corporate governance standards
 - » Robust fraud detection, reporting, and early-warning systems

- Balancing financial inclusion and innovation with systemic stability remains a central policy challenge for India's banking sector.

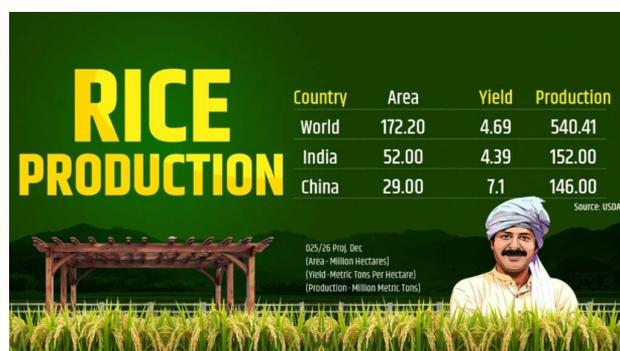
India Becomes the World's Largest Rice Producer

Context:

According to official data, India has overtaken China to become the world's largest rice producer, with output reaching 150.18 million tonnes in 2024–25, compared to China's 145.28 million tonnes. This milestone reflects sustained policy support, farmer resilience, and technological innovation in Indian agriculture.

Background:

- Historically, China dominated global rice production due to higher per-hectare yields, advanced mechanisation, and intensive input use. Over time, India steadily narrowed the gap through the expansion of rice-cultivated area, improved irrigation coverage, adoption of high-yielding varieties, and supportive government policies.
- Rice cultivation in India is predominantly undertaken during the Kharif season (sowing in June–July and harvesting in November–December). Major rice-producing states include West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and parts of Northeast India. Rice production plays a critical role in meeting domestic food requirements while supporting export demand.



Climatic Needs and Cultivation Methods:

- Rice requires warm temperatures (above 25°C), high humidity, and 100–200 cm of rainfall, and is ideally grown on level floodplains with water-retentive soils.
- Farmers increasingly use Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) to reduce water use and labour costs. Innovations such as genome-edited rice varieties (e.g., Kamla and Pusa DST) have improved yield potential and water-use efficiency.
- The System of Rice Intensification (SRI), though labour-intensive, significantly reduces seed and water requirements and offers a sustainable alternative, particularly in climate-stressed regions.

Factors behind India's Rise:

- **Science-led Agriculture:** Research institutions, particularly the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), have developed high-yielding, climate-resilient, and short-duration rice varieties. Recently, 184 new crop varieties were released to boost productivity and enhance farmer incomes.
- **Policy Support:** Government initiatives such as Minimum Support Price (MSP) assurance, expansion of irrigation infrastructure, and efficient seed distribution systems have incentivised farmers to increase rice cultivation.
- **Food Security and Exports:** Robust domestic production ensures food security while reinforcing India's position as a leading global rice exporter, contributing to foreign exchange earnings and strengthening its role in international agricultural markets.

Significance of the Achievement:

- **Global Food Security:** India's leadership in rice production enhances stability in the global food system, particularly in Asia, where rice is a dietary staple.
- **Economic Impact:** Higher output stabilises domestic food prices, supports rural livelihoods, and increases India's participation in global agricultural trade.

- **Agricultural Leadership:** The achievement underscores India's growing influence in global agriculture, highlighting the combined impact of policy continuity, technological adoption, and farmer participation.

Challenges:

- Despite this success, India's average rice yield per hectare remains lower than China's. Rice cultivation is also water-intensive, raising concerns about groundwater depletion, soil degradation, and environmental sustainability.
- Addressing these challenges will require a greater focus on precision agriculture, sustainable water management, crop diversification, and mechanisation.

Conclusion:

India's emergence as the world's largest rice producer is a testament to scientific innovation, policy consistency, and farmer resilience. While the achievement strengthens global food security and India's economic standing, the next phase of growth must be guided by sustainable agricultural practices to ensure long-term productivity, environmental protection, and ecological balance.

Tex RAMPS Scheme

Context:

Recently, the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with 15 States and Union Territories under the Textiles-focused Research, Assessment, Monitoring, Planning and Start-Up (Tex RAMPS) scheme. These agreements were formalised on the first day of the National Textiles Ministers' Conference held in Guwahati, themed "India's Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage & Innovation."

About the Tex RAMPS Scheme:

- Tex RAMPS is a Central Sector Scheme fully funded by the Ministry of Textiles and approved by the Government of India to

strengthen the textiles and apparel sector through evidence-based policymaking, improved data systems, research, and innovation.

- It seeks to address long-standing gaps in sectoral data, research infrastructure, planning, monitoring, and capacity development.

Key Objectives of Tex RAMPS:

- **Drive Research and Innovation:** Support sector-specific research to inform policy and enhance competitiveness.
- **Data-Driven Planning:** Enable real-time data collection and integrated statistical systems for informed decision-making.
- **Strengthen Monitoring and Analytics:** Promote performance tracking and advanced analytics for strategic policymaking.
- **Promote Start-Ups and Innovation:** Encourage start-ups, product innovation, and high-value manufacturing.
- **Enhance Sectoral Capabilities:** Build capacity across states, academia, and industry through collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- The total projected outlay for the scheme from FY 2026 to FY 2031 is Rs.305 crore.

Focus of the Agreements:

- **Cluster and District-Level Planning:** Emphasises integrated planning for key segments such as handlooms, handicrafts, apparel, and technical textiles, with implementation targeted at the cluster and district levels.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** By engaging state governments, the initiative promotes cooperative federalism and strengthens Centre-State collaboration for sectoral growth.

Financial Support:

- **State/UT Grants:** Each participating State or Union Territory will receive an annual grant of Rs.12 lakh to support scheme activities.
- **District Action Grants:** An additional Rs.1 lakh per year per district will be provided

for the development and implementation of district action plans.

Implications for the Textile Sector:

- The initiative will strengthen the evidence base for policymaking through improved data infrastructure and analytics, enabling more informed and responsive policies.
- By facilitating robust data insights and integrated planning, the scheme supports the government's goal of building India's textile industry into a \$350 billion economy by 2030.
- Its district and cluster-level focus aligns national strategies with local strengths, enhancing competitiveness and productivity.
- Strengthened data systems are also expected to address long-standing statistical gaps and enable real-time monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion:

The signing of MoUs under the Tex RAMPS scheme marks a significant step towards modernising the textile ecosystem through data-driven governance, integrated planning, research, and innovation. By partnering with states, the Ministry of Textiles aims to harness cooperative federalism and evidence-based policymaking, positioning India's textile sector for sustainable growth, enhanced competitiveness, and global leadership in the coming decade.

New KYC Norms for Crypto in India

Context:

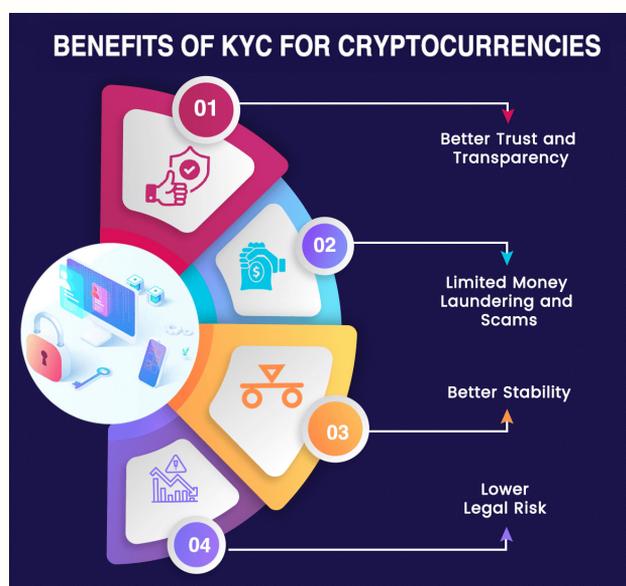
Recently, India's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) mandated live selfies, geo-tagging, and penny-drop bank verification for cryptocurrency users. This step strengthens AML (Anti-Money Laundering) and KYC (Know Your Customer) compliance to prevent fraud, money laundering, and financing of illegal activities via digital assets.

About New KYC Norms:

- FIU now mandates:
 - » Live selfie with liveness detection to confirm user presence.
 - » Geo-tagging and IP tracking during onboarding.
 - » Penny-drop verification to confirm bank account ownership.
 - » Additional KYC includes PAN and government ID, verified via OTPs, with updates every six months for high-risk clients and annually for others.

Regulatory Rationale:

- Strengthen identity verification and prevent fake accounts or identity theft.
- Enhance traceability of transactions to curb money laundering and terrorist financing risks via digital assets.
- Ensure that the individual initiating an account is physically present and legitimately connected to the financial instruments used.



Significance for Policy and Governance:

- **Combating Illicit Finance:** Stricter AML and KYC norms for crypto platforms align with global efforts to bring digital assets within regulated financial systems and reduce their misuse for illegal activities such as tax evasion and funding of prohibited

organisations.

- **Regulatory Clarity:** Although India does not recognise cryptocurrencies as legal tender, the updated guidelines position exchanges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) as reporting entities, ensuring they regularly submit reports on suspicious activity.
- **Protection of Users:** Enhanced verification can protect genuine users by reducing fraud and identity theft. However, the increased compliance burden could also deter casual investors or complicate onboarding for new users.

About Cryptocurrency:

- Cryptocurrency is a digital/virtual currency secured by cryptography, operating on decentralized networks without central authority control. Its core technology, blockchain, is a distributed and immutable ledger recording transactions in linked “blocks.”
- Decentralization ensures no single entity controls the network. Transactions are verified through mining/validation mechanisms like Proof-of-Work or Proof-of-Stake.
- Users store their coins in digital wallets, which safeguard private and public keys. Popular types include Bitcoin, Ethereum, stablecoins.

About India’s Regulatory Stance:

- Cryptocurrencies are unregulated but not banned in India; they are not legal tender. The RBI warns of financial risks, while taxation includes 30% on crypto transfers and 1% TDS on transactions.

Conclusion:

The mandate for selfies with liveness detection and penny drop bank verification marks a significant shift in how cryptocurrency users are identified and authenticated in India. These changes reflect the government’s prioritisation of financial integrity, user security, and closer supervision of virtual assets — a rapidly evolving

segment with both high growth potential and significant risks.

India's Fish Production More Than Doubles Over a Decade

Context:

In recent years, India's fisheries sector has undergone a remarkable transformation. According to the Government of India, total fish production increased to approximately 198 lakh tonnes in FY 2024–25, up from 95 lakh tonnes in 2013–14, registering a growth of over 106% during the past decade.

Drivers of Expansion:

- **Policy Initiatives and Institutional Support:** Transformative government initiatives such as the Blue Revolution, Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), and the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah Yojana have played a pivotal role in revitalising the fisheries sector. Since 2014–15, projects worth over Rs.32,700 crore have been approved under these schemes, strengthening infrastructure, promoting technology adoption, and enhancing value chains across the sector.
- **Focus on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture:** Inland fisheries and aquaculture have emerged as major growth drivers. The adoption of modern practices such as recirculatory aquaculture systems, improved feeding technologies, and scientific water-resource management has significantly boosted productivity in freshwater ecosystems. These advances have contributed substantially to the overall increase in national fish production.
- **Infrastructure Development and Market Integration:** Significant improvements in post-harvest infrastructure, including cold storage facilities, ice plants, fish transportation systems, and processing units, have reduced post-harvest losses and improved market access. Furthermore, over

26 lakh stakeholders, including fishers, fish farmers, and enterprises, are now registered on the National Fisheries Digital Platform, enabling streamlined access to services, inputs, and financial support.

Global Position and Economic Impact:

- India has emerged as the second-largest fish producer globally, accounting for nearly 8% of total global fish output. This robust performance has strengthened domestic availability while also enhancing export competitiveness.
- In FY 2024–25, seafood exports reached an all-time high of over Rs. 62,400 crore, underscoring the sector's growing contribution to foreign exchange earnings and export diversification.

Broader Implications:

- The surge in fish production has wide-ranging socio-economic benefits:
 - » It enhances nutritional security by increasing access to protein-rich food.
 - » It generates employment opportunities across the value chain, from production to processing and marketing.
 - » It stimulates rural and coastal economies, particularly benefiting traditional fishing communities.
 - » It supports India's blue economy vision by integrating fisheries growth with sustainability and resource conservation.

Challenges:

- Despite impressive gains, several challenges require sustained policy attention:
 - » Resource sustainability and responsible fishing practices are essential to prevent overexploitation of marine stocks.
 - » Environmental concerns, including water quality and ecosystem health, must be continuously addressed.
 - » Climate change impacts, such as rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and altered hydrological cycles, pose long-term risks to fisheries productivity.

Conclusion:

The dramatic rise in India's fish production to nearly 198 lakh tonnes in FY 2024–25 represents a notable success story driven by effective policy frameworks, technological innovation, and strong institutional support. Going forward, balancing productivity enhancement with ecological sustainability will be critical to achieving national objectives related to food security, rural livelihoods, and global competitiveness in the fisheries sector.

IMF Forecast for India's GDP

Context:

Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised India's GDP growth forecast for FY26 to 7.3 per cent, an upward revision of 0.7 percentage points from its October 2025 projection. For FY27, growth is projected at 6.4 per cent, reflecting sustained, though moderating, economic momentum. These estimates were released in the IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) Update, January 2026.

Key Highlights of the IMF's Revised Forecast:

- **Stronger-than-Expected Growth in FY26**
 - » Robust third-quarter performance and sustained momentum into Q4 FY26 underpinned the upward revision.
 - » India's National Statistical Office (NSO) reported GDP growth of around 8 per cent in the first half of FY26.
- **Outlook for FY27 and FY28**
 - » Growth is projected at 6.4 per cent for both FY27 and FY28.
 - » This moderation reflects the fading of cyclical and temporary growth drivers, signalling a transition from high growth to a more sustainable medium-term trajectory.

Why India's Growth Outlook Improved?

- **Domestic Demand and Consumption:** A

large domestic market and resilient services demand continue to support economic stability.

- **Investment and Industrial Activity:** Renewed investor confidence, rising industrial output, and sustained infrastructure investment underpin growth.
- **Strong Q3 and Q4 Momentum:** Positive performance in the latter half of FY25 has strengthened short-term growth prospects.

Comparative Global Growth Context:

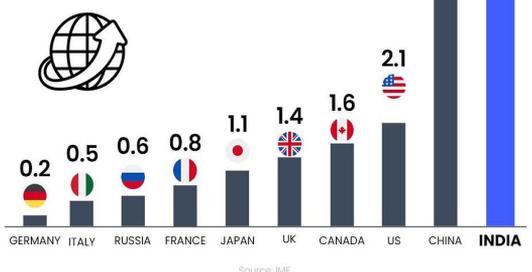
- Global growth is projected at 3.3 per cent in 2026, moderating slightly to 3.2 per cent in 2027.
- India is expected to remain among the fastest-growing major economies, outperforming peers such as the United States and China.

Unprecedented:

IMF Says India's Stronger Q3 & Q4 Pushed the 2025 Growth Call up to 7.3%

IMF revised India's growth upward by 0.7 percentage points to 7.3% for 2025, citing a better-than-expected outturn in the third quarter of the year & strong momentum in the fourth quarter.

Real GDP (Annual % Change)
(2025 Estimates):



Policy and Structural Implications:

- **India as a Global Growth Engine:** The upward revision reinforces India's growing importance in the global economy and

strengthens investor confidence.

- **Inflation and Monetary Policy:** Inflation is expected to converge towards the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) target range of 4 (± 2) per cent, providing greater monetary policy flexibility.
- **Structural Reforms and Sustainability:** Continued reforms in labour markets, infrastructure, the digital economy, and the ease of doing business are essential to sustaining long-term growth.

Challenges and Risks Ahead:

- Geopolitical tensions and global trade uncertainties could adversely affect exports and investment flows.
- Slower growth in advanced economies may dampen external demand.
- Inflationary pressures could re-emerge due to volatility in global commodity prices.

About the IMF:

- The International Monetary Fund, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a multilateral financial institution with 191 member countries. Established in 1944, it promotes global monetary cooperation, financial stability, international trade, and sustainable economic growth.
- The IMF provides policy advice, technical assistance, financial support, and conducts economic surveillance, functioning as a global economic watchdog and lender of last resort.

Conclusion:

The IMF's upward revision of India's FY26 growth forecast to 7.3 per cent reflects strong macroeconomic fundamentals, resilient domestic demand, and favourable short-term momentum. Although growth is expected to moderate in FY27–28, stable inflation and sustained structural reforms can support durable expansion, presenting both opportunities and challenges for inclusive and long-term development.

India's First Open Sea Marine Fish Farming Project

Context:

Recently, the Union Government launched India's first open sea marine fish farming project at North Bay in the Andaman Sea. The project marks a significant step towards realising India's Blue Economy ambitions by harnessing the economic potential of the country's vast ocean resources.

About the Project:

- The initiative is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), its technical arm, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), and the Union Territory Administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The project represents India's first open sea cage-based marine fish farming initiative, executed under the natural oceanic conditions of the Andaman Sea.
- It focuses on two key components:
 - » **Marine flora (seaweed cultivation):** Seaweed seeds were distributed to local fishers to promote deep-water seaweed farming.
 - » **Marine fauna (finfish farming):** Finfish seeds were provided for cage-based cultivation using open sea cages designed by NIOT to withstand offshore conditions.

Strategic Importance of the Initiative:

- **Boost to the Blue Economy:** The initiative is a major step towards India's Blue Economy strategy, aiming to tap the economic potential of marine resources, much like the utilisation of India's terrestrial assets.
- **Empowering Coastal and Island Communities:** The pilot project integrates scientific innovation with livelihood generation, benefiting local fishing communities through the provision of technology, seeds, and training for marine aquaculture.

- These interventions aim to enhance employment opportunities and promote income diversification for coastal and island populations.

Technology to Strengthen Marine Farming:

- The project utilises NIOT's advanced open sea cages, engineered to operate under real oceanic conditions, representing a technological leap beyond traditional coastal aquaculture systems.
- The initiative promotes sustainable practices that work with natural ocean dynamics rather than confined coastal environments, potentially reducing ecological pressures on near-shore ecosystems.

Importance of the Blue Economy:

- **Extensive Maritime Domain**
 - » India's coastline stretches approximately 7,500–11,098 km, spanning 9 coastal states and 4 Union Territories, along with numerous islands.
 - » Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers over 2 million sq. km, offering vast potential for deep-sea fisheries, aquaculture, and mineral and energy exploration.
- **Economic Contribution**
 - » The marine sector contributes about 4% of India's GDP, though this figure is likely an underestimate due to incomplete ecosystem accounting.
 - » Nearly 95% of India's merchandise trade by volume is handled through maritime routes, underscoring the strategic importance of oceans for commerce.
- **Livelihoods and Food Security**
 - » The fisheries and aquaculture sectors support millions of livelihoods, including those engaged in fishing, processing, and allied activities.
 - » India ranks among the top fish-producing countries globally, reflecting both its existing strengths and significant growth potential.

The launch of India's first open sea marine fish farming project in the Andaman Sea marks a milestone in the country's efforts to harness its maritime potential. By integrating technology, sustainability, and community participation, the initiative lays the foundation for scalable, ocean-based economic growth while reinforcing the Blue Economy as a national priority.

A Decade of Startup India

Context:

January 16, 2026, marks a decade of the Startup India Initiative, launched in 2016 under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Over the past ten years, the initiative has transformed India into one of the world's largest startup ecosystems, with over 2 lakh DPIIT-recognised startups as of December 2025. Notably, around 50% of these startups originate from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, reflecting the democratisation of entrepreneurship and the promotion of inclusive regional development.



Conclusion:

Role of Startups in India's Economy:

- Startups have emerged as a important pillar of India's economic transformation by:
 - » Driving technological innovation and productivity
 - » Generating employment opportunities, both direct and indirect
 - » Promoting financial inclusion and digital adoption
 - » Bridging rural-urban divides through solutions in agri-tech, telemedicine, microfinance, ed-tech, and clean energy
- Women-led startups have played a critical role in advancing inclusive growth, with over 45% of recognised startups having at least one woman Director or Partner. This underscores entrepreneurship as a powerful lever for both economic empowerment and social equity.

Key Government Initiatives and Platforms:

- **Funding and Finance:**
 - » **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS):** A Rs.10,000 crore corpus invested through over 140 Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), supporting more than 1,370 startups.
 - » **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS):** Facilitates collateral-free loans for eligible startup borrowers.
 - » **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS):** A Rs.945 crore allocation to over 215 incubators for early-stage startup support.
- **Ecosystem Development:**
 - » **Startup India Hub:** A digital platform connecting startups with investors, mentors, incubators, and corporate partners.
 - » **National Mentorship Portal (MAARG):** Provides strategic and sectoral guidance to startups through structured mentorship.
 - » **States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF):** Encourages competitive federalism in promoting startup ecosystems across

states.

- **Innovation and Deep-Tech Programmes:**
 - » **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM 1.0 & 2.0):** Fosters innovation through Atal Tinkering Labs, Community Innovator Fellowship, Youth Co:Lab, and targeted programmes for underserved regions.
 - » **GENESIS and MeitY Startup Hub:** Promote deep-tech innovation, particularly in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.
 - » **TIDE 2.0 and NIDHI Programmes:** Support ICT- and technology-driven entrepreneurship, with a focus on Tier-II/III cities, women entrepreneurs, and persons with special abilities.
- **Rural and Grassroots Entrepreneurship:**
 - » **Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP):** Has supported over 3.74 lakh rural enterprises, strengthening local livelihoods.
 - » **ASPIRE:** Promotes innovation, skilling, and micro-enterprise creation in rural areas.
 - » **PMEGP:** Provides margin money support for self-employment and grassroots enterprise creation, with special incentives for SC/ST communities, women, and aspirational regions.



Impact Over a Decade:

- Growth from 4 unicorns in 2014 to over 120 high-value startups, collectively valued at more than \$350 billion.
- Strong representation from smaller cities, signalling decentralised and inclusive innovation.
- Structural integration of startups across key sectors such as agri-tech, clean mobility, ed-tech, and financial inclusion.
- Generation of employment for lakhs of youth, alongside facilitation of technology transfer, industrial collaboration and global market access.

Way Forward:

As India transitions from rapid expansion to sustainable scaling, startups are poised to drive innovation-led economic growth, employment generation, and global competitiveness. Anchored in robust digital public infrastructure, a demographic dividend, and reform-oriented governance, startups will remain central to India's vision of a \$7.3 trillion economy by 2030 and the broader Viksit Bharat 2047 roadmap.

Equity Infusion into SIDBI to Boost MSME Credit

Context:

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved an equity infusion of Rs.5,000 crore into the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to enhance the flow of credit to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The move aims to expand financial assistance to MSMEs, generate employment, and strengthen SIDBI's financial stability amid rising lending demands.

How is it implemented?

- The Department of Financial Services (DFS) will provide the capital in three tranches: Rs.3,000 crore in 2025-26 at a book value of Rs.568.65, followed by Rs.1,000 crore each in 2026-27 and 2027-28 at the prevailing book values.

- This phased approach ensures a continuous capital base to support SIDBI's lending operations while maintaining a strong Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR).

Impact on MSMEs:

- Currently, SIDBI extends financial assistance to approximately 76.26 lakh MSMEs. After the infusion, the number of beneficiaries is expected to rise to 102 lakh by 2027-28, adding nearly 25.74 lakh new enterprises.
- Considering the average employment generation of 4.37 persons per MSME, this expansion is estimated to create about 1.12 crore jobs, contributing significantly to livelihood generation and inclusive growth.

UNION CABINET APPROVES ₹5,000 CRORE EQUITY INFUSION INTO SIDBI

To Boost MSME Credit Flow | January 21, 2026

• PHASED INVESTMENT (DFS) •



EXPANDED REACH & EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

MSME Beneficiaries: **76.26 Lakh (FY25) to 1.02 Crore (FY28) (+25.74 Lakh)**

Estimated Additional Jobs: **1.12 Crore by 2027-28**



STRENGTHENING CAPITAL BASE

Maintaining **CRAR > 14.50%** for Affordable Credit

• FOCUS AREAS •

- Digital & Collateral-Free Credit Products
- Venture Debt for Startups
- Wider Branch Network Across Clusters

Implication on SIDBI's Financial Health:

- The infusion will help SIDBI maintain a robust CRAR, ensuring credit rating protection and enabling it to mobilize resources at competitive rates.
- A healthy CRAR is essential for lending stability, particularly as the bank's risk-weighted assets grow with increased MSME financing. This move also supports the government's broader objective of enhancing access to affordable credit for the MSME sector.

Role of SIDBI in MSME Development:

- Established in 1990, SIDBI is the principal financial institution for MSME promotion, financing, and development.
- It executes the government's triple agenda of growth, coordination with other institutions, and sectoral development.
- Key initiatives include:

- » **GIFT Scheme:** Provides concessional finance and credit guarantees for green technologies.
- » **TReDS Platform:** Ensures faster invoice payments for MSMEs without collateral.
- » **Udyam Assist Platform (UAP):** Facilitates formal registration and access to Priority Sector Lending.
- » **CGTMSE:** Offers credit guarantees for collateral-free loans up to Rs.5 crore.

Conclusion:

The Rs.5,000 crore equity infusion into SIDBI is a strategic initiative to strengthen India's MSME ecosystem, enhance credit accessibility, and generate employment. By supporting sustainable growth and innovation, this measure aligns with the government's vision of a robust, financially inclusive, and resilient MSME sector that contributes to national economic growth.



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Defence and Internal Security

Strategic and Technology Autonomy: An Analysis of India's Submarine Programme

Context:

Over the past decade, the Indo-Pacific region has decisively emerged as the focal point of global geopolitics. Within this evolving maritime strategic landscape, India's position is not only geographically central but also extremely sensitive from a security perspective. In the changing security architecture of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Indian Navy is recalibrating its traditional capabilities in line with the most advanced contemporary standards. In this context, Project-75I (P-75I) stands out as the most significant and ambitious pillar of India's long-term naval capability development. With an estimated cost of nearly USD 8 billion (over ₹60,000 crore), this project is not merely a means of expanding the naval fleet, but represents a comprehensive strategic response to China's "String of Pearls" strategy and Pakistan's growing naval assertiveness.

In this context, defence and security cooperation emerged as a key issue during the recent visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to India. Both countries signed a joint declaration aimed at strengthening bilateral defence-industrial cooperation, reflecting their commitment to deeper strategic ties. In recent years, Germany has modified its defence export norms, simplifying the approval process for Indian procurement. Long-pending applications are now being processed more swiftly, creating a more conducive environment for defence trade.

Project-75I and the AIP System

■ Under Project-75I, six state-of-the-

art conventional submarines are to be constructed. The most critical technological component of this project is the Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) system.

- The principal limitation of conventional diesel-electric submarines lies in the constraints on their stealth capabilities. To recharge their batteries, they must frequently surface or snorkel, making them vulnerable to detection by radar and satellites. Once equipped with AIP technology, submarines can remain submerged continuously for two to three weeks. This capability brings them closer to nuclear-powered submarines in operational terms; however, owing to their lower noise levels, they are quieter and potentially more lethal. For India, this technology is particularly significant because in the shallow waters of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, such submarines can pose an invisible threat to adversary aircraft carrier groups.

Project-75I Submarine Programme:

- Project-75I is the successor initiative to India's earlier Project-75, under which six Scorpène-class submarines were constructed at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL). Unlike Project-75, where advanced technologies were envisaged largely through later retrofitting, Project-75I mandates the integration of cutting-edge AIP technology at the construction stage itself.

■ **Key features of Project-75I:**

- » Construction of six advanced diesel-

electric submarines

- » Equipped with Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) systems
- » Designed for prolonged underwater operations
- » Implemented under the Strategic Partnership (SP) model
- » Emphasis on indigenisation and transfer of technology

- **Strategic significance of Project-75I:** Project-75I substantially enhances India's military capabilities by:
 - » Monitoring Chinese submarine activity in the IOR
 - » Securing critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)
 - » Enabling prolonged covert patrols
 - » Signalling credible deterrence without overt provocation

Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP)

- Traditional submarines primarily rely on batteries, which require periodic surfacing or snorkelling for recharging, thereby increasing the risk of detection. AIP technology fundamentally alters this equation.
- **Strategic advantages of AIP-equipped submarines:**
 - » Enables submarines to remain underwater for weeks
 - » Significantly reduces acoustic, radar and infrared signatures
 - » Enhances stealth, survivability and endurance
 - » Ideal for covert surveillance and maritime control missions
 - » Offers near-nuclear-submarine-like stealth at substantially lower cost
- For India, AIP bridges the operational gap between conventional and nuclear submarines, without escalating costs or political risks. The programme sends a clear message: India will not relinquish underwater dominance in its primary maritime domain.

Regional Balance of Power:

- India's defence planners increasingly

India's submarine fleet

CONVENTIONAL DIESEL-ELECTRIC SUBMARINES (SSK)

Kalvari-class (Scorpène)

- INS Kalvari
- INS Khanderi
- INS Karanj
- INS Vela
- INS Vagir
- INS Vagsheer

TOTAL | 6   
 BUILT UNDER |
Project-75 (India-France)



Shishumar-class (HDW Type 209)

- INS Shishumar
- INS Shankush
- INS Shalki
- INS Shankul

TOTAL | 4  
 ORIGIN | **Germany**



Sindhughosh-class (Kilo-class)

- INS Sindhughosh
- INS Sindhukesari
- INS Sindhuraj
- INS Sindhuvir
- INS Sindhukirti
- INS Sindhuvijay
- ORIGIN | **Russia**



(Some boats are nearing retirement or undergoing life-extension upgrades)

NUCLEAR-POWERED SUBMARINES

Ballistic missile submarines (SSBN)

INS Arihant



INS Arighat (advanced trials / induction phase)



ROLE | **Sea-based nuclear deterrence**

confront a "two-front war" scenario that is taking shape in the maritime domain as well.

- » **China's influence:** The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has become the world's largest navy. Through its base in Djibouti and investments in ports such as Gwadar, China is institutionalising

its presence in the Indian Ocean.

- » **Pakistan's modernisation:** Pakistan has signed an agreement with China to acquire eight Hangor-class (Type-039B) submarines equipped with AIP technology.
- If India does not modernise its fleet in a timely manner, a situation could emerge where Pakistan's submarine strike capability equals or even surpasses that of India. Project-75I seeks to bridge this technological gap. It ensures that India possesses not only regional defence capabilities but also the power projection required to disrupt adversary SLOCs.

Strategic Partnership Model and Atmanirbhar Bharat:

- Project-75I is the first major defence programme under India's Strategic Partnership (SP) model. This model aims to involve the private sector in defence production and establish long-term collaboration with foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).
- The growing cooperation between Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) and India's Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) has injected new momentum into the project. The central issue here is Transfer of Technology (ToT). India no longer seeks to remain merely a buyer; the very conditions of the project mandate construction in Indian shipyards with a high percentage of indigenous content. In the long run, this approach has the potential to establish India as a global submarine-building hub.

Economic and Industrial Impact:

- The USD 8-billion investment is not confined to military capability alone. Large defence projects generate significant multiplier effects:
 - » **MSME ecosystem:** Thousands of small and medium enterprises across the country gain opportunities to supply components, sensors and sub-systems.
 - » **Skill development:** Indian engineers and technicians attain global standards

in high-technology welding, stealth materials science and advanced electronics.

- » **Research and Development (R&D):** Plans to integrate the indigenously developed AIP module by DRDO will test and strengthen India's domestic scientific capabilities.

Challenges:

- The most serious challenge facing Project-75I is prolonged delay. Even after more than a decade since the original conceptualisation, construction has yet to commence. Complex tendering procedures, stringent technical requirements and reluctance among foreign firms to share critical technologies have slowed progress.
- Meanwhile, the retirement of older submarines is creating a capability gap within the Indian Navy. The government must therefore pursue the project in a mission-mode approach; otherwise, by the time these submarines enter service, prevailing maritime technology standards may have already evolved further.

Conclusion:

Project-75I represents the future of India's maritime sovereignty. A powerful and modern submarine fleet ensures the maintenance of balance of power in the Indian Ocean. The successful implementation of Project-75I is indispensable for the realisation of India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision. If completed in a timely manner, the project will not only strengthen India's position in South Asia but also reinforce its claim to being an emerging great power in the global defence domain.

Short Issues

Cyber Crime and Financial Fraud in India

Context:

According to recently released data compiled by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Indians lost Rs.19,812.96 crore to cheating and financial frauds in 2025. More than 21.7 lakh complaints were recorded on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal during the year.

Key Findings:

- Among Indian states, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana together accounted for more than half of the total monetary losses in 2025, cumulatively exceeding Rs.10,000 crore.
- **Magnitude and State-wise Breakdown:**
 - » Maharashtra recorded the highest monetary losses at Rs.3,203 crore, with 28,33,20 complaints, making it the worst-affected state in terms of both volume and value of offences.
 - » Karnataka followed with losses of Rs.2,413 crore and 21,32,28 complaints.
 - » Tamil Nadu reported losses amounting to Rs.1,897 crore from 12,32,90 complaints.
 - » Uttar Pradesh witnessed losses of Rs.1,443 crore with 27,52,64 complaints, indicating significant exposure even in states with large rural and semi-urban populations.
 - » Telangana lost Rs.1,372 crore from around 95,000 complaints.
 - » Together, these five states accounted for the majority of offences, largely clustered around digitally facilitated frauds.

Types of Fraud and Emerging Trends:

- The data indicates that fraudulent investment schemes dominated the fraud landscape in 2025, accounting for nearly 77% of total monetary losses.
- Other significant categories included:

- » Digital arrest scams (8%) — where victims are falsely informed that they are accused in legal cases and coerced into transferring money.
- » Credit card frauds (7%) — involving unauthorised use of card details.
- » Sextortion (4%), e-commerce frauds (3%), and app- or malware-based frauds (1%).
- Experts attribute the surge in losses to multiple overlapping factors, including rapid digitisation, a sharp increase in online financial transactions, aggressive promotion of high-return investment products, and the growing sophistication of organised cyber fraud networks.

Causes of Vulnerability:

- **Urbanisation and Digital Connectivity:** States with larger urban populations and higher levels of digital penetration—such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu—have experienced higher fraud incidence due to greater online engagement with financial products and digital platforms.
- **Investment Scams:** Fraudsters exploit aspirations for quick wealth creation by offering “too-good-to-be-true” returns, particularly through unregulated investment schemes, crypto-related platforms, and fake trading applications.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Despite improvements in financial inclusion, cyber security awareness remains uneven. Vulnerable groups, including senior citizens and first-time digital users, are frequently targeted through impersonation, phishing and social engineering techniques.

Conclusion:

The substantial financial losses recorded in 2025 particularly in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana, underscore the growing challenge of cyber-enabled financial fraud in India’s increasingly digital economy. While technological progress has expanded access to financial services, it has

simultaneously created wider attack surfaces for fraudsters. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, enhancing public awareness, and promoting secure digital practices remain critical to curbing this trend and safeguarding citizens' financial assets.

ICGS Samudra Pratap

Context:

The Indian Coast Guard Ship Samudra Pratap, India's first indigenously designed Pollution Control Vessel (PCV), was commissioned in Goa by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on January 5, 2026. The commissioning marks a significant milestone in strengthening India's maritime environmental protection framework and advancing self-reliance in defence manufacturing. The vessel aligns with the broader vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat while enhancing India's capacity to respond to marine environmental emergencies.

Design & Capabilities:

- Built by Goa Shipyard Limited, Samudra Pratap incorporates over 60% indigenous content, reflecting India's growing shipbuilding capabilities.
- The vessel measures 114.5 metres in length with a displacement of 4,200 tonnes. It can achieve speeds exceeding 22 knots and has an operational endurance of 6,000 nautical miles.
- Key onboard technologies include a dynamic positioning system, advanced pollution detection and response equipment, oil recovery machinery, and a high-capacity firefighting system. The ship is also equipped with an integrated bridge system and an automated power management system, ensuring operational efficiency during complex and prolonged maritime missions.

Roles and Functions:

- The primary role of Samudra Pratap is to combat oil spills and marine pollution within

India's territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Its specialised equipment enables effective containment, recovery, and analysis of pollutants, thereby minimising ecological damage.

- In addition to pollution control, the vessel undertakes search and rescue operations, maritime law enforcement, and firefighting at sea. Its integrated surveillance systems further enhance the monitoring of maritime traffic and support the enforcement of maritime safety and environmental regulations.

Strategic Importance:

- **Environmental Protection:** India's extensive coastline and high volume of maritime traffic increase vulnerability to ecological disasters. Dedicated pollution control vessels enable rapid response, safeguarding marine biodiversity and coastal livelihoods.
- **Maritime Domain Awareness:** The vessel strengthens India's capability to monitor, regulate, and secure maritime activities across its maritime zones.
- **'Make in India' Boost:** Indigenous design and construction underscore India's expanding expertise in advanced shipbuilding and maritime technologies, promoting domestic industry and skill development.
- **Regional Leadership:** Deployment of specialised environmental protection assets highlights India's commitment to responsible maritime governance, environmental stewardship, and regional maritime security.

Conclusion:

Samudra Pratap is more than a mere addition to the Indian Coast Guard fleet; it symbolises India's growing proficiency in maritime engineering and environmental security. By integrating advanced technology with strategic foresight, the vessel significantly enhances India's capacity to address marine pollution, protect coastal ecosystems, and fulfil its responsibilities as a leading maritime nation.

Breakthrough in Hypersonic Missile Technology

Context:

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted a long-duration ground test of its Actively Cooled Scramjet Full-Scale Combustor, achieving a run time of over 12 minutes. The test was conducted at the Scramjet Connect Pipe Test (SCPT) facility of the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) in Hyderabad. This achievement marks a significant milestone in India's pursuit of hypersonic missile capabilities, at a time when global competition in advanced missile technologies is intensifying.

About Scramjet Technology:

- A scramjet (Supersonic Combustion Ramjet) is an air-breathing propulsion system designed to operate efficiently at hypersonic speeds, typically above Mach 5 (five times the speed of sound).
- Unlike conventional rocket engines, scramjets utilise atmospheric oxygen for combustion, enabling sustained propulsion under supersonic airflow conditions. This eliminates the need to carry onboard oxidisers, thereby reducing vehicle weight and enhancing fuel efficiency.

Significance of the Test:

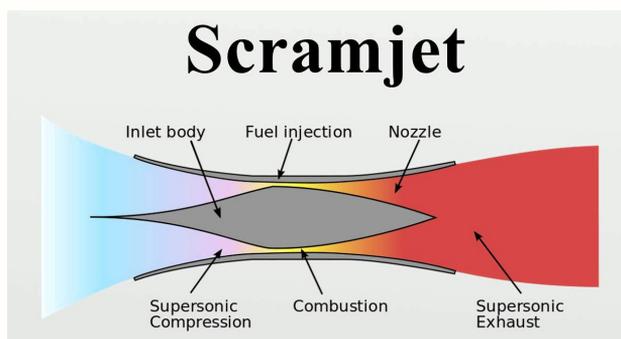
- The successful test validates both the full-scale combustor design and the operational capability of the SCPT facility, placing India among a select group of nations capable of developing indigenous hypersonic propulsion systems.
- This milestone builds upon earlier sub-scale scramjet tests conducted in April 2025, which demonstrated stable combustion for over 1,000 seconds, indicating progress toward long-duration hypersonic operation.

Strategic and Defence Implications:

- **Advancement of Hypersonic Cruise Missiles:** Hypersonic cruise missiles can sustain

speeds exceeding Mach 5 (over 6,100 km/h), enabling rapid precision strikes while significantly reducing reaction time for adversaries and challenging existing missile defence systems.

- **Strengthening Indigenous Technological Capability:** The successful development of an indigenously designed, actively cooled scramjet combustor reflects India's growing self-reliance in critical defence technologies, aligned with strategic autonomy objectives.
- **Broader Aerospace Applications:** Beyond military use, scramjet technology has potential applications in hypersonic vehicles, rapid global transportation systems, and future space-access platforms, highlighting its dual-use civilian and defence relevance.



Global Context:

- Hypersonic technology represents the cutting edge of modern defence innovation, integrating high-speed propulsion, advanced materials, thermal management, and precision guidance systems.
- Major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China are actively investing in hypersonic weapons to gain strategic and military superiority. India's successful 12-minute combustor test strengthens its geostrategic posture and contributes to the development of a credible deterrence capability.

Challenges Ahead:

- Despite this progress, several challenges remain, including flight integration, sustained thermal management, structural

integrity, and guidance stability at hypersonic speeds.

- Achieving a successful airborne demonstration will be the next critical milestone in translating ground-test success into operational capability.

Conclusion:

The 12-minute scramjet combustor ground test represents a landmark achievement in India's hypersonic technology programme. It underscores the country's ability to develop indigenous, long-endurance hypersonic propulsion systems and lays a strong foundation for future hypersonic missile development and advanced aerospace innovation.

Pralay Missile

Context:

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted a salvo launch of two Pralay missiles in quick succession from the same launcher off the Odisha coast. This marked a significant milestone in the ongoing user evaluation trials and demonstrated the system's operational robustness.

About the Pralay Missile:

- Pralay is an indigenously developed, solid-propellant, quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile designed to deliver high-precision conventional strikes against a range of tactical targets. It effectively bridges the capability gap between short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missile systems within India's evolving defence architecture.

Key Characteristics:

- **Type:** Quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile (SRBM)
- **Propulsion:** Two-stage solid-propellant system, ensuring rapid launch readiness and high reliability
- **Trajectory:** Quasi-ballistic flight profile enabling in-flight manoeuvrability and

interception avoidance, thereby challenging adversary air-defence systems

- **Range:** Approximately 150–500 km, depending on payload configuration
- **Guidance:** Advanced navigation and guidance systems enabling high-precision targeting
- **Warhead Flexibility:** Capable of carrying multiple types of conventional warheads, enhancing mission adaptability
- **Salvo Launch Capability:** Demonstrated ability to fire multiple missiles in quick succession from the same launcher, significantly improving saturation strike potential

PRALAY: Surface-to-Surface Missile

Pralay is a canisterised tactical, surface-to-surface, and short-range ballistic missile for battlefield use developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation of India

ENGINE: Two stage rocket motor with third stage MaRV

SPEED: Mach 1 to 1.6

RANGE: 150-500 km

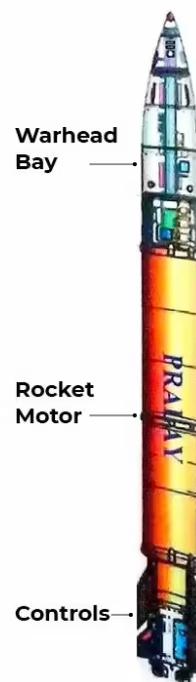
TRAJECTORY: low

GUIDANCE SYSTEM: Inertial navigation system

LAUNCH PLATFORM: 8x8 BEML-Tatra transporter erector launcher

MASS: 5 tonnes (4.9 long tons; 5.5 short tons)

OPERATIONAL RANGE: 150–500 km (93–311 mi)



Aim and Strategic Objectives:

- **Rapid Precision Strike Capability:** To provide the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force with a quick-response, high-accuracy conventional strike weapon capable of neutralising high-value tactical targets.

- **Enhanced Tactical Deterrence:** To strengthen battlefield deterrence through credible conventional precision strikes, thereby lowering reliance on nuclear escalation for deterrence signalling.
- **Operational Readiness:** To improve force preparedness by integrating a mobile, reliable, and swiftly deployable missile platform suited for dynamic and high-intensity conflict scenarios.

Why It Matters?

- **Operational Validation:** Confirms Pralay's performance under realistic operational conditions, paving the way for its early induction into the armed forces.
- **Strengthened Conventional Deterrence:** Augments India's conventional missile arsenal by providing a credible and flexible response option against evolving regional threats.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Reinforces India's indigenous missile development capabilities and supports national objectives of defence self-reliance.

Broader Strategic Context:

- The Pralay missile adds depth and flexibility to India's tactical strike capabilities, complementing systems such as BrahMos while fulfilling the role of a conventionally armed, medium-range ballistic missile.
- Its development aligns with India's broader strategic emphasis on credible deterrence, precision conventional warfare, and technological self-sufficiency.

Conclusion:

The successful salvo launch of the Pralay missile underscores India's advancing missile technology and significantly strengthens the country's conventional strike posture. With its high precision, rapid response capability, and operational flexibility, Pralay is poised to become a key component of India's tactical deterrence framework. As the system moves closer to operational induction, it stands as

a strong testament to India's growing defence manufacturing capability and strategic autonomy.

Approval of Rs.79,000 Crore in Defence Purchases

Context:

On 29 December 2025, India's Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, approved defence procurement proposals worth approximately Rs.79,000 crore. These acquisitions span the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force, marking a significant push towards modernising India's armed forces and enhancing operational readiness amid evolving regional and global security challenges.

Key Defence Procurements:

The DAC approved proposals aimed at strengthening operational capabilities across all three services:

- **Indian Army**
 - » Loiter Mmunition Systems for precision strikes
 - » Low-Level Lightweight Radars to detect small, low-flying aerial threats
 - » Long-Range Guided Rockets for the Pinaka Multiple Launch Rocket System
 - » Drone Detection and Interdiction Systems
- **Indian Navy**
 - » Bollard Pull Tugs and Software-Defined Radios
 - » Leasing of High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) Remotely Piloted Aircraft for enhanced maritime surveillance
- **Indian Air Force**
 - » Astra Mk-II air-to-air missiles
 - » LCA Tejas simulator systems
 - » SPICE-1000 guidance kits for precision-guided munitions
 - » Collectively, these procurements reflect a strategic emphasis on next-generation combat systems, enhanced surveillance,

precision strike capabilities, and counter-drone operations, ensuring multi-domain operational readiness.

Strategic Significance:

- **Strengthening Defence Capabilities:** The acquisitions enhance combat effectiveness and deterrence, particularly in the context of persistent regional security challenges.
- **Boost to Indigenous Defence Production:** The approvals align with the objectives of Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat, promoting domestic defence manufacturing and technological self-reliance.
- **Comprehensive Modernisation Across Services:** Balanced upgrades across land, air, and maritime domains support integrated, joint-force preparedness.
- **Improved Operational Efficiency:** Reforms in procurement procedures under the DAC aim to reduce acquisition timelines, thereby improving force readiness and responsiveness.

Boost to armed forces

₹79,000 crore

TOTAL VALUE OF ACQUISITIONS

ARMY: Nag Missile System (Tracked) Mk-II (NAMIS), Ground Based Mobile ELINT System (GBMES) and High Mobility Vehicles (HMs) with Material Handling

NAVY: Landing Platform Docks (LPD), 30mm Naval Surface Gun (NSG), Advanced Light Weight Torpedoes (ALWT), Electro Optical Infra-Red Search and Track System, and Smart Ammunition for the 76mm Super Rapid Gun Mount.

AIR FORCE: Long Range Target Saturation/Destruction System



About the Defence Acquisition Council:

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) is the apex decision-making body within the Ministry of Defence for capital acquisitions and defence policy matters concerning the armed forces and the Coast Guard.
- It ensures that procurement decisions are strategically aligned, timely, and cost-effective, while balancing operational requirements with fiscal prudence.

Historical Background:

- » **Established:** 2001, to streamline defence procurement and reduce systemic delays
- » **Chairman:** Union Minister of Defence
- » **Objective:** Efficient utilisation of allocated resources to facilitate military modernisation and operational preparedness

Composition:

- The DAC brings together senior civilian and military leadership, including:
 - » Minister of State for Defence
 - » Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)
 - » Chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force
 - » Secretaries from the Ministry of Defence
 - » Member Secretary and other senior defence officials
- This institutional composition enables integrated decision-making by combining operational, financial, and policy perspectives.

Conclusion:

The Defence Acquisition Council's approval of Rs.79,000 crore worth of defence purchases underscores India's sustained commitment to military modernisation, strategic preparedness, and self-reliance. By facilitating the timely acquisition of advanced weaponry and surveillance platforms, the DAC continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening national security and enhancing the operational capabilities of India's armed forces.

Bhairav Battalions

Context:

Recently at the 78th Army Day Parade held in Jaipur, the newly raised Bhairav Battalions of the Indian Army made their public debut, highlighting India's evolving defence posture focused on rapid response, hybrid warfare, and technology-enabled combat operations.

About the Bhairav Battalions:

- The Bhairav Battalions are high-speed offensive formations designed to bridge the operational gap between strategic Para Special Forces (SF) and regular infantry units.
- While Ghatak platoons conduct battalion-level tactical assaults and Para SF undertake deep-strike strategic missions, Bhairav units provide rapid-response capabilities for immediate border contingencies or short-notice offensives—effectively functioning as an intermediate, highly agile force.

Modernisation Initiative:

- These battalions are part of the Indian Army's 2025 modernisation and force restructuring programme, aimed at preparing land forces for hybrid and technology-driven warfare.



THE BHAIRAV BATTALION

THE "LEAN" STRUCTURE

Strength
250 Personnel
(vs. 800+ in standard infantry)

Mix
Experts from
Artillery, Signals, & Air Defense

Target
25 Battalions
(5 Operational Now)

THE ROLE: "THE BRIDGE"

Function Fills the gap between regular Infantry and Para SF

Mission Deep Recon & Cross-Border Strikes

TECH DOMINANCE
Ashli Platoons: Dedicated drone & loitering munition squads
100% Drone Literacy: Every soldier is a pilot/operative
Arsenal: Javelin Missiles (Anti-Tank) & CQB Carbines

RECRUITS
Recruitment: Local troops for local terrain (e.g., Desert sectors)
Advantage: Native knowledge of language, weather, and geography
War Cry: "Raja Ramchandra Ki Jal"

DEPLOYMENT MAP

Northern Command
Leh, Srinagar, Nagrota

Western Command
Desert Sectors

Validated In
Exercise **Akhand Prahar** (2025)

MOTTO
Abhayam Bhairav

Composition and Structure:

- **Integrated Force Mix:** Each Bhairav Battalion is a compact formation of approximately 200–250 personnel, drawn from multiple arms including infantry, artillery, air

defence, and signals, enabling autonomous and effective offensive operations.

- **Recruitment Approach:** The Army follows a "Sons of the Soil" recruitment concept, prioritising local personnel from deployment sectors. This ensures terrain and climatic familiarity, enhancing unit effectiveness in specific operational environments.

Deployment and Expansion:

- **Current Status:** As of early 2026, around 15 Bhairav Battalions have been raised, with plans to expand the force to approximately 23–25 battalions to strengthen rapid-response capabilities across sensitive theatres.
- **Placement:** These units are being deployed under corps- and division-level formations, particularly along sensitive borders such as Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, and the Northeast, where rapid mobility and an aggressive posture are operationally critical.

Focus on Unmanned and Hybrid Warfare:

- **Technology Integration:** Bhairav Battalions are central to the Army's push towards unmanned and hybrid warfare. They are trained to deploy drones and other unmanned systems for reconnaissance, surveillance, and precision targeting of enemy positions deep within hostile territory.
- **Drone Operatives Pool:** To support these capabilities, the Army is developing a large pool of over one lakh drone operatives, reflecting the growing emphasis on networked, technology-dominant operations in future conflict scenarios.

Conclusion:

The emergence of the Bhairav Battalions marks a significant milestone in the Indian Army's modernisation journey, creating agile, technology-enabled forces capable of swift offensive action while bridging the gap between conventional infantry and specialised forces. Their debut at the Jaipur Army Day Parade not only demonstrates their operational

readiness but also underscores India's broader shift towards future-oriented, hybrid warfare capabilities in an increasingly complex security environment.

Unified Rocket–Missile Force

Context:

Recently, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi underlined the urgent need for India to create a unified Rocket–Missile Force, emphasising that modern warfare increasingly demands integrated and precision-based strike capabilities.

What is a Rocket Force?

- A Rocket Force is a specialised military command responsible for:
 - » Long-range rocket artillery and missile systems
 - » Planning, command, control, and execution of precision strikes
 - » Targeting enemy command centres, airbases, logistics hubs, and strategic infrastructure

Key Features:

- Centralised command and control over rockets and missile assets
- Stand-off strike capability, reducing exposure of frontline troops
- Use of advanced guidance systems such as GPS, radar, and infrared sensors
- Capability to conduct deep strikes beyond enemy frontlines
- Integration with joint operations involving the Army, Navy, and Air Force
- Such forces enable strikes to be executed from secure command centres, minimising casualties while maximising operational impact.

Why Modern Warfare Demands a Rocket–Missile Force?

- Modern warfare has moved beyond the traditional dominance of tank–artillery–

infantry formations.

Changing Nature of Warfare:

- Greater emphasis on precision, speed, and long-range firepower
- Reduced reliance on large-scale troop deployments
- Increasing role of missiles, rockets, drones, and cyber-enabled targeting
- Distance no longer guarantees safety for military bases or strategic infrastructure
- Recent global conflicts have demonstrated that missile systems can strike targets 400–450 km away with high accuracy, fundamentally reshaping deterrence and response strategies.

Strategic Rationale for India

- **Two-Front Security Challenge:**
 - » Both Pakistan and China operate dedicated rocket or missile forces
 - » China established the PLA Rocket Force in 2015
 - » Pakistan announced its Army Rocket Force Command in August 2025, reportedly modelled on China's structure
- **Lessons from Recent Operations:** During Operation Sindoor, India demonstrated credible missile strike capabilities:
 - » BrahMos missiles were reportedly used against Pakistani airbases
 - » Damage was reported at 10–11 airbases
 - » The operation showcased India's capacity for precise, high-impact stand-off strikes
- **India's Existing Capabilities:** India already possesses robust rocket and missile systems, including:
 - » Pinaka Multi-Barrel Rocket System
 - Tested range of up to 120 km
 - Planned upgrades to 150 km
 - Long-term development goals extending to 300–450 km
 - » Pralay tactical ballistic missile
 - » BrahMos supersonic cruise missile
- While these systems provide strong deterrence and stand-off capabilities, they

currently operate under separate command structures, limiting full operational synergy.

Advantages of a Unified Rocket–Missile Force

- Integrated planning and coordinated execution of strikes
- Faster decision-making and reduced response times
- Optimal utilisation of precision-guided munitions
- Enhanced deterrence posture against adversaries
- Reduced casualties among ground forces
- Improved preparedness for both high-intensity and limited-conflict scenarios

Conclusion:

The Indian Army Chief's call for a Unified Rocket–Missile Force reflects a pragmatic assessment of evolving warfare and India's complex security environment. With both Pakistan and China already operating dedicated rocket forces, the creation of such a command is no longer merely aspirational but strategically necessary. A well-structured Rocket–Missile Force would significantly enhance India's deterrence capability, reduce battlefield risks, and align the country's military posture with the realities of 21st-century warfare.

Global Risks Report 2026

Context:

Recently, the World Economic Forum (WEF) released the Global Risks Report 2026. The report identifies geoeconomic confrontation as the top near-term global risk, while cyber insecurity is flagged as India's most significant risk.

About the World Economic Forum (WEF):

- The World Economic Forum is a Swiss public–private cooperation organisation, founded in 1971 by Klaus Schwab and headquartered in Geneva.

- It brings together leaders from government, business, civil society, and academia to discuss and address major global issues.

What Is a Global Risk?

- A global risk is defined as a potential event or condition capable of causing significant harm to large segments of the global economy, population, or natural systems. These risks are often interconnected and can trigger cascading consequences across societies and national borders.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Global Risk Outlook (2026–2028)**
 - » Geoeconomic confrontation has overtaken all other risks to become the top global concern in the short term.
 - » It refers to the strategic use of economic instruments" such as trade restrictions, sanctions, investment controls, and technology bans" by countries to pursue geopolitical advantage and constrain rivals. This trend reflects intensifying economic competition and the weakening of traditional multilateral frameworks.
- **Other risks ranked high globally include:**
 - » State-based armed conflict — ongoing tensions and wars between nations.
 - » Misinformation and disinformation, undermining social cohesion and democratic processes.
 - » Societal polarisation, deepening divisions within and between societies.
 - » Extreme weather events, although environmental risks are currently eclipsed by geopolitical and economic concerns in the short term.

Long-Term Risks (Up to 2036):

- Over a decade-long horizon, environmental risks continue to dominate severity assessments:
 - » Extreme weather events
 - » Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
 - » Critical changes to Earth systems
 - » Adverse outcomes of artificial intelligence

technologies

- These long-term threats underscore climate change, ecological degradation, and technological uncertainty as persistent global vulnerabilities.

India Risk Outlook (2026):

- For India, the report highlights a distinct mix of priorities:
 - » **Cyber insecurity:** ranked as the top risk, reflecting India's heavy reliance on digital infrastructure for governance, payments, and service delivery.
 - » **Income and wealth inequality:** persistent disparities that heighten economic and social vulnerabilities.
 - » **Insufficient public services and social protection:** gaps in healthcare, education, infrastructure, and welfare systems.
 - » **Economic downturn:** exposure to global shocks and trade disruptions affecting growth and employment.
 - » **State-based armed conflict:** security challenges arising from regional tensions and cross-border issues.
- Compared to the global risk landscape, India's risk profile places greater emphasis on societal and governance-related challenges rather than purely geopolitical competition.

Policy Implications for India:

- The report's findings carry several implications for India's strategic planning and governance responses:
 - » Strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure and regulatory frameworks to protect digital ecosystems.
 - » Addressing income inequality through inclusive growth strategies and expanded social protection.
 - » Improving public services in healthcare, education, and social safety nets to enhance resilience.
 - » Diversifying trade and economic partnerships to mitigate geoeconomic

shocks.

- » Integrating long-term climate and technological risk assessments into national planning frameworks.

C-295 Aircraft

Context:

Recently, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced that the first "Made in India" C-295 military transport aircraft will roll out from the Airbus-Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) final assembly line in Vadodara, Gujarat before September 2026.

About the C-295 Aircraft:

- The Airbus C-295 is a medium-range, twin-engine turboprop tactical transport aircraft originally designed by Spain's CASA (now part of Airbus Defence and Space).
- It is capable of multi-role operations such as troop and cargo transport, para-dropping, medical evacuation and logistical support, with performance across varied environments and runway conditions.
- India signed a Rs.21,935-crore contract in 2021 with Airbus Defence and Space for 56 C-295 aircraft, aimed at replacing the Indian Air Force's ageing Avro-748 fleet.

Make in India and Production Plan:

- Under the agreement:
 - » The first 16 C-295 aircraft were delivered in "fly-away" condition from Airbus' Seville facility in Spain between 2023-25.
 - » The remaining 40 aircraft will be manufactured and assembled in India by TASL under a joint industrial partnership.
- The Final Assembly Line (FAL) in Vadodara, inaugurated in October 2024, is the first such facility for military aircraft in India's private sector, reflecting a major shift in the defence industrial base.



FEATURES OF C-295

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 24.45 m Length | 8.66 m Height | 25.81 m Wingspan | 2 Crew |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|

Capacity: 71 troops / 50 paratroops / 5 cargo pallets

Strategic and Industrial Significance:

The rollout of the first Made-in-India C-295 has multiple layers of significance:

- **Defence Capability and Modernisation**
 - » Enhances the tactical airlift capability of the Indian Air Force, essential for troop movement, logistics and humanitarian missions.
 - » Replaces the ageing Avro-748 fleet with a modern, versatile transport platform.
- **Boost to Indigenous Manufacturing**
 - » Represents a major step in Make in India, expanding the domestic aerospace ecosystem.
 - » Involves production of significant structural components and major sub-assemblies within India, integrating Indian suppliers into global value chains.
- **Skill and Industrial Ecosystem Development**
 - » The assembly line and associated supply chain support the creation of skilled employment and capability building in aerospace manufacturing.
- **International Collaboration**
 - » Demonstrates growing defence industrial cooperation between India and Spain, rooted in shared strategic

interests and bilateral ties.

Economic and Geopolitical Implications:

- **Economic Impact:** The programme is set to catalyse domestic MSME participation, deepen industrial competencies and potentially support future aerospace exports.
- **Geostrategic Positioning:** Indigenous defence manufacturing reduces import dependence, enhances strategic autonomy, and bolsters India's role as a credible defence production hub globally.

Conclusion:

The upcoming roll-out of India's first Made-in-India C-295 aircraft marks a milestone in defence manufacturing and self-reliance. It exemplifies the convergence of strategic partnership, industrial capability and national policy goals under Make in India. As the project progresses toward full operationalisation by 2031, it is poised to strengthen India's defence readiness while expanding its aerospace industrial base.

DRDO's Hypersonic Missile

Context:

At the 77th Republic Day Parade on 26 January 2026, India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) unveiled the Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM), a watershed achievement in the country's defence technology landscape.

About LR-AShM:

- The LR-AShM is a hypersonic glide missile developed by DRDO to engage both static and moving sea targets at extended ranges of approximately 1,500 kilometres. It was showcased alongside its mobile launcher during the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path, New Delhi.
- The missile follows a quasi-ballistic trajectory, beginning like a ballistic missile but operating at lower altitudes with

atmospheric “skips”, enabling high agility and reduced detectability. It achieves hypersonic speeds, initial bursts around Mach 10 and sustaining an average of Mach 5 making it difficult for enemy radars and air-defence systems to detect or intercept.

Key Technological Features:

- **Hypersonic Flight and Manoeuvrability:** The LR-AShM uses a two-stage solid propulsion rocket system. The first stage accelerates the missile to hypersonic velocity, after which the second stage propels it further before transitioning into an unpowered glide phase marked by controlled manoeuvres that enhance survivability and unpredictability.
- **Low Detectability:** Flying at low altitude at hypersonic speeds, the missile evades ground-based and ship-borne radar systems, reducing enemy reaction times and neutralising layered air-defence responses.
- **Indigenous Technologies:** The LR-AShM is built with fully indigenous avionics, sensor packages, and guidance systems, reflecting India’s push towards Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence technology.



Strategic Significance:

- **Enhanced Sea-Denial Capability:** By enabling long-range anti-ship strikes, the LR-AShM significantly strengthens India’s sea-denial posture, a critical aspect in the strategically vital IOR, where naval influence directly impacts commerce, security, and geopolitical stability.
- **Rapid Response and Deterrence:** With its

hypersonic speed, the missile can traverse its maximum range in roughly 15 minutes, dramatically shrinking enemy decision and reaction windows. This compresses the sensor-to-shooter cycle and increases deterrence against maritime adversaries.

- **Multi-Domain Potential:** While the initial focus is on coastal battery deployment for the Indian Navy, future variants could see ship-launched, air-launched, and even Army or Air Force derivatives, making it a versatile, multi-platform asset.

Implications:

- The unveiling of the LR-AShM positions India within the elite group of nations possessing advanced hypersonic weapon capabilities, alongside the United States, Russia, and China.
- This breakthrough underscores India’s progress in materials science, propulsion technologies, and high-speed aerodynamics, critical for sustained hypersonic flight and manoeuvrability.
- Beyond glide vehicles like LR-AShM, DRDO is also pursuing hypersonic cruise missile technologies driven by scramjet propulsion systems, reflecting a two-pronged approach to hypersonic warfare capability development.

Conclusion:

DRDO’s LR-AShM hypersonic missile represents a paradigm shift in India’s strategic and technological capabilities. Its integration into India’s defence architecture enhances deterrence, maritime reach, and rapid strike potential, elevating the country’s position in the global defence technology order. As India continues to innovate in next-generation weapons systems, it not only fortifies national security but also fosters greater self-reliance and technological edge in an era defined by high-speed warfare.

Place in News

Chagos Archipelago (Indian Ocean)

Recently, US President Donald Trump has criticised UK's plan to hand over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. In May 2025, the UK signed a sovereignty transfer agreement with Mauritius: Britain agreed to formally hand over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, while retaining a 99 year lease for the Diego Garcia military base. This deal aims to implement the ICJ's ruling while protecting continued UK U.S. use of the base, seen as vital for Western military presence in the Indian Ocean.

Background

- The Chagos Archipelago is a group of over 60 small islands in the central Indian Ocean. Diego Garcia, the largest island, hosts a major joint UK–U.S. military base used for strategic operations across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.
- Historically, the islands were part of the British colony of Mauritius. In 1965, just before Mauritius gained independence, the UK separated the Chagos Archipelago and created the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).
- To build the Diego Garcia base in the early 1970s, the UK forcibly expelled the local Chagossian population, resettling them mainly in Mauritius and Seychelles. They have long campaigned to return.
- In 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the UN General Assembly ruled that the decolonisation was unlawful and that the UK should end its administration and return the territory to Mauritius.



Why it matter?

- **Strategic military importance:**
 - » Diego Garcia is one of the West's most important military hubs, hosting airfields, naval facilities, and logistical platforms critical for operations in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Maintaining access is key to U.S. and UK strategic reach.
- **Post colonial legal and moral issues:**
 - » The long dispute highlights questions about decolonisation, sovereignty, and indigenous rights. The original separation of the islands from Mauritius and the forced displacement of Chagossians remain deeply contentious issues.

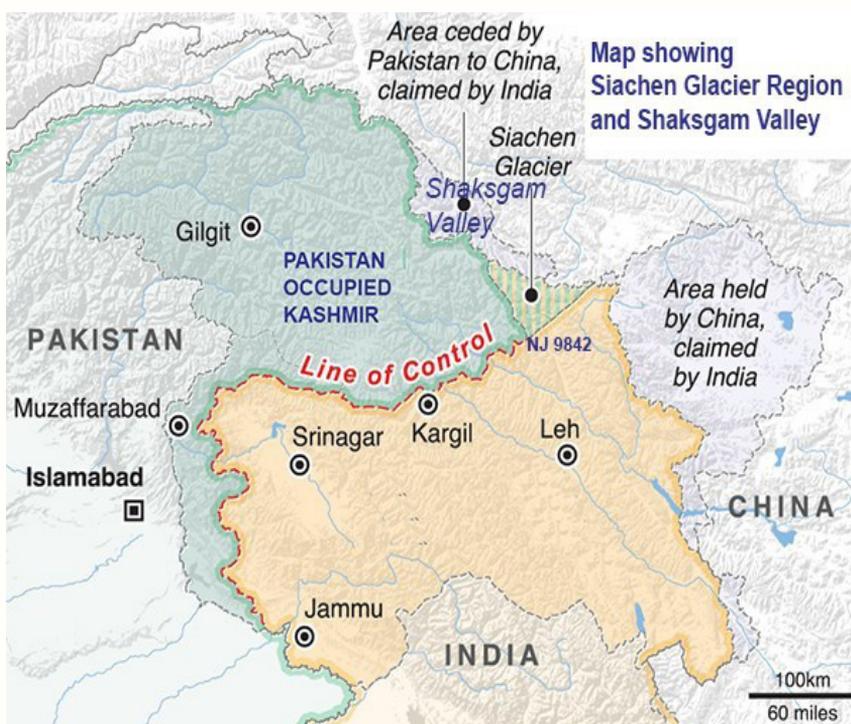
- » Geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean:
- » As China expands its influence in the region (e.g., ports, bases, partnerships), Western states are keen to secure strategic positions. The status of Chagos plays directly into broader Indo Pacific security dynamics.

Shaksgam Valley

Recently, India formally objected to Chinese infrastructure projects in the Shaksgam Valley, describing them as illegal because the valley is Indian territory under its legal claim. Infrastructure reportedly includes roads and other logistical developments, possibly linked to the broader China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which India also does not recognise when it traverses areas India claims.

Background

- The Shaksgam Valley is a high altitude region north of the Siachen Glacier in the Karakoram range, bordering China's Xinjiang and Pakistan administered Gilgit Baltistan.
- In 1963, Pakistan and China signed a boundary agreement under which Pakistan ceded about 5,180 sq km of territory, the Trans Karakoram Tract, to China. India has never recognised that agreement and asserts that the valley is part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, which India claims in its entirety.
- Pakistan's ability to "cede" territory is itself contested by India, Delhi argues Pakistan had no legal right to negotiate over territory that was Indian under international law.
- Indian leaders, including the Army Chief and the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, have reiterated that the 1963 agreement is illegal and that India does not approve any activity in the region, signalling continued diplomatic resistance.



Why It Matters

- **Territorial integrity and international law:**
 - » India's claim to Shaksgam is anchored in the legal principle that territory cannot be validly transferred by a government lacking legal sovereignty (here, Pakistan). Accepting China's control could weaken India's position on other territorial issues.
 - » Strategic and military implications:

- » The valley's proximity to the Siachen Glacier and Ladakh front means infrastructure there could enhance China's ability to move troops or supplies near sensitive areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India.
- **Regional geopolitics:**
 - » This dispute highlights the complex triangular dynamics between India, China, and Pakistan. Infrastructure and territorial assertions in such high altitude borderlands feed into broader strategic competition, including over CPEC and influence in South Asia.

Greenland

Greenland, due to its strategic location, vast reserves of rare minerals, melting ice and US President Donald Trump's talk of taking control of Greenland, has made this vast Arctic island a geopolitical centre.

- **Geography & status:** Greenland is the world's largest island, located between the Arctic and North Atlantic Oceans. It is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, with its own government handling most internal affairs but Denmark retaining authority over defense and foreign policy.
- **Population & identity:** Around ~56,000 people live primarily in coastal towns; the majority are Indigenous Inuit, with a strong cultural connection to the land.
- **Historical governance:** Greenland was a Danish colony for centuries and was fully incorporated into the Danish state in 1953. Home rule began in 1979, with expanded self government from 2009 onward.



Why It Matters

- Greenland is far more than a remote, icy island, its strategic importance is growing rapidly due to several interconnected factors:
- Greenland is strategically important for several reasons:
 - » **Geopolitics & Military:** Its Arctic location opens new shipping routes and supports U.S. and NATO monitoring and defense, while countering Russia and China.
 - » **Resources & Economy:** Rich in minerals, potential oil and gas, and emerging Arctic trade routes make it valuable for global supply chains.
 - » **Sovereignty & Autonomy:** Greenland's independence aspirations intersect with U.S. and global strategic interests, shaping future Arctic geopolitics.

Gaza

Israel has reopened the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt on a limited basis for pedestrian traffic, a major development in the US brokered ceasefire framework that began in October 2025. This marks the first significant opening of the crossing since Israel seized it in May 2024 during its conflict with Hamas.

Gaza has been a major flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, contested over land, identity, and governance. Since 1967, it has been under varying degrees of Israeli military occupation and blockade. Since 2007, it has been governed by Hamas, designated as a terrorist organization by Israel, the U.S., and EU. The conflict escalated on 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched a major attack on southern Israel, prompting a prolonged Israeli military campaign.

Gaza's Geography

- The Gaza Strip is a narrow Palestinian territory on the eastern Mediterranean coast, bordered by Israel to the north and east, and Egypt to the southwest.
- The key Rafah crossing lies at Gaza's southern border with Egypt; it is Gaza's main gateway to the outside world that does not pass through Israel.
- Other crossings, such as Erez to the north, connect Gaza with Israel but are often restricted and controlled by Israeli authorities.
- Rafah's reopening is significant because it provides one of the few routes for movement of people and possibly humanitarian aid into and out of Gaza after long closures due to the Israel Hamas conflict.



Power Packed News

Mukhyamantri Gramotthan Yojana

- Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel launched the Mukhyamantri Gramotthan Yojana (MGY) from Bhadaran village in Anand district, with the objective of developing 114 key rural areas with urban-like infrastructure. Under this scheme, 2,666 Gram Panchayat Ghar-cum-Talati residential buildings will be constructed at a cost of Rs.663 crore, strengthening rural development and governance.
- The scheme aims to reduce the development gap between villages and cities, enhance rural self-reliance, and reduce pressure on urban areas.
- In the first phase, 114 villages functioning as taluka headquarters have been selected, where facilities such as roads, underground drainage systems, and solar-powered streetlights will be provided. To improve connectivity in rural areas, 'e-Gram' services are being strengthened. The construction of 2,666 Gram Panchayat buildings will improve administrative efficiency.
- The Gramatthan campaign will later be extended to all villages with a population of more than 10,000. This scheme is an important step toward empowering governance at the grassroots level and improving living standards in Gujarat.

Two New Ramsar Sites

- India has recently designated the Patna Bird Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh) and Chhari-Dhand (Gujarat) as Ramsar sites. This is a major achievement in wetland conservation efforts. As of January 2026, the total number of Ramsar sites in India has reached 98.
 - » **Patna Bird Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh):** Located in Etah district, this sanctuary is an important stopover for birds on the Central Asian Flyway. More than 178 bird species are found here.
 - » **Chhari-Dhand (Gujarat):** Situated in the Rann of Kutch, this seasonal saline wetland is renowned for its biodiversity and serves as a winter habitat for cranes and flamingos.
- India is among the contracting parties to the "Convention on Wetlands" (Ramsar Convention), which was signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. India became a signatory to the convention on 1 February 1982.
- Ramsar designation provides international recognition and protection to these areas, strengthening local tourism and ecosystems. It is also a significant step toward achieving the objectives of India's "Amrit Dharohar" mission. Wetlands not only help in water storage but also play an important role in carbon sequestration and flood control.

NPS Health Pension Scheme

- On 27 January 2026, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) launched the NPS Health Pension Scheme as a pilot project under its regulatory sandbox framework.
- This is a sector-specific initiative under the National Pension System (NPS), aimed at linking long-term retirement savings with healthcare expenses, including OPD and IPD costs.
- The scheme is being implemented on a limited scale as a proof of concept, to assess its operational, technological, and regulatory feasibility before full-scale implementation. It is voluntary and contributory in nature and follows a multiple-scheme investment framework.
- Subscribers can make partial withdrawals of up to 25% of their contributions for medical

expenses, while in cases of critical illness, a one-time withdrawal of up to 100% is permitted. This initiative is expected to reduce healthcare expenses and promote customer-centric innovation within the NPS ecosystem.

Best Marching Contingents and Tableaux at the Republic Day Parade 2026

- At the 77th Republic Day Parade held on 26 January 2026 at Kartavya Path, New Delhi, awards for the best marching contingents and tableaux were announced. The awards were decided by three independent judging panels based on performances during the parade, evaluating contingents from the armed forces, central armed police forces, and states/union territories.
- Among the three armed services, the Indian Navy won the award for the best marching contingent. In the category of central armed police forces and other auxiliary forces, the Delhi Police was awarded the best marching contingent.
- In the category of best tableaux, Maharashtra's tableau titled "Ganeshotsav: Symbol of Self-Reliance" secured first place. The tableaux of Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala secured second and third places respectively, showcasing themes such as regional culture, handicrafts, and digital literacy. In the category of central ministries, the Ministry of Culture's tableau "Vande Mataram – The Soul-Sound of a Nation" was declared the best.
- These awards symbolize traditional discipline, official excellence, and cultural diversity, presenting the Republic Day Parade as a matter of national pride.

Uttarakhand Implements the Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026

- The Uttarakhand government has implemented the Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026 after receiving the Governor's assent. The ordinance has been promulgated under Article 213 of the Constitution and has come into force with immediate effect. Its objective is to ensure the effective, transparent, and accountable implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC).
- Through these amendments, procedural, administrative, and penal reforms have been introduced, with a focus on women's empowerment, protection of children's rights, and equality in civil matters. One of the major reforms relates to the marriage registration process. Before the implementation of the UCC, marriage registration in Uttarakhand was carried out offline under the Uttarakhand Compulsory Marriage Registration Act, 2010, which required the physical presence of the couple and two witnesses at the Sub-Registrar's office.
- After the amendments, the process has been simplified and digitized. Nearly 100% of marriage registrations are now being completed online, without the mandatory requirement of physical presence at government offices. Within one year of the implementation of the UCC, more than 4.7 million marriage registrations have been completed, reflecting the effectiveness of these reforms.
- In addition, penal provisions have been aligned with the new Indian criminal laws, and the appellate mechanism has been strengthened. On the completion of one year of the UCC, 27 January was observed as "UCC Day," along with statewide awareness programs.

India's Growth Rate Projections by Various Institutions

- The following growth rate projections for India were released by different institutions in January 2026:
 - » **Economic Survey 2025–26:** According to the Economic Survey presented in Parliament on 30 January 2026 by the Government of India, real GDP growth for the financial year 2025–26 is projected at 7.4%.
 - » **International Monetary Fund (IMF):** In its World Economic Outlook report released in January 2026, the IMF revised India's growth projection upward to 7.3%.
 - » **World Bank:** The World Bank also revised its estimate in January 2026, projecting India's growth rate at 7.2%.
 - » **Reserve Bank of India (RBI):** The RBI has projected a growth rate of 7.3% for the current financial year (FY26).
- **Projection for FY 2026–27:**
 - » According to the Economic Survey, India's growth rate for the next financial year 2026–27 is expected to be in the range of 6.8% to 7.2%.
- **Key Drivers of Growth:**
 - » Strong domestic demand and improvement in the agricultural sector.
 - » Continued expansion of the manufacturing and services sectors.
 - » Sustained emphasis by the government on capital expenditure (Capex).
- These projections indicate that despite global uncertainties, India continues to remain the world's fastest-growing major economy.

Graça Machel to Receive the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2025

- Renowned Mozambican human rights activist and social worker Graça Machel has been selected for the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2025. The announcement was made by the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust. The selection was carried out by an international jury chaired by former National Security Adviser of India, Shivshankar Menon.
- The award recognizes Graça Machel's outstanding contributions in the fields of education, health, nutrition, economic empowerment, and humanitarian work. The prize includes a citation, a trophy, and a cash award of Rs.1 crore.
- Graça Machel is regarded as a distinguished African leader and a global advocate for human rights. In the 1990s, she led a landmark United Nations study on the impact of armed conflict on children, which reshaped international humanitarian assistance and child protection policies.
- She has also founded several institutions promoting women's empowerment and child development. She was the wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela and served as the First Lady of South Africa.

Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework Released

- In a significant step toward future-proofing India's defence capabilities, General Anil Chauhan released the Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework on 22 January 2026. This comprehensive policy document outlines the strategy and roadmap for the induction of quantum technologies into the armed forces.
- The policy identifies four key pillars of quantum technology, quantum communication, quantum computing, quantum sensing, and quantum materials. Its objective is to prepare the

Army, Navy and Air Force for future battle and ensure technological superiority.

- For effective implementation, the policy proposes dedicated governance bodies across various government sectors. Jointness and integration are identified as the keys to success, which will play a decisive role in modern, technology-driven warfare.

Announcement of Gallantry Awards

- President Droupadi Murmu approved the conferment of gallantry awards on 70 personnel of the Armed Forces, including 6 posthumous awards.
- Among them, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla has been awarded the Ashoka Chakra, India's highest peacetime gallantry award. Major Arshdeep Singh, Naib Subedar Doleswar Subba Singh, and Group Captain Prashant Balakrishnan Nair have been awarded the Kirti Chakra.
- The list also includes 13 Shaurya Chakras, one of which is posthumous. In addition, approval has been given for 1 Vir Chakra Bar to Sena Medal, 44 Sena Medals (Gallantry), 6 Nao Sena Medals (Gallantry), and 2 Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry). The President has also approved an additional 301 military medals.
- President Droupadi Murmu has further approved 98 Mentions-in-Despatches for personnel of the Armed Forces and the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB), including 5 posthumous honors. These awards recognize exceptional courage and bravery displayed during operations such as Operation Rakshak, Snow Leopard, Meghdoot, Rhino, Sindoor, and other missions.

Former BCCI President Inderjit Singh Bindra Passes Away

- Veteran Indian cricket administrator Inderjit Singh Bindra passed away on 25 January 2026 at the age of 84. He served as the President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) from 1993 to 1996 and is regarded as a pioneer of a new era of commercialization and marketing of cricket in India.
- He also served as the President of the Punjab Cricket Association for over three decades, from 1978 to 2014. Under his leadership, Punjab cricket gained a distinct national identity.
- In recognition of his contributions, the PCA Stadium in Mohali was renamed the I.S. Bindra Stadium in 2015. Current ICC Chairman Jay Shah described him as a pillar of Indian cricket administration.
- Bindra's contribution extended beyond administration, as he helped professionalize the sport and give it a global outlook. His passing is considered an irreparable loss to Indian cricket.

India Government Announces Padma Awards 2026

- The Government of India has announced the names of 131 distinguished individuals for the Padma Awards 2026. The list includes 5 Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri awards. A total of 19 women in the list, and 16 awards will be conferred posthumously.
- Those to be honored with the Padma Vibhushan include actor Dharmendra (posthumous), Justice K. T. Thomas, violinist N. Rajam, writer P. Narayanan, and politician V. S. Achyuthanandan (posthumous). Prominent recipients of the Padma Bhushan include singer Alka Yagnik, actor Mammooty, industrialist Uday Kotak, and tennis player Vijay Amritraj.
- In sports, Padma Shri awards have been announced for Rohit Sharma, Harmanpreet Kaur,

and other athletes. These awards recognize outstanding contributions in the fields of art, sports, public service, and science.

Sunita Williams Retires from NASA

- Renowned astronaut Sunita Williams has retired from NASA after a distinguished career spanning 27 years. According to NASA, her retirement became effective on 27 December 2025. The decision followed an unexpectedly extended nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station.
- NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman described her as a pioneering figure in the field of human spaceflight. Sunita Williams was born in Euclid, Ohio, and considers Needham, Massachusetts, as her hometown. Her father was a neuroanatomist born in Jhulasaan village of Mehsana district in Gujarat, while her mother is of Slovenian origin.
- Her first spaceflight began in 2006 with the STS-116 mission. Across three missions, she spent a total of 608 days in space, completed nine spacewalks, and logged over 62 hours of spacewalking, the highest by any woman astronaut. She was also the first person to run a marathon in space.

Atal Pension Yojana till 2030–31

- The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) till the financial year 2030–31. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 21 January.
- The government has also decided to enhance financial support for promotion, awareness, and developmental activities related to the scheme. The objective is to ensure its long-term sustainability and further expand its outreach among workers in the unorganised sector. Continuous assistance will be provided for capacity building and awareness generation, and the gap fund will also be strengthened.
- Launched in 2015, the scheme provides a guaranteed monthly pension ranging from Rs.1,000 to Rs.5,000 after the age of 60, depending on the contribution made. As of January 2026, more than 8.66 crore beneficiaries have been registered under the scheme.
- This decision promotes financial inclusion and strengthens the social security framework in line with the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047, particularly for citizens who have remained outside the formal pension system.

Amelia Valverde Appointed Head Coach of the Indian Women's Football Team

- All India Football Federation has appointed Amelia Valverde as the new head coach of the senior Indian women's football team. A native of Costa Rica, Valverde has already joined the Indian team's training camp currently underway in Antalya, Turkey.
- The appointment comes at a crucial time as the Indian women's team is preparing for the AFC Women's Asian Cup, scheduled to be held in Australia in March 2026. Valverde will work closely with the existing coaching staff to strengthen the team's technical, tactical, and mental aspects.
- The current staff includes experienced coaches such as Crispin Chettri, Priya PV, and Mario Aguiar. Valverde's international experience is expected to provide a new direction to Indian

women's football. This move is seen as a significant step toward the development of women's sports in India and improving competitive performance on the global stage.

Lucknow Becomes UP's First Zero Fresh Waste Dump City

- Lucknow has been declared Uttar Pradesh's first Zero Fresh Waste Dump city under the Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban. This milestone was achieved with the commissioning of the Shivri Solid Waste Management Plant.
- The Lucknow Municipal Corporation is now scientifically processing 100% of the city's municipal solid waste. The newly inaugurated Shivri plant has a capacity of 700 metric tonnes per day. With three operational plants, more than 2,100 metric tonnes of waste are being processed daily.
- Waste is segregated into biodegradable and non-biodegradable components and converted into compost, biogas, recyclable materials, and refuse-derived fuel (RDF). So far, 12.86 lakh metric tonnes of legacy waste have been scientifically disposed of, and more than 25 acres of land have been reclaimed. This model is based on the principles of a circular economy and is emerging as a replicable example for other urban local bodies.

SKOCH Award 2025

- The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) has been conferred the SKOCH Award 2025 for its Cell Broadcast Solution. The award was presented at the 104th SKOCH Summit, organised on the theme "Developed India through Resources." This recognition acknowledges C-DOT's significant contribution to disaster and emergency communication systems.
- The Cell Broadcast Solution has been developed as an integrated disaster warning dissemination platform. It connects key agencies such as the India Meteorological Department and the National Disaster Management Authority on a single digital platform. Through this system, real-time alerts related to weather disasters and other emergencies can be generated and rapidly disseminated to the general public.
- The SKOCH Awards honour individuals, projects, and institutions for excellence in governance and development, encouraging innovation in sectors such as finance, technology, health, education, and disaster management.
- Notably, C-DOT is a premier research and development institution functioning under the Department of Telecommunications and plays a crucial role in developing indigenous telecom technologies under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

Vidarbha Wins Vijay Hazare Trophy for the First Time

- Achieving a historic milestone in domestic cricket, Vidarbha has won the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025–26 for the first time. In the final, Vidarbha defeated Saurashtra by 38 runs. The match was played at the BCCI Centre of Excellence.
- Atharva Taide's century proved decisive in Vidarbha's victory. He scored 128 runs in the final, registering his maiden century of the tournament, which helped Vidarbha post a formidable total of 318 runs. While chasing the target, Saurashtra showed resistance in the middle order but was eventually bowled out for 279 runs.
- The Vijay Hazare Trophy, earlier known as the Ranji One-Day Trophy, is India's premier domestic one-day cricket competition. It was first held in the 2002–03 season. Tamil Nadu

and Karnataka have been the most successful teams in the tournament's history, having won the title five times each.

- In the previous season (2024–25), Karnataka were the champions. Vidarbha's historic triumph reflects the team's consistent progress, strong batting lineup, and balanced bowling attack in domestic cricket.

Tyler Prize

- American scientist Toby Kiers has been awarded the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement for her pioneering research on mycorrhizal fungal networks. The Tyler Prize is often referred to as the “Nobel Prize for the Environment” and recognizes outstanding environmental contributions at the global level.
- Toby Kiers' research has highlighted the role of vast underground fungal networks that facilitate the exchange of nutrients between plants and their roots. These mycorrhizal networks also play a crucial role in maintaining Earth's climate balance. According to the research, these networks absorb approximately 13.12 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, helping to reduce global carbon emissions.
- The global underground atlas developed by Toby Kiers and her colleagues has scientifically mapped the worldwide distribution and significance of these networks. Their findings demonstrate that mycorrhizal fungi are not merely symbiotic partners of plants, but one of the Earth's major biogeophysical circulation systems. Currently serving as a Research Chair at the University of Amsterdam, Kiers' work is considered extremely important for the conservation of underground biodiversity, long-term climate regulation, and carbon storage strategies.

Ilaiyaraaja to Receive the Padmapani Award

- Legendary Indian music composer Ilaiyaraaja will be honored with the prestigious Padmapani Award at the 11th Ajanta–Ellora International Film Festival. The award recognizes his unparalleled and long-standing contribution to Indian cinema.
- The honor includes the Padmapani memento, a citation, and a cash prize of Rs.2 lakh. Previously, the award has been conferred upon eminent personalities such as Javed Akhtar, Sai Paranjpye, and Om Puri.
- The 11th Ajanta–Ellora International Film Festival will be held from 28 January to 1 February at the Mahatma Gandhi Mission, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. It is being organized with the support of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and the Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra. Co-presentation is by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and the Maharashtra Film, Stage and Cultural Development Corporation.
- Ilaiyaraaja has created a new musical language not only in Tamil cinema but also in Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Hindi films. His music is regarded as a unique blend of classical and folk traditions in Indian cinema.

Yoweri Museveni Re-elected President of Uganda

- Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has secured power for the seventh time by winning the presidential election. The official results were announced on 17 January 2026, in which Museveni received 71.65 percent of the vote. The election was conducted amid a nationwide

internet shutdown, raising questions about its transparency.

- Museveni's main challenge was musician-turned-politician Bobi Wine, who secured 24.72 percent of the votes. Bobi Wine, whose real name is Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, rejected the election results, alleging widespread irregularities in the voting process and the abduction of his agents.
- The Election Commission also faced criticism during the polls. On polling day, malfunctioning biometric voter identification machines caused delays in voting, particularly in urban areas. Voter turnout stood at 52 percent, the lowest since the restoration of multiparty politics in 2006.
- In addition, veteran opposition leader Kizza Besigye remains in jail on charges of treason. The absence of a peaceful transfer of presidential power in Uganda since independence from British rule raises serious concerns about the country's democratic future.

Political Changes in Yemen

- Yemen's Prime Minister Salem bin Breik has resigned and his resignation has been accepted by the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council. Subsequently, Yemen's Foreign Minister Shaya Mohsen Zindani has been appointed as the new Prime Minister. This change has occurred at a time when Yemen is once again becoming a focal point of tensions among regional powers.
- In recent months, differences between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen have become increased. In December, the UAE-backed separatist group, the Southern Transitional Council, took control of several areas in southern and eastern Yemen and advanced close to the Saudi border, which Saudi Arabia viewed as a serious threat to its national security. In response, Saudi-backed fighters regained control of these areas.
- Earlier, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were united against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war. However, differences have now emerged between the two Gulf countries over geopolitics, oil production, and spheres of influence. This situation could further deepen political instability in Yemen.

Golden Globe Awards 2026

- The Golden Globe Awards 2026 were held in Los Angeles, honoring outstanding achievements in film and television. This was the 83rd edition of the awards, recognizing films released in 2025 and American television productions.
- In the film categories, Hamnet won Best Motion Picture (Drama), while One Battle After Another received the award for Best Motion Picture (Musical/Comedy). In the non-English language film category, The Secret Agent emerged as the winner, while K-Pop Demon Hunters won Best Animated Feature.
- In the acting categories, Jessie Buckley and Wagner Moura won Best Actress and Best Actor respectively in the drama category. In the television segment, Netflix's Adolescence won the award for Best Limited Series.
- The Golden Globe Awards not only promote creativity in the global film and television industry but also provide international recognition to emerging trends and themes.

Inauguration of India's First Vande Bharat Sleeper Train

- India has achieved a historic milestone in rail transportation with the inauguration of its first

Vande Bharat Sleeper Train. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the train from Malda railway station in West Bengal. This state-of-the-art train will operate between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya), one of the country's most important railway corridors.

- The fully air-conditioned Vande Bharat Sleeper Train has been designed to offer a comfortable, airline-like travel experience. It consists of 16 modern coaches with a total passenger capacity of 823. The train will also connect major pilgrimage destinations such as the Kalighat Temple and the Kamakhya Devi Temple. While the existing Saraighat Express takes around 17 hours to cover this route, the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train will complete the journey in just 14 hours. This will save passengers' time and significantly enhance connectivity to Northeast India.
- In addition, the Prime Minister virtually flagged off four new Amrit Bharat Express trains and participated in the Bagurumba dance 2026, conveying a message of cultural unity.

Mizoram Declared 'India's Ginger Capital'

- Mizoram has recently been declared the 'Ginger Capital of India'. This recognition has been conferred by NITI Aayog based on the significant increase in ginger production and its high quality. The achievement highlights the success of the state's agriculture-based development model.
- Chief Minister Lalduhoma credited the farmers of the state for this achievement, stating that their consistent efforts have given Mizoram a distinct national identity. He also inaugurated a ginger processing unit at the Sairang Horticulture Centre, located about 21 kilometres from Aizawl, which will help in value addition and increasing farmers' income.
- The Chief Minister further noted that passion fruit holds immense potential for income generation and that the government will further promote its cultivation. According to the Mizoram Agricultural Marketing Board, more than 33.8 million kilograms of ginger were procured in the state in 2025, reflecting its commercial success.
- This initiative is regarded as an important step toward "Vocal for Local," agricultural diversification, and inclusive development of Northeast India.

Rakesh Agrawal Appointed as New NIA Chief

- Senior IPS officer Rakesh Agrawal has been appointed by the central government as the new Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The appointment was made following the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet on 14 January.
- A 1994-batch IPS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre, Agrawal was serving as Special Director General in the NIA and had already been holding additional charge as Director General. His tenure as the NIA chief will continue until 31 August 2028, the date of his superannuation.
- Along with this, the government has also made senior appointments in the Central Armed Police Forces. Shatrugjit Singh Kapoor has been appointed as the Director General of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), while Praveen Kumar has been appointed as the new Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF).
- These appointments are considered significant steps toward strengthening internal security, counter-terrorism operations, and border management in the country.

78th Army Day Celebrations

- The 78th Army Day was celebrated with grand parades and cultural programmes on 15 January

in Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. The event was organised on Mahal Road in Jagatpura with the objective of showcasing the bravery, discipline, and modern combat capabilities of the Indian Army.

- During the parade, well-decorated contingents displayed exemplary professional excellence while marching past the saluting dais. Indigenous missile systems, advanced tanks, drones, and modern combat vehicles highlighted the technological prowess of the Indian Army. Participation by various regiments underscored the Army's diverse traditions and war-fighting skills.
- The participation of the Nepal Army Band reflected the strong defence cooperation between India and Nepal. Folk cultural performances such as Kalbeliya and Gair dances added regional flavour to the celebrations.
- The Governor, Chief Minister, senior military officers, and People in a large number were present on the occasion. As part of the celebrations, a "Shaurya Sandhya" programme was organised at the SMS Stadium, in which Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also participated.

Henley Passport Index 2026

- The Henley Passport Index 2026 has recently been released by London-based Henley & Partners. In the latest index, the Indian passport has climbed five places to rank 80th, compared to 85th in 2025. According to the ranking, Indian citizens enjoy visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 55 countries.
- The index evaluates passports of 199 countries across 227 global destinations and is based entirely on authentic data provided by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- At the global level, Asian countries continue to dominate the rankings. Singapore occupies the top position, while Japan and South Korea jointly hold second place, with their citizens enjoying visa-free access to 188 destinations. Several European countries "Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, and Luxembourg" share the third position.
- The United States has managed to return to the top 10, while Afghanistan remains at the bottom of the ranking at 101st position. India's improved ranking reflects gradual progress in its international diplomacy, travel relations, and global acceptance.

Demographic Changes in France

- The year 2025 has been recorded as a significant turning point in France's demographic history. For the first time since the Second World War, the number of deaths in the country exceeded the number of births. This development signals a decline in France's traditionally strong population structure. According to data released by France's national statistics agency, INSEE, around 651,000 deaths were recorded in 2025, compared to only 645,000 births. As a result, the country experienced a natural population decline.
- Traditionally, France has been known for relatively higher fertility rates and a younger population compared to other European Union countries. However, it is now facing challenges such as an ageing population, increased life expectancy, and declining fertility rates. In 2025, France's fertility rate fell to 1.56 children per woman, the lowest level since the First World War.
- Although France had the second-highest fertility rate in the European Union in 2023, recent trends indicate that this shift could have profound implications for the workforce, social security systems, and economic growth in the future.

NITI Aayog's Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024

- NITI Aayog has recently released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024. This is the fourth edition of the index, with the first edition published in August 2020. The index aims to assess export-friendly ecosystems across Indian states and Union Territories, in line with India's target of achieving USD 1 trillion in merchandise exports by 2030.
- EPI 2024 is based on four major pillars: Export Infrastructure (20%), Business Ecosystem (40%), Policy and Governance (20%), and Export Performance (20%). Under these pillars, the index includes a total of 13 sub-pillars and 70 indicators.
- States and Union Territories are categorized into large states, small states, northeastern states, and Union Territories, and are further classified into leader, challenger, and aspirant groups.
- Among large states, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh emerged as leaders. Among small states and Union Territories, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Goa were the top performers. The index promotes cooperative federalism and enhances state-level export competitiveness.

Virat Kohli Becomes the Second Highest Run-Scorer

- Veteran Indian cricketer and former captain Virat Kohli has recently become the second-highest run-scorer in international cricket across all three formats, Tests, One Day Internationals, and T20 Internationals combined. With this achievement, he has surpassed Sri Lankan legend and former wicketkeeper-batsman Kumar Sangakkara.
- Kohli achieved this milestone on 11 January 2026 during the first ODI against New Zealand in Vadodara. During his brilliant knock of 93 runs, he surpassed Sangakkara's tally of 28,016 international runs. Kohli has now scored more than 28,068 runs in 624 international innings.
- At the top of this prestigious list is India's Sachin Tendulkar, who has amassed 34,357 international runs. Kohli is also the fastest batsman to reach 28,000 international runs, highlighting his consistency and exceptional fitness.

Decision to End "10-Minute Delivery" Model

- Recently, following the intervention of Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, major quick-commerce and food delivery platforms in India, Blinkit, Zepto, Zomato, and Swiggy have decided to remove the "10-minute delivery" model from their apps. This move came into the spotlight after widespread protests and strikes by delivery personnel in December 2025, who raised concerns over excessively tight delivery targets, unsafe working conditions, and an increase in risky road accidents.
- The 10-minute delivery model is a quick-commerce strategy based on dark stores, AI-driven demand forecasting, and highly optimized logistics. Its primary objective was to deliver groceries and essential items to customers within just ten minutes, especially in urban areas. While consumers benefited from faster deliveries, the model proved to be extremely stressful and hazardous for the workforce.
- As per the Ministry of Labour's directive, removing time-bound delivery branding prioritizes workers' safety and dignity, and signals the need to balance consumer convenience with labour welfare. This decision is expected to encourage more responsible labour practices and stricter regulatory oversight in the quick-commerce sector, contributing to a more sustainable and safer digital economy.

BRICS 2026: Official Logo, Theme, and Website Unveiled

- On 13 January 2026, India unveiled the official logo, theme, and website for its BRICS 2026 presidency calendar year, formally marking the beginning of preparations for the 18th BRICS Summit. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar launched the new website, brics2026.gov.in, along with the theme and logo. This platform would provide comprehensive information on all meetings, initiatives, and events related to the presidency.
- The newly launched logo prominently features the lotus flower, symbolizing strength, beauty, unity, and inclusiveness. At the center of the logo is the greeting “Namaste,” reflecting India’s culture of warmth and respect. The petals of the lotus incorporate the colours of all BRICS member countries, representing unity in diversity and a shared sense of purpose.
- The official theme for the year is “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,” which emphasizes a human-centric approach and global well-being. The theme aims to foster collective action to address global challenges such as health crises, economic uncertainties, climate change, and technological transformations.
- India’s BRICS presidency also conveys a strong message of people-centric, inclusive, and sustainable development. It seeks to deepen cooperation among emerging economies while advancing shared interests and solutions on the global stage.

16th IRENA Assembly Concludes in Abu Dhabi

- The 16th Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 10 to 12 January 2026, under the theme “Powering Humanity: Renewable Energy for Shared Prosperity.” More than 1,500 ministers, senior officials, industry leaders, and partners participated, making it a major global platform for dialogue and cooperation on the energy transition.
- During the Assembly, member countries adopted a medium-term strategy and programme for 2026–27 and reaffirmed their global commitment to the rapid and large-scale expansion of renewable energy. Discussions covered key issues such as achieving climate targets, accelerating the pace of the energy transition, mobilizing and managing financial resources, and leveraging digital technologies and sustainable energy fuels.
- United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted a record investment of USD 2.2 trillion in the clean energy sector in 2025, stating that the renewable energy transition has become irreversible, but must be accelerated further to align with the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- IRENA, an intergovernmental organization established in 2009 and headquartered in Abu Dhabi, promotes the global adoption of renewable energy. It supports countries in policy formulation, technical assistance, and capacity building, and works to ensure a just, inclusive, and sustainable global energy transition. India is a founding member of IRENA.
- The Assembly underscored that renewable energy is not only essential for environmental protection but also a key pillar of energy security, economic prosperity, and long-term sustainable development.

Madhya Pradesh Government Launches ‘Swachh Jal Abhiyan’

- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav launched the statewide ‘Swachh Jal Abhiyan’ (Clean Water Campaign) on 10 January 2026. The initiative was launched from Bhopal with

the objective of ensuring safe and clean drinking water across the state. The campaign follows a health crisis caused by contaminated water in Indore's Bhagirathpura area, which led to infections and deaths, highlighting the urgent need to improve water supply systems.

- Under the campaign, comprehensive testing of water quality will be conducted in all urban and rural areas, and contaminated water sources will be identified and rectified immediately. Special emphasis will be placed on detecting leakages in water supply systems, cleaning pipelines, and regularly testing and cleaning water storage tanks.
- The campaign will also leverage modern technology. Robotic systems and GIS mapping will be used to identify leakages and potential contamination points in underground pipelines. Additionally, the government has strengthened mechanisms such as 'Jal Sunwai' where citizens can register drinking water-related complaints, which will be resolved within a fixed timeframe.
- Through the Swachh Jal Abhiyan, the state aims to ensure water security, protect public health, and strengthen infrastructure, thereby preventing future water-borne diseases and crises.

India Becomes the First Country to Commercially Produce Bio-Bitumen

- India has recently achieved a major global milestone by commencing the commercial production of bio-bitumen, becoming the first country in the world to do so. The achievement was announced during the CSIR Technology Transfer Programme held in New Delhi. This innovation is the result of a collaborative effort between CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CRRI) and CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP).
- Bio-bitumen is an environment-friendly binder that offers a sustainable alternative to conventional petroleum-based bitumen. It is produced from paddy straw and other agricultural/biomass residues through the pyrolysis process. The bio-oil obtained is refined and blended with conventional bitumen, making it suitable for road construction while meeting quality testing standards.
- **Key Benefits of Bio-Bitumen:**
 - » Reduction in air pollution caused by stubble burning and lowering of life-cycle emissions.
 - » Decreased dependence on crude oil, leading to import savings of approximately Rs.25,000-Rs.30,000 crore annually.
 - » Conversion of agricultural waste into a valuable resource, supporting farmers' income and rural employment.
- This initiative is a significant step toward the goals of Viksit Bharat 2047, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and green infrastructure, promoting sustainable, indigenous, and eco-friendly road construction.

Approval of 22 Additional Projects under the ECMS

- Under the Electronic Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has approved 22 additional projects. These approvals have been granted under the third tranche of the scheme, which aims to boost domestic electronics manufacturing and reduce import dependence.
- The 22 projects are expected to attract investments of around Rs.41,863 crore and generate an estimated production value of Rs.2,58,152 crore. They are also projected to create approximately

33,791 direct jobs, with many more indirect employment opportunities.

- These projects span 11 key product categories, including printed circuit boards (PCBs), capacitors, connectors, enclosures, lithium-ion cells, camera and display modules, as well as supply-chain products such as aluminium extrusions and anode materials.
- Manufacturing units will be set up across multiple states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, promoting balanced regional development.
- Launched in April 2025, ECMS is a PLI-type scheme aimed at enhancing local value addition, attracting investment, and making India self-reliant and globally competitive in sectors such as mobile manufacturing, telecom, automotive, and IT hardware.

Historic Growth in India's Non-Fossil Energy Capacity

- India has achieved a significant milestone in its energy transition by increasing its installed non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity to 266.78 GW in 2025. This progress was highlighted by Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi. The capacity marks a 22.6% increase compared to 2024, reflecting the rapid pace of India's clean energy transition.
- During 2025, more than 49 GW of new non-fossil capacity was added, with solar energy playing the most prominent role. Solar power capacity rose from 97.86 GW to 135.81 GW, registering an annual growth of 38.8%. Wind energy capacity also increased from 48.16 GW to 54.51 GW.
- This progress is the result of a consistent policy framework, long-term planning, private sector investment, and a supportive regulatory environment. Expansion of non-fossil energy not only strengthens energy security but also reinforces India's commitment to addressing climate change. The achievement provides a strong foundation for India's national target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030 and positions the country firmly on the path of global clean energy leadership.

Indian Hockey Player Davinder Singh Garcha Passes Away

- Olympic gold medal-winner Indian hockey player Davinder Singh Garcha passed away on 10 January at the age of 73 at his residence in Jalandhar, Punjab. He was a key member of India's gold medal-winning men's hockey team at the 1980 Moscow Olympics. This remains India's eighth and last Olympic gold medal in men's hockey.
- Born on 7 December 1952, Davinder Singh Garcha made his international hockey debut in 1979. At the 1980 Olympics, he scored eight goals in six matches, playing a decisive role in India's gold medal triumph. He represented India in over 30 international matches, scoring a total of 19 goals.
- Beyond the hockey field, his life was equally inspiring. He was an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer and rose to the rank of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) in the Punjab Police.
- In recognition of his sporting achievements and contributions, he was awarded the Dhyan Chand Award in 2021. The passing of Davinder Singh Garcha is regarded as an irreparable loss to both Indian hockey and public service.

Two New Services Launched by India Post

- India Post has recently launched two new premium services, Speed Post 24 and Speed Post

48. The official launch took place on 11 January 2026 in Pichhore, Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh, by Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia.

- » **Speed Post 24:** This service ensures guaranteed delivery of mail and parcels within 24 hours of booking on major urban routes.
- » **Speed Post 48:** This service promises time-bound delivery within 48 hours on other domestic routes.
- In the initial phase, these services will cover more than 1,000 PIN codes, primarily including metro cities and major urban corridors.
- The objective of these services is to transform India Post from a “cost centre” into a “profit centre,” modernise the postal network, compete with private courier companies, and provide a reliable option for e-commerce logistics. Customers will benefit from real-time end-to-end tracking and SMS alerts. This initiative aligns with the government’s “Design in India” and Digital India missions, ensuring uniform service standards across rural and urban areas.

National IED Data Management System (NIDMS)

- On 9 January 2026, Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the National IED Data Management System (NIDMS), describing it as a “next-generation security shield against terrorism.” The system has been developed by the National Bomb Data Centre (NBDC) of the National Security Guard (NSG). It contains data on all IED (Improvised Explosive Device) blasts and incidents since 1999.
- The system uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning to identify patterns, modus operandi, and “signature linkages” across incidents. It provides single-click access to investigative agencies such as the NIA, ATS, State Police, and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).
- NIDMS modernises the country’s security architecture by providing evidence-based support in the investigation of terrorist incidents. Under the “One Nation, One Data Repository” framework, it integrates data from different departments at a single platform and enables real-time information sharing among central and state agencies.
- The system also analyses explosion patterns and the types of explosives used to help prevent future incidents. It is integrated with the Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS-2), which functions on the principle of “one data–one entry.”

Expansion of India–Fiji Agricultural Cooperation

- India and Fiji have agreed to extend their existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on agricultural cooperation for another five years. The decision was taken during bilateral talks in New Delhi between India’s Minister of Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Fiji’s Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Tomasi Tunabuna.
- To make the cooperation more effective, both countries also decided to constitute a Joint Working Group in the agriculture sector. Agriculture and food security were identified as priority areas of collaboration, especially in the context of climate change and global supply chain disruptions.
- Key areas of discussion included small-scale agricultural machinery, digital agriculture solutions, agricultural research, student exchange programmes, and specialised training modules. This cooperation will allow island nations like Fiji to benefit from India’s experience, while providing India an opportunity to strengthen its diplomatic and developmental presence

in the Pacific region.

- India–Fiji relations date back to 1879, when Indian labourers first arrived in Fiji. India appointed a commissioner there in 1948, and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Fiji in 1981. This agreement represents an important step in linking the historical ties between the two countries with contemporary development needs.

Uttarakhand Police Ranks First in ICJS 2.0

- The Uttarakhand Police has achieved a significant milestone in the field of digital policing by securing first place in the national ranking of ICJS (Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System) 2.0. The ranking is based on the monthly CCTNS/ICJS Progress Dashboard Report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).
- Uttarakhand topped the ranking with a score of 93.46, while Haryana and Assam secured the second and third positions respectively.
- On this occasion, Inspector General of Police Sunil Kumar Meena highlighted two major achievements: first, national leadership in ICJS 2.0, and second, the exemplary performance of the Uttarakhand State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) during the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2025.
- The objective of ICJS 2.0 is to integrate police, courts, prosecution, prisons, forensics, and fingerprint databases on a shared digital platform by 2026. Uttarakhand has already integrated most of the modules well ahead of the national timeline.
- During the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2025, a 112-member Uttarakhand SDRF team was deployed at the request of the Uttar Pradesh government. For their services, the team was awarded medals and commendation certificates. This achievement establishes Uttarakhand as a leading state in disaster management and criminal justice reforms.

Ecologist and Environmentalist Madhav Gadgil Passes Away

- Renowned ecologist Madhav Gadgil passed away at the age of 82 after a brief illness at his residence in Pune. He was internationally acclaimed for his pioneering work on the ecology and conservation of the Western Ghats.
- Madhav Gadgil was honoured with the United Nations’ highest environmental award, Champions of the Earth, in 2024. He was also a recipient of the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award, Padma Shri (1981), and Padma Bhushan (2006).
- His landmark Gadgil Report recommended strict regulation of developmental activities in ecologically sensitive areas of the Western Ghats. The report proposed measures such as restrictions on mining, construction of new roads, and construction on steep slopes.
- Gadgil repeatedly warned that unchecked development and mining activities were increasing disaster risks in fragile ecosystems.
- He was a strong advocate of people-centric conservation, community participation, and respect for traditional knowledge systems. His passing is considered an irreparable loss to India’s environmental discourse.

Indian Army Declares 2026 as the ‘Year of Networking and Data-Centricity’

- In a significant step toward strengthening future war preparedness, the Indian Army has

declared 2026 as the “Year of Networking and Data-Centricity.” This announcement was highlighted in the New Year message issued by the Chief of Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi.

- The primary objective of this initiative is to ensure seamless connectivity among various arms of the Army, develop real-time data-driven decision-making capabilities, and enhance overall combat effectiveness. In modern warfare, information, data, and network-based systems play a decisive role, making this a future-oriented move.
- The Army has described itself as an institution undergoing a decade of transformation, with jointness, self-reliance, and innovation as its key pillars. Indigenous technologies, digital systems, and continuous upgrades have been identified as the foundation for strengthening military capabilities.
- This declaration follows the designation of 2024–25 as the “Year of Technology Absorption,” reflecting a phased approach to military modernisation. The initiative aligns with broader defence reforms, digital integration, and the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Former World Billiards Champion Manoj Kothari Passes Away

- The passing of former world billiards champion Manoj Kothari has caused an irreparable loss to Indian sports. He died of a heart attack on 5 January at the age of 67 at a hospital in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.
- Manoj Kothari was one of the leading players of the golden era of Indian billiards. He brought international recognition to India by winning the World Billiards Championship title in 1990. In addition, he won the state billiards championship title 16 times during his career.
- In recognition of his sporting achievements, he was awarded the Dhyan Chand Award in 2005, a prestigious national honour given for lifetime contribution to sports. More recently, in 2025, he was also honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Billiards and Snooker Federation of India.
- Beyond his achievements, Manoj Kothari played an important role in inspiring future generations of players. His contribution to Indian billiards will be remembered with great respect.

NHAI Creates Guinness World Records

- Marking a historic achievement in India’s infrastructure sector, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has created two Guinness World Records during the construction of the Bengaluru–Kadappa–Vijayawada Expressway. The achievement was announced by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.
- These records were set on the Bengaluru–Kadappa–Vijayawada Economic Corridor (NH-544G) by Rajpath Infracon Private Limited. The first record is for laying nearly 29 lane-kilometres of bituminous concrete within 24 hours, while the second record is for laying more than 10,000 metric tonnes of bituminous concrete within the same time period.
- The 343-kilometre-long economic corridor will significantly strengthen inter-state connectivity between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- The project is expected to boost trade, tourism, and regional economic development by enabling faster, safer, and seamless transportation.
- This achievement highlights India’s growing construction capacity, project management efficiency, and commitment to achieving global benchmarks in the infrastructure sector.

UIDAI Launches New Mascot 'Uday' for Aadhaar

- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has launched a new mascot named 'Uday' with the objective of making Aadhaar services more people-friendly and accessible. According to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the mascot will help convey information related to Aadhaar in a simple and effective manner.
- The purpose of 'Uday' is to make processes related to Aadhaar services—such as updates, authentication, and offline verification—easier for ordinary citizens to understand. It is expected to promote digital inclusion and enhance citizen participation.
- Last year, UIDAI organised a nationwide mascot design competition on the MyGov platform. Arun Gokul from Thrissur, Kerala, won the first prize in the design category.
- This initiative is an important step toward making digital governance more participatory, simple, and effective.



Special Session on

HOW TO DECODE STATIC & DYNAMIC CURRENT AFFAIRS

by

Devashish Sir



14th FEB 2026



12:30 PM

**"Decode Current.
Master Concepts.
Crack UPSC 2026"**



7570009003

MCQs Based on Current Affairs

1. With reference to the Pralay missile, consider the following statements:

1. It is an indigenously developed quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile.
2. It uses liquid propellant to achieve long-range precision strikes.
3. Its trajectory makes interception by enemy air-defence systems difficult.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 2 only
C: 1 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

2. With reference to the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), consider the following statements:

1. It is the highest decision-making body in the Ministry of Defence for capital acquisition of defence equipment.
2. It is chaired by the Chief of Defence Staff.
3. It was established to reduce delays and improve efficiency in defence procurement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1 and 3 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

3. Consider the following statements regarding India–Australia bilateral trade:

1. India's exports to Australia reached approximately USD 8.58 billion in 2024–25.
2. Total bilateral merchandise trade stood at about USD 24.1 billion in the same period.
3. India recorded a trade deficit with Australia in 2024–25.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1 and 3 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

4. With reference to India's gig and platform economy, consider the following statements:

1. Gig workers are engaged in work outside a traditional employer–employee relationship.
2. Platform workers necessarily work for a single digital platform at a time.
3. Algorithmic management plays a significant role in determining work allocation and incentives.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1 and 3 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

5. Consider the following statements regarding the Yemen conflict:

1. The Yemeni civil war began after Iran-backed Houthi rebels overthrew the internationally recognised government in 2014.
2. Saudi Arabia led a military coalition in 2015 to counter Houthi influence in Yemen.
3. The conflict has remained a purely internal civil war without regional involvement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1 and 3 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

6. With reference to the Export Promotion Mission (EPM), consider the following statements:

1. It aims to replace multiple fragmented export promotion schemes with a unified, outcome-based mechanism.
2. It focuses exclusively on merchandise exports and excludes services.
3. It is designed as a digitally driven system to address structural bottlenecks in exports.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1 and 3 only

- C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

7. With reference to cheating and financial fraud in India in 2025, consider the following statements:

1. The total monetary loss due to cheating and financial fraud exceeded Rs.19,000 crore.
2. More than 20 lakh complaints were registered on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.
3. Fraudulent investment schemes accounted for more than half of the total monetary losses.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

8. With reference to the Indian Coast Guard Ship Samudra Pratap, consider the following statements:

1. It is India's first indigenously designed Pollution Control Vessel (PCV).
2. It was commissioned in Kochi in January 2026.
3. It has an indigenous content of more than 60 percent.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 1 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

9. Rice cultivation in India is primarily associated with which of the following agro-climatic requirements?

1. Temperature above 25°C
2. Rainfall between 100–200 cm
3. Low humidity and dry climate
4. Level or gently sloping floodplains

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only

- B: 1,3 and 4 only
 C: 1, 2 and 4 only
 D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

10. Consider the following statements regarding Operation Absolute Resolve conducted by the U.S. in Venezuela:

1. The operation involved coordinated air and ground strikes across northern Venezuela.
2. It resulted in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife.
3. The operation was primarily aimed at regime change to install Juan Guaidó as president. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

11. With reference to Section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), consider the following statements:

1. Bail shall not be granted if the court finds that the accusations against the accused are prima facie true.
2. Prolonged incarceration alone is a sufficient ground for granting bail under UAPA.
3. The provision creates a stricter standard for bail compared to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

12. Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, which of the following offences are specifically addressed?

1. Misinformation
2. Cyberstalking
3. Defamation in digital space

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only

- B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

13. The India–EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) is significant because it:

1. Includes a binding commitment of \$100 billion in foreign direct investment into India.
2. Targets the creation of 1 million jobs in India over a 15-year period.
3. Provides India preferential access to the European Union market.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

14. With reference to grasslands, consider the following statements:

1. Grasslands are ecosystems dominated by grasses and typically occur in transitional rainfall zones between forests and deserts.
2. Grasslands cover less than 10% of the Earth's land surface.
3. Grasslands play a significant role in carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

15. With reference to the Election Commission of India (ECI), consider the following statements:

1. The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body established under Part XV of the Constitution.
2. The ECI was established in 1950, prior to the first general elections.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 only

- B: 2 only
 C: Both 1 and 2
 D: None

16. With reference to ISRO, consider the following statements:

1. ISRO was established in 1969 under the leadership of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai.
2. ISRO functions under the Ministry of Science & Technology.
3. The Department of Space reports directly to the Prime Minister.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

17. With reference to the International Solar Alliance (ISA), consider the following statements:

1. It was launched jointly by India and France during COP21 in Paris.
2. It is the first treaty-based intergovernmental organisation to be headquartered in India.
3. It functions as a non-binding voluntary coalition without a legal framework.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

18. The “Towards 1000” strategy of the International Solar Alliance aims to achieve which of the following by 2030?

1. Installation of 1,000 GW of global solar capacity
2. Mobilisation of USD 1,000 billion in solar investments
3. Providing clean energy access to 1,000 million people
4. Annual mitigation of 1,000 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions

Select the correct answer using the code below:

19. With reference to the membership of the International Solar Alliance, consider the following statements:

1. Membership was originally limited to countries located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.
2. A 2020 amendment expanded ISA membership eligibility to all UN member states.
3. ISA currently has observer status at the United Nations General Assembly.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

20. With reference to PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation), consider the following statements:

1. PRAGATI was launched in 2015 as a real-time project monitoring platform.
2. It is an ICT-enabled platform integrating the Prime Minister's Office, Central Ministries, and State Governments.
3. It functions primarily as a grievance redress mechanism for individual citizens.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

21. With reference to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Indian context, consider the following statements:

1. Nominal GDP is adjusted for inflation, whereas Real GDP is evaluated at current market prices.
2. GDP in India is officially released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
3. The three approaches to calculating GDP are

the expenditure method, income method, and production (value-added) method.

4. GDP at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) allows for international comparison by adjusting for differences in cost of living between countries.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1,3 and 4 only
 C: 2 ,3 and 4 only
 D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

22. With reference to India's fish production growth over the last decade, consider the following statements:

1. India's total fish production increased by more than 100% between 2013–14 and 2024–25.
2. Inland fisheries and aquaculture have contributed more to this growth than marine capture fisheries.
3. India became the world's largest fish producer during this period.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

23. With reference to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, consider the following statements:

1. The POCSO Act criminalises all sexual activity involving persons below 18 years of age, irrespective of consent.
2. The Act allows the judiciary to legally exempt consensual adolescent sexual activity between peers.
3. The Act prescribes child-friendly procedures for reporting and investigation of sexual offences.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only

- C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

24. Consider the following statements about the regulatory framework for cryptocurrency in India:

1. Cryptocurrencies are recognized as legal tender in India.
2. Cryptocurrency exchanges are treated as reporting entities under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
3. Crypto transactions in India are taxed at 30% with a 1% TDS on transfers.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

25. Why has Greenland acquired renewed geopolitical importance in recent years?

1. Climate change has increased access to its mineral resources and potential shipping routes.
2. It is central to U.S. efforts to reduce dependence on Chinese rare earth supply chains.
3. It lies along critical air and sea routes connecting North America and Europe.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

26. With reference to the “Pax Silica” initiative, consider the following statements:

1. Pax Silica is a U.S.-led initiative aimed at building secure and resilient supply chains for critical technologies.
2. The initiative focuses exclusively on semiconductor manufacturing.
3. The term “Silica” in Pax Silica refers to silicon as a foundational material for modern technologies.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

27. India’s participation in Pax Silica is significant primarily because it:

1. Enhances India’s semiconductor and AI ecosystem
2. Deepens strategic cooperation with the U.S. and allied partners
3. Complements India’s policy of strategic autonomy

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

28. With reference to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), consider the following statements:

1. IRENA was established in 2009, and its statute entered into force in 2010.
2. IRENA is headquartered in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
3. India is an observer state of IRENA.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

29. With reference to Somaliland, consider the following statements:

1. Somaliland has been internationally recognized by the United Nations as an independent state.
2. Somaliland controls a coastline along the Gulf of Aden near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.
3. It has its own currency, military, and elected government.

Which of the statements given above is/are

correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

30. Berbera Port, frequently mentioned in discussions on Somaliland's strategic value, is important because:

1. It has been developed under a long-term concession by the UAE.
2. It can host large naval vessels and military aircraft.
3. It serves as a logistical hub for monitoring Red Sea security.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

31. With reference to the recent visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to India, consider the following statements:

1. The visit coincided with 25 years of the India–Germany Strategic Partnership.
2. Germany is India's largest trading partner within the European Union.
3. The visit took place after the conclusion of the India–EU Free Trade Agreement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

32. Which of the following countries became full members of BRICS in 2024?

1. Egypt
2. Ethiopia
3. Iran
4. United Arab Emirates

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only

- B: 1,3 and 4 only
- C: 1, 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

33. With reference to the origin of the World Bank, consider the following statements:

1. The World Bank emerged from the Bretton Woods Conference held in 1944.
 2. Its legal foundation lies in the Articles of Agreement of the International Development Association (IDA).
 3. The World Bank initially focused on reconstruction in Europe after World War II.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

34. Which of the following vulture species found in India are classified as Critically Endangered?

1. White-rumped Vulture
2. Slender-billed Vulture
3. Egyptian Vulture
4. Red-headed Vulture

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1,2 and 4 only
- C: 1, 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

35. With reference to the Startup India Initiative, consider the following statements:

1. It was launched in 2016 under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
 2. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is the nodal department.
 3. As of December 2025, more than 2 lakh startups have been recognised under it.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, and 3

36. With reference to India's startup ecosystem, consider the following statements:

1. India is the third-largest startup ecosystem globally as of early 2026.
2. India ranks ahead of both the United States and China in the number of unicorns.
3. A unicorn is defined as a privately held startup valued at \$1 billion or more.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

37. With reference to the Stockholm Declaration (2020), consider the following statements:

1. It set a new global target to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030.
2. It marked the launch of the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021–2030).
3. It replaced the Sustainable Development Goals related to road safety.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

38. Which of the following statements about MSMEs in India is/are correct?

1. MSMEs contribute around 30% to India's GDP.
2. MSMEs account for about 45% of India's exports.
3. More than half of MSME employment is rural-based.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

39. With reference to the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, consider the following statements:

1. The Act prohibits only games of chance involving monetary stakes.
2. The Act bans advertisements related to real money gaming platforms.
3. The Act empowers authorities to block financial transactions linked to illegal gaming platforms.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 2 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

40. With reference to the Tirukkural, consider the following statements:

1. It consists of 1,330 couplets written in classical Tamil.
2. It deals exclusively with spiritual and religious themes.
3. It addresses governance, ethics, economy, and human relationships.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
 B: 1 and 3 only
 C: 2 and 3 only
 D: 1, 2, and 3

41. With reference to the SPREE Scheme (Scheme for Promotion of Registration of Employers and Employees), 2025, consider the following statements:

1. It is a time-bound, one-time initiative of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation to expand social security coverage.
2. Registration under the scheme is mandatory for all establishments employing 10 or more workers across India.
3. The scheme has been extended beyond December 2025 and remains operational till January 31, 2026.

Which of the statements given above are

correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

42. With reference to India's first Open Sea Marine Fish Farming Project, consider the following statements:

1. The project has been launched in the Arabian Sea near the Gujarat coast.
2. It is India's first initiative involving cage-based marine fish farming in open sea conditions.
3. The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) has designed cages capable of operating under offshore oceanic conditions. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

43. Consider the following statements regarding the Blue Economy in India:

1. India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers more than 2 million sq. km.
2. Nearly 95% of India's merchandise trade by volume is carried through maritime routes.
3. The marine sector contributes more than 10% to India's GDP. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

44. Consider the following statements regarding the High Seas Treaty:

1. It applies to ocean areas beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast.
2. Nearly two-thirds of the world's oceans fall under its jurisdiction. Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 only
- B: 2 only
- C: Both 1 and 2
- D: None

45. The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty is significant because:

1. It creates the first legally binding biodiversity framework for international waters.
2. It strengthens the role of oceans in climate change mitigation.
3. It replaces the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

46. With reference to India-UAE trade relations, consider the following statements:

1. UAE is India's third largest trading partner.
2. UAE is India's second largest export destination.
3. Bilateral trade has crossed US \$100 billion in recent years.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

47. With reference to the Governor's address to the State Legislature, consider the following statements:

1. Article 176 of the Constitution mandates that the Governor shall address the State Legislature at the commencement of the first session of each year.
2. The Governor has constitutional discretion to modify or omit portions of the address prepared by the Council of Ministers.
3. The address reflects the policy and legislative agenda of the elected State Government. Which of the statements given above is/are

correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

48. Which of the following provisions reflects the unitary bias in the Indian federal system?

1. Residuary powers vested in the Union
2. Power of Parliament to override State laws on Concurrent List subjects
3. Provision for President's Rule under Article 356

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

49. With reference to the discretionary powers of the Governor, consider the following:

1. Reserving a bill for the consideration of the President
2. Appointing the Chief Minister when no party has a clear majority

3. Promulgating ordinances under Article 213
Which of the above involve the discretionary powers of the Governor?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 2 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

50. With reference to "digital arrest" scams, consider the following statements:

1. Digital arrest involves physical detention by law enforcement authorities using electronic warrants.
2. Fraudsters impersonate investigative agencies to extort money through fear and coercion.
3. Video calls and deepfake technologies are commonly used in such scams.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A: 1 and 2 only
- B: 1 and 3 only
- C: 2 and 3 only
- D: 1, 2, and 3

ANSWER

| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | C |
| 2 | B |
| 3 | D |
| 4 | B |
| 5 | A |
| 6 | B |
| 7 | D |
| 8 | C |
| 9 | C |
| 10 | A |

| | |
|----|---|
| 11 | B |
| 12 | D |
| 13 | A |
| 14 | B |
| 15 | C |
| 16 | B |
| 17 | A |
| 18 | D |
| 19 | D |
| 20 | A |

| | |
|----|---|
| 21 | C |
| 22 | A |
| 23 | B |
| 24 | C |
| 25 | D |
| 26 | B |
| 27 | D |
| 28 | A |
| 29 | C |
| 30 | D |

| | |
|----|---|
| 31 | A |
| 32 | D |
| 33 | B |
| 34 | B |
| 35 | D |
| 36 | B |
| 37 | A |
| 38 | D |
| 39 | C |
| 40 | B |

| | |
|----|---|
| 41 | B |
| 42 | C |
| 43 | A |
| 44 | C |
| 45 | A |
| 46 | D |
| 47 | B |
| 48 | D |
| 49 | A |
| 50 | C |



NEW BATCH UPPCS



9th FEB 2026

23rd FEB 2026

**Morning Batch: 09:00 AM
Evening Batch: 06:00 PM**

**Morning Batch: 09:00 AM
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