In This Edition...

India AI Impact Summit 2026
From Self-Reliant AI to Digital Sovereignty

SPECIAL FEATURES | Power Packed News | Prelims based MCQs | Editorial Article

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Schedule

Date	Paper	Time
07.03.2026	HINDI ESSAY	09:00AM-12:00 PM 01:00PM-04:00 PM
08.03.2026	GS I GS II	09:00AM-12:00 PM 01:00PM-04:00 PM
09.03.2026	GS III GS IV	09:00AM-12:00 PM 01:00PM-04:00 PM
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Starting
07 MAR 2026

Qualify

Write

Think

Registration Open

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

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PERFECT 7

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In This Issue

Menstrual Health as a Fundamental Right under Article 21: Dignity, Equality and Constitutional Justice

Context:

The Supreme Court of India recently delivered a landmark judgment in Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Union of India & Others, declaring menstrual health and hygiene an integral part of the right to life, dignity, and bodily autonomy under Article 21 of the Constitution. This decision is not merely the recognition of a public health concern; rather, it significantly advances the constitutional jurisprudence of gender equality and social justice in India.

By doing so, the Court has elevated menstrual health from the domain of welfare schemes and policy initiatives to an enforceable fundamental right. This shift is not symbolic but structural, as the responsibility of the State now extends beyond policy formulation to constitutional accountability.

Constitutional Basis:

- The interpretation of "life" under Article 21 has evolved over time. The Court has consistently expanded it beyond mere physical existence to include the right to live with dignity. In this continuum, linking menstrual health with dignity and bodily autonomy affirms that ignoring biological realities renders the concept of equality hollow.

- The Court clarified that the absence of safe toilets, clean water, menstrual hygiene products, and proper disposal systems during menstruation amounts to a violation of a girl's dignity, privacy, and equal opportunity. Therefore, the judgment must be read in conjunction with Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Sex).

- This reasoning builds upon earlier constitutional precedents such as Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration and K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, where bodily autonomy and privacy were recognized as central to fundamental freedoms. Menstrual health must be understood as a continuation of these constitutional principles.

Structural Inequality:

- A significant aspect of the judgment is the Court's recognition that menstrual challenges are not merely personal inconveniences or social taboos but manifestations of structural rights deprivation.

- Many girls studying in rural and government schools are compelled to miss classes during menstruation due to the absence of separate toilets, safe water, access to sanitary products, and proper waste disposal systems.

- Thus, the lack of menstrual infrastructure is not merely a health issue; it directly

affects education, economic opportunity, and the constitutional promise of equal citizenship. By acknowledging this reality, the Court linked menstrual health to the right to education and dignity.

Education, Equality and Substantive Equality:

- The classical notion of equality rests on the principle of "treating equals equally." However, the Court observed that ignoring biological and social differences can deepen real inequality.
- By connecting menstrual health to the right to education, the Court strengthened the doctrine of substantive equality. This implies that the State must account for conditions that uniquely affect women and girls.
- At the international level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Special Rapporteurs on water and sanitation have emphasized that menstrual hygiene is essential for gender equality and the right to education. In this respect, the Indian Supreme Court's ruling aligns with global human rights discourse.

Court Directions:

- The Court went beyond mere declaration and issued clear directives to States and Union Territories:
  - » Ensure functional and gender-segregated toilets in all schools.
  - » Provide safe water, hygienic disposal systems, and access to menstrual hygiene products.
  - » Hold government schools accountable

through State responsibility and permit cancellation of recognition of non-compliant private schools.

- These directions clearly demonstrate that the Court has attempted to mandate implementation. This decision goes beyond policy advice and calls for a responsibility-based administrative structure.

Menstrual Health: From Welfare Policy to Fundamental Right
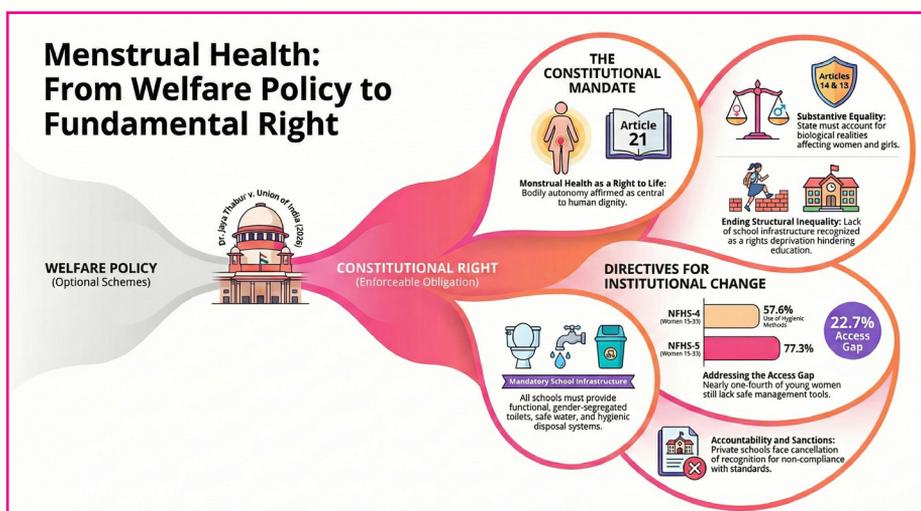
Challenges:

- India's constitutional experience demonstrates that judicial recognition of rights alone is insufficient; effective implementation is crucial.
- According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), the percentage of women aged 15–24 using hygienic methods during menstruation increased from 57.6% in NFHS-4 to 77.3% in NFHS-5. While this progress is commendable, nearly one-fourth of young women still lack access to safe menstrual management.
- Similarly, under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation issued guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management. However, implementation has often been inconsistent and project-based rather than sustained.
- After menstrual health is recognised as a fundamental right, the biggest challenge is its effective implementation. The main challenges are as follows:

» **Lack of infrastructure:** Many schools have toilets but they are not functional. Lack of water, soap, safe disposal facilities, and privacy leads to girls missing school during menstruation.

» **Lack of financial commitment:** Menstrual hygiene programs are often project-based and lack consistent budgeting, monitoring, and social audits. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), the use of hygienic methods has increased to 77.3%, yet nearly one-quarter of young women remain deprived, reflecting structural inequalities.

» **Social taboos:** The stigma and silence surrounding menstruation impact girls' self-confidence, education, and social participation.

» **Environmental challenges:** Waste management is also a significant issue, as is the lack of safe and environmentally friendly disposal mechanisms.

Conclusion:

Menstruation has long been treated as a private matter. This judgment transforms it into a matter of public rights and institutional responsibility. It forms part of the broader judicial trend expanding Article 21 to include mental health, reproductive autonomy, disability access, and environmental health within the framework of dignified life. By constitutionally protecting menstrual health, the Court addresses a historically neglected dimension of gender inequality rooted not in explicit legal discrimination but in institutional neglect.

The Central and State governments must treat menstrual health not as ancillary welfare expenditure but as essential public health investment. Without sustained financial commitment, community awareness, and school-level monitoring, the right will remain incomplete. Ultimately, this decision strengthens the democratic promise of equal citizenship. If effectively implemented, it will mark not merely progress in menstrual health policy but a decisive step toward dignity, equality, and constitutional morality.

Short Issues

Discovery of Tamil-Brahmi Inscriptions in Egypt

Context:

Recently, around 30 Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions have been identified at the famous archaeological site, the Valley of the Kings, in Theban Necropolis along the Nile in Egypt. These inscriptions are believed to date from the 1st to 3rd century CE (Roman period). This discovery is a significant achievement, providing evidence of trade and cultural connections between ancient South India and Egypt.

About Tamil-Brahmi Script:

▪ The Brahmi script is India's earliest writing system, developed after the Indus script. It is the foundation of all modern Indian scripts as well as several scripts in Southeast and East Asia. Most Brahmi inscriptions are in Prakrit. The earliest known inscriptions are Ashokan edicts (268–232 BCE), successfully deciphered by James Prinsep in 1838.

▪ Brahmi remnants have been found in the Ganga plains, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Sri Lanka, mainly on pottery. Its descendant scripts include Devanagari, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada.

Key Points of the Discovery:

- Around 30 Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions were found at royal burial sites in Egypt.
- Some inscriptions are in Sanskrit and Prakrit.
- Tamil names such as Cēkaikōttan, Kōpan, Sātan appear in the inscriptions.
- Some inscriptions include phrases like "came and saw", indicating they were written by visitors.
- Repetition of certain names suggests that the Indian presence was organized and sustained, not accidental.

Historical and Global Significance:

- **Beyond Coastal Trade:** Previously, Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions were mostly found at Red Sea ports like Berenike. Their presence along the Nile shows that Indian traders ventured into Egypt's interior, not just coastal areas.
- **Indo-Roman Trade Network:** By the 1st–2nd century CE, extensive maritime trade existed between South India and the Roman Empire. India exported black pepper, spices, pearls, ivory, and fine textiles, while importing gold coins, wine, and luxury goods from Rome.
- **Evidence of Cultural Contact:** The inscriptions indicate that Indian traders were familiar with local culture. Inscribing their names at royal tombs shows a sense of engagement with the local social environment.
- **Early Globalization:** This discovery reinforces that the Indian Ocean trade network in antiquity was a major medium of global connectivity, with South India as a powerful and influential hub.

Conclusion:

The discovery of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions in Egypt's Valley of the Kings is strong evidence of deep, multidimensional connections between ancient India and the Mediterranean world. It highlights the extent of Indo-Roman trade, the importance of South India in ancient global commerce and cultural exchange, and contributes to understanding the historical dimensions of early globalization, maritime power, and cultural diplomacy.

Advancing India's Mental Healthcare

Context:

Recently, the Union Budget 2026–2027 announced the setting up of a second National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS-2) in northern India. NIMHANS-2 will be modeled on the existing NIMHANS in Bengaluru, focusing on high-quality treatment, training, and research in neurosciences and mental healthcare.

About Mental Health:

- Mental health refers to a state of well-being in which individuals can cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, learn effectively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
- Poor mental health can manifest in

disorders such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and other severe conditions, affecting physical health, relationships, and productivity.

▪ In India, rising stress levels, rapid urbanisation, and post-pandemic challenges have significantly increased demand for mental healthcare. Timely access to support and treatment prevents crises, improves quality of life, and strengthens social stability and economic productivity.

Union Budget 2026–2027 Initiatives:

▪ **NIMHANS Expansion**
  » Establishment of NIMHANS-2 in northern India.
  » Modeled on NIMHANS, Bengaluru, focusing on high-quality treatment, research, and training.
  » Aims to correct regional imbalances and expand tertiary mental healthcare access.

▪ **Upgradation of Existing Institutes**
  » The Central Institute of Psychiatry (CIP), Ranchi and the Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur will be upgraded as Regional Apex Institutions.
  » These upgrades will enhance specialised care, academic excellence, research capacity, and trauma support services in eastern and northeastern India.

▪ **Establishment of Emergency and Trauma Care Centres**
  » Emergency and Trauma Care Centres will be set up in district hospitals nationwide.
  » They will provide affordable, 24×7 emergency medical and mental health services.
  » The initiative strengthens crisis response mechanisms for accident victims, survivors of violence, and individuals facing acute psychological distress.
  » Collectively, these measures aim to reduce disparities, improve affordability, and strengthen mental healthcare

access for vulnerable populations.
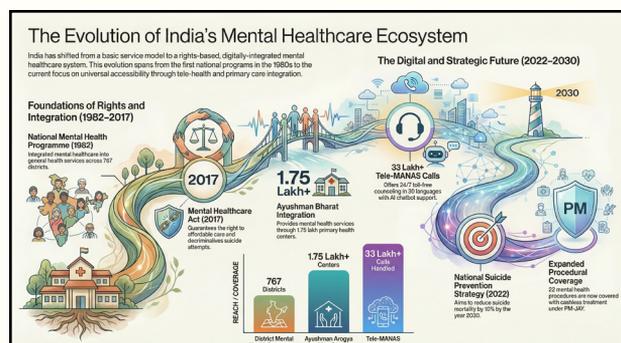
India's Mental Health Journey:

India has steadily built its mental healthcare ecosystem through legislative, institutional, and digital reforms.

▪ **National Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**
  » Replaced the Mental Health Act, 1987.
  » Guarantees the right to affordable and quality mental healthcare.
  » Protects dignity and rights in line with the UNCRPD.
  » Decriminalises suicide attempts, emphasising rehabilitation.

▪ **National Health Policy, 2017**
  » Recognises mental health as a national priority.
  » Promotes specialist training and workforce expansion.
  » Strengthens primary and community-based mental healthcare.

▪ **Integration through Ayushman Bharat**
  » Over 1.75 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs provide comprehensive primary healthcare, including mental health services.
  » Under PM-JAY, 22 mental health procedures are covered with cashless treatment.

▪ **NMHP and DMHP:**
  » Launched in 1982, the National Mental Health Programme integrates mental healthcare into general health services. The District Mental Health Programme, initiated in 1996, now covers 767 districts, providing outpatient care,

inpatient facilities, suicide prevention initiatives, and awareness campaigns with dedicated mental health teams.

- **National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022):**
  » Aims to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.
  » Promotes screening in schools and workplaces.
  » Establishes crisis helplines and targeted support for high-risk groups.
- **National Tele-Mental Health Programme (Tele-MANAS):**
  » Launched in 2022, Tele-MANAS provides 24×7 toll-free counselling in 20 languages. Over 33 lakh calls have been handled.
  » It includes a mobile app, AI chatbot "Asmi," and nationwide video consultation services, acting as the digital arm of the District Mental Health Programme.
- Together, these initiatives reinforce India's commitment to building an inclusive, accessible, and resilient mental healthcare system.

100 Years of Ol Chiki Script and Santhali Recognition

Context:

The President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, recently inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script in New Delhi, commemorating 100 years since its creation by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925. The celebrations reflect India's broader policy priority of safeguarding linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and knowledge systems in a multilingual nation.

Historical Background:

- Santhali, a major tribal language of India, historically relied on oral traditions such as folklore, songs, and storytelling. While these practices preserved cultural identity, the absence of a dedicated script limited formal education, literary growth, and official recognition.
- Pandit Raghunath Murmu created the Ol Chiki script in 1925 to provide Santhali with a scientific and phonetic writing system.
- His literary contributions, including High Serena (1936), along with other novels, poetry, and grammar books, transformed Santhali from an oral tradition into a vibrant written culture, thereby strengthening tribal pride and identity.

Govt Commemorates
100 Years of Ol Chiki Script
with Coin & Stamp Release

Structural and Linguistic Features:

- » **Letters:** 30, each representing a distinct vowel or consonant
- » **Phonetic Accuracy:** One symbol corresponds to one sound
- » **Cultural Specificity:** Captures unique Santhali phonetics, including glottal stops, unlike borrowed scripts such as Roman, Bengali, or Devanagari
- » **Impact:** Facilitates literacy, education, literature, and digital usage, including Unicode integration and keyboard compatibility
- The precision of Ol Chiki has enabled the standardisation of Santhali, thereby supporting teaching, publishing, and

intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Constitutional Recognition and Contemporary Relevance:

- Santhali was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 2003 through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment, with Ol Chiki as its official script.
- In December 2025, the Constitution of India was translated into Santhali using the Ol Chiki script, thereby expanding democratic access and enabling tribal communities to engage with governance and legal frameworks in their own language.
- The centenary celebrations also reflect India's emphasis on tribal empowerment, linguistic diversity, and cultural inclusion, aligning with broader initiatives such as Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

Conclusion:

The Ol Chiki centenary is not merely a celebration of a script but a recognition of tribal identity, cultural resilience, and linguistic justice. From its creation in 1925 to constitutional recognition and modern digital integration, Ol Chiki has enabled the Santhali language to thrive in education, literature, and public life. Its journey underscores the importance of preserving indigenous languages as integral to India's cultural pluralism, democratic participation, and socio-cultural heritage.

SAHI and BODH Initiatives to Boost Health AI Ecosystem

Context:

During the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi, Union Health and Family Welfare Minister J.P. Nadda launched two key digital health initiatives, SAHI (Secure AI for Health Initiative) and BODH (Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI). According to the Ministry, these initiatives mark a significant milestone in advancing the safe, ethical, and evidence-based deployment of AI in India's healthcare ecosystem.

Background:

- The National Health Policy, 2017 envisioned a comprehensive, interoperable, inclusive, and scalable digital health ecosystem.
- This vision was further strengthened by the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (2020), which established a robust digital public infrastructure for healthcare. SAHI and BODH build upon this foundation to create a trustworthy, transparent, and people-centric AI ecosystem.

About SAHI and BODH:

- SAHI is more than a technological initiative; it serves as a governance framework, policy compass, and national roadmap for the responsible use of AI in healthcare. It guides India in leveraging AI ethically, transparently, and accountably, ensuring that technological adoption aligns with the public interest.
- BODH, developed through collaboration between government and academia, provides a structured platform to benchmark, test, and validate AI solutions before large-scale deployment. This ensures that AI applications meet high standards of performance, reliability, and real-world readiness, thereby strengthening public trust in digital health technologies.

Key Applications of AI in Healthcare:

- AI is transforming healthcare by improving diagnostic accuracy, streamlining workflows, and enabling personalized treatment. Key applications include:
  » **Diagnostic Imaging & Radiology:** Deep learning algorithms analyze medical images to detect diseases such as cancer with high accuracy.
  » **Predictive Analytics & Risk Management:** AI predicts life-threatening conditions (such as sepsis), manages ICU capacity, and forecasts patient readmission risks.
  » **Drug Discovery & Development:** AI accelerates pharmaceutical research,

from target identification to molecular optimization and the advancement of personalized medicine.

» **Administrative Automation:** AI tools reduce clerical workload, enabling clinicians to focus more on patient care.

» **Virtual Assistants & Remote Monitoring:** AI-powered chatbots support telemedicine services and enable continuous patient monitoring.

» **Robotic Surgery:** AI-assisted systems enhance surgical precision and reduce procedural risks.

» **Fraud Detection:** AI identifies irregular patterns in insurance claims to curb fraudulent practices.

Conclusion:

AI in healthcare offers multiple benefits, including improved efficiency, faster and more accurate diagnosis and treatment, and enhanced access, particularly in remote and resource-limited areas. Early detection of diseases such as tuberculosis and cancer significantly improves patient outcomes, while administrative automation helps reduce clinician burnout. However, challenges remain in ensuring data privacy, robust validation mechanisms, and equitable access. Therefore, initiatives such as SAHI and BODH are crucial in upholding ethical, accountable, and inclusive AI deployment. These initiatives position India as a potential global leader in responsible health AI while expanding the reach and impact of digital healthcare.

Witch-Hunting in India: Causes, Laws and Human Rights Issues

Context:

On February 17, 2026, in Kalaiya village, West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand, a 32-year-old woman and her two-month-old baby were allegedly set on fire by a mob after being accused of practicing witchcraft. The police have arrested four individuals in connection with the case.

Background of Witch-Hunting:

▪ Witch-hunting remains prevalent in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Assam. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 2,500 women have been killed since 2000 on charges of practicing witchcraft.

▪ Despite legal prohibitions such as the Prevention of Witch (DAAIN) Practices Act, 2001 in Jharkhand and similar laws in other states, convictions in witch-hunting cases remain rare. This is due to underreporting, administrative apathy, fear of retaliation, and community complicity.

Underlying Causes:

▪ Several socio-cultural factors contribute to the persistence of witch-hunting:

» **Gender and patriarchy:** Women, especially widowed, elderly, or socially independent women are disproportionately targeted.

» **Caste and marginalization:** Women from lower castes or tribal communities face heightened vulnerability.

» **Superstition and illiteracy:** Misfortunes such as illness, death, or crop failure are often attributed to black magic.

» **Property disputes and personal rivalries:** Accusations are sometimes used as tools to seize land or settle personal enmities.

▪ Accused women frequently face physical assault, social ostracism, psychological trauma, and, in extreme cases, murder. Such violence is often sanctioned or ignored by local communities, reflecting deep-seated patriarchal and caste-based hierarchies.

Challenges in Redressal:

▪ **Underreporting:** Fear, stigma, and lack of trust in authorities discourage victims and families from reporting incidents.

▪ **Administrative apathy:** Local law enforcement agencies may lack adequate training or sensitivity to effectively address

such crimes.

▪ **Cultural legitimacy of superstition:** Traditional healers, often referred to as ojhas or self-styled spiritual practitioners, may reinforce harmful beliefs that legitimize accusations.

Human Rights and Constitutional Dimensions:

▪ Witch-hunting is not merely a social evil but a grave violation of fundamental rights:
  » **Article 21:** Right to life and personal liberty
  » **Article 14:** Equality before the law
  » **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on grounds including sex
▪ These acts also contravene the constitutional duty under Article 51A(h), which calls upon citizens to develop scientific temper, humanism, and a spirit of inquiry and reform.

Need for Comprehensive Solutions:

▪ Addressing witchcraft accusations requires a multi-pronged approach:
  » **Legal enforcement:** Strict implementation of anti-witch-hunting laws, fast-track trials and accountability for perpetrators.
  » **Education and awareness:** Community sensitization programs to dispel myths surrounding witchcraft and promote scientific temper.
  » **Healthcare access:** Strengthening rural healthcare infrastructure to reduce superstition linked to unexplained illnesses.
  » **Social protection:** Rehabilitation, counseling, and protection mechanisms for accused women and their families.
  » **Intersectional policies:** Recognizing the interplay of gender, caste, and economic vulnerability in policy formulation.
  » **Capacity building:** Sensitizing police and judicial authorities to respond proactively and effectively.

Conclusion:

The West Singhbhum witchcraft lynching underscores a grim reality: deep-seated superstition continues to fuel brutal violence in contemporary rural India. Beyond criminal investigation, long-term solutions require sustained social reform, legal vigilance, inclusive development, and community education to dismantle the structural roots of such practices and protect vulnerable populations.

Naneghat Caves

Context:

Recently, the Maharashtra Police booked a man for illegal construction near the Naneghat Caves in Junnar taluka of Pune district. The case was registered under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act following a complaint by officials of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Cave Architecture in India:

▪ Cave architecture flourished with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.
▪ Caves provided isolation for meditation, ascetic practices, and frugal living for the Buddhist, Jain and Ajivika sects.
▪ This period witnessed the development of spectacular rock-cut art and architecture, which are considered hallmarks of Indian cultural heritage.

Key Sites in Junnar Taluka:

▪ **Naneghat Caves:**
  » Dating back to the 1st century BCE, the caves contain Brahmi inscriptions detailing Satavahana rulers and early trade routes.
  » They served as a corridor between the Deccan Plateau and the western coast and were important for commerce and administration.
▪ **Shivneri Fort:**
  » It houses ancient fortifications and water management systems, reflecting

phases from the early historic to the medieval period.

» It is the birthplace of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire.

▪ **Lenyadri Caves:**

» Part of a Buddhist rock-cut complex, these caves are notable for their chaitya and vihara structures carved into the hillside.

Prominent Caves of Western India:

▪ **Ajanta Caves (Maharashtra):**

» A UNESCO World Heritage Site (1983), built over 2,000 years ago.

» It contains 29 chaityas and viharas with paintings such as Padmapāni Bodhisattva and the Mahājanaka Jātaka.

▪ **Ellora Caves (Maharashtra):**

» Houses Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monasteries and temples.

» Includes the Kailashnatha monolith, one of the largest monolithic temples in the world.

▪ **Elephanta Caves (Maharashtra):**

» 5th-century CE rock-cut temples dedicated to Lord Shiva.

» Notable for colossal sculptures located on Elephanta Island.

▪ **Varaha Cave Temple & Krishna Mandapam (Tamil Nadu):**

» 7th-century monuments showcasing Pallava architecture and bas-reliefs of

Vishnu and Krishna.

▪ **Bagh and Badami Caves (Madhya Pradesh & Karnataka):**

» The Bagh Caves (500–600 CE) depict simpler Ajanta-style structures.

» The Badami Caves feature Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Jaina shrines with sculptures of Vishnu's avatars and Hari-Hara.

Conclusion:

The Naneghat Caves are not merely an archaeological treasure of the Satavahana era but also a symbol of India's ancient trade networks, evolving scripts and numeration systems, and the interplay between religion and commerce. Their preservation is vital for understanding early Deccan history, economic linkages, and socio-cultural developments between the coast and the interior regions of ancient India.

Household Survey of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

Context:

Recently, the Centre has directed states to complete the first-of-its-kind household survey of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by April-end 2026. The survey aims to capture last-mile data on welfare scheme delivery, issue entitlement cards, and create a digital database for 12.35 lakh PVTG households through a dedicated app. The move also aligns with the potential inclusion of PVTGs in the upcoming national Census.

About PVTGs:

▪ PVTGs are a sub-category of Scheduled Tribes (STs) considered more vulnerable than other ST communities. Originally identified as "Primitive Tribal Groups" by the Dhebar Commission in 1960–61, they were renamed PVTGs in 2006.

▪ The criteria for PVTG classification include:

» declining or stagnant population,
» geographical isolation,
» pre-agrarian subsistence practices such as hunting and gathering,
» economic backwardness, and
» low literacy levels.

- Currently, 75 PVTGs exist across 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, including communities such as the Chenchu, Dongaria Khond, Bondo, Maria Gond, Jarawa, and Onge. These communities face marginalisation, limited access to basic services, low political representation, and high vulnerability to displacement.

Key Government Initiatives:

- **PM JANMAN Scheme:**
  » The Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), launched in November 2023 at Khunti, Jharkhand, targets all 75 PVTG communities with an outlay of Rs. 24,104 crore. Coordinated across nine ministries, it implements eleven key interventions, including rural roads, piped water supply, last-mile electrification, pucca housing, and mobile connectivity.
  » A nationwide Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaign was also conducted to ensure the saturation of government schemes in PVTG-majority areas.
- **Other Welfare Schemes:** Apart from PM JANMAN, several schemes support PVTGs:
  » The PVTG Development Plan focuses on education, healthcare, livelihoods, and the preservation of traditional knowledge.
  » The Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM) facilitates market linkages and the procurement of Minor Forest Produce at Minimum Support Prices.
- **Additional programmes include:**
  » Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana
  » Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP)
  » Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)
  » Eklavya Model Residential Schools
  » Forest Rights Act, 2006
  » SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
  » Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

Significance and Challenges:

- The survey and associated welfare initiatives represent a data-driven and targeted approach to tribal development. They address issues of marginalisation, poor access to services, and vulnerability to displacement, while promoting socio-economic inclusion.
- However, PVTGs continue to face challenges due to geographical isolation, limited literacy, and weak political representation, making effective implementation and monitoring crucial.

Conclusion:

The PVTG household survey and initiatives such as PM JANMAN highlight India's efforts to ensure inclusive development for the most marginalised tribal communities. Strengthening last-mile delivery of entitlements remains critical for the sustainable and equitable growth of PVTGs.

Women, Business and the Law 2026 Report

Context:

A recent World bank report, "Women, Business and the Law 2026", found that laws giving women equal economic chances are only enforced about halfway worldwide. Even with better laws, weak enforcement means women still face big barriers at work. This gap slows global economic growth and keeps gender inequality high.

About the Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2026 Report:

- The Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2026 report is the 11th annual study covering 190 economies. It measures how laws and policies affect women's economic opportunities.
- This edition introduces the WBL 2.0 framework, which evaluates three pillars:
  - » **Legal Frameworks:** Laws guaranteeing equality
  - » **Supportive Frameworks:** Policies and services that enable implementation
  - » **Enforcement Perceptions:** How effectively laws are applied in reality

Key Findings of the Report:

- The report states that, on average, countries score 67 out of 100 for having laws that support women's economic equality. However, when it comes to enforcing these laws, the score falls to 53. Further, the systems needed to implement these rights score only 47.
- Only 4% of women worldwide live in countries where there is nearly full legal equality. Even if all existing laws were fully enforced, women would still have only about two-thirds of the legal rights available to men.

FIGURE ES.1 Equality laws are associated with more women working, owning businesses, and participating in politics, as well as a reduced gender gap in labor force participation
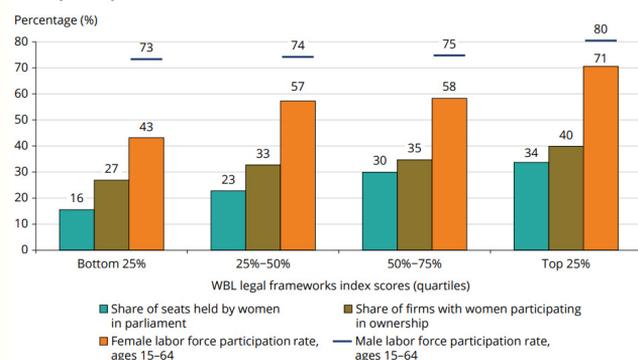
Major Areas of Concern:

- **Safety from Violence:** Safety is identified as the biggest weakness. Many countries lack strong laws protecting women from violence at home, in public, and at the workplace. Even where such laws exist, enforcement is weak. Without safety, women cannot participate fully in economic life.
- **Access to Credit and Entrepreneurship:** Although women are legally allowed to start businesses in most countries, only about half of the economies ensure equal access to credit. Many women entrepreneurs struggle to get loans due to lack of collateral, financial bias, and limited banking support. This restricts business growth and innovation.
- **Childcare Support:** Childcare remains a major barrier to women's employment. Less than half of the countries provide financial or tax support for childcare. In low-income nations, childcare systems are almost absent. Without affordable childcare, many women are forced to leave jobs or work in informal sectors.
- **Economic Impact:** The report warns that weak enforcement of women's economic rights is holding back global growth. Over the next decade, about 1.2 billion young people will enter the workforce, half of them girls. If women do not get equal opportunities, countries will lose a major part of their productive population.
- **Recent Progress:** Despite challenges, some progress has been made. In the last two years, 68 countries introduced 113 legal reforms to improve women's economic rights. Egypt was identified as one of the top reformers.

Conclusion:

The World Bank report makes it clear that passing laws is not enough. Countries must ensure proper enforcement and build strong institutions to support women's economic participation. True gender equality is not only a social goal but also an economic necessity for sustainable development.

Growing Culture of Freebies: Impact on Fiscal Sustainability and Social Equity

Context:

The Supreme Court of India recently raised a serious alarm over the increasing trend of state governments offering freebies to citizens, particularly in the lead-up to elections. The apex court warned that such practices could endanger fiscal discipline, undermine economic growth, distort markets, and even erode the work ethic of citizens. The bench questioned whether these handouts, often distributed without targeting the genuinely needy, amounted to a form of political appeasement. These observations have reignited a national debate on the line between welfare and populism.

Understanding Freebies:

- Although widely discussed in political discourse, there is no precise legal definition of freebies. According to the Reserve Bank of India, freebies are: "A public welfare measure that is provided free of charge."
- Typically, freebies are announced by political parties during election campaigns, promising short-term benefits such as free electricity, water, laptops, cycles, or even debt waivers. Over the years, such measures have become an integral part of Indian electoral politics, with the distinction between welfare and giveaways often blurred.

Welfarism vs. Freebies:

It is critical to differentiate welfare programs from political freebies. While welfare initiatives aim for sustainable social development, freebies are often transient measures designed to secure votes.

Aspect	Welfarism	Freebies
Root	Constitutional duty	Short-term political incentive
Examples	Food security (PDS), jobs (MGNREGA), education/ health support	Free electricity, water, debt waivers
Sustainability	Long-term	Often unsustainable
Economic Impact	Builds human capital	Distorts markets, erodes credit culture, discourages work
Approach	Rights-based, needs-based, or charity-based	Populist handouts

Approaches to Welfarism:

- **Charity Approach:** Focuses on inputs rather than outcomes, recognizes moral responsibility of the rich, and views

individuals as victims.

- **Needs-Based Approach:** Addresses inputs and outcomes to meet identified needs, seeing individuals as objects of development interventions.
- **Rights-Based Approach:** Emphasizes process and outcome, where citizens are empowered to claim their rights, and structural causes of problems are addressed.

Supreme Court Observations on Freebies:

- The apex court, in hearings involving petitions challenging the distribution of freebies by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd, observed that universal handouts, such as free electricity without income distinction—raise questions of financial prudence and political motivation.

Key observations from the bench included:

- Freebies without targeting the needy could strain state finances, especially for states running revenue deficits.
- Political giveaways may undermine work culture, as citizens may become reliant on free provisions rather than engage in productive employment.
- Welfare should focus on long-term development, employment generation, and sustainable social support rather than transient handouts aimed at garnering votes.

Constitutional and Legal Perspectives:

The Supreme Court has consistently framed the debate around freebies within constitutional provisions and the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):

- Articles 38, 39, 41 of the Constitution stress the state's responsibility to:
  - » Promote social welfare and economic justice.
  - » Ensure adequate means of livelihood for citizens.
  - » Prevent excessive concentration of wealth.
  - » Provide rights to work, education, and public assistance in specified cases.

Key Judicial Interventions:

- **Subramaniyam Balaji Case (2013):** A two-judge bench ruled that distributing goods like laptops and color TVs to eligible citizens aligns with DPSPs and does not warrant judicial interference.
- **Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v Union of India:** Challenges the legality of offering and distributing freebies during election campaigns.

Election Commission Guidelines:

- The Election Commission of India has emphasized transparency in electoral promises, urging political parties to disclose funding mechanisms for freebies. This measure aims to curb excessive populism and ensure electoral accountability.

Impacts of Freebies:

Freebies, while sometimes beneficial in alleviating immediate hardship, carry significant economic and social risks.

Positive (Welfarism)	Negative (Freebies)
Fulfillment of basic needs (food, health, education)	Financial burden on government, fiscal deficits
Addresses social and gender disparities	Dependency culture, reduced motivation/ productivity
Promotes inclusivity and social mobility	Undermines sustainable growth, affects intergenerational equity
Political participation and voter engagement	Used as populist tools to secure votes
Mitigates market failure by addressing underemployment	Diverts resources from investments, undermines market competitiveness

- Experts note that in recent times, the distinction between welfare programs and freebies has often vanished, with the two being used almost interchangeably in political discourse.

Policy Reforms and Recommendations:

To ensure welfare remains sustainable and

political freebies do not compromise economic and social development, several steps are proposed:

- **Fiscal Prudence and Debt Management:** Prioritize sustainable welfare schemes with sunset clauses while maintaining fiscal discipline.
- **Prevent Leakages and Corruption:** Ensure subsidies reach intended beneficiaries without diversion or fraud.
- **Expand Insurance Coverage:** Protect vulnerable populations against shocks such as pandemics or natural disasters.
- **Political Consensus:** Central and state governments should coordinate to prevent misuse of welfare schemes for vote-bank politics.
- **Election Commission Oversight:** Enforce transparency in manifestos and funding of freebies to avoid competitive populism.
- **Skill Development and Self-Reliance:** Empower individuals to reduce long-term dependency on freebies.
- **Voter Awareness Programs:** Educate citizens about the long-term costs and consequences of freebies to encourage informed voting.
- **Judicial Oversight and Expert Committees:** Bodies comprising members of NITI Aayog, RBI, and Finance Commission can evaluate the socioeconomic impacts of freebies.
- **Global Lessons:**
  » **Sri Lanka (2019):** Election-promise tax cuts and giveaways led to a severe fiscal crisis.
  » **Venezuela:** Populist freebies and debt waivers contributed to prolonged economic collapse.

Welfare vs Populism:

- The Supreme Court's observations are a reminder of the delicate balance between fulfilling the constitutional mandate of welfare and avoiding unsustainable populist handouts. Welfare programs aim to build human capital, alleviate poverty, and empower citizens, whereas unchecked freebies risk eroding fiscal discipline, distorting markets, and creating dependency culture.
- While welfare is legally and morally necessary, indiscriminate giveaways, especially during elections, can compromise long-term development and economic stability. The judiciary's warnings underscore the need for targeted, sustainable, and transparent policies that prioritize human development and social equity over short-term political gains.

Conclusion:

India's democracy and constitutional framework emphasize the state's duty to ensure social welfare, but the line between welfare and political freebies has blurred. The Supreme Court's intervention serves as a critical reminder that public resources should be used prudently, sustainably, and equitably. Freebies are not truly free, they come at the cost of future generations, fiscal stability, and economic growth. Sustainable welfare, combined with transparency, fiscal responsibility, and empowerment initiatives, is essential to ensure that India continues to progress toward inclusive and equitable development. Citizens, policymakers, and political parties must reflect on the long-term consequences of vote-driven giveaways, ensuring that social welfare remains a constitutional imperative rather than a political tool.

Short Issues

Judicial Ultimatum for Meta and WhatsApp

Context:

Recently, India's Supreme Court issued a stern ultimatum to Meta Platforms Inc. and WhatsApp, warning that they must comply with Indian constitutional and statutory norms on privacy, competition, and data protection or consider exiting the country. The dispute arises from WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy update, which allowed extensive data sharing with Meta entities without meaningful user consent, raising concerns over both privacy and market dominance.

Legal and Regulatory Background:

- **Right to Privacy:**
  » The Supreme Court reaffirmed that the right to privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. It emphasised that citizens' data cannot be treated as a commercial asset at the expense of constitutional rights.
  » The Court stated that companies cannot "play with the right to privacy of citizens" and that meaningful consent, not a mere "take it or leave it" choice must underpin any data-sharing arrangements.

- **Competition Act, 2002:**
  » In November 2024, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) found WhatsApp's 2021 policy to be an abuse of dominant position under the Competition Act, 2002. Forcing users to accept broad data sharing without a genuine opt-out was deemed exploitative and unfair.
  » The CCI imposed a Rs.213.14 crore penalty and directed remedial measures, including prohibiting conditional access and requiring clearer opt-in/opt-out mechanisms. Meta and WhatsApp challenged this at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), which partly stayed the data-sharing ban but upheld the monetary penalty. The matter then reached the Supreme Court. Thus supreme Court given ultimatum to meta platform for abiding privacy law of India or exit from India.

Broader Legal and Policy Implications:

- **Constitutional Governance:** Reinforces enforcement of fundamental rights in the digital domain.
- **Competition and Digital Markets:** Shows how competition law complements privacy law to check dominant platforms.
- **Digital Sovereignty:** Signals India's insistence that foreign tech firms comply with local laws rather than impose global privacy regimes.

Conclusion:

The judicial ultimatum highlights India's insistence that global technology firms respect privacy rights, competition law, and data protection standards. The outcome could reshape the regulatory landscape for multinational platforms, balancing innovation and investment with fundamental rights and consumer protection.

SC Raised concerns over DGP Appointments

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India raised serious concerns over the growing practice among several States of appointing "Acting" or ad hoc Directors General of Police (DGPs) instead of regular police chiefs with a fixed tenure, in violation of its binding directives issued in Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006). The Court observed that this practice undermines merit, transparency, and police autonomy. It also directed the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to take proactive steps to ensure compliance with its earlier directions.

Supreme Court Observations:

▪ The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, noted that many States continue to delay forwarding proposals for DGP appointments to the UPSC. This results in ad hoc arrangements and deprives senior and meritorious officers of legitimate opportunities for appointment.

▪ The Court directed the UPSC to formally communicate with States to ensure timely submission of proposals. It further permitted the Commission to approach the Court in cases of non-compliance, warning that accountability would be fixed on erring authorities.

About the Prakash Singh Case and Police Reforms:

▪ In the landmark Prakash Singh judgment (2006), the Supreme Court emphasised that the office of the DGP must be insulated from political interference and filled through a transparent, merit-based process. Exercising its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Court issued the following directives:

  » **Selection Criteria:** States must appoint the DGP from among the three senior-most and most meritorious Indian Police Service (IPS) officers empanelled by the UPSC.

  » **Minimum Tenure:** The appointed DGP must be granted a fixed tenure of at least two years to ensure stability and effectiveness in policing.

  » **Rejection of Acting DGPs:** The concept of "Acting" or ad hoc DGPs was expressly rejected, as temporary appointments were held to defeat the very purpose of police reforms.

▪ Subsequent orders in 2018 and 2019 further clarified procedural requirements, including the obligation of States to forward proposals to the UPSC several months before a vacancy arises, enabling advance preparation of the recommended panel.

About the Appointment Process:

▪ To streamline and standardise DGP appointments in accordance with judicial directions, the Centre has introduced a Single Window System for appointing State DGPs. This mechanism aligns with the Prakash Singh judgment and the UPSC's guidelines (2009), and seeks to minimise delays and procedural bottlenecks.

Appointment Process under the Single Window System

▪ **State Proposal:** Each State must forward a list of eligible officers to the UPSC at least six months before the retirement of the incumbent DGP.

▪ **Eligibility Criteria:** Officers must have a minimum of 30 years of service, or hold the rank of police chief (and one rank below), as prescribed for the respective State. Officers with less than six months of service remaining before retirement are not eligible.

▪ **Empanelment by UPSC:** An UPSC Empanelment Committee selects a panel of three officers (or two in the case of smaller States) based on merit, seniority, service record, and range of experience.

▪ **State Selection:** The State Government

appoints the DGP from among the officers empanelled by the UPSC.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's observations expose a persistent gap between judicial mandates and State-level implementation. The Single Window System, grounded in the Prakash Singh judgment and UPSC guidelines, promotes transparent, merit-based, and accountable appointments. Effective implementation of these norms is essential for strengthening police autonomy, professionalism, and democratic governance.

Supreme Court and Capital Punishment

Context:

A recent report by Project 39A, a research and litigation initiative at National Law University, Delhi, reveals that the Supreme Court of India has not upheld a single death sentence in the past three years (2023–2025). Despite an increase in death sentences awarded by trial courts, this trend underscores the apex court's cautious and rights-oriented approach toward capital punishment.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **No Death Sentence Confirmed by the Supreme Court (2023–2025):** Over the last three years, the Supreme Court has either commuted death sentences to life imprisonment or acquitted the accused, highlighting the rigorous scrutiny applied at the appellate stage.
- **High Acquittal and Commutation Rates:** In 2025, more than half of the death penalty cases decided by the Supreme Court resulted in acquittals, the highest such proportion since 2016.
- **Rising Death Row Population:** Despite appellate restraint, 574 individuals were on death row at the end of 2025, the highest number recorded since 2016.

Judicial Approach towards the Death Penalty:

- The Supreme Court has consistently emphasised procedural safeguards, fair trial standards, and individualised sentencing. Key elements of this approach include:
  - » **Procedural Safeguards:** In Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022), the Court mandated that trial courts must consider psychological evaluations, probation officer reports, and prison conduct records. Non-compliance with these requirements has been deemed a violation of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.
  - » **Article 32 Jurisdiction:** The Supreme Court retains the authority to revisit death sentences through writ petitions where procedural safeguards have been violated.
  - » **Emphasis on Mitigation:** Even in cases involving heinous crimes, factors such as the convict's age, socio-economic background, and potential for reform are increasingly considered to determine whether the punishment meets the "rarest of rare" threshold.

Capital punishment
Examining death penalty trends in India (2016-2025)

1,310 death sentences by Sessions Courts

128 sentenced in 2025

842 death sentences were heard by the High Courts

70 confirmed (8.31%), 285 acquitted, 411 commuted

0 death sentences confirmed by the Supreme Court in the past 3 years

Of 37 HC- confirmed cases decided by SC:

15 acquitted | **14** commuted

574 prisoners on death row (Dec. 31, 2025) — highest since 2016

Contrasts within the Justice System:

- **Trial Courts vs. Appellate Scrutiny:** Trial

courts continue to impose death sentences with relative frequency; however, a majority of these sentences are overturned or commuted by the High Courts or the Supreme Court.

- **High Courts' Mixed Role:** While High Courts occasionally confirm death sentences, only a small proportion withstands scrutiny at the Supreme Court level.

About Project 39A:

- Project 39A, inspired by Article 39A of the Constitution, focuses on criminal justice reform, legal aid, and death penalty litigation. Its research indicates that a significant proportion of death row inmates belong to economically vulnerable, socially backward, or minority communities. The initiative provides pro bono legal representation and undertakes research on forensic science, mental health, and procedural fairness.

Implications for India's Death Penalty Regime:

- The Supreme Court's restrained approach has reignited debates on judicial humanitarianism versus public confidence in the justice system, the gap between legal principles and ground-level practices, and the need for uniform adherence to sentencing safeguards across courts.

Conclusion:

The three-year record of the Supreme Court not upholding any death sentence marks a transformative phase in India's capital punishment jurisprudence. While it strengthens constitutional safeguards and ethical fairness, it also highlights persistent systemic challenges in trial-level adjudication. The debate over capital punishment in India continues to navigate the complex balance between retribution, deterrence, and human rights within an evolving justice framework.

Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026

Context:

Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, superseding the SWM Rules, 2016. The new rules will come into full effect from 1 April 2026 and aim to strengthen source segregation, scientific processing, and accountability of waste generators, while integrating the principles of the circular economy and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

Key Features of the SWM Rules, 2026:

- **Four-Stream Segregation:** Waste must be segregated at source into wet, dry, sanitary, and special-care waste. This promotes recycling and composting and reduces the burden on landfills.
- **Bulk Waste Generators (BWGs):** Entities with a floor area ≥ 20,000 sq. m, water consumption ≥ 40,000 litres/day, or waste generation ≥ 100 kg/day. They are responsible for collection, transport, and processing of waste. An EBWGR certificate is required if on-site wet waste processing is not feasible. BWGs account for nearly 30% of India's solid waste.
- **Polluter Pays Principle:** Environmental compensation will be imposed for violations such as false reporting or improper waste handling. The CPCB will issue guidelines, while SPCBs/PCCs will levy penalties.
- **Digital Governance:** A centralised online portal for registration, tracking, audits, and reporting. This enhances transparency, improves compliance, and reduces paperwork.
- **Faster Land Allocation & Buffer Zones:** Graded land allocation for waste processing facilities, with buffer zones determined by capacity and pollution load. This facilitates quicker establishment of material recovery

facilities (MRFs) and waste processing plants.

- **Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF):** Industrial units are mandated to increase RDF usage from 5% to 15% over six years, supporting the circular economy and reducing the carbon footprint.
- **Landfill Restrictions & Legacy Dumps:** Landfills are restricted to non-recyclable and inert waste. Higher tipping fees will be imposed for unsegregated waste. Legacy dumpsites are to be remediated through biomining and bioremediation.
- **Hilly Areas & Islands:** Provisions include tourist user fees, regulated inflow, designated collection points, and decentralised wet waste processing to prevent environmental degradation.

Implications:

- Improves source segregation, recycling, and resource recovery.
- Reduces pressure on urban local bodies through enhanced accountability of bulk waste generators.
- Digital monitoring ensures transparency, traceability, and regulatory compliance.
- Strengthens the circular economy while supporting sustainable development and climate goals.

Background and Need:

- India generates over 62 million tonnes of municipal solid waste annually, of which only 25–28% is scientifically processed.
- The SWM Rules, 2016 emphasised three-stream segregation, EPR, and user fees; however, gaps persisted in enforcement, legacy waste management, and accountability of bulk waste generators.
- Key challenges include infrastructure deficits, inadequate integration of the informal sector, financial constraints of urban local bodies, and limited public participation.

Conclusion:

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 provide a comprehensive legal and operational framework for sustainable waste management in India. By combining regulatory enforcement, stakeholder accountability, and digital governance, the rules aim to promote a cleaner, healthier, and more circular urban ecosystem.

Coking Coal as Critical & Strategic Mineral

Context:

On 29 January 2026, the Government of India notified coking coal as a Critical and Strategic Mineral under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act). This decision aligns with the government's vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat 2047, aiming to strengthen domestic

mineral security and reduce import dependence in strategic sectors like steel production.

Key Highlights of the Notification:

- The notification was based on recommendations from the High-Level Committee on Implementation of Viksit Bharat Goals (HLC-VB) and policy inputs from NITI Aayog.
- Coking coal is critical for the domestic steel sector, ensuring industrial continuity and strategic self-reliance.
- India has 37.37 billion tonnes of coking coal resources, primarily in Jharkhand, with reserves in Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh.
- Despite domestic reserves, 95% of coking coal demand is met through imports, increasing from 51.20 MT (2020–21) to 57.58 MT (2024–25), resulting in significant foreign exchange outgo.

Cocking Coal Declared
A CRITICAL MINERAL
A Major reform for India's Coal Sector
Key outcomes:
- Faster approvals & smoother clearances
- Accelerated exploration and mining
- Greater private sector participation
Impact:
- Reduced import dependence
- Stronger steel supply chains
- Support to National Steel Policy

Legal & Policy Implications:

- Section 11C of MMDR Act empowered the Central Government to amend the First Schedule, adding "Coking Coal" in Part D (Critical & Strategic Minerals).
- **Benefits include:**
  » Faster approvals and ease of doing business for mining operations.
  » Exemption from public consultation for mining of critical minerals.
  » Utilisation of degraded forest land for compensatory afforestation.
  » Encouragement of private sector investment in exploration, beneficiation, and technology adoption.
- Royalties, auction premiums, and statutory payments continue to accrue to State Governments, maintaining federal fiscal balance.

Strategic Rationale:

- Reducing import dependence strengthens supply chain resilience for steel and allied industries.
- Supports National Steel Policy and promotes a self-reliant industrial ecosystem.
- Potential to generate employment across mining, logistics, and steel value chains.
- Aligns with India's broader focus on critical minerals, such as Lithium, Cobalt, Nickel, Graphite, essential for defense, EVs, and high-tech industries.

About Critical & Strategic Minerals Framework:

- India has identified 30 critical minerals essential for economic development, national security, and clean energy transition.
- These Minerals support EVs, renewable energy, electronics, aerospace, and defense sectors.

MMDR Act, 1957 – Key Features:

- Governs mining leases, mineral exploration, and resource management while balancing environmental safeguards.
- Differentiates between major minerals (Central control) and minor minerals (State control).
- Provides reconnaissance permits, prospecting licenses, and mining leases.
- Recent reforms:
  » Auction regime (2015) to ensure transparency.

» Critical minerals provision (2023) for exclusive Central Government auctions.

» Exploration License (2023) for deep-seated mineral exploration.

» Institutional frameworks like NMET and DMF for exploration and community development.

Significance of the Notification:

▪ Enhances national mineral security.

▪ Boosts private investment and adoption of advanced mining technologies.

▪ Reduces import dependency, saving foreign exchange.

▪ Promotes employment generation and regional development.

▪ Strengthens the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 through industrial self-reliance.

No Confidence Motion Against Lok Sabha Speaker

Context:

Recently, Opposition parties, led by the Congress-led INDIA bloc, submitted a notice of no-confidence against Speaker Om Birla. The motion, signed by 118 MPs, alleges partisan conduct by the Speaker during the Budget Session. This event marks only the fourth instance in Indian parliamentary history where a no-confidence motion has been moved against the Speaker.

Constitutional Basis for Removal:

▪ The Speaker of the Lok Sabha holds a pivotal constitutional office under Article 93, entrusted with presiding impartially over House proceedings. The Constitution provides for their removal under Article 94(c):

» The Speaker or Deputy Speaker may be removed by a resolution of the Lok Sabha.

» The resolution requires the support of a majority of all then members of the House (absolute majority).

» This applies only to the Lok Sabha, not the Rajya Sabha.

▪ Additionally, under Article 94, a Speaker vacates office if they:

▪ Cease to be a member of the House (94(a))

» Resign in writing to the Deputy Speaker (94(b))

» Are removed via a House resolution (94(c))

Procedure for Removal:

▪ The process is guided by Rules 200–203 of the Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure:

» **Notice:** Written notice submitted to the Secretary-General, backed by at least two members, with a minimum 14-day notice.

» **Listing in Business:** Motion for leave is listed only after the notice period.

» **Minimum Support:** At least 50 members must rise in support; otherwise, the motion lapses.

» **Debate and Voting:** If admitted, the motion is taken up within 10 days, discussion is confined to charges, the mover can speak up to 15 minutes, and removal requires an absolute majority.

The Path to Removal:
No-Confidence Motion Against the Lok Sabha Speaker

Constitutional Framework & Grounds

Article 94(c) Mandate
The Speaker can be removed by a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the Lok Sabha.

1954   1987

Historic Rarity
This process is rare; historically initiated only in 1954, 1966, 1987, and most recently in 2026.

Year: 1954	Speaker: G.V. Mavalankar Outcome: Motion Failed
Year: 1966	Speaker: Hukam Singh Outcome: Motion Failed
Year: 2026	Speaker: TBD Outcome: Pending

Neutrality Protocol
During the removal discussion, the Speaker does not preside over the session to ensure impartiality.

Conditions and Role of the Speaker:

- Under Rule 200A, the motion must be precise, specific, and free of defamatory or ironical statements. No speech is allowed when seeking leave.
- During discussions, the Speaker may defend themselves but traditionally steps aside from presiding to maintain impartiality. Voting rights are limited to the first instance of the resolution.

Conclusion:

No-confidence motions against Lok Sabha Speakers are rare: G.V. Mavalankar (1954), Hukam Singh (1966), Balram Jakhar (1987) none led to removal. The current motion is a watershed moment, highlighting the tension between institutional authority and democratic accountability.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2025

Context:

In the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025, released by the Berlin-based civil society organisation Transparency International, India has been ranked 91st out of 182 countries and territories, securing a score of 39 on a scale of 0–100. A score of 0 indicates a highly corrupt public sector, while a score of 100 indicates a very clean one.

What the CPI Measures:

- The CPI evaluates perceived public sector corruption using assessments from 13 independent sources, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and other research organisations. These assessments reflect the perceptions of experts and business leaders regarding the extent of corruption in public institutions and governance systems.
- The 2025 report highlights that more than two-thirds of countries score below 50, underscoring that corruption perceptions remain high globally. The global average CPI

score declined to 42, marking a worrying trend of stagnation or deterioration in anti-corruption outcomes worldwide.

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025: Global Trends & India's Standing
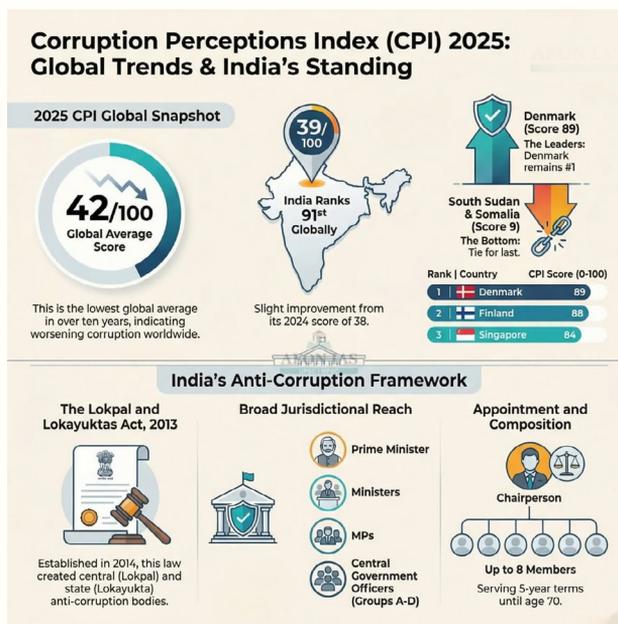
India's Performance: Incremental Improvement Amid Structural Challenges:

- India's ranking at 91st represents an improvement of five places compared to the previous CPI and a one-point increase in its score from last year. While this indicates modest perceptual gains, the ranking remains below the global average and points to persistent structural concerns regarding transparency and accountability in the public sector.
- Experts note that the slow pace of improvement partly reflects bureaucratic opacity, political influence in decision-making processes, and uneven enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Corruption, therefore, continues to be viewed as a systemic governance issue rather than a series of isolated incidents.
- The CPI report also flags India among countries that pose high risks for journalists reporting on corruption, where media personnel may face threats or violence while pursuing investigative reporting. This factor

can potentially weaken transparency and accountability mechanisms.

Institutional and Legal Framework in India:

India has developed a robust anti-corruption architecture comprising statutory bodies and legal instruments:

Institution / Law	Purpose / Mandate
Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013	Establishes ombudsman bodies to investigate corruption complaints against public functionaries at the Centre and in the states, respectively.
Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)	Apex supervisory body overseeing vigilance administration across central government departments.
Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)	Premier federal investigative agency handling anti-corruption and related cases.
Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (amended 2018)	Core legislation penalising bribery; the 2018 amendment criminalised bribe-giving in addition to bribe-taking.
Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002	Enables the prevention of money laundering and the confiscation of proceeds of crime.
Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014	Provides protection to individuals reporting corruption against retaliation.

- This multi-tiered framework aims to strengthen accountability and enhance legal deterrence against corrupt practices.

Conclusion:

The CPI 2025 ranking suggests that while India has achieved modest perceptual gains, corruption remains a structural governance challenge. Bridging the gap between policy intent and effective implementation, reinforcing institutional autonomy, and fostering ethical public service values are essential to improving both the perception and reality of transparency and accountability. Comprehensive and sustained efforts in these areas will be crucial to enhancing India's global integrity standing and strengthening public trust in democratic governance.

Government Notifies New Social Media Rules

Context:

Recently, the Government of India notified amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The rules introduce mandatory AI content labelling and require social media platforms to remove unlawful content within three hours, reduced from the previous 36-hour timeline.

Key Features:

- **Prominent AI Content Labelling:** Platforms must clearly label all AI-generated or synthetic content, including deepfakes. Labels must be visible and cannot be removed or obscured.
- **Three-Hour Takedown:** Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X must remove flagged unlawful content within three hours. A two-hour timeline applies to non-consensual intimate imagery or harmful deepfakes.
- **User Declarations & Metadata:** Platforms may require users to declare AI-generated content and verify it using automated tools. Non-compliance risks the loss of safe harbour protections under Section 79 of the IT Act.

Definition of AI/Synthetic Content:

- Synthetic Generated Information (SGI) includes any audio, visual, or audiovisual content created or manipulated using AI

that appears realistic. Routine edits and educational illustrations are exempt.

- **Compliance & Accountability:** Platforms must:
  - » Embed metadata and visible labels on AI-generated content.
  - » Adhere strictly to the prescribed takedown timelines.
  - » Warn users about penalties for the misuse of AI tools at least once every three months.
  - » Non-compliance may result in legal liability, as intermediaries could lose safe harbour protection.

MeitY's New AI Content Rules:
8 Key Changes Social Media Users Must Know

Rationale:

- The government's stated objective is to curb the spread and virality of harmful, deceptive, or unlawful synthetic content, particularly deepfakes and AI-driven misinformation that can manipulate public perception, cause reputational harm, or facilitate fraud.
- By reducing takedown timelines and mandating labels, the authorities aim to enhance digital accountability, transparency, and user awareness in an era where sophisticated AI tools can create highly realistic but misleading content.

Concerns & Criticisms:

- **Industry Burden:** Three-hour deadlines may lead to over-censorship and operational challenges.
- **Freedom of Expression:** Rapid takedown requirements could result in prior restraint, automated removals, and adverse impacts on user rights.

Significance for Digital Governance:

- The amendments signal India's intent to be among the first major democracies to bring AI-generated and synthetic content under a formal digital governance framework with clear compliance obligations for social media intermediaries.
- By mandating visible AI labels and strict takedown timelines, the government seeks to balance innovation in AI with user protection and accountability in the age of synthetic media.

Conclusion:

The new rules, combining prominent AI labelling and stringent takedown timelines, mark a significant shift in digital regulation. Effective implementation and safeguards for freedom of speech will determine their success in curbing misinformation while fostering responsible digital innovation.

No Questions on PM CARES, Relief and Defence Funds

Context:

Recently, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) informed the Lok Sabha Secretariat that Members of Parliament (MPs) cannot table questions or raise matters regarding:

- » Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund)
- » Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)
- » National Defence Fund (NDF)
- The directive has generated significant political and constitutional debate on parliamentary oversight and transparency.

What Exactly Did the PMO Say?

- The PMO cited the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha:
  - » **Rule 41(2)(viii):** Questions "shall not

relate to a matter which is not primarily the concern of the Government of India."

» **Rule 41(2)(xvii):** Questions "shall not raise matters that are under the control of bodies or persons not primarily responsible to the Government of India."

▪ The PMO noted that these funds are sourced entirely from voluntary public contributions and receive no allocations from the Consolidated Fund of India. Consequently, parliamentary questions on their operations, receipts, or utilisation are deemed inadmissible.

About the Funds:

▪ **PM CARES Fund**
  » **Established:** March 27, 2020, as a public charitable trust
  » **Objective:** To respond to national emergencies and disasters
  » **Funding:** Entirely voluntary; no government budgetary allocation
  » **Balance (March 2023):** Rs. 6,283.7 crore
  » **Legal Status:** Not a public authority under the RTI Act

▪ **Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)**
  » **Established:** January 1948
  » **Purpose:** Relief for natural calamities, major accidents, and riots
  » **Funding:** Public contributions

▪ **National Defence Fund (NDF)**
  » **Purpose:** Welfare of armed and paramilitary forces and their families
  » **Administration:** Managed by an executive committee chaired by the Prime Minister

▪ **Reasoning Behind the PMO's Directive:** The PMO maintains that, as these funds:
  » Do not draw from the Consolidated Fund of India, and
  » Are administered as voluntary charitable trusts,

▪ They are not primarily the concern of the Government of India under Lok Sabha rules. Therefore, questions regarding them are not admissible in Parliament.

Legal and Democratic Implications:

▪ **Parliamentary Oversight:** Restricts legislative scrutiny of funds receiving substantial public contributions

▪ **RTI and Transparency:** PM CARES is not a public authority under the RTI Act, though courts have acknowledged certain privacy protections

▪ **Public Accountability:** Raises concerns regarding executive responsibility and transparency for high-profile donation-based funds

Conclusion:

The PMO's directive underscores a strict procedural interpretation that limits parliamentary oversight of certain funds. While legally grounded, it has sparked broader debates on democratic accountability, transparency, and legislative scrutiny, particularly for funds chaired by top constitutional office holders.

Parliament Passes Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Context:

Recently, Parliament passed the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026 during the ongoing Budget Session. It is now awaiting Presidential assent to become law.

Background:

▪ Prior to 2020, India's labour law framework was fragmented across numerous statutes governing trade unions, employment conditions, and dispute resolution. To simplify and modernise these laws, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 was enacted and brought into force as part of a bundle of four labour codes. These codes consolidated multiple older laws, including:
  » The Trade Unions Act, 1926
  » The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946

» The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
- The consolidation aimed to create a unified and updated framework for industrial relations, improve compliance, and facilitate ease of doing business.

Need for the Amendment:

- Although the 2020 Code provided for the repeal of the legacy legislations through Section 104's savings provisions, the government argued that the automatic operation of the repeal could be open to future legal challenges on procedural grounds.
- The amendment was introduced to explicitly clarify the statutory status of the repeal, removing any scope for ambiguity or unwarranted complications in future judicial interpretation.
- The government's position emphasised that:
  » The repeal of the older statutes had already occurred by operation of law, not by administrative discretion.
  » The amendment strengthens legal certainty and stability in industrial relations governance.

Key Provisions of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020:

- **Definitions & Scope:** Standardises terms such as "worker," "wages," and "strike," and introduces fixed-term employment with the same statutory benefits as permanent staff.
- **Union Recognition & Collective Bargaining:** A union with at least 51% worker membership is recognised for negotiation; multiple unions may form a negotiating council.
- **Standing Orders:** Applicable to establishments with 300 or more workers; covers worker classification, hours, leave, conduct, discipline, and grievance redressal.
- **Strikes & Lockouts:** Regulated through mandatory notice (14–60 days); strikes include concerted casual leave by 50% or more workers; prohibited during dispute resolution proceedings.

- **Lay-off, Retrenchment & Closure:** Government approval is required only for establishments with 300 or more workers, easing operations for smaller units.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Internal works and grievance committees; external resolution through conciliation, arbitration, and industrial tribunals.
- **Worker Reskilling Fund:** Employers contribute (approximately 15 days' wages) to support the re-employment of retrenched workers.
- **Penalties & Compliance:** Fines for illegal strikes or lockouts and procedural violations; compounding of certain offences is permitted.

Conclusion:

The passage of the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026 represents a technical yet significant step in India's labour law reform journey. While the amendment does not introduce substantive changes to workers' rights, it seeks to strengthen legal clarity within the consolidated industrial relations framework introduced in 2020.

Supreme Court Ruling on Spectrum

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the spectrum held by bankrupt telecom operators cannot be sold to repay lenders. This issue arose from insolvency proceedings involving companies such as Aircel Ltd and Reliance Communications (RCom), whose lenders had sought to monetise spectrum usage rights to recover debts. The judgment clarified the legal status of spectrum under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016, emphasising that such resources cannot be treated as corporate assets.

Legal and Constitutional Reasoning:

- The Supreme Court held that telecom

spectrum is a scarce public resource owned by the Union of India and held in trust for its citizens. Licences granted to telecom service providers allow usage but do not confer ownership rights.

- The IBC does not permit liquidation of assets that the debtor does not own. Even conditional transfer under a licence does not equate to ownership, reinforcing the primacy of sectoral laws over insolvency provisions.

Economic and Sectoral Implications:

- The ruling impacts lenders and financial institutions by limiting recovery options and potentially increasing NPAs. Future telecom financing may involve stricter risk assessments.

- For the government, sovereign control over spectrum is reinforced, enabling reallocation through auctions or re-licensing. The judgment also clarifies the treatment of statutory licences in insolvency cases, balancing public interest with creditor rights.

Supreme Court on Spectrum Ownership

Spectrum is a National Resource, Not an Asset of Telecom Companies

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016:

- The IBC, 2016 is India's comprehensive, creditor-driven law for the time-bound resolution of distressed companies and individuals.

- It consolidated archaic laws to expedite recovery, with a 180-day timeline

(extendable up to 270 days) for insolvency resolution or liquidation. Its objectives include maximising asset value, improving ease of doing business, and reducing Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

Key Aspects:

- **Objective:** A swift and efficient legal framework for corporate, partnership, and individual insolvency.

- **Time-Bound Process:** CIRP completion mandated within 180 days, extendable up to 270 days.

- Institutions: Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), and Information Utilities (IUs).

- **Process Initiation:** Can be triggered by financial creditors, operational creditors, or the debtor itself.

- **Committee of Creditors (CoC):** Financial creditors decide the company's future (revival or liquidation).

Impact & Challenges:

- Over 1,194 companies had been resolved as of March 2025, with creditors recovering over Rs.3.89 lakh crore. The IBC has shifted power from "debtor-in-possession" to "creditor-in-control," though delays in admission and resolution remain a challenge.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's decision reaffirms spectrum as a public trust resource and aligns insolvency law with sectoral regulation. By distinguishing ownership from licensing rights, it safeguards public resources while providing clarity to lenders and regulators. The ruling strengthens the framework of the IBC and sets a precedent for how statutory licences and natural resources are treated in corporate insolvency, ensuring long-term governance and financial stability.

MANAV Vision for AI

Context:

During the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled MANAV Vision for AI governance in India. India is positioning itself as a global leader in responsible AI development, especially from the perspective of the Global South.

Components of MANAV Vision:

- The acronym MANAV represents five guiding principles for AI in India:
  - » **M — Moral and Ethical Systems:** AI must be guided by ethical frameworks, ensuring decisions respect human rights, societal norms, and moral accountability.
  - » **A — Accountable Governance:** AI governance should be transparent and robust, with clear rules, oversight mechanisms, and mechanisms to hold developers and operators responsible.
  - » **N — National Sovereignty:** Data belonging to individuals or nations should be protected, reinforcing the principle of data ownership and sovereignty — "whose data, his right."
  - » **A — Accessible and Inclusive:** AI should benefit all citizens, enabling wide participation rather than creating monopolies. Equity, accessibility, and democratization are key.
  - » **V — Valid and Legitimate:** AI applications must be lawful, verifiable, and scientifically sound, ensuring trust, accountability, and legitimacy in real-world deployment.

Significance of MANAV Vision:

- Positions India as a global leader in responsible AI, particularly in the Global South.
- Promotes human-centric AI that prioritizes welfare, fairness, and ethical governance.
- Balances innovation with regulation, ensuring AI development is safe, transparent, and socially beneficial.
- Provides a framework for international cooperation, emphasizing values-based AI in a rapidly evolving technological world.

M.A.N.A.V.

PM Narendra Modi's Human-Centric AI Odyssey at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**

A roadmap where technological advancement progresses in harmony with societal values

Moral and Ethical Systems | National Sovereignty | Valid and Legitimate Systems

Accountable Governance | Accessible and Inclusive AI
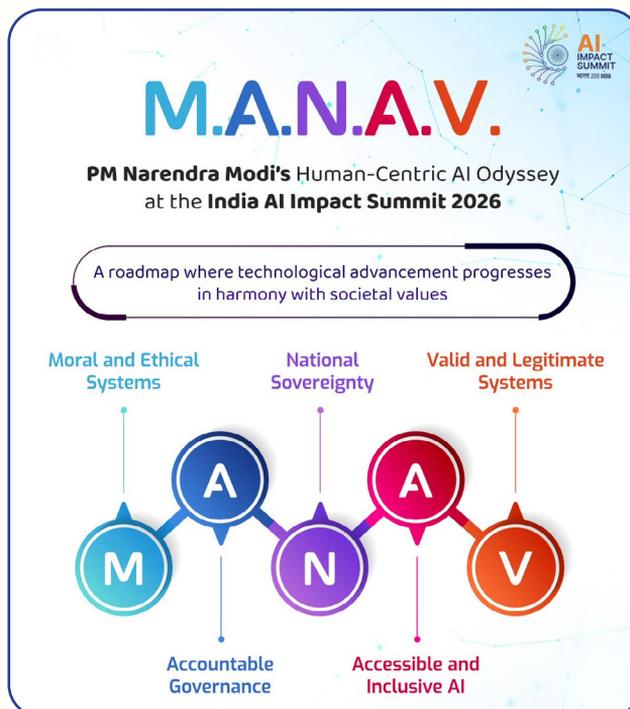
India's Strategic Approach to AI:

- **Inclusive and Socially Useful AI:** Through the IndiaAI Mission, the government promotes fairness, inclusivity, and social utility, using AI to bridge urban–rural divides and enhance healthcare, education, and livelihoods.
- **Practical Applications:** In the dairy sector, AI initiatives through Amul benefit over 36 lakh women workers, improving productivity and strengthening incomes.
- **Employment & Skilling:** AI is framed as a transformative tool, not a threat, with large-scale skilling programs preparing the workforce for technological change.

Global AI Frameworks & Collaboration:

- Governance is shifting to inclusive frameworks addressing bias, digital colonization, and the North–South divide.

Key initiatives:

- **Bletchley Park Declaration (2023):** 28 nations agreed on frontier AI risks and shared scientific understanding.
- **Global Partnership on AI (GPAI, 2024):** India led efforts to treat AI as a global public good, supporting the Global South.
- **AI Action Summit (Paris, 2025):** Focused on responsible deployment and equitable access.
- **AI Impact Summit (New Delhi, 2026):** Emphasizes People, Planet, and Progress, ensuring AI benefits are widely shared.

Conclusion:

The MANAV Vision marks India's effort to shape AI policy not merely as a technological roadmap, but as a framework rooted in human welfare, ethical governance, inclusivity, accountability and national interests, integral concerns in contemporary governance debates.

Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023

Context:

Recently, three separate PILs filed in the Supreme Court by the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI), transparency advocate Venkatesh Nayak, and the Reporters' Collective Trust have challenged the constitutionality of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. The petitions argue that the DPDP Act undermines the Right to Information (RTI), hampers investigative journalism, and expands state surveillance powers.

Key Objections:

- A key objection concerns the amendment to the RTI Act, 2005 under Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act. The amendment replaces the RTI Act's "public interest override" with a blanket exemption for personal information. Previously, public officials could disclose personal information if it served a larger public interest. Petitioners argue that the new provision removes this balance, enabling public authorities to withhold information even when disclosure is critical for governance or accountability.
- The petitions invoke the Supreme Court's Puttaswamy judgment (2017), which mandates that any restriction on fundamental rights must satisfy the proportionality test. Petitioners contend that the DPDP Act fails this test, as it does not adopt the least restrictive means and arbitrarily limits the RTI framework, thereby threatening participatory democracy.

Impact on Investigative Journalism:

- The Act classifies journalists handling personal data as data fiduciaries, imposing obligations to seek consent and erase data if consent is denied.
- Petitioners argue that these provisions are impractical for investigative reporting, make post-facto verification difficult, and create a chilling effect due to penalties of up to Rs.250 crore. Such measures may discourage reporting on corruption, public interest issues, and government accountability.

Expansion of State Power and Surveillance:

- Section 36 empowers the Union government to demand information from any data fiduciary without independent authorization or an appellate mechanism.

Safeguard User Data — Implement security measures to protect user data with third-party processors.

Data Protection Board Authority — Summon, examine, recommend sanctions for data breaches.

Minor Consent — Guardian approval for processing data of minors and physically disabled.

Appoint DPO — Appoint Data Protection Officer (DPO) for enhanced transparency.

Controlled Transfers — Central govt. will oversee data export beyond India.

Rapid Breach Alert — Notify Data Protection Board & affected users on data breaches.

Hefty Penalties — Up to Rs 250 crore penalties for breach severity.

Fair Appeals — Telecom Disputes Settlement & Appellate Tribunal will resolve Data Protection Board (DPB) decision disputes.

- Petitioners contend that this provision allows unrestricted access to personal data, including information that could reveal anonymous sources, thereby raising concerns about privacy, state overreach, and potential misuse in policy or electoral processes.

Independence of the Data Protection Board:

- The DPDP Act establishes a Data Protection Board to enforce the law and impose penalties. Petitioners highlight that its appointment process is dominated by government secretaries and nominees, potentially undermining the principle of separation of powers.
- Given that the State is the largest data collector, such executive control over a quasi-judicial body raises doubts about the Board's independence and impartiality.

About the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:

- The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 is India's first comprehensive law designed to protect digital personal data and safeguard the privacy of individuals (Data Principals), while allowing businesses (Data Fiduciaries) to process data for lawful purposes.
- Enacted on August 11, 2023, and fully operationalised with the DPDP Rules, 2025 on November 14, 2025, the Act seeks to balance individual privacy, business utility, and national security.

Conclusion:

While the DPDP Act aims to strengthen digital privacy protections, the constitutional challenge highlights its potential tensions with transparency, press freedom, and checks on state power. The Supreme Court will examine whether the Act strikes an appropriate balance between privacy, public interest, and democratic accountability.

Allahabad High Court's Decision Regarding Inter-Religious Marriage

Context:

Recently, the Allahabad High Court has clarified that the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 does not prohibit interfaith marriages or live in relationships between consenting adults in the absence of any act of religious conversion.

Key Findings of the Allahabad High Court:

- **No Bar on Consensual Personal Relations:** The Court held that the anti conversion law does not prohibit interfaith marriage or live in relationships between consenting adults where there is no evidence of unlawful conversion.
- **Conversion Requirement Critical:** For the Act to apply, there must be clear proof of force, coercion, fraud, allurement, or misrepresentation in the act of conversion; mere interfaith personal relationships do not meet this threshold.
- **Fundamental Rights Protection:** The judgment underscored that the right to choose a partner and the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution cannot be curtailed on the basis of religion alone.
- **Equality Before Law:** The Court noted that if same religion adults can live together without legal sanctions, interfaith adults must have the same right under Articles 14 and 15.
- **Police Protection:** Police were directed to consider applications for protection from threatened couples and act to safeguard their life and liberty in accordance with law.

Significance of the Judgment:

- **Clarification of Legal Scope:** The ruling distinguishes between the anti conversion law's objective of governing unlawful religious conversions and the constitutional

freedoms of adult individuals in personal relationships.

▪ **Reaffirming Fundamental Freedoms:** It reinforces core constitutional protections, especially autonomy, dignity, equality, and freedom of choice in personal matters.

▪ **Protection from Social and Legal Harassment:** The order affirms that consensual choices in interfaith relationships cannot be criminalised or unduly constrained through the anti conversion statute.

About the Uttar Pradesh Anti Conversion Law:

▪ The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 is a state anti conversion law enacted to prohibit religious conversions obtained through force, fraud, coercion, allurement or other unlawful means. It came into effect after being passed by the Uttar Pradesh Legislature and assented to by the Governor in March 2021.

Key features of the Act include:

▪ **Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion:** It makes it an offence to convert or attempt to convert a person from one religion to another by use of misrepresentation, force, coercion, undue influence, allurement, or any fraudulent means.

▪ **Prior Notice and Inquiry:** The Act requires individuals who wish to convert to another religion, and religious functionaries solemnising such conversions, to give prior notice to the District Magistrate, who then conducts an inquiry into the genuineness of the conversion.

▪ **Penalties:** Unlawful conversions are punishable under the Act and, following subsequent amendments, offences are generally made non bailable. Punishment initially ranged up to 10 years' imprisonment with fines and amended provisions in 2024 allow for heavier penalties, including rigorous imprisonment ranging from 20 years to life imprisonment in cases involving threats, force, or marriage for conversion.

▪ **Mass Conversions:** The Act also criminalises mass conversions and provides for proscribed penalties in such cases.

Union Cabinet Approves Renaming Kerala to 'Keralam'

Context:

Recently, the Union Cabinet of India approved a proposal to rename the southern state of Kerala as Keralam, setting in motion a constitutional process to alter the state's official name. The move follows a unanimous resolution passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly in June 2024 requesting the name change.

About Proposal:

▪ The Cabinet approved the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026, which, once returned with the President's recommendation, will be referred to the Kerala Assembly for its views under the proviso to Article 3 of the Constitution of India. After this step, the Bill can be introduced in Parliament.

Constitutional Process to Change a State's Name:

▪ **Article 3 of the Constitution:** Under Article 3, Parliament has the authority to alter the name of any state through legislation. The process involves:

» **State Resolution:** The state legislature must first pass a resolution requesting the change.

» **Presidential Recommendation:** The President must recommend the Bill for Parliament.

» **State Legislature's Views:** The Bill must be referred to the concerned state assembly for its views on the proposal, though the assembly's opinion is not binding.

» **Parliamentary Approval:** The Bill must be passed by a simple majority in both Houses of Parliament.

» **Presidential Assent:** Once approved, the

President signs the Bill, and the name is updated in the First and Fourth Schedules of the Constitution.

Kerala to "Keralam" Gets Union Cabinet Nod

February 24, 2026 | Historic Name Change Move

Kerala → Keralam

Cultural Significance
• "Keralam" reflects original Malayalam identity
• Rooted in linguistic heritage

Background
• Resolution Passed by **Kerala Assembly** (June 2024)

Constitutional Process
• Under **Article 3** of the Constitution
• Bill ➡ President ➡ State Assembly ➡ Parliament

Aligning State Identity with Language & Culture

Context of State Name Changes:

▪ India has witnessed several state name changes reflecting linguistic, cultural, or historical identities:
   » **Orissa to Odisha (2011):** Both state and language names were amended.
   » **Uttaranchal to Uttarakhand (2007):** Name revised to reflect local usage.
▪ These changes were carried out through constitutional amendments supported by state demands.

Significance of the Name Change:

▪ **Cultural and Linguistic Identity:** Supporters argue that "Keralam" aligns more closely with the state's Malayalam linguistic heritage and reflects its original historical name. The move has also drawn political attention as the state heads toward Assembly elections.

▪ **Constitutional and Administrative Implications:** While largely symbolic, changing a state's name requires careful constitutional compliance and impacts official documents, schedules, and references in federal records once finalised through Parliament.

Conclusion:

The Cabinet's approval to rename Kerala as Keralam marks an important constitutional exercise in recognising regional identity and linguistic heritage. While the Cabinet's nod is a critical step, final approval will depend on Parliament's action after state and presidential recommendations under Article 3. This decision also underscores how India's federal structure accommodates local aspirations within constitutional parameters.

3

India–Israel Relations: Technology, Security and Strategic Balance

Context:

Recently, on 25–26 February, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a State Visit to Israel. During this visit, it was announced that bilateral ties between the two countries would be elevated to a Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity. This step signifies a qualitative transformation in India–Israel relations, moving beyond a defence-centric framework toward a broader technology-driven alliance.

Key Highlights of the Visit:

- **Strategic and Security Cooperation:** Both countries reaffirmed their strong partnership in defence and security, including enhanced defence collaboration, joint development and production, and technology transfer. They reiterated their shared stance against terrorism, emphasizing that it has "no place in the world."

- **Critical and Emerging Technologies:** A partnership was established in critical and emerging technologies to cooperate in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, critical minerals, cybersecurity, and digital innovation.

- **Economic and Trade Cooperation:** India and Israel agreed to work toward finalizing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of the year, which would significantly boost economic engagement. Expansion of digital payment cooperation, including the possible linkage of UPI systems to promote cross-border financial integration.

- **Agriculture and Rural Development:** Agricultural cooperation, historically a key pillar of India–Israel relations, will be expanded. This includes scaling up Centres of Excellence and establishing "Villages of Excellence" to transfer Israeli agricultural technologies to Indian farms.

- **People-to-People Contact and Labour Mobility:** Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in education, culture, research, and academic exchanges. Israel agreed to allow up to 50,000 additional Indian workers by 2030, enhancing employment and livelihood opportunities.

- **Regional Initiatives and Multilateral Engagement:** Both leaders emphasized collaboration under frameworks such as I2U2 (India–Israel–UAE–USA) and the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) to support connectivity and economic integration.

Evolution of India–Israel Relations

- India recognized Israel in 1950; however, full diplomatic relations were established only in 1992. The geopolitical realities of the Cold War, India's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, and its moral-political commitment to the Palestinian cause limited the relationship for decades.

- After 1992, the global order changed. The collapse of the Soviet Union, economic liberalization, and emerging security

challenges pushed India toward pragmatic diplomacy. During the 1999 Kargil War, Israel supplied critical defence equipment at short notice. That moment of crisis laid the foundation of trust.

- In 2017, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel formalized the "de-hyphenation" policy, meaning India would view its relations with Israel independently of the Palestinian issue. This allowed India to adopt a balanced triangular strategy, such as deepening technological and defence cooperation with Israel, maintaining energy and diaspora ties with Arab states, and continuing its historical support for Palestine.

- At present, India–Israel relations have evolved from a limited defence-import relationship into a multidimensional strategic partnership, including:
  - » High-technology cooperation
  - » Defence co-development
  - » Trade expansion
  - » Water and agricultural innovation
  - » Minilateral frameworks such as I2U2
  - » The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

the "Critical and Emerging Technologies Partnership," cooperation has expanded into Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, cybersecurity, critical minerals, and semiconductors. This collaboration could provide India with a strategic edge in an era of global technological competition.

- Israel's startup ecosystem is considered among the most advanced in the world. On the other hand, India possesses a vast digital base, skilled human resources, and manufacturing capacity. The complementarity between the two can create a technological partnership that influences not only bilateral gains but also global value chains.

Defence and Technology-Based Alliance:

- Defence cooperation has been the backbone of India–Israel relations. Platforms such as Phalcon AWACS, Heron and Searcher drones, Spyder air defence systems, and electronic warfare equipment have significantly enhanced the capabilities of the Indian armed forces. The co-development of the Barak-8 missile system symbolizes India's transition from a mere buyer to a co-developer.

- However, the significance of the current elevation lies in the fact that the relationship is no longer confined to defence. Through

Economic Dimension:

- Bilateral trade has grown from approximately USD 200 million in 1992 to USD 3.75 billion in 2024–25. However, it remains below its full potential. The proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) can convert this potential into tangible outcomes.

- Beyond diamonds and chemicals, cooperation in agri-technology, water management, defence co-production, cybersecurity, and digital payments can elevate economic ties to new heights. The possible linkage of UPI systems would facilitate cross-border payment mechanisms, forming the backbone of a

future digital economy.

Agriculture and Water Cooperation:

- An extremely practical dimension of India–Israel cooperation lies in agriculture and water management. The 43 Centres of Excellence established in India are transferring Israeli precision farming, drip irrigation, and protected cultivation technologies adapted to Indian conditions.

- Amid the challenges of climate change and water scarcity, cooperation in desalination, wastewater recycling, and integrated water management could prove vital for India's water-stressed western and peninsular regions. Thus, the partnership encompasses not only strategic and economic aspects but also social and environmental dimensions.

Regional and Global Perspective:

- The elevation of India–Israel ties cannot be viewed separately from West Asia's broader geopolitics. Platforms such as I2U2 (India–Israel–UAE–USA) and IMEC indicate that India is expanding its geo-economic influence through multilateral, minilateral, and connectivity-based diplomacy.

- Projects like IMEC can provide India with alternative routes to Europe, promoting maritime trade, energy security, and supply chain diversification.

Challenges:

- Despite strong momentum, several structural challenges persist-
  - » **The Iran Dilemma:** Israel considers Iran an existential threat. For India, however, Iran is crucial for energy security and connectivity through the Chabahar Port. Balancing these interests is complex.
  - » **The Palestinian Question:** India officially supports a two-state solution. During Middle East escalations, sustaining the de-hyphenation policy may become difficult.
  - » **The China Factor:** China is Israel's largest trading partner in Asia. Chinese investments in Israeli infrastructure and technology sectors create strategic

sensitivities for India.
  - » **Intellectual Property Concerns:** Israeli firms express concerns about India's relatively lenient IPR regime. Reluctance to transfer source codes and deep technological know-how may slow defence indigenization.
  - » **Risks to Megaprojects:** Connectivity initiatives like IMEC rely on infrastructure such as the Port of Haifa. Regional conflicts may affect their security and viability.

Way Forward:

To transform the Special Strategic Partnership into concrete outcomes, certain steps are necessary. First, there is a need to move toward defence co-production and joint intellectual property ownership to strengthen Atmanirbhar Bharat. Second, platforms such as I2U2 and IMEC should be institutionalized to ensure the steady progress of connectivity and energy projects. Third, innovation ecosystems must be expanded through joint research in AI, semiconductors, green technologies, and water management. Finally, academic and Track-2 diplomacy should be strengthened to deepen people-to-people trust and promote long-term cooperation.

Conclusion:

The elevation of India-Israel relations to a Special Strategic Partnership symbolizes 21st-century diplomacy, where defence, technology, economy, and geopolitics are deeply interconnected. This partnership offers India the opportunity to play a balanced, autonomous, and influential role in West Asia. If both countries manage challenges with balance, transparency, and long-term vision, this relationship will extend beyond bilateral interests and contribute significantly to the global technological and economic architecture.

Short Issues

India and GCC Nations Sign Terms of Reference for FTA

Context:

In a major step towards deepening economic engagement, India and the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) signed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on 5 February 2026. The ToR serves as a formal precursor to the commencement of FTA negotiations, outlining the scope, objectives, and modalities of discussions between the two sides. The GCC countries, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE collectively constitute India's largest merchandise trading partners, surpassing trade volumes with both the European Union and the United States.

Bilateral Benefits:

- **Trade and Investment:** A potential FTA is expected to remove or reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers, facilitating a smoother and larger flow of goods and services.
- **Energy Diversification:** The GCC's vast energy resources could support India's energy security and diversification objectives.
- **Employment Opportunities:** India's workforce, both within GCC nations and domestically, could benefit from increased trade, services, and investment flows.
- **Investment Influx:** Existing investments from GCC countries are likely to expand under the FTA framework, boosting infrastructure, industrial growth, and the services sector in India.

About Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):

- FTAs are agreements between countries aimed at reducing or eliminating trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas, thereby creating preferential trade areas.
- Modern FTAs often extend beyond goods and services to include investment, intellectual property rights, and digital trade. While FTAs enhance market access and lower consumer costs, they may also pose challenges such as job displacement and environmental concerns.

India-GCC FTA Terms of Reference Signed

International Relations

India and GCC signed ToR for a proposed FTA, defining the pact's scope, structure, and modalities to deepen economic cooperation.

USD 178.56 billion

India's trade with GCC in FY 2024-25, representing 15.42% of India's global trade.

ToR defines scope, structure, and modalities.

Framework Agreement for FTA exploration signed in 2004.

GCC: 61.5M market, $2.3T GDP (2024), $31.14B+ FDI (Sep 2025).

About the GCC:

- **Members:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates
- **Established:** 25 May 1981, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- **Objectives:** Economic, social, and security coordination; trade and customs integration; and promotion of technological progress
- **Significance:** The GCC is a major economic bloc with substantial oil and gas reserves and a large expatriate population, particularly from India
- **Role in Regional Stability:** The GCC plays a critical role in ensuring stability in the Middle East, fostering economic growth, and facilitating global investment flows

Conclusion:

The signing of the Terms of Reference underscores India's commitment to strengthening economic ties with the Middle East. If successfully negotiated, the India–GCC FTA could emerge as a landmark agreement, significantly expanding trade, investment, and

employment opportunities while reinforcing India's strategic and economic partnership with a geopolitically important region.

New START Treaty

Context:

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia expired on 5 February 2026. Russia has offered a one-year extension, but there has been no formal response from the United States. The impending expiration has raised global concerns about the future of nuclear arms control and the risk of a renewed arms race.

About the New START Treaty:

- **Background:** Signed in 2010 in Prague by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the treaty entered into force on 5 February 2011. It was extended in 2021 for a further five-year period.
- **Purpose:** The treaty limits both countries to 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads and 700 deployed delivery systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. It also places caps on total deployed and non-deployed launchers.
- **Verification Mechanisms:** New START incorporated mutual inspections, notifications, and regular data exchanges to reduce mistrust and enhance transparency.
- **Suspension of Participation:** In February 2023, Russia suspended certain aspects of the treaty, particularly on-site inspections, while continuing to adhere to the numerical limits. The United States also partially suspended compliance-related notifications in response.

Significance and Benefits:

- **Strategic Stability:** New START ensured predictability in U.S.–Russia strategic relations and reduced the risk of uncontrolled nuclear competition.
- **Transparency:** Regular data exchanges and inspections lowered the likelihood of accidental escalation and misinterpretation.
- **Arms Reduction Legacy:** The treaty contributed to a significant reduction in global nuclear warheads, from tens of thousands during the Cold War to around 12,000 today.
- **Confidence-Building:** Clearly defined limits helped sustain a degree of trust even amid heightened tensions, including the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

The New START Treaty

Signed in 2010
- Signed by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev
- Entered into force on February 5, 2011
- Extended in 2021 for 5 more years

Key Provisions

1,550 Deployed Nuclear Warheads

700 Deployed ICBMs, SLBMs & Heavy Bombers

Inspections & Data Exchanges

Suspension of Participation

February 2023 Russia Suspended Inspections

U.S. Limited Treaty Notifications

Current Status

Numerical Limits Still Observed

Verification Measures Suspended

Challenges and Current Issues:

- **Lack of Extension:** The absence of agreement on an extension or a successor treaty has

created uncertainty regarding binding nuclear limits.

- **Erosion of Verification:** The suspension of inspections has weakened monitoring mechanisms and mutual confidence.
- **Geopolitical Context:** Efforts to bring other nuclear-armed states, particularly China, into arms control frameworks have so far proved unsuccessful.

Implications of Expiry:

- **Potential Arms Race:** Without legal constraints, the United States and Russia may expand their nuclear arsenals, increasing the risk of competition.
- **Loss of Transparency:** Reduced verification measures could heighten the chances of miscalculation and strategic misunderstanding.
- **Global Nuclear Governance at Risk:** The lapse of New START may undermine the broader global arms control architecture and the norms underpinning the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- **Multilateral Dynamics:** Other nuclear-armed states may feel pressured to expand or modernise their arsenals, complicating future disarmament efforts.

Conclusion:

The possible lapse of the New START Treaty represents a critical juncture in global security. Its absence would threaten strategic stability and weaken the existing arms control framework. Extending the treaty, negotiating a successor agreement, or pursuing inclusive multilateral arms control mechanisms is essential to prevent escalation and preserve international peace and security.

Rafah Reopening and the Gaza Peace Plan

Context:

Recently, Israel reopened the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt on a limited basis for pedestrian movement under a U.S.-brokered ceasefire framework that began in October 2025. This marks the first significant access through Rafah since Israel took control of the area in May 2024 during its conflict with Hamas. While the reopening is highly restricted, it represents a critical though constrained, humanitarian step, particularly for medical patients and returning civilians.

Geographical and Political Background:

- The Gaza Strip is a narrow Palestinian territory along the eastern Mediterranean coast, bordering Israel to the north and east and Egypt to the southwest. It has long been a flashpoint in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, shaped by contested claims over land, identity, and governance.
- Since 1967, Gaza has experienced periods of Israeli military control and blockade, and since 2007, it has been governed by Hamas, which is designated as a terrorist organisation by Israel, the United States, and the European Union. The conflict escalated sharply on 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched a major attack on southern Israel, triggering a prolonged Israeli military campaign in Gaza.

Strategic Importance of Rafah:

- The Rafah crossing is Gaza's primary access point to the outside world that bypasses Israel. Its reopening, although limited and tightly controlled, enables rare movement of people and provides symbolic relief to a territory that has remained largely isolated due to prolonged conflict and border closures.

About Trump's Gaza Peace Plan:

- In September 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled a 20-point Gaza peace proposal aimed at ending the Israel–Hamas conflict and establishing a framework for humanitarian relief and long-term stability.
- The plan calls for an immediate ceasefire, the return of all hostages within 72 hours, and a phased withdrawal of Israeli forces contingent on de-escalation.
- The proposal envisions a demilitarised and redeveloped Gaza, free from terror threats, with governance initially managed by a transitional technocratic committee under an international "Board of Peace" chaired by Trump and comprising global figures such as former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.
- Israel would refrain from annexation, while a multinational International Stabilization Force would ensure security and train local police. Humanitarian assistance and large-scale infrastructure reconstruction constitute core pillars of the plan.

Conclusion:

The limited reopening of the Rafah crossing underscores ongoing efforts to ease humanitarian access amid the Gaza crisis. Trump's peace initiative represents a comprehensive yet complex proposal linking ceasefire arrangements, security guarantees, governance restructuring, and post-conflict reconstruction. Its success will depend on fragile political dynamics among Israel, Hamas, and international stakeholders, which will ultimately shape prospects for peace and stability in the region.

India–U.S. Trade Deal

Context:

Recently, India and the United States announced a major trade agreement under which U.S. tariffs on Indian goods have been reduced from around 50% to 18%. As part of the arrangement, India agreed to halt purchases of Russian oil and lower trade barriers on U.S. imports, signalling a reset in bilateral economic relations.

Background:

- In August 2025, the United States imposed punitive duties by raising tariffs on Indian goods to as high as 50%. This included a 25% reciprocal tariff and an additional 25% penalty tariff linked to India's continued purchase of Russian crude oil.
- The elevated tariffs created uncertainty for Indian exporters across key sectors such as textiles, engineering goods, chemicals, and agricultural products.Under the new understanding, the penalty tariff has been withdrawn, and only the revised reciprocal tariff remains, set at 18%.

India–U.S. Trade Overview:

- **Largest Trading Partner:** The United States has been India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade amounting to approximately USD 131.84 billion in FY 2024–25.
- **Trade in Goods and Services:** India recorded a healthy trade surplus, with exports to the U.S. valued at USD 86.51 billion and imports at USD 45.33 billion in FY 2024–25.
- **Sectoral Composition:** Major Indian exports include pharmaceuticals, telecom instruments, precious stones, petroleum products, and ready-made garments.

Major Export Sectors Set to Benefit:

- The reduction in tariffs is expected to significantly enhance the competitiveness of several Indian sectors in the U.S. market:
  » **Textiles and Apparel:** Previously burdened by high duties, the sector is

now poised for renewed demand.

» **Gems and Jewellery:** Lower tariffs could result in improved valuations and export growth.

» **Solar Manufacturing:** "Made in India" solar cells and modules gain a cost advantage.

» **Engineering Goods:** Products such as pumps, compressors, and auto components become more price competitive.

INDIA-US TRADE DEAL

NON-TARIFF BARRIERS TO BE ADDRESSED

Big win for exporters

Compliances to come down

Procedural delays to reduce

Massive opportunities for employment

Market access to increase

Boost to exports-led growth

RECIPROCAL TARIFFS SLASHED TO 18%

Economic and Strategic Impact of the Deal:

▪ **Market Reaction:** Indian equity markets and the rupee rallied following the announcement, reflecting improved investor confidence.

▪ **Export Competitiveness:** Reduced tariffs give Indian exporters a competitive edge over regional rivals such as China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh.

▪ **Broader Engagement:** India also committed to increasing imports from the U.S., including energy, defence equipment, and aircraft, as part of a broader commercial engagement framework.

Challenges:

▪ Despite the positive announcement, concerns remain regarding the absence of detailed legal texts and sector-wise tariff schedules. Clarity is also required on India's commitments related to tariff reductions and agricultural market access for U.S. products. Additionally, certain duties, particularly on steel and aluminium may continue to exceed the average 18% rate for specific items.

Conclusion:

The India–U.S. trade deal, reducing tariffs to 18%, marks a significant milestone in bilateral economic relations. It helps ease recent trade tensions and strengthens India's export prospects. While detailed implementation timelines and sector-specific schedules are awaited, the agreement reflects deepening strategic cooperation across trade, technology and investment, reinforcing the United States' role as a key economic partner for India.

2nd India–Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Context:

Recently, India hosted the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi after a gap of ten years. The meeting was co-chaired by India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Foreign Ministers from all 22 member states of the Arab League, along with the League's Secretary-General, attended the meeting to deepen political, economic, security, and cultural cooperation.

About the Arab League (League of Arab States):

▪ The Arab League, officially known as the League of Arab States (LAS), is a regional intergovernmental organisation comprising

22 member states from the Middle East and North Africa. It was established in Cairo on 22 March 1945 to foster political, economic, and cultural cooperation and to safeguard the sovereignty of its members.

- Each member state has one vote in the League Council, and decisions are binding only on those states that adopt them. The headquarters of the Arab League is located in Cairo, Egypt.

- The League's members include founding states such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen, along with other members like Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, and Tunisia. India holds observer status in the Arab League.

2026 Delhi Declaration

Adopted during the 2nd India–Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi.

Marking 10 years since the 1st Meeting in Bahrain.

Jointly Issued by India and the League of Arab States

Israel–Palestine Issue
Supported Arab Peace Initiative, 2002 for a peaceful resolution.

Sovereignty & Integrity
Emphasised respect for sovereignty of Sudan, Libya, and Somalia.

Yemen Stability
Condemned Houthi attacks, supported Yemen's unity and stability.

About India–Arab League Engagement:

- India's engagement with the Arab League was formalised in March 2002 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to institutionalise political dialogue. In December 2008, the Arab–India Cooperation Forum (AICF) was established to expand cooperation across multiple sectors, with its first meeting held in January 2016 in Bahrain.

- In 2010, India's Ambassador to Egypt was designated as the Permanent Representative to the Arab League, further strengthening diplomatic ties. Economic engagement between India and Arab countries is substantial, with bilateral trade exceeding USD 240 billion, including major energy imports that are vital to India's economy.

- Initiatives such as the India–Arab Partnership and Investment Summit and the India–Arab Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (2026) aim to further enhance trade, investment, technology collaboration, and people-to-people linkages.

Key Outcomes of the 2nd Meeting:

- **New Delhi Declaration and Strategic Cooperation:** India and Arab states adopted the New Delhi Declaration, reaffirming cooperation across political, economic, and security domains, along with an Executive Programme (2026–28) to guide future collaboration.

- **Counter-Terrorism:** Both sides reaffirmed a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism, condemned cross-border terrorism, and agreed to strengthen joint efforts against terrorism and transnational crime.

- **Regional Stability:** Leaders discussed regional crises, including Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, and Libya, underscoring the need for peaceful resolution and regional stability. India reiterated its support for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

- **Economic and Technological Cooperation:** The meeting reaffirmed cooperation in trade, energy, connectivity, digital technologies, innovation, and people-to-people contacts, as outlined in the AICF's Executive Programme.

- **Institutional Momentum:** The meeting generated momentum for regular high-level engagements, including future Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs), partnership conferences, and cultural and educational initiatives.

Conclusion:

The 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting underscores India's expanding diplomatic footprint in West Asia and reinforces its strategic partnerships with Arab states. It institutionalises cooperation across a broad spectrum-ranging from energy security and trade to counter-terrorism and cultural exchanges, thereby

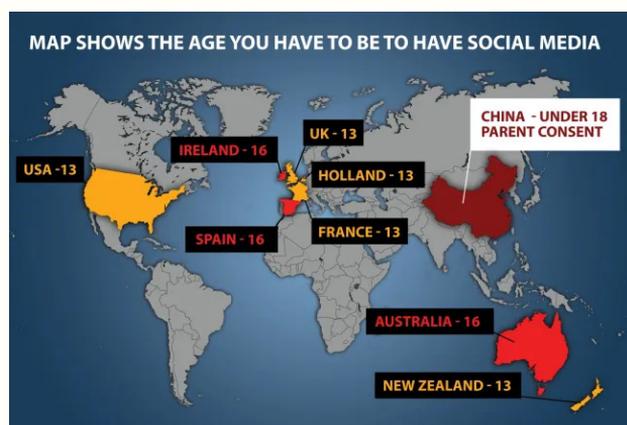aligning India's foreign policy with evolving regional and global dynamics.

Spain Plans to Ban Social Media for Children Under 16

Context:

Recently, Spain has joined a growing global trend to tighten regulations on children's access to social media. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced on 3 February 2026, at the World Government Summit in Dubai, that his government plans to ban social media use for those under 16 years of age. This move aims to protect minors from online harms and ensure safer digital engagement for young users.

Why Is Spain Taking This Step?

▪ **Protection Against Online Harms:** The Spanish government has highlighted that children face significant online risks, including:

» Exposure to pornographic and sexually exploitative content, including harmful AI-generated material.

» Interaction with hate speech, disinformation, and violent content.

» Adverse effects on mental health, well-being, and social development.

» Prime Minister Sánchez described social media as a "digital Wild West," where children navigate complex digital spaces without adequate safeguards.

MAP SHOWS THE AGE YOU HAVE TO BE TO HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA

USA - 13
IRELAND - 16
UK - 13
HOLLAND - 13
SPAIN - 16
FRANCE - 13
CHINA - UNDER 18 PARENT CONSENT
AUSTRALIA - 16
NEW ZEALAND - 13

Key Provisions of Spain's Proposal:

▪ **Age Restriction:**

» Minors under 16 would be prohibited from accessing or creating social media profiles.

» Platforms would be required to implement robust age-verification systems, going beyond simple tick-box checks.

» The ban would be integrated into existing digital safety laws currently under parliamentary discussion.

▪ **Broad Digital Safety Reforms:**

» Legal accountability for social media executives who fail to remove illegal content.

» Criminalisation of algorithmic amplification of harmful or illegal material.

» New measures to monitor hate speech and online polarisation.

International Context:

▪ **Australia:** In December 2025, Australia became the first country to enforce a blanket ban on social media for under-16s under the Online Safety Amendment Act, penalising non-compliant platforms.

▪ **France:** France has passed a bill to ban social media use for children under 15, effective from 2026, and has also sought to restrict mobile phone use in schools.

▪ **Wider European Movement:** Countries such as Denmark and parts of the United Kingdom are considering similar measures, signalling a broader European trend.

Challenges and Practical Considerations:

▪ **Verification and Enforcement:** Effective age verification is technically challenging and may raise privacy concerns.

▪ **Legislative Hurdles:** The Spanish government lacks a parliamentary majority, requiring broader political support.

▪ **Balancing Rights:** Critics warn that such bans may limit freedom of expression and shift attention away from digital literacy

initiatives.

Conclusion:

Spain's proposed ban reflects growing global concern over children's exposure to online harms. By following the path set by Australia and France, Spain aims to redefine platform responsibility towards minors while balancing child protection, digital freedom, and government regulation. The proposal carries significant implications for young users, technology companies, and society at large.

Funding to Chabahar Port

Context:

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) informed Parliament that India has fully paid the USD 120 million committed for the development of the Chabahar Port, with the final tranche transferred on 26 August 2025. This development underscores India's intent to honour international commitments despite external constraints.

About Chabahar Port Project:

- Chabahar is a deep-water port located in south-eastern Iran on the Gulf of Oman. It provides India with direct maritime access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan, thereby enhancing regional connectivity and strategic outreach.

Long-term Contract:

- On 13 May 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement under which India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) would equip and operate the Shahid Beheshti Terminal. Under this agreement, India committed USD 120 million for port equipment and infrastructure development.

Strategic Significance of the Project:

- **Connectivity and Trade:** Chabahar is central to India's Connect Central Asia Policy, improving access to landlocked regions and facilitating trade routes.

- **Counterweight to Gwadar:** It serves as a strategic alternative to Gwadar Port in Pakistan, developed with Chinese assistance, thereby balancing regional influence.

- **Economic and Humanitarian Engagement:** The port has previously enabled humanitarian shipments such as wheat and pulses to Afghanistan, demonstrating its operational relevance.

Challenges and Geopolitical Implications:

- **US Sanctions Environment:** Sanctions create uncertainty for Indian companies and long-term operations.

- **Budgetary Shifts:** The absence of allocations in the Union Budget 2026–27 suggests completion of funding or cautious recalibration.

- **Diplomatic Balancing:** India must carefully balance relations with Iran and the United States while protecting its strategic interests.
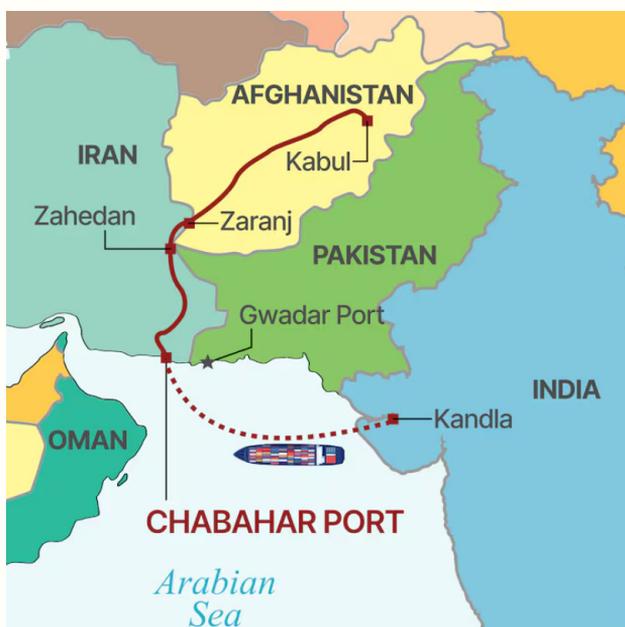
Way Forward:

It is essential for India to maintain sustained and proactive diplomatic engagement with all key stakeholders, including Iran, to effectively manage the political and strategic challenges associated with the project. Private

sector participation, financial innovation and risk-mitigation mechanisms should also be considered to ensure the long-term operational viability of Chabahar Port. Additionally, connecting Chabahar Port to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will strengthen regional connectivity and provide new impetus to India's trade, supply chain and strategic access with Eurasian countries.

Conclusion:

India's fulfilment of the USD 120 million pledge to Chabahar Port reaffirms its commitment to strategic infrastructure diplomacy amid a complex geopolitical landscape. Despite sanctions-related and fiscal challenges, the port remains a vital pillar of India's regional connectivity, strategic autonomy, and foreign policy outreach in West and Central Asia

US-Bangladesh Trade Agreement

Context:

The recently signed US–Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade has triggered concerns among Indian textile and apparel exporters. The agreement provides a mechanism for zero reciprocal tariff access for specified volumes of Bangladeshi textile and apparel exports to the US, subject to the use of US-origin textile inputs such as cotton and man-made fibres (MMF). This development comes at a time when Indian exporters were expecting improved competitiveness in the U.S. market following an interim India–U.S. trade understanding.

Why the Concern for India?

- » **Yarn Dependence:** India exported $1.47 billion worth of cotton yarn (570 million kg) to Bangladesh in FY 2024–25, making it India's largest yarn export destination.
- » **U.S. Market Exposure:** Nearly 20% of Bangladesh's garment exports and 26% of India's cotton apparel exports go to

the U.S.

- If Bangladesh increases procurement of U.S. cotton to avail zero-tariff access, demand for Indian yarn and cotton could decline. Indian industry leaders have raised concerns about traceability mechanisms, fearing potential misuse of origin claims.

Key Highlights of the US–Bangladesh Trade Agreement

Tariff Reduction
US to lower tariff on Bangladeshi exports to **19%** from previous **20%** under new bilateral trade agreement.

Earlier Rate Changes
Tariff was originally **37%**, reduced to **20%** in August 2025.

Zero-Tariff Provisions
Duty-free access for Bangladeshi garments made with **US cotton & fibers**.

Mechanism Tied to US Exports
Duty-free quota linked to US textile & fiber exports to Bangladesh.

Exports & Market Significance
Garments & textiles are major exports to the US.

Negotiations Timeframe
Over 9 months of talks since April 2025.

Non-Tariff Commitments
Bangladesh to accept US safety & FDA standards.

Bilateral Commercial Deals
Planned purchases of US agriculture & energy products.

Signing & Implementation
Agreement signed, to take effect after official notifications.

Impact on Competitiveness:

- Bangladesh is a dominant global apparel exporter, especially in cotton-based garments such as T-shirts and women's wear. Preferential tariff access could:
  - » Reduce India's price competitiveness in 100% cotton garments.
  - » Shift supply chains toward U.S. cotton.
  - » Increase Bangladesh's apparel exports to the U.S. at India's expense.

About Indian Apparel Sector:

- **Global Rank:** 6th largest exporter of textiles

and apparel.

- **Exports:** $35.9 billion in FY 2023–24 (Apparel = 42%).
- **Major Markets:** USA (25%), EU, UAE, UK, Germany.
- **Employment:** 4.5 crore direct and 10 crore indirect, the second-largest employer after agriculture.

Structural Challenges:

- **Fragmentation:** Over 80% of MSMEs lack scale compared to Bangladesh's mega-factories.
- **Synthetic Gap:** Global demand is shifting toward MMF, while India remains cotton-heavy.
- **High Cost of Capital:** ~9% in India versus ~4.5% in Vietnam.
- **Tariff Disadvantages:** Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access in key markets.

Government Initiatives:

- **PM MITRA Parks:** Integrated textile infrastructure.
- **PLI Scheme (Textiles):** Boosts MMF and technical textiles.
- **AEPC:** Export facilitation.
- **Samarth Scheme:** Skill development.

Way Forward:

India should negotiate reciprocal tariff provisions with the United States similar to those secured by Bangladesh to maintain competitive parity in the U.S. market. Simultaneously, there is a need to accelerate diversification into man-made fibres (MMF) and value-added garments in order to align with shifting global demand patterns. Strengthening traceability mechanisms and promoting the branding of Indian cotton can enhance credibility and market positioning. Additionally, improving scale through cluster integration and reducing the cost of capital will be crucial to enhancing efficiency and long-term competitiveness in the global apparel value chain.

Conclusion:

The U.S.–Bangladesh trade agreement highlights the fragility of India's export competitiveness in a highly tariff-sensitive sector. While immediate disruption may be limited, sustained strategic reforms in trade diplomacy, product diversification, and supply chain efficiency are essential to safeguard India's position in global apparel markets.

India and Malaysia Sign Pacts to Expand Ties

Context:

Recently, India and Malaysia signed 11 agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to deepen cooperation in defence, trade, semiconductors, digital technologies, energy, and health. These pacts mark a strategic expansion of bilateral ties.

Key Agreements:

- The agreements cover:
  » **Defence and security:** Enhanced maritime cooperation, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism efforts, and joint capacity building.
  » **Trade and investment:** Promotion of bilateral trade, local currency settlement mechanisms, and facilitation of Malaysian investments in electronics, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and healthcare.
  » **Technology and semiconductors:** Collaboration to integrate into global supply chains for advanced manufacturing.
  » **Multilateral cooperation:** Joint initiatives at ASEAN, the United Nations, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- The pacts reinforce a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism, with both nations condemning cross-border terrorism and radicalisation.

About India–Malaysia Bilateral Relationship:

- **Historical and Civilisational Links:** India and Malaysia share over two millennia of civilisational connections, shaped by trade, religion, language, and cultural exchanges. Sanskritic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions influenced Malaysia's historical evolution. Diplomatic relations were established soon after India's independence and have been sustained through consistent political engagement.

- **Political and Diplomatic Engagement:** In 2024, the relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, reflecting growing political trust. High-level visits, foreign office consultations, and cooperation in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and ASEAN-led platforms have strengthened diplomatic engagement. Malaysia supports India's permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.

- **Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Malaysia is India's third-largest trading partner in ASEAN. Bilateral trade in 2024–25 stood at US\$ 19.86 billion. Major Indian exports include petroleum products, engineering goods, and organic chemicals, while imports comprise vegetable oils, machinery, and electrical equipment. Malaysia's strategic location along the Strait of Malacca supports India's Act East Policy and maritime connectivity initiatives.

- **Defence and Security Cooperation:** As maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions, both countries share concerns regarding freedom of navigation, maritime security, piracy, and terrorism. Joint exercises, capacity building initiatives, and intelligence sharing have expanded steadily.

- **Diaspora and People-to-People Ties:** India's diaspora in Malaysia exceeds 2 million, contributing significantly to politics, business, education, and culture. Educational exchanges, tourism, and cultural diplomacy further strengthen bilateral relations.

Significance:

- The pacts, combined with deep historical ties, reflect multi-sectoral cooperation encompassing trade, security, technology, and people-to-people linkages.

- They consolidate India's strategic presence in Southeast Asia while reinforcing shared commitments to regional stability, economic integration, and reforms in global governance.

India Announces USD 175 Million Economic Package to Seychelles

Context:

Recently, President Dr. Patrick Herminie of Seychelles visited India from February 5 to 10, 2026. This marks his first visit to India since assuming office in October 2025. During his visit, India announced a special economic package of USD 175 million for the Republic of Seychelles. The package aims to support social housing, e-mobility, health, vocational training, defence, and maritime security. This initiative underscores India's long-standing commitment

to Seychelles' socio-economic development while reinforcing strategic cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Historical and Diplomatic Relations:

▪ India and Seychelles share a deeply rooted relationship characterized by strategic maritime cooperation, development assistance, and strong people-to-people ties.

▪ India considers Seychelles a key partner in its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and MAHASAGAR visions, emphasizing regional security, sustainable growth, and maritime stability.

▪ India and Seychelles have maintained bilateral diplomatic relations since Seychelles gained independence in 1976. Both nations describe their relationship as built on friendship, trust, and cooperation, with Seychelles acknowledging India as a "rock of dependability" in the IOR.

Maritime and Defence Cooperation:

▪ Seychelles' strategic location makes it a vital partner for India's maritime security goals. India has provided patrol vessels (e.g., PS Zoroaster), Dornier aircraft, and coastal surveillance radars to protect Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

▪ The Assumption Island naval project, though facing domestic political sensitivities in Seychelles, continues to be a focal point of joint maritime collaboration. Historical interventions include Indian naval assistance during political crises in 1986 and ongoing anti-piracy patrols.

People-to-People and Cultural Ties:

▪ The relationship is strengthened by robust people-to-people links: about 11% of Seychelles' population is of Indian origin, and 82% have some Indian heritage.

▪ India's ITEC program facilitates technical training, while medical tourism to India and direct air connectivity promote cultural and economic exchange.

▪ These initiatives, combined with defence, development, and strategic cooperation, highlight India's holistic approach to bilateral engagement in the Indian Ocean region.

Conclusion:

The USD 175 million package marks a new phase in India–Seychelles relations, combining economic development, defence cooperation, and technical assistance. It reflects India's broader strategic priorities, including the "SAGAR" initiative and the "Neighbourhood First" policy, aiming to foster regional stability, sustainable development, and capacity building. The package is expected to enhance livelihoods, strengthen infrastructure, and deepen people-to-people and institutional linkages, consolidating India's role as a reliable partner in the Indian Ocean.

Sawalkote Hydropower Project

Context:

Recently, Pakistan has protested strongly against India's decision to proceed with the Rs.5,129 crore Sawalkote Hydroelectric Project on the Chenab river in Jammu & Kashmir, alleging it violates India's international

commitments and constitutes a "dewatering policy" harming Islamabad's water rights.

About The Indus Water Treaty (IWT):

- The Indus Water Treaty (1960) is a water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank, governing the six-river Indus system.

Key features:

- **Signatories & Date:** Signed on 19 September 1960 by PM Jawaharlal Nehru and President Ayub Khan in Karachi.
- **River Division:**
  » **Eastern Rivers (India):** Ravi, Beas, Sutlej – unrestricted use by India.
  » **Western Rivers (Pakistan):** Indus, Jhelum, Chenab – Pakistan has primary control, India retains limited rights.
- **India's Rights on Western Rivers:** Domestic use, non-consumptive, agricultural purposes, and run-of-the-river hydropower projects.
- **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC):** Bilateral body for cooperation, data sharing, and annual meetings.
- **Dispute Resolution:**
  » PIC for technical questions
  » Neutral Expert (appointed by World Bank for differences)
  » Court of Arbitration for formal disputes
- The Sawalkote project has become the first major Chenab project cleared following India's suspension of IWT after the Pahalgam terror attack in 2025.

Pakistan's key Objections:

- **Breach of Treaty Obligations:** Pakistan claims India's unilateral move violates IWT provisions and demanded formal consultations through the Indus Water Commissioners, which it asserts were ignored.
- **Water Security Concerns:** The project affects the "existential water rights" of Pakistan's population, as much of its water comes from Chenab, Jhelum, and Indus.
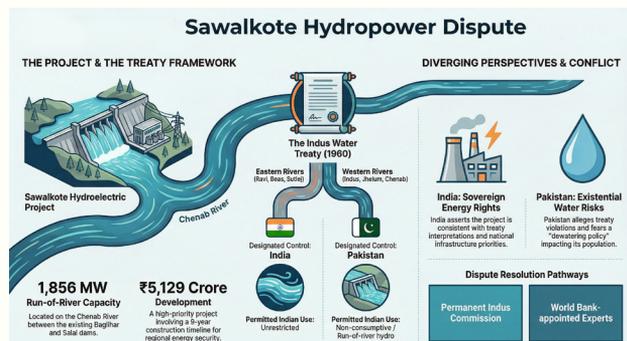
About India's Position:

- India maintains that the Sawalkote Hydropower Project is a domestic development initiative pursued under its sovereign rights, fully consistent with its interpretation of the Indus Waters Treaty.
- India emphasises that advancing hydropower projects on western rivers is part of national energy security, regional development, and infrastructure priorities, and it considers objections from Pakistan as non-binding on India's domestic policy decisions.

About Sawalkote Hydropower:

- **Location:** Chenab river, Udhampur & Ramban districts, between Baglihar (upstream) and Salal (downstream)
- **Capacity:** 1,856 MW (Stage I: 1,406 MW; Stage II: 450 MW)
- **Type:** Run-of-the-river hydroelectric project
- **Cost & Timeline:** Rs.5,129 crore; construction ~9 years, with central push for early commissioning

Conclusion:

The Sawalkote hydroelectric project illustrates the balance between India's development needs and Indus Water Treaty obligations. While India pursues domestic energy and infrastructure goals, Pakistan sees potential threats to its water security. The project highlights the role of transboundary water diplomacy, treaty compliance, and conflict resolution in South Asia, showing how infrastructure, geopolitics and international law intersect in policymaking.
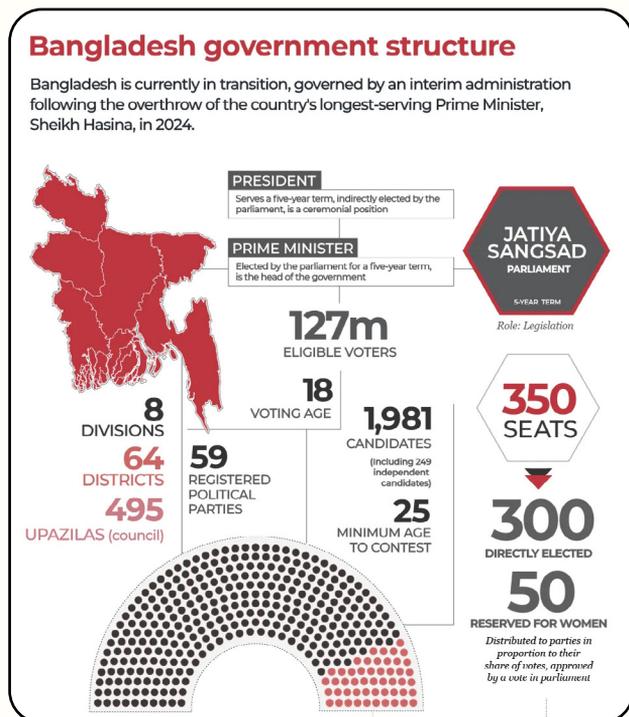
Formation of New Government in Bangladesh

Context:

Recently, Tarique Rahman was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh following a landslide victory for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the 13th parliamentary elections. This event marks a major political transition in Dhaka after years of internal political turbulence and represents a potential inflection point in bilateral ties with India

About 2026 Bangladesh General Election:

- The general elections held on 12 February 2026 were the first democratic polls after the 2024 student-led uprising that led to the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and ended the long dominance of the Awami League.
- The elections resulted in a decisive victory for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Tarique Rahman. The mandate reflects a domestic political shift and signals potential recalibration in Bangladesh's foreign policy.

Bangladesh government structure

Bangladesh is currently in transition, governed by an interim administration following the overthrow of the country's longest-serving Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, in 2024.

PRESIDENT Serves a five-year term, indirectly elected by the parliament, is a ceremonial position

PRIME MINISTER Elected by the parliament for a five-year term, is the head of the government

JATIYA SANGSAD PARLIAMENT 5-YEAR TERM *Role: Legislation*

127m ELIGIBLE VOTERS

18 VOTING AGE

1,981 CANDIDATES (including 249 independent candidates)

350 SEATS

8 DIVISIONS

64 DISTRICTS

495 UPAZILAS (council)

59 REGISTERED POLITICAL PARTIES

25 MINIMUM AGE TO CONTEST

300 DIRECTLY ELECTED

50 RESERVED FOR WOMEN *Distributed to parties in proportion to their share of votes, approved by a vote in parliament*

Background of Bilateral Relations:

- India and Bangladesh share deep cultural and historical ties, particularly from India's support during the 1971 Liberation War.
- During Sheikh Hasina's tenure (2009–2024), bilateral cooperation strengthened in:
  » Counter-terrorism and border security
  » Connectivity (road, rail, waterways)
  » Trade and energy cooperation
- However, unresolved issues persisted, including the Teesta River water-sharing dispute and border management concerns.

Recent Strains in Bilateral Ties:

- The 2024 student uprising and Hasina's subsequent stay in India created diplomatic friction.
- **Areas of Tension:**
  » Visa restrictions and protocol disagreements
  » Border incidents
  » Allegations within Bangladesh of Indian political interference
  » Public perception issues affecting trust
- These developments introduced uncertainty into a partnership that had otherwise remained strategically important for both countries.

Implications for India:

- **Opportunity for Reset:** The BNP leadership has expressed intent to maintain stable ties, opening space for pragmatic diplomacy.
- **Security Concerns:** India shares a 4,000+ km border with Bangladesh. Managing cross-border migration, smuggling, and insurgency remains crucial for Northeast India's stability.
- **Water and Trade Issues:** The Teesta dispute and trade imbalances may test bilateral trust. Cooperative mechanisms will be essential.
- **China Factor:** A BNP-led government may pursue a balanced foreign policy involving India, China, and Pakistan. India must carefully monitor growing Chinese influence

in South Asia.

Strategic Importance for India:

- For India, Bangladesh is critical because:
  - » It provides connectivity to Northeast India.
  - » It is a key partner in Bay of Bengal maritime security.
  - » Stability in Bangladesh directly affects India's internal security.
  - » It plays a major role in regional initiatives like BIMSTEC.
- Any deterioration in ties could impact India's eastern frontier and regional influence.

Way Forward:

- To safeguard its interests, India should:
  - » Engage early and consistently with the new BNP leadership.
  - » Resolve outstanding issues like Teesta through cooperative federal diplomacy.
  - » Enhance economic interdependence to create mutual stakes in stability.
  - » Strengthen people-to-people ties beyond political regimes.
  - » Monitor strategic competition without appearing intrusive.

Conclusion:

The 2026 swearing-in ceremony represents both continuity and change. While historical distrust and unresolved disputes pose challenges, the political transition offers an opportunity to recalibrate ties. Sustained diplomatic engagement, mutual respect, and strategic cooperation will be essential for ensuring stability and safeguarding India's long-term interests in the region.

India Signs Pax Silica Declaration

Context:

Recently, India formally signed the Pax Silica Declaration on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit held in New Delhi. This marks India's entry into a United States–led strategic initiative aimed at building secure and resilient supply chains for artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and critical minerals.

About Pax Silica:

- Pax Silica was launched in late 2025 as a consortium of nations committed to strengthening technological cooperation and supply chain resilience among "trusted partners," while addressing geopolitical vulnerabilities in critical technology sectors.
- The name Pax Silica combines "Pax" (Latin for peace) and "Silica" (a fundamental material used in semiconductor manufacturing), symbolising an alliance centered on technology sovereignty and supply chain security.
- It is conceived as a coalition of capabilities focused on ensuring resilient supply chains for AI infrastructure, semiconductor fabrication, critical minerals, and other advanced technologies.
- Initially comprising countries such as Australia, Japan, Israel, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the UAE, Singapore, Qatar, and Greece, India's inclusion significantly expands the coalition's geopolitical and economic footprint.

Pax Silica: Securing the Global Silicon Stack

Strategic Significance:

- **Technological Competition with China:** Pax Silica is widely perceived as a strategic initiative to counter China's dominance in global technology supply chains,

particularly in critical minerals processing, semiconductor fabrication, and AI technologies.

- **Economic and Security Framework:** The pact emphasizes collaborative research, coordinated investments, and supply chain resilience by integrating raw materials, manufacturing ecosystems, and AI development platforms across partner nations.

- **Trusted Technology Ecosystem:** The initiative seeks to reduce dependence on potentially adversarial sources of critical technologies, thereby safeguarding the "commanding heights" of the global digital economy among like-minded democracies.

India's Domestic and Geopolitical Interests:

- **Technological Self-Reliance:** India's participation aligns with national initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat, the National Critical Mineral Mission, and the India Semiconductor Mission, all of which aim to strengthen domestic technological capabilities and manufacturing ecosystems.

- **Talent and Innovation Base:** India's vast engineering talent pool and growing semiconductor design ecosystem are recognized as strategic assets that complement the coalition's objectives.

- **Supply Chain Diversification:** Membership provides India with an opportunity to diversify its technology supply chains and reduce reliance on any single external partner, particularly in a global environment where access to infrastructure and raw materials is central to future industries.

Geopolitical Implications:

- **Strengthening India–US Strategic Ties:** India's engagement with Pax Silica deepens its strategic partnership with the United States, potentially creating avenues for expanded cooperation in trade, technology transfer, and joint research and development.

- **Alignment with Democratic Technology Norms:** The alliance promotes governance frameworks grounded in transparency, ethical AI practices, and secure semiconductor standards, aligning India with countries advocating democratic norms in global technology governance.

Conclusion:

India's signing of the Pax Silica Declaration during the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi marks a significant milestone in contemporary technology diplomacy. It reflects not only deeper collaboration with the United States and other trusted partners but also India's aspiration to play a central role in shaping secure, democratic, and resilient technology and supply chain architectures in the 21st century.

India–Brazil Set $30 Billion Trade Target by 2030; Sign Critical Mineral Pacts

Context:

Recently, India and Brazil have set an ambitious target to raise bilateral trade to USD 30 billion by 2030, alongside signing agreements on critical minerals and rare earth cooperation. The development marks a significant step in strengthening ties between two major emerging economies of the Global South. Brazil President Mr. Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was on a visit to India during the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

Background:

- India and Brazil established diplomatic relations in 1948, and their partnership has evolved into a Strategic Partnership covering trade, defence, energy, and multilateral cooperation. Brazil is India's largest trading partner in Latin America, with bilateral trade fluctuating between USD 12–15 billion in recent years.

- The new target seeks to more than double trade by the end of the decade, reflecting growing economic complementarities.

About Mineral and Strategic Agreements:

- A key outcome of recent engagements is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on critical and rare earth minerals.
- **Significance:**
  » Diversifies India's mineral supply chains.
  » Reduces overdependence on dominant global suppliers.
  » Supports India's renewable energy, EV, semiconductor and defence manufacturing sectors.
  » Strengthens cooperation in exploration, processing and technology transfer.
  » Brazil possesses substantial reserves of rare earth elements and strategic minerals essential for clean energy technologies and high-tech industries.

Trade and Economic Relations:

- Brazil is India's largest trading partner in Latin America, with bilateral trade fluctuating between $12–15 billion in recent years.
- India's exports to Brazil mainly include organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, diesel, engineering goods (auto components, electrical and mechanical equipment), iron & steel, textiles, plastics and ceramics.
- India's imports from Brazil largely comprise crude oil, soya oil, gold, raw sugar and key minerals such as iron ore, manganese and copper ores, along with select agricultural products.

Multilateral and Strategic Convergence

- India and Brazil are key members of:
  » BRICS
  » G20
  » IBSA
  » BASIC
- Both countries advocate:
  » Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)
  » Greater voice for developing nations
  » A multipolar global order
  » South–South cooperation

Defence, Energy and Climate Cooperation:

- The two nations cooperate in defence production, maritime security and technology sharing.
- Brazil's leadership in biofuels complements India's renewable energy expansion. Both are part of the Global Biofuels Alliance, highlighting clean energy as a pillar of bilateral ties.

Strategic Significance for India:

- Enhances supply chain resilience.
- Strengthens Global South leadership.
- Expands India's footprint in Latin America.
- Supports industrial growth under Make in India.

Conclusion:

The USD 30 billion trade target and mineral cooperation agreements signal a deepening India–Brazil partnership rooted in economic pragmatism and strategic alignment. As two large democracies and emerging powers, their collaboration in trade, minerals, energy and global governance reinforces a broader vision of a balanced, multipolar world order.

Environment & Ecology

4

Wetland Conservation in India: Integrating Ecology, Security, and Sustainable Development

Context:

Wetlands are not merely natural resources; they constitute the foundational base of national interests related to peace, security, livelihoods, water, and food security. Recently, on 2 February 2026 (World Wetlands Day), Patna Bird Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh) and Chhari-Dhand (Gujarat) were designated as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, bringing the total number of Ramsar sites in India to 98. This recognition reflects India's environmental commitment and its strategic approach toward conservation.

Wetlands:

- Wetlands include marshes, lakes, large riverine ponds, coastal mangroves, and deep as well as shallow water bodies. They are not merely static water reservoirs but complex ecosystems that provide integrated services such as biodiversity conservation, regulation of the water cycle, soil structure maintenance, water storage, and natural disaster mitigation (flood control).

- According to the Ramsar Convention, wetlands are defined as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters."

Types of Wetlands

- » Freshwater wetlands – Lakes, ponds, and riverine zones
- » Marshlands and swamps
- » Coastal wetlands – Mangroves, lagoons
- » Artificial wetlands – Reservoirs, irrigation tanks, aquaculture areas
- The concept of wetlands is broad and encompasses both natural and human-made systems.

Importance of Wetlands:

- **Ecological Importance**
  - » **Biodiversity Conservation:** Wetlands provide habitat for numerous migratory birds, fish, amphibians, and wildlife species. For instance, Chilika Lake, one of Asia's largest brackish water lagoons is a major refuge for migratory birds.
  - » **Contribution to the Water Cycle:** Wetlands store rainwater and facilitate

groundwater recharge.

- » **Water Purification:** They function as natural filters, absorbing pollutants from water.
- ▪ **Economic Importance**
  - » Income generation through fisheries
  - » Tourism and bird watching
  - » Water availability for agriculture
  - » Reduced costs from disaster mitigation
  - » Healthy wetlands provide stability to local economies.
- ▪ **Social and Cultural Importance**
  - » Foundation of livelihoods for local communities
  - » Integration with traditional knowledge and lifestyles
  - » Religious and cultural significance
  - » Many lakes and water bodies are associated with religious ceremonies and cultural traditions.
- ▪ **Role in Disaster Management**
  - » Flood control
  - » Cyclone protection (especially coastal mangroves)
  - » Water storage during drought conditions
  - » Thus, wetlands function as natural disaster regulation systems.
- ▪ **Contribution to Climate Change Mitigation**
  - » Carbon sequestration
  - » Temperature regulation
  - » Ecological stability
  - » Wetlands play a crucial role in reducing the impacts of climate change.

Ramsar Site Designation in India:

- ▪ India signed the Ramsar Convention on 1 February 1982. To ensure wetland conservation, the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules have been implemented. Under these rules, state-level authorities are established to identify, conserve, and manage wetlands.
- ▪ The process of Ramsar designation begins with proposals from state governments to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Proposals are examined under nine criteria, and approved submissions are forwarded to the international Ramsar Secretariat through the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS).

Key Stages in the Nomination Process:

- ▪ **Local Identification:** State Wetland Authorities or relevant institutions identify wetlands meeting ecological or biodiversity criteria.
- ▪ **Proposal Preparation:** The state government prepares a Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS).
- ▪ **Central Approval:** The proposal is examined by an expert committee under MoEFCC.
- ▪ **International Nomination:** Upon approval, the proposal is sent to the Ramsar Secretariat in Switzerland.
- ▪ **Inclusion in the List:** After verification, the site is added to the international Ramsar list.

Important Criteria for Selection:

- » Presence of rare or unique ecosystems
- » Support for endangered species or high biodiversity
- » Hosting significant populations of waterfowl
- ▪ Initially, India had very few Ramsar sites. However, between 2014 and 2026, the number increased from 26 to 98, indicating a substantial expansion of conservation efforts.

Newly Added Sites:

- » **Patna Bird Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh):** A medium-sized pond covering approximately 108 hectares that becomes a habitat for hundreds of migratory and resident birds each winter.
- » **Chhari-Dhand (Gujarat):** A seasonal marshland situated in the arid landscape of Kutch, serving as a vibrant center of biodiversity with numerous migratory birds and wildlife.
- ▪ The inclusion of these sites demonstrates that wetlands are not limited to large or permanent water bodies; small, seasonal, and socio-ecologically significant systems

also merit global recognition.

India's Wetland Conservation Policies:

- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:** Mandate state-level authorities and community participation in conservation.
- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA), 2015:** Integrates the National Wetland Conservation Programme (NWCP) and the National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP).
- **Amrit Dharohar Capacity Building Scheme, 2023:** Enhances wetland management through sustainable practices and traditional knowledge by training officials and communities.
- **National Wetland Conservation Programme (NWCP), 1987:** Provides financial assistance for state-level conservation and restoration.

Challenges:

- Despite the rise in Ramsar designations, wetlands in India face serious challenges:
- **Rapid Decline of Wetlands**
  » Nearly 40% of India's natural wetlands have been lost over the past three decades.
  » About half of the remaining wetlands show ecological degradation due to pollution, improper land use, and climate change.
- **Pollution and Untreated Discharge**
  » Untreated sewage, agricultural runoff, and industrial effluents severely affect water quality and biodiversity.
- **Developmental Pressures and Land Conversion**
  » Urban expansion, encroachments, and infrastructure projects such as roads, dams, and flood-control structures disrupt natural water flows and ecological functions.
  » Ramsar designation alone is a formal recognition and not sufficient for sustainable conservation. Effective implementation of regulation,

monitoring, and community participation is essential.

Way Forward:

- **Clear Mapping and Public Data:** Wetland boundaries must be clearly demarcated and made publicly accessible to prevent illegal land-use change.
- **Community Participation and Traditional Knowledge:** Local communities, farmers, and fishers must be integrated into conservation strategies to ensure monitoring, innovation, and long-term sustainability.
- **Science-Based Management and Research:** Regular monitoring of biodiversity, water quality, and hydrological parameters is necessary for objective ecosystem assessment.

Conclusion:

The expansion of Ramsar designations in India is a significant achievement. Protecting wetlands is not merely an environmental obligation but a foundation for water security, social stability, and economic development. It reflects India's global commitment and ecological consciousness. However, conservation cannot remain confined to designation alone. It requires a visionary, scientific, coordinated, and community-centered policy framework in which wetlands are redefined and managed as national public assets essential for sustainable development.

Short Issues

Recommendation for Declaring Heatwaves and Lightning as Disasters

Context:

The 16th Finance Commission of India has recommended adding heatwaves and lightning strikes to the list of nationally notified disasters, citing their increasing frequency, intensity and human toll. This recommendation comes as part of broader disaster management funding reforms highlighted in the Union Budget 2026–27, where Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced Rs.1.4 lakh crore in Finance Commission grants for states, covering disaster management, rural bodies, and urban local bodies.
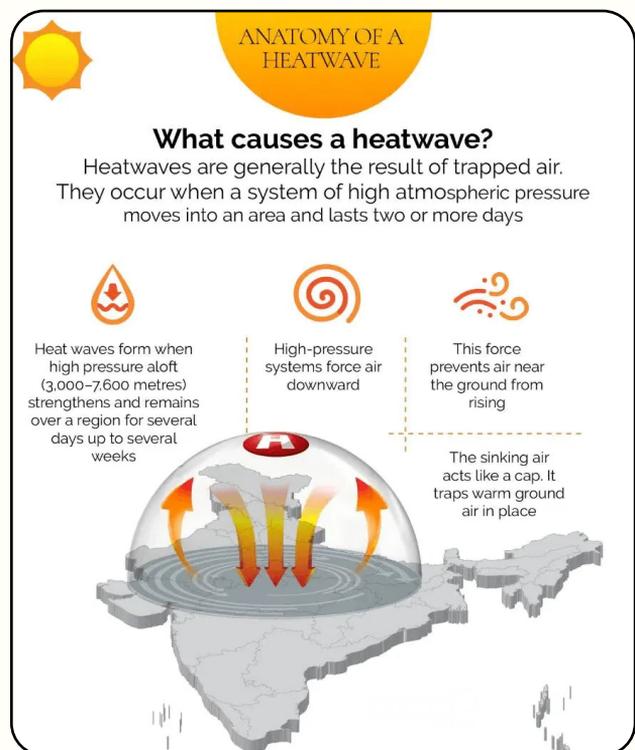
Under Article 281 of the Constitution, the Finance Commission's report, submitted on 17 November 2025, is tabled in Parliament along with an explanatory memorandum. The government has also accepted the recommendation to retain the Centre's share in tax devolution at 41%.

Rationale for Inclusion:

- Extreme heat disproportionately affects vulnerable populations such as the elderly, outdoor workers, and economically weaker sections, while lightning has emerged as a leading cause of death among natural disasters. Between 2018 and 2022, 3,798 deaths were attributed to heatwaves. In 2022 alone, 2,887 deaths occurred due to lightning, accounting for 36% of total natural disaster fatalities that year.
- Several states, at least 11, already classify heatwaves as state-specific disasters, strengthening the demand for national-level recognition. National data also indicate a rising trend in extremely hot days and nights, significantly increasing health risks such as heatstroke and heat-related mortality.

Current Disaster Framework:

- At present, the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) covers disasters such as cyclones, droughts, earthquakes, floods, landslides, cold waves, and other notified hazards. States are permitted to allocate up to 10% of SDRF funds for locally severe disasters that are not included in the national list.
- The Finance Commission has recommended retaining this flexibility while elevating heatwaves and lightning to the national disaster list, thereby enabling states to access the full range of disaster response and mitigation funds for these hazards.

ANATOMY OF A HEATWAVE

What causes a heatwave?
Heatwaves are generally the result of trapped air. They occur when a system of high atmospheric pressure moves into an area and lasts two or more days

Heat waves form when high pressure aloft (3,000–7,600 metres) strengthens and remains over a region for several days up to several weeks

High-pressure systems force air downward

This force prevents air near the ground from rising

The sinking air acts like a cap. It traps warm ground air in place

Funding and Allocation:

- For the period 2026–27 to 2030–31, the Finance Commission has recommended a total allocation of Rs. 2,04,401 crore for disaster management through the SDRF and the State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF):
  » **Centre's share:** Rs.1,55,915.85 crore
  » **States' share:** Rs.48,485.15 crore
  » **Cost-sharing ratio:** 75:25 for non-north-

eastern and non-hill states; 90:10 for north-eastern and hill states

» **Allocation split:** 80% to SDRF and 20% to SDMF

- The Rs.1.4 lakh crore grants announced in the Union Budget 2026–27 include dedicated allocations for disaster management, ensuring that states are better equipped for both immediate disaster response and long-term risk mitigation.

Significance:

- Recognising heatwaves and lightning as national disasters will ensure timely financial assistance, standardise relief and compensation norms, and strengthen state-level preparedness.

- It also reflects India's growing acknowledgment of climate change-induced risks, making the country's disaster management framework more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready.

About the 16th Finance Commission:

- The Finance Commission of India is a constitutional body established under Article 280 of the Constitution to recommend the distribution of financial resources between the Centre and the states, and among states themselves.

- The 16th Finance Commission, chaired by N. K. Singh, was constituted in 2020 for the period 2021–26, with a mandate to review tax devolution, fiscal consolidation, and disaster funding mechanisms. Its recommendations guide central transfers, including Finance Commission grants, disaster relief allocations, and incentives for fiscal management.

United Sangtam Likhum Pumji Bans Pangolin Hunting

Context:

Recently, the United Sangtam Likhum Pumji (USLP), the apex tribal body of the Sangtam

Naga community in Nagaland, imposed a complete ban on hunting pangolins within its jurisdiction. This community-led conservation initiative aims to curb illegal wildlife trade and protect these critically threatened species in the Indo-Myanmar biodiversity hotspot.

About Pangolins:

- Pangolins are the world's most trafficked non-human mammals, protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and listed by the IUCN as Endangered (Indian Pangolin) or Critically Endangered (Chinese Pangolin).

- They are nocturnal, insectivorous mammals known for feeding on ants and termites and defending themselves by rolling into a ball (volvation). Their keratin scales are highly sought after in traditional medicine and for meat, especially in Asian markets.

Species and Habitat in India:

- Indian Pangolin (Manis crassicaudata): Widely distributed across India, except in arid regions, the high Himalayas, and the Northeast. It is also the largest among the eight pangolin species globally.

- Chinese Pangolin (Manis pentadactyla): Restricted to the Himalayan foothills and Northeast India.

Protection Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** Indian Pangolin,

Endangered; Chinese Pangolin – Critically Endangered.

- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I
- **CITES:** Appendix I (prohibiting international commercial trade)

Characteristics and Behaviour:

- Nocturnal and burrowing
- The only mammals covered in scales
- Feed primarily on ants and termites
- Non-migratory
- Defend themselves through volvation (rolling into a ball)

Significance of the USLP Ban:

- Demonstrates community-driven conservation in a tribal region with constitutional autonomy under Article 371(A).
- Strengthens the fight against illegal wildlife trade along the Indo-Myanmar corridor.
- Complements statutory laws such as the Wildlife Protection Act, CITES commitments, and global pangolin conservation strategies.

Challenges Ahead:

- Enforcement and monitoring of bans in remote, forested areas.
- Providing sustainable livelihood alternatives for communities traditionally reliant on forest resources.
- Combating cross-border trafficking networks involving China and Vietnam.

Conclusion:

The USLP's ban on pangolin hunting is a milestone in grassroots conservation. By combining traditional authority with legal frameworks, it sets a precedent for community-led wildlife protection, enhancing biodiversity conservation while curbing illegal trade in one of India's ecologically sensitive regions.

NHAI Launches India's First Bee Corridors

Context:

Recently, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) announced the development of India's first dedicated 'Bee Corridors' along National Highways. This initiative marks a shift from ornamental roadside plantations to ecological and climate-sensitive highway planning, integrating biodiversity conservation with infrastructure development.

About Bee Corridors:

- Bee Corridors are linear stretches of pollinator-friendly vegetation developed along National Highways. These corridors will consist of flowering trees, shrubs, and plants that provide year-round nectar and pollen for honeybees and other pollinators.

Aim:

- The initiative aims to reduce ecological stress on pollinators, ensure continuous nectar availability, and strengthen agricultural productivity and ecological balance through sustainable plantation planning.

Key Features:

- **Native, Nectar-Rich Plantation Mix:** Species such as Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Jamun, and Siris will be planted to enhance biodiversity.
- **Staggered Blooming Cycle:** The selection of species will ensure flowering across different seasons, maintaining a near-continuous food supply for bees.
- **Strategic Spacing:** Flowering clusters will be planted at intervals of 500 m to 1 km, aligned with the average foraging distance of honeybees.
- **Climate-Sensitive Planning:** Corridors will be developed based on local agro-climatic suitability.

Significance of the Initiative:

- **Enhancing Ecological Services:** Pollination is critical for agriculture and horticulture. Bee Corridors will strengthen ecosystem services essential for crop productivity.
- **Promoting Sustainable Infrastructure:** The initiative integrates biodiversity conservation

into highway construction, reflecting the concept of green infrastructure.

- **Supporting Food Security:** Healthy pollinator populations contribute directly to sustainable agricultural systems.

Importance of Bees:

- Bees are vital winged insects and act as keystone species, pollinating nearly 90% of wild flowering plants and about one-third of global crops.

Species in India:

- Apis cerana indica (Indian Hive Bee)
- Apis dorsata (Rock Bee)
- Apis florea (Little Bee)
- Apis mellifera (Western Honey Bee – introduced)
- Recently discovered Apis karinjodian (Indian Black Honey Bee)

Special Aspects:

- **Waggle Dance:** A unique communication method used by honeybees to indicate the direction and distance of food sources.
- **Stingless Bees:** Tetragonula iridipennis, found in Northeast India, are effective pollinators.

Threats & Conservation:

- Major threats include habitat loss, pesticide misuse, and climate change. Global efforts such as World Bee Day (20 May) promote pollinator conservation. In India, initiatives like the Mobile Honey Processing Van by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) support beekeeping and rural livelihoods.

New Micro-Arthropod Species Found in Eastern Himalayas

Context:

Recently, scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) discovered a new species of Diplura, a primitive, wingless, soil-dwelling hexapod, in the eastern Himalayas. This marks a historic milestone in Indian entomology. Named Lepidocampa sikkimensis, it is the first species of Diplura to be described by an Indian research team, ending nearly five decades of stagnation in the study of this group in India. Diplurans, commonly known as two-pronged bristletails, are blind, six-legged arthropods that play an important role in nutrient cycling and the preservation of soil structure.

About Lepidocampa sikkimensis:

- Lepidocampa sikkimensis is a newly discovered species of Diplura found near Ravangla, Sikkim, by an Indian research team. It belongs to a primitive hexapod group. Previously, 17 species of Diplura had been recorded in India, all described by foreign researchers.
  - » **Morphological Distinctiveness:** The species is identified by a unique arrangement of body scales, distinctive bristle patterns (chaetotaxy), and specialized appendages, which set it apart from other Diplura species.
  - » **Ecological Role:** As blind, soil-dwelling hexapods, diplurans play a crucial role in maintaining soil health by contributing to nutrient cycling and preserving soil structure.

About the Zoological Survey of India:

- Established in 1916 and headquartered in Kolkata, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) is a premier organization under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Its objectives include:
  - » **Taxonomic Research:** Classification of species and maintenance of national zoological collections.
  - » **Status Surveys:** Monitoring endangered and threatened species.
  - » **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** Conducting studies on ecosystems and biodiversity management.
- ZSI operates 16 regional centers and integrates modern tools such as DNA barcoding, GIS, and scanning electron

microscopy in its research. Its key publications include Fauna of India and various state-level faunal reports.

Conclusion:

This discovery enriches India's understanding of soil fauna, highlights the ecological importance of lesser-known micro-arthropods, and strengthens the foundation for biodiversity conservation in the Himalayas.

Climate Change Threatens Loggerhead Turtles: 17-Year Study

Context:

A 17-year study conducted by researchers from Queen Mary University of London and the NGO Associação Projeto Biodiversidade in Cabo Verde has identified significant climate change–induced challenges affecting loggerhead turtles (Caretta caretta).

Climate Change Challenges for Loggerhead Turtles:

- **Smaller Size and Reduced Reproduction:** Turtles are becoming smaller, producing fewer eggs per nest, and laying smaller clutches overall.
- **Longer Breeding Intervals:** Declining ocean productivity has doubled the interval between breeding seasons—from two years to four years—as turtles require more time to rebuild their energy reserves.
- **Female-Biased Sex Ratios:** Warmer nest temperatures result in a higher proportion of female hatchlings. Currently, 84% of hatchlings in Cabo Verde are female, and this proportion could reach 99.86% by 2100 under high-emission scenarios.
- **Habitat Loss and Disruption:** Rising sea levels are eroding nesting beaches, while changes in ocean currents are disrupting migration routes and hatchling dispersal patterns.

About the Loggerhead Turtle:

- The Loggerhead Turtle (Caretta caretta) is a marine reptile belonging to the family Cheloniidae, named for its large head and powerful jaw muscles.
- It is the world's largest hard-shelled turtle and second only to the leatherback sea turtle in overall size.
- Loggerheads are long-lived, with lifespans exceeding 80 years. They inhabit the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean Sea.
- They are omnivorous and primarily feed on bottom-dwelling invertebrates such as gastropods, bivalves, and decapods.
- Conservation Status: Vulnerable (IUCN), facing threats from climate change, habitat loss, pollution, and bycatch.

Broader Ecological Implications:

- Loggerhead turtles are considered indicator species, reflecting the health of marine ecosystems.
- Declines in body size, reproductive output, and migration success signal broader environmental stress caused by climate change.
- Conservation efforts must extend beyond shoreline protection to include feeding grounds, ocean health, and climate mitigation strategies.

Conservation Recommendations:

- Protect and restore critical feeding habitats

in addition to nesting beaches.

- Reduce fishing bycatch and marine pollution to improve survival rates.
- Monitor climate impacts on nesting sites and manage sex ratios where significant imbalance occurs.
- Integrate climate resilience into marine turtle conservation strategies, acknowledging the multi-dimensional threats posed by global warming.

Conclusion:

Loggerhead turtles demonstrate remarkable adaptability; however, climate change is imposing multi-faceted stress on their reproduction, growth, and migration patterns. Protecting this species requires a holistic conservation approach that combines habitat protection, sustainable fisheries management, and robust climate action to ensure their long-term survival.

New Dragonfly species Lyriothemis Keralensis discovered in Kerala

Context:

A new dragonfly species, Lyriothemis keralensis, has been discovered in Kerala, highlighting the State's rich biodiversity. Although it was first recorded in 2013 near Varapetty in Ernakulam district, it was misidentified for over a decade as Lyriothemis acigastra. This species belongs to the odonate group, which comprises predatory, amphibious insects characterized by aquatic larval stages and winged adults. Its distinct identity was confirmed through detailed morphological studies, further underscoring Kerala's remarkable insect diversity.

Habitat and Characteristics:

- Lyriothemis keralensis inhabits vegetated pools and irrigation canals located within shaded pineapple and rubber plantations in Kerala's low-lying coastal plains.
- The species is relatively small, measuring

about 3 cm in length, and exhibits clear sexual dimorphism. Males are bright blood-red with black markings and possess slender abdomens, while females are bulkier and yellow with black markings.

- It is seasonally visible during the Southwest monsoon (late May to August). For the remainder of the year, it persists in its aquatic larval stage. As a predatory insect, it feeds on mosquitoes, flies, midges, moths, and butterflies.

Conservation and Ecological Significance:

- Most populations of Lyriothemis keralensis occur outside protected areas, making them particularly vulnerable to land-use changes in plantation-dominated landscapes.
- Odonates are widely regarded as bioindicators of healthy wetland ecosystems. Therefore, the discovery of Lyriothemis keralensis emphasizes the ecological importance of conserving microhabitats, especially in human-modified environments.
- Adopting sustainable land-use practices will be essential to ensure the survival of this endemic species and to maintain Kerala's high level of insect biodiversity.

Giant Phantom Jellyfish Discovered

Context:

A recent scientific expedition off the coast of Argentina has captured rare and extraordinary

footage of the giant phantom jellyfish (Stygiomedusa gigantea), a species seldom observed alive in its natural habitat. The discovery was made during an Argentina-led deep-sea mission aboard the Schmidt Ocean Institute's research vessel R/V Falkor (too). The expedition explored marine ecosystems along the continental shelf, stretching from Buenos Aires to Tierra del Fuego.

About the Giant Phantom Jellyfish

▪ The giant phantom jellyfish is an elusive and mysterious deep-sea species that is rarely encountered by humans. It is known for its impressive size, with a bell measuring up to one metre in diameter and long, ribbon-like oral arms extending up to ten metres.

▪ Unlike many jellyfish species, it lacks stinging tentacles. Instead, it captures prey, such as plankton and small fish using its large oral arms. Scientists often describe its appearance as ghostly, owing both to its infrequent sightings and its habitat in the ocean's "midnight zone," where sunlight does not penetrate.

Conclusion:

The sighting of the giant phantom jellyfish off Argentina's coast provides a rare glimpse into the largely unexplored depths of the ocean and underscores how much remains to be discovered beneath the waves. The mission's findings, ranging from potential new species to extensive coral systems highlight the ecological complexity of deep-sea environments and reinforce their growing global scientific importance.

Rising Global Pesticide Toxicity in India

Context:

A recent study published in Science revealed that India is among four countries contributing nearly 70 % of global pesticide toxicity, measured as Total Applied Toxicity (TAT), accounting for both pesticide quantities and their impact on non-target species. The other major contributors are China, Brazil, and the United States.

Key Findings of the Study:

▪ **Rising Toxicity:** Data from 2013–2019 across 65 countries and over 600 pesticides show increasing TAT, particularly in India and other major agricultural economies.

▪ **High Biodiversity Impact:** Terrestrial arthropods, soil organisms, fish, pollinators, and aquatic plants are disproportionately affected, threatening ecological functions.

▪ **Crop Patterns & Usage:** Heavy pesticide application on fruits, vegetables, cereals, rice, maize, and soybeans, combined with more toxic formulations, amplifies environmental harm.

▪ **Poor Monitoring:** Lack of comprehensive national pesticide data hampers tracking of progress toward international targets.

▪ **Only One Country on Track:** Chile is currently the only nation on course to meet the 50 % pesticide risk reduction target by 2030.

Impacts on Environment and Health:

▪ **Biodiversity Loss:** Insects and soil organisms face the greatest increase in toxicity, risking pollination, nutrient cycling, and food webs.

▪ **Human Health Risks:** Pesticides are linked to neurological, reproductive, and carcinogenic effects. Global initiatives, including the UN Environment Assembly, call for elimination of highly hazardous pesticides by 2035.
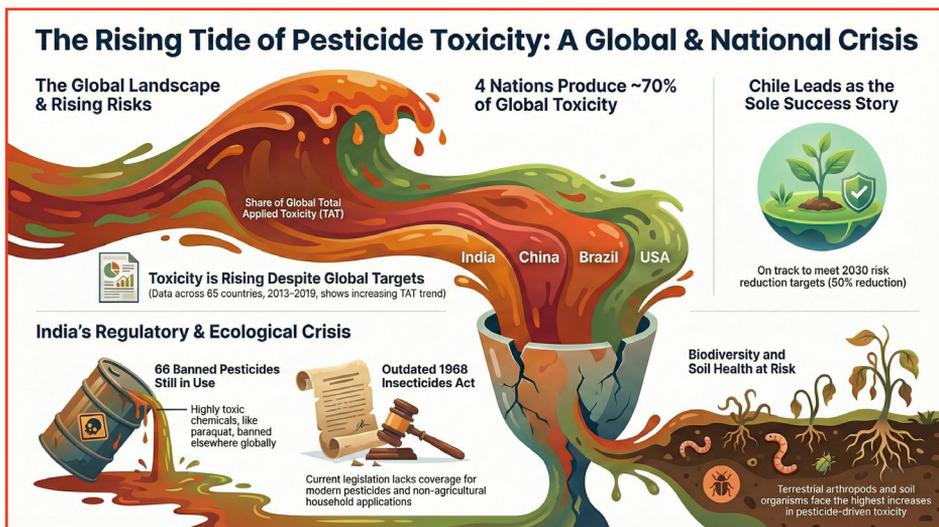
Policy and Regulatory Gaps in India:

▪ **Outdated Legislation:** The Insecticides Act,

1968 focuses on agricultural use, with limited coverage for household or non-agricultural applications, making it obsolete for modern pesticides.

- **Banned Pesticides Still in Use:** India continues to use at least 66 pesticides banned elsewhere, including highly toxic chemicals like paraquat.
- **Proposed Pesticides Management Bill, 2025:** Aims to reduce environmental risks and promote biopesticides, but may fall short without expert consultation.

The Rising Tide of Pesticide Toxicity: A Global & National Crisis

underscores the need to balance agricultural productivity with biodiversity and human health protection. Rising TAT highlights an urgent requirement for policy reform, regulatory enforcement, sustainable pest management, and improved monitoring. Aligning domestic policy with international environmental goals is crucial to reduce risks and safeguard ecosystems and communities.

Underlying Drivers Behind High Toxicity:

- **Green Revolution Legacy:** Reliance on chemical-intensive agriculture created entrenched pesticide dependence.
- **Agricultural Intensification:** High cropping intensity and monocultures increased pest pressures.
- **Limited Alternatives:** Slow adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and biopesticides sustains reliance on conventional chemicals.

Policy Responses and International Commitments:

- **Global Targets:** India pledged to halve pesticide risks by 2030 under the Global Biodiversity Framework, but TAT trends indicate insufficient progress.
- **Need for Better Data:** Regular reporting of pesticide use by active ingredient is essential for monitoring and compliance with international commitments.

Conclusion:

India's contribution to global pesticide toxicity

India AI Impact Summit 2026: Steps towards Self-Reliant Sovereign Artificial Intelligence

Context:

India took a leap toward asserting global leadership in artificial intelligence (AI) at the historic India AI Impact Summit 2026, held from 16 -20 February 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The summit was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who underlined AI's transformational potential for society, governance, and economic growth. The event brought together representatives from over 100 countries, global AI pioneers, policymakers, industry leaders, and innovators — marking a major milestone in India's evolving AI ecosystem and commitment to "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" (welfare for all, happiness for all).

A central story of the summit was the emergence of Sarvam AI, an Indian AI startup that showcased advanced Made-in-India AI models and technologies, affirming India's shift from AI adoption to AI creation. Sarvam's contributions encapsulate India's focus on sovereign, inclusive, and multilingual AI systems that serve diverse societal needs while reducing dependency on foreign AI infrastructure.

India AI Impact Summit 2026

➢ The India AI Impact Summit 2026 was conceptualised under the IndiaAI Mission, initiated by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to catalyse India's AI capabilities across sectors and demographics. At the summit, Prime Minister Modi articulated India's M.A.N.A.V vision for AI

➢ Moral and Ethical Systems, Accountable Governance, National Sovereignty, Accessible and Inclusive AI, and Valid and Legitimate technologies underscoring a human-centric technology agenda.

➢ The summit's framework was anchored on three pillars- People, Planet and Progress with seven working groups focusing on practical outcomes in fields such as healthcare, agriculture, climate action, education, economic growth, inclusion, and ethical AI governance.

➢ Importantly, the summit concluded with the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact, signed by 89 countries and international organisations, reaffirming voluntary cooperation to promote equitable access to AI, respect for national sovereignty, and open, interoperable ecosystems. This multilateral consensus stressed principles like democratic diffusion of AI, inclusive development, and trust-worthy technology deployment.

Sarvam AI: Indigenous Foundation Models and Innovations:

▪ Sarvam AI emerged as one of the summit's standout innovations, highlighting India's drive to build foundational AI systems rooted in local contexts. The company unveiled multiple indigenous AI models, including its Sarvam-30B and Sarvam-105B large language models (LLMs), both developed using a Mixture-of-Experts (MoE) architecture designed for efficient reasoning

and multilingual performance. These models can process and generate natural language in over 22 Indian languages and are optimised for diverse tasks such as translation, comprehension, creative generation, and tool use.

▪ Unlike many global AI systems that are trained predominantly on English data, Sarvam's models reflect India's multilingual diversity and real-world usage patterns. The 105-billion-parameter model, in particular, underscores India's intent to compete at the cutting edge of AI capability, both in platform performance and linguistic reach.

▪ At the summit, Sarvam also revealed Sarvam Kaze, a line of AI-powered smart glasses capable of interpreting visual data and assisting users in real time — a significant step toward wearable AI technologies that combine vision, language, and contextual understanding.

▪ In addition to foundational models and hardware, Sarvam launched the Indus chat app, a web and mobile interface enabling users to interact with AI systems in text and speech. Indus supports real-time engagement with Sarvam's models and prioritises Indian language interaction, aligning with India's goal to make AI accessible and relevant to local users.

Strategic Importance of Sarvam and India's AI Ecosystem:

Sarvam AI's emergence is significant on multiple fronts:

▪ **Sovereign AI Development:** India's AI strategy emphasises building sovereign AI, systems developed domestically with full control over data, architecture, and governance. This priority stems from concerns about digital colonialism, where dependence on foreign AI tools can compromise local values, data privacy, and technological autonomy. Industry leaders from Sarvam have cautioned that India must build homegrown AI capabilities rather than rely chiefly on external platforms.

▪ **Multilingual and Inclusive AI:** Sarvam's

foundation models are built to understand and generate content across India's many languages, ensuring AI technologies are inclusive and culturally relevant. This focus aligns with broader national goals to expand technology access beyond urban, English-speaking populations and bridge linguistic divides in digital adoption.
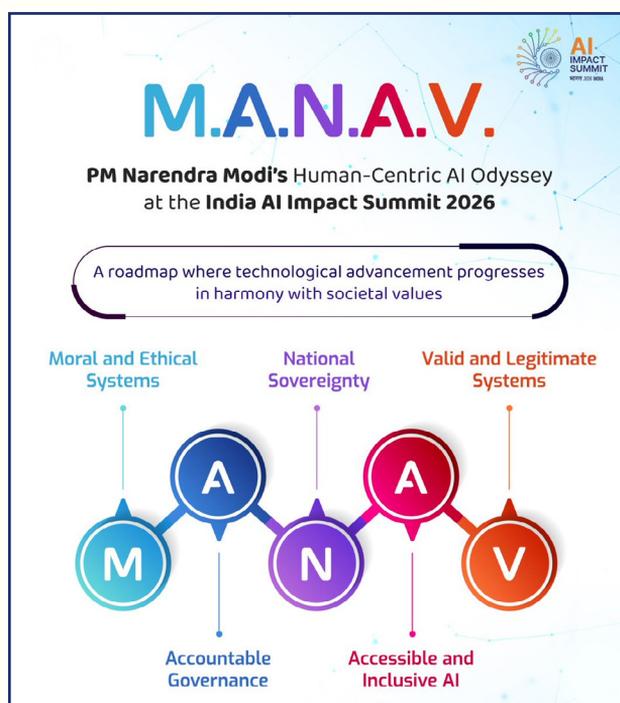
▪ **Lean Innovation with High Impact:** Despite operating with a relatively small team, Sarvam has demonstrated innovation at scale. Leveraging a frugal yet focused research strategy, the startup trained advanced models and built tools using subsidised compute infrastructure provided under the IndiaAI Mission, highlighting how policy support and strategic infrastructure can fuel high-impact outcomes.

▪ **Hardware and Applications:** Sarvam's innovations extend beyond LLMs, with vision AI, speech systems, smart wearables like Kaze glasses, and enterprise tools. These technologies promise transformative applications in education, assisted living, accessibility solutions, and workflow automation. By integrating multimodal AI

capabilities, India's AI stack moves closer to real-world utility.

National and Global AI Agenda:

- The India AI Impact Summit 2026 illustrated India's ambition to balance innovation, governance, and human values. While global AI leaders such as Google, OpenAI, and Anthropic were central to discussions, India emphasised collaborative frameworks that prioritise ethical use, data sovereignty, transparency and equitable growth.
- The summit also showcased India's investment in computing infrastructure, with tens of thousands of GPUs deployed in data centres to accelerate AI research and training, backed by subsidised access for domestic startups. This has enhanced India's ability to develop and scale AI systems competitively.
- Moreover, the summit's focus on AI for public good, such as healthcare, agriculture, governance, and climate action reflects a broader vision where AI is a tool for solving complex societal challenges rather than merely a commercial technology.

Challenges:

Although the India AI Impact Summit 2026 indicated significant progress, several structural challenges still remain facing India's AI ecosystem.

- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Compared to Western and East Asian countries, India still lacks high-end computing infrastructure, advanced chip manufacturing, and large-scale data centers.
- **Global Competition:** Competing with established global AI companies like Google, OpenAI, and Anthropic is challenging for Indian startups.
- Talent and Research Investment: High-level AI research requires long-term investment, specialized human resources, and university-industry collaboration.
- **Data Privacy and Regulatory Framework:** To Develope sovereign AI models while ensuring data security, transparency, and ethical use is a complex task.

- **From Prototype to Mass Adoption:** Moving innovations from the laboratory to widespread societal and commercial use remains a major challenge.

Way Forward:

- India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy to realize its AI vision.
  - » **Increasing investment in infrastructure:** Long-term investments in advanced GPUs, data centers, and semiconductor manufacturing will strengthen domestic AI development.
  - » **Encouraging public-private partnerships:** Strengthening collaboration between government, industry, and academic institutions can accelerate innovation.
  - » **Emphasis on sovereign and multilingual AI:** Developing AI systems based on local languages and cultural contexts will ensure digital inclusion.
  - » **Ethical and transparent governance framework:** Clear policy guidelines and regulatory mechanisms should be developed for the safe, accountable, and human-centered use of AI.
  - » **AI for Public Good:** Social impact should be prioritized by developing AI-based solutions in areas such as health, agriculture, education, and climate.
- Through these efforts, India can not only strengthen its technological autonomy but also emerge as a responsible and inclusive leader in the global AI landscape.

Conclusion:

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, underlined by the strides made by Sarvam AI, marked a turning point in India's AI journey. By nurturing homegrown foundational models, promoting ethical and inclusive AI, and convening global consensus through the New Delhi Declaration, India is steadily shaping its identity as a responsible AI innovator. As technology evolves, India's focus on sovereignty, inclusion, and human-centric AI will remain central to its quest to lead the world's next digital frontier.

Short Issues

WHO Report on Cancer

Context:

A new global analysis by the World Health Organization (WHO) and its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has found that up to four in ten cancer cases diagnosed in India are preventable. The study, released ahead of World Cancer Day (4 February 2026), underscores the enormous potential of prevention strategies in reducing the cancer burden in India and globally.

Key Findings of the WHO Analysis:

- According to the WHO–IARC report analysing data from 185 countries and 36 cancer types:
  » 37% of all new cancer cases globally, about 7.1 million cases in 2022 were linked to preventable causes.
  » In India, nearly four in ten cancers, approximately 520,000 cases are potentially preventable through modification of risk factors.
  » **Sex-wise variation:** Over four in ten preventable cancers occur among men, while about three in ten occur among women.

Major Preventable Risk Factors:

- The analysis identifies several modifiable factors responsible for a significant share of cancer cases:
  » **Tobacco use:** The leading preventable cause, contributing to cancers of the lung, oral cavity, and several other organs.
  » **Infections:** Including human papillomavirus (HPV) and Helicobacter pylori, which are linked to cervical and stomach cancers, respectively.
  » **Other factors:** Alcohol consumption, high body mass index, physical inactivity, air pollution, and exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation significantly increase cancer risk.

Preventable Cancers in India:

- In India, the major cancers that are largely preventable include:
  » Oral cancer, driven by tobacco smoking, smokeless tobacco use, and areca nut consumption.
  » Lung and stomach cancers, linked to smoking and chronic infections.
  » Cervical and breast cancers, where HPV vaccination, routine screening, and lifestyle modifications can substantially reduce incidence.

Ways to reduce cancer risk — World Health Organization

- Do not smoke or use any form of tobacco
- Make your home smoke-free
- Enjoy a healthy diet
- Breastfeeding reduces the mother's cancer risk
- Vaccinate your children against Hepatitis B and HPV
- Avoid too much sun, use sun protection
- Reduce indoor and outdoor air pollution
- Be physically active
- Limit alcohol intake
- Take part in organized cancer screening programmes

Policy and Public Health Implications:

- The findings carry important implications for public health policy in India:
  » Tobacco control and cessation measures, including higher taxation and sustained public awareness campaigns, can significantly reduce cancer rates.
  » Vaccination programmes against HPV and hepatitis B can prevent infection-related cancers.
  » Promotion of healthy lifestyles, including balanced diets, regular physical activity, and reduced alcohol consumption, is essential.

» Early screening and improved access to preventive services, particularly in rural and underserved areas, can enhance early detection and outcomes.

About Cancer:

- Cancer refers to a group of diseases characterised by uncontrolled cell growth, evasion of normal cell death mechanisms, and the ability to invade surrounding tissues or spread (metastasise) to distant organs, often forming tumours. Its causes include genetic mutations, lifestyle choices, environmental exposures, and infections.

- **Key Features:**
  » **Abnormal cell growth:** DNA damage leads to uncontrolled division and resistance to programmed cell death.
  » **Tumours:** These may be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).
  » **Metastasis:** Malignant cells can spread through blood or lymphatic systems to other parts of the body.

- **Types:**
  » **Solid tumours:** Carcinomas (e.g., skin, lung, breast) and sarcomas (bone, muscle).
  » **Blood cancers:** Leukemia and lymphoma.

Conclusion:

The WHO report's finding that nearly 40% of cancers in India are preventable highlights a critical opportunity for health systems and policymakers to shift emphasis from treatment to prevention and early detection. Coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts addressing tobacco use, infections, lifestyle choices, and environmental risk factors can substantially reduce the cancer burden, improve quality of life, and lower long-term healthcare costs.

Use of Sound Waves to Detect Elusive Helium Gas Leaks

Context:

A team of researchers at Nanjing University, China, has developed a novel sensor that uses sound waves instead of chemical interactions to detect helium. The findings were published in Applied Physics Letters (December 2025).

About Helium:

- Helium is a colourless, odourless, inert gas widely used in industries, from cooling magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines to aerospace engineering and semiconductor manufacturing. Despite its ubiquity in high technology applications, helium is a scarce and expensive resource globally.

- Detecting and locating even small leaks is critical to avoid wastage, ensure safety, and maintain industrial efficiency. Traditional gas sensors, which rely on chemical reactions, struggle to detect helium because of its chemical stability and inability to interact with typical sensor materials.

How the Sensor Works:

- The sensor uses acoustic topological materials in a Kagome lattice (interlaced triangles and hexagons) to trap sound. Nine cylinders connected by tubes let air and helium in. Speakers introduce sound, and microphones measure signals at three corners.

- Detection: Helium changes the speed and frequency of trapped sound waves, which is measured to determine its concentration.

Advantages over Conventional Sensors:

- **Robustness and Stability:**
  » The sensor does not rely on chemical reactions, making it ideal for detecting inert gases like helium.
  » It remains unaffected by external conditions (temperature, humidity) that typically destabilise chemical sensors.
  » The topological design ensures that the sound trapping mechanism is resilient even with structural imperfections and gas input openings are large for rapid measurements.

- **Directional Detection:** A unique feature of the triangular configuration is its ability to

triangulate the source of a leak:

- » By comparing how quickly frequency shifts occur at each corner, the device can locate the direction of the helium influx.
- » This adds a spatial detection capability, unlike most point sensors.

Applications:

- Helium leak detection is essential in high value sectors such as aerospace, healthcare (MRI systems) and semiconductor fabrication.
- The new device promises a much cheaper and faster alternative to mass spectrometry based detectors, which are expensive and bulky.

Conclusion:

This innovation shifts gas sensing from chemical to acoustic topological methods, enabling sensitive, stable and directional detection of helium, with potential to improve resource conservation and industrial safety.

India's Snakebite Burden

Context:

A recent report by the Global Snakebite Taskforce (GST) highlights a major gap in India's capacity to manage snakebite cases effectively. According to the survey, 99% of healthcare workers in India face challenges in administering antivenom, the life-saving therapy that neutralises venom toxins.

Background:

- India accounts for nearly half of global snakebite deaths, with around 58,000 fatalities annually.
- Despite being the world's largest producer and consumer of antivenoms, challenges such as delayed access to care, weak rural healthcare systems, and infrastructure gaps significantly hinder effective treatment.
- Snakebite envenoming remains a silent crisis, disproportionately affecting rural

and agricultural communities, particularly during the monsoon season. Meanwhile, urban areas face rising risks due to rapid urbanisation and poor waste management.

Global and National Scenario:

- Globally, about 5.4 million people are bitten by snakes each year, with 1.8 to 2.7 million cases resulting in venom exposure. Annually, snakebites cause between 81,410 and 137,880 deaths worldwide, leaving many survivors with amputations or permanent disabilities. Recognising its severity, the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified snakebite envenoming as a high-priority neglected tropical disease.
- In India, the diversity of venomous snakes is remarkable, with over 300 species, more than 60 of which are venomous. The "Big Four"—the Indian cobra, common krait, Russell's viper, and saw-scaled viper, account for most fatalities.
- A study covering the period from 2001 to 2014 estimated 1.2 million deaths and 3.6 million cases of permanent disability, implying that nearly one in 250 Indians faces a lifetime risk of dying from a snakebite.
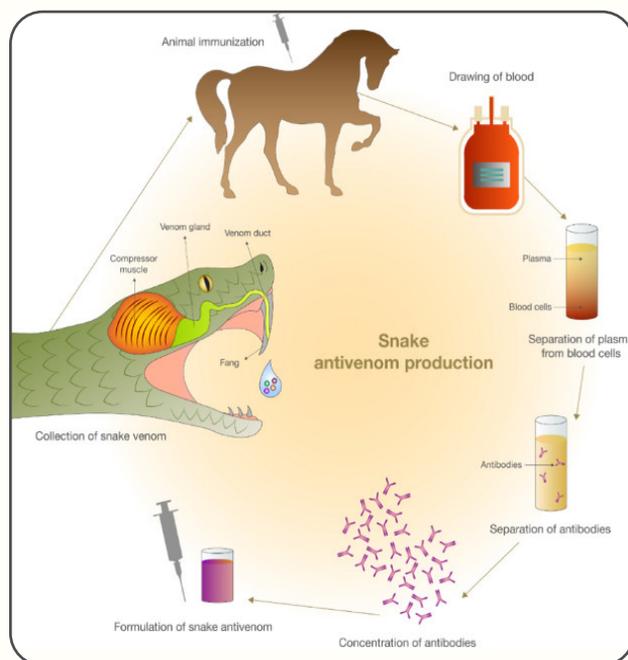
About Antivenoms:

- Snake venom contains haemotoxins, neurotoxins, and cytotoxins that can destroy blood cells, paralyse nerves, and dissolve tissues. Antivenoms are life-saving medicines that bind to and neutralise venom toxins, enabling the immune system to eliminate them safely. India's polyvalent antivenoms primarily target the Big Four but do not cover species such as king cobras or pit vipers.

- Antivenom production involves milking venomous snakes, immunising animals (usually horses or sheep), and extracting antibodies. The Irula tribe of Tamil Nadu supplies nearly 80% of the venom used in antivenom production, operating under regulated permits in accordance with the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Challenges in Accessing Antivenoms:

- Despite domestic production, access to antivenoms faces multiple barriers:
  - » **Geographical:** Remote and rural areas lack nearby healthcare facilities.
  - » **Cultural:** Superstitions and traditional beliefs delay timely medical care.
  - » **Economic:** High production costs limit affordability and availability.
  - » **Logistical:** Inadequate cold-chain infrastructure degrades antivenom quality.

- These challenges result in delayed treatment, severe complications, and preventable deaths.

Way Forward:

Reducing snakebite mortality requires comprehensive and systemic interventions. This includes strengthening infrastructure in primary and rural healthcare centres, ensuring the widespread availability of antivenom supported by proper storage and efficient distribution systems, and training healthcare professionals in effective snakebite management and safe antivenom administration. Equally important is the implementation of community awareness programmes to promote early hospital visits and discourage delays caused by reliance on traditional or unscientific treatments.

Cancer Immunotherapy

Context:

Recently, researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay) developed a gentler and more effective method to recover lab-grown T cells for cancer immunotherapy — a crucial step in improving the reliability and affordability of advanced treatments such as CAR T-cell therapy. The study was published in Biomaterials Science and featured in the European Society for Biomaterials conference collection.
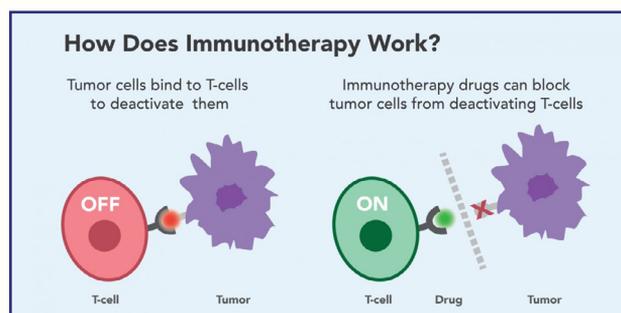
About the Research:

- CAR T-cell therapy involves extracting a patient's T cells, engineering them in the laboratory to target cancer, expanding their numbers, and reinfusing them into the patient. While techniques for growing T cells have advanced significantly, retrieving them intact and fully functional remains a major challenge.

- Traditionally, T cells are cultured on flat plastic surfaces, which do not replicate the body's natural environment. To address this, researchers now use three-dimensional (3D) fibrous scaffolds that mimic human tissue, enabling T cells to grow faster and multiply more effectively. However, these cells adhere tightly to the scaffold fibres, making their recovery difficult without causing damage.

- The IIT Bombay team tested three methods to retrieve T cells:
  - » Manual flushing with growth medium
  - » Use of TrypLE, a strong detaching enzyme
  - » Use of Accutase, a gentler enzyme solution
- While all three methods recovered similar numbers of cells, Accutase proved superior in preserving cell viability and immune function. Cells recovered using Accutase continued to grow and behaved like healthy T cells, unlike those retrieved using harsher methods, which damaged surface proteins essential for immune activation.

About T Cells and CAR T-Cell Therapy:

- **What Are T Cells?**
  - » T cells are white blood cells that play a central role in the immune system. They patrol the body, detect abnormal cells, including cancer cells and either destroy them directly or activate other immune responses, making them critical to immunotherapy.
- **What Is CAR T-Cell Therapy?**
  - » CAR T-cell (Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell) therapy involves engineering a patient's own T cells to better recognise and attack cancer cells. The process includes:
    - ➢ Collecting T cells from the patient's blood
    - ➢ Introducing a gene encoding a CAR receptor in the laboratory
    - ➢ Expanding the engineered cells and reinfusing them into the patient
  - » Globally, CAR T-cell therapy is approved for certain blood cancers, such as leukemia and lymphoma, and has shown dramatic responses in patients with treatment-resistant disease. However, it remains expensive and is still under investigation for solid tumours.

Importance of Recovery in Immunotherapy:

- Growing T cells is only part of the challenge.

For immunotherapy to succeed, the cells must remain viable, functional, and undamaged during recovery.

- The IIT Bombay finding that Accutase can gently detach cells ensures healthier and more functional T cells, representing a crucial step toward reliable and scalable immunotherapies.

Conclusion:

The IIT Bombay study addresses a key technical hurdle in cancer immunotherapy — recovering lab-grown T cells without compromising their function. By demonstrating that gentler recovery techniques preserve cell health, the research strengthens the foundation for effective, scalable, and more affordable cancer therapies, supporting India's goal of making advanced treatments more accessible.

Scientists Capture the Clearest Evidence of a Star Collapsing into a Black Hole

Context:

Recently, astronomers observed a star called M31 2014 DS1 in the Andromeda Galaxy collapse directly into a black hole. This is the clearest evidence yet of a star disappearing without a supernova explosion.

How a Star Collapses:

- Stars are like a balance between two forces:
  - » **Outward Pressure:** From nuclear fusion in the core (hydrogen turning into helium).
  - » **Inward Pull:** From gravity.
- When a massive star runs out of fuel, the outward pressure stops. Gravity takes over, and the star's core collapses.

Different Outcomes for Stars:

- What a star becomes depends on the mass of its core:
  - » **White Dwarf:** If core < 1.4 times the Sun's mass (Chandrasekhar Limit).

» **Neutron Star:** If core is 1.4–3 times the Sun's mass (TOV Limit).
» **Black Hole:** If core > 3 times the Sun's mass, gravity crushes it completely.

Ways a Black Hole Can Form:

- **Supernova Explosion:** Most massive stars explode, leaving behind a dense core that becomes a black hole.
- **Direct Collapse ("Failed Supernova"):** Some stars, like M31 2014 DS1, collapse quietly without an explosion. Nearby stars can continue orbiting, as seen in the V404 Cygni Black Hole Triple System.

Parts of a Black Hole:

- **Singularity:** The center with infinite density.
- **Event Horizon:** The point of no return; nothing can escape.
- **Accretion Disk:** Gas and dust around a black hole emit X-rays, helping scientists detect it.

Recent Discoveries:

- **Gaia BH3:** A black hole 33 times the Sun's mass in the Milky Way.
- **Sagittarius A:** The supermassive black hole at our galaxy's center.

- **Event Horizon Telescope (EHT):** Took the first picture of a black hole's shadow in 2019.

Why It Matters:

This discovery shows that black holes can form without a huge explosion, confirming theories about "silent" star deaths. It helps scientists understand how stars die, how black holes form, and how our universe evolves.

New Genome Editing Technique for Rare Genetic Diseases
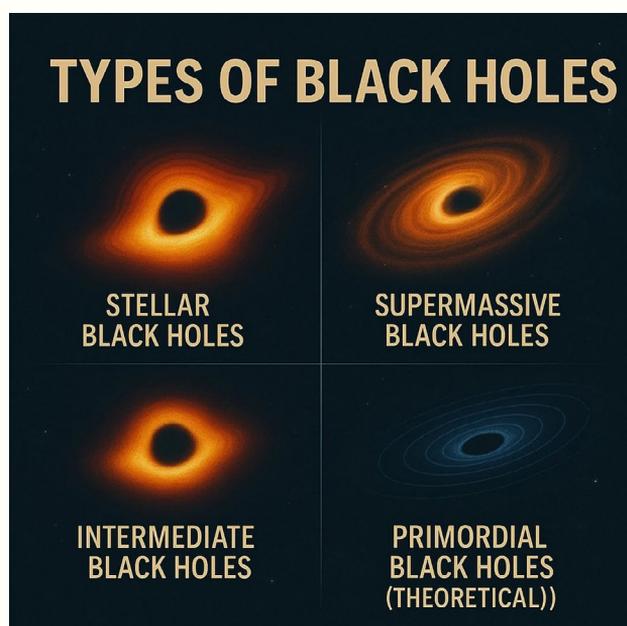
Context:

Recently, a study published in Nature by researchers from the Broad Institute, Harvard University, and the University of Minnesota demonstrated a novel genome-editing strategy capable of treating multiple genetic disorders caused by nonsense mutations using a single approach. The technique, called Prime-Editing-Mediated Readthrough of Premature Termination Codons (PERT), offers a gene-agnostic solution for diseases that previously required mutation-specific therapies.

About Nonsense Mutations:

- Nonsense mutations account for nearly 25% of all known disease-causing genetic changes.
- These mutations introduce a premature "stop codon" in DNA, halting protein production.
- Diseases such as cystic fibrosis, Batten disease, Tay-Sachs disease, and Niemann–Pick disease type C are linked to such mutations.
- Currently, each mutation requires a separate therapy, making treatment slow, costly, and fragmented.

About the PERT Strategy:

- DNA contains instructions for making proteins. These instructions are copied into a message called messenger RNA (mRNA).

The mRNA is read in groups of three letters, known as codons, each of which instructs the cell to add a specific amino acid.

- Transfer RNAs (tRNAs) assist in this process by acting as translators. Each tRNA reads a specific codon and brings the correct amino acid to the ribosome — the cell's protein-making machinery. The ribosome then joins these amino acids together to form a protein.

- Human cells contain approximately 418 tRNA genes. Many of these perform similar functions and are therefore not absolutely essential. Scientists used this fact to explore whether a non-essential tRNA could be modified into a special tRNA that ignores a faulty stop signal and allows protein synthesis to continue.

- Such special tRNAs, known as suppressor tRNAs, have been studied for many years; however, their safe use in human cells has remained challenging.

- In this study, researchers employed a precise gene-editing method called prime editing to permanently convert a normal tRNA gene into a suppressor tRNA gene. Importantly, the edited gene continued to produce tRNA at normal and safe levels, thereby reducing the risk of harmful side effects.

About Gene Editing:

- Gene editing refers to the precise modification of DNA within living cells. Major tools include:
  - » CRISPR-Cas9

- » Base Editing
- » Prime Editing (used in this study), which allows targeted insertions, deletions, or replacements without double-strand DNA breaks

- Prime editing enhances precision and reduces unintended genetic damage compared to earlier techniques.
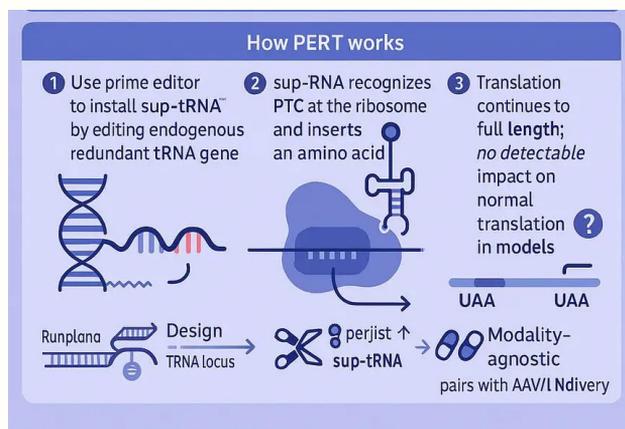
Implications of the Research:

- **Universal Therapeutic Potential:** A single strategy could treat multiple rare genetic disorders caused by nonsense mutations.
- **Reduced Cost and Time:** Eliminates the need to design mutation-specific therapies for each disease.
- **Advancement in Precision Medicine:** Marks a shift toward gene-agnostic, platform-based therapies.

Challenges Ahead:

- Efficient delivery across tissues
- Long-term safety validation
- Ethical and regulatory scrutiny

Conclusion:

The PERT strategy represents a paradigm shift in genetic medicine by offering a universal solution for nonsense mutation disorders. While clinical translation requires further validation, the study marks a major milestone in genome-editing research and precision therapeutics, with the potential to transform treatment for numerous rare diseases.

National Biobank for Rare Lysosomal Storage Disorders

Context:

Recently, India established its first government-supported national biobank dedicated to Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSDs), a group of more than 70 rare, inherited metabolic conditions that are often life-threatening and lack effective treatments.

About Biobank:

▪ A biobank is a specialised facility that collects, processes, stores, and manages human biological samples (such as blood, tissue, DNA, and urine), along with associated health data for research purposes.

▪ These repositories are crucial for advancing medical research, understanding diseases, and developing personalised medicines. They follow strict ethical guidelines to ensure participant confidentiality and informed consent.
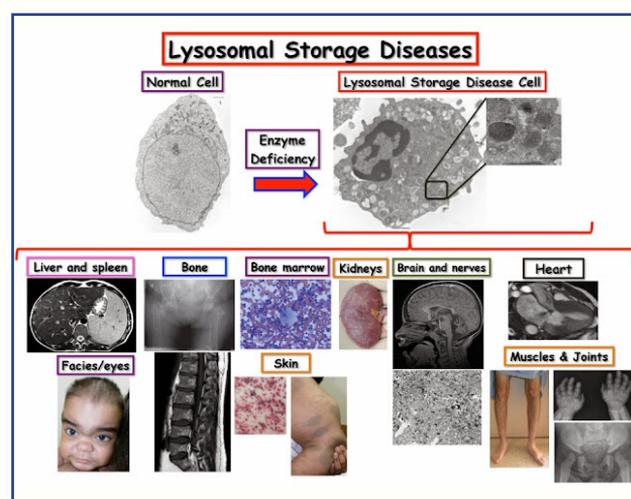
About Lysosomal Storage Disorders:

▪ LSDs are rare genetic metabolic diseases caused by the deficiency of specific enzymes or activators required to break down complex molecules such as fats and sugars. Their absence leads to the accumulation of toxic substances in cells, resulting in progressive organ damage and severe morbidity.

▪ Over 12,000 patients in India are estimated to be affected by LSDs.

▪ Only a small fraction of LSDs currently have therapies, and available treatments are often prohibitively expensive (frequently exceeding Rs.1 crore per patient annually).

Key Features of the Biobank:

▪ **National Resource:** Covers data and bio specimens of 530 patients drawn from 15 states across India.

▪ **Biological Samples:** Includes genomic DNA from blood, plasma, and urine, alongside detailed clinical, enzyme activity, and genetic profiles.

▪ **Diverse Disorders:** Encompasses 27 distinct LSDs, with common conditions such as Gaucher disease, Tay-Sachs disease, Mucolipidosis, and Morquio A syndrome represented in the cohort.

▪ **Centralised Platform:** A digital database maintains both clinical and genomic data, enabling structured access for researchers and institutions.

How It Supports Research and Healthcare:

▪ **Bridges Data Gaps:** Addresses the long-standing absence of a nationwide, centralised clinical and genomic registry for LSDs.

▪ **Facilitates Therapeutic Development:** Researchers are already using biobank data to develop potential screening tools, disease models, and therapeutic strategies, including stem cell-based research collaborations.

▪ **Enables Precision Medicine:** The repository provides a platform for genotype-phenotype correlation studies and natural history analyses that may eventually aid in precision diagnostics and tailored treatments.

▪ **Rare Disease Policy:** This biobank complements India's National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD) 2021, which seeks to improve care and support for patients with rare genetic conditions.

Conclusion:

India's national biobank for LSDs is a pioneering step in rare disease governance, research infrastructure, and clinical science, offering hope for improved understanding, early diagnosis, and therapeutic innovation for some of the most challenging genetic disorders in the country.

Biosimilar for Chronic Retinal Diseases

Context:

Recently, Zydus Lifesciences Ltd., a leading Indian pharmaceutical and life sciences company, launched ANYRA, India's first indigenously developed biosimilar of Aflibercept 2 mg. This launch marks a significant milestone in expanding access to high-end biologic therapies for Indian patients, particularly those suffering from chronic eye conditions that can lead to irreversible vision loss.

About Biosimilars and Why They Matter:

▪ Biosimilars are biologic medicines that are highly similar to already approved reference biologic drugs, with no clinically meaningful differences in terms of safety, purity, or efficacy.

▪ Unlike generic versions of small-molecule drugs, the development of biosimilars requires advanced biotechnology capabilities, including cell line development, large-scale biomanufacturing, and rigorous clinical validation. This makes biosimilars technologically complex and resource-intensive to produce.

Significance for Public Health:

▪ Chronic retinal diseases—such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic macular edema (DME), and retinal vein occlusion (RVO)—often require long-term, repeated intravitreal injections. These treatments can be expensive, placing a substantial financial burden on patients and healthcare systems.

▪ The indigenous production of ANYRA™ is expected to significantly improve affordability and accessibility, thereby enhancing treatment continuity and reducing the risk of preventable blindness.

▪ Given India's ageing population and the high prevalence of diabetes, the availability of affordable biologic therapies is increasingly critical for strengthening ophthalmic care and ensuring equitable health outcomes.

Broader Implications:

▪ The launch strengthens India's biopharmaceutical ecosystem by demonstrating domestic capabilities in the research, development, and manufacturing of complex biologics.

▪ It may also enhance India's competitiveness in the global biosimilars market, reduce dependency on imported biologics, and contribute to lowering overall healthcare costs.

▪ From a policy perspective, this development aligns with the goals of affordable healthcare, innovation-driven growth, and expanded access to specialty treatments across socio-economic groups.

Conclusion:

The launch of ANYRA™ by Zydus Lifesciences represents a transformative step toward democratizing access to advanced retinal care in India. By addressing a critical therapeutic gap through an indigenously developed biosimilar, this initiative advances public health objectives, strengthens domestic biotechnology capabilities, and underscores the evolving role of Indian pharmaceutical companies in the high-value biologics segment.

India Launches Nationwide HPV Vaccination Drive for Girls

Context:

The Union government is set to launch a nationwide single-dose Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination drive targeting to reduce India's high burden of cervical cancer among girls. The campaign will run intensively for 90 days and later be integrated into the routine immunisation programme.

About the Drive:

- The vaccination campaign will cover all girls aged 14 years across the country. Adolescence is considered the ideal time for immunisation because the vaccine provides maximum protection when administered before exposure to HPV.
- Eligible beneficiaries will be able to register through the U-Win digital platform and receive the vaccine at designated government health centres. After the 90-day campaign, the vaccine will continue to be offered through health and wellness centres under the Universal Immunisation Programme framework. Given that nearly 1.15 crore girls turn 14 every year in India, the initiative is designed as a sustained intervention rather than a one-time exercise.

About Cervical Cancer:

- Cervical cancer develops in the cells of the cervix, typically due to persistent infection with high-risk HPV types. While many HPV infections resolve naturally, long-term infection can cause precancerous lesions that may progress to invasive cancer if untreated.
- Besides cervical cancer, HPV is also linked to anal, penile, vaginal, vulvar, and oropharyngeal cancers. Evidence from countries like Australia, which introduced HPV vaccination in 2007, shows a sharp decline in HPV prevalence and precancerous conditions over time.
- Early vaccination, combined with regular screening, is considered the most effective strategy for eliminating cervical cancer as a public health threat.
- Cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in India, with nearly 1.25 lakh new cases and about 75,000 deaths annually. Since almost 90% of cervical cancer cases are caused by persistent HPV infection, expanding vaccine coverage has become a public health priority.

About the HPV Vaccine:

- The HPV vaccine protects against high-risk strains of the virus responsible for most cervical cancer cases. In 2022, the World Health Organization recommended a single-dose schedule for girls aged 9–20 years, based on strong evidence of long-lasting protection.

Protecting India's Daughters: The Free HPV Vaccination Drive
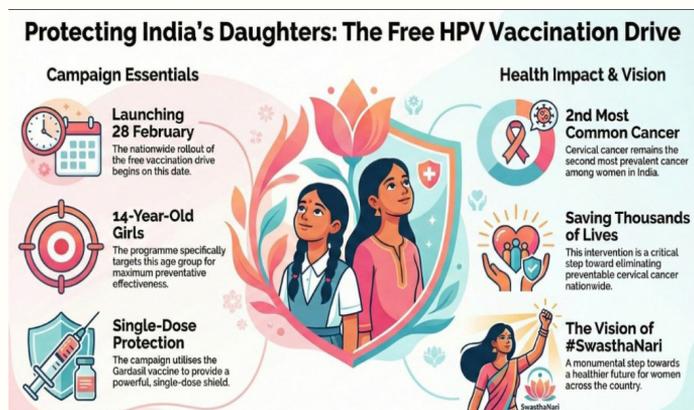
- For the current phase, the government will use Gardasil, manufactured by MSD Pharmaceuticals. The vaccine targets HPV types 16 and 18, which account for nearly 70% of global cervical cancer cases, along with other strains depending on the formulation.
- India has also developed its indigenous vaccine, Cervavac, produced by the Serum Institute of India, which may be introduced widely after necessary approvals.

Conclusion:

The nationwide HPV vaccination drive represents a major preventive health intervention. By targeting adolescent girls before exposure to the virus, India aims to significantly reduce future cervical cancer cases and deaths. If implemented effectively with high coverage and continued awareness, the campaign could mark a turning point in India's fight against a largely preventable cancer, reducing healthcare burden and saving thousands of lives annually.

Orange Economy: A New Horizon for India's Economic and Cultural Advancement

Context:

In the global order of the 21st century, the measure of economic power is no longer limited to industrial or service production alone. Instead, digital platforms, cultural influence, and the velocity of ideas, shaped by imagination, innovation, and intellectual property have emerged as crucial determinants of economic strength. In this context, the concept of the Orange Economy has gained prominence, where creativity is viewed as a key driver of economic development.

For a culturally rich and diverse country like India, the Orange Economy is not merely an engine of growth but also a strategic means to strengthen its soft power at the global level. Recognizing this significance, the Government of India, in the Union Budget 2026–27, placed the country's creative industries at the centre of its service-led growth strategy. This marks the first time that the government has explicitly indicated its intent to mainstream the Orange Economy, also referred to as the Creative Economy.

Orange Economy:

➢ The Orange Economy, commonly known as the "Creative Economy," encompasses economic activities that are based on ideas, knowledge, cultural capital, and intellectual property rights. It includes sectors such as film and music industries, animation, visual effects, gaming and comics (AVGC), digital content creation, design and fashion, advertising and publishing, cultural tourism, and live entertainment and media.

➢ In these sectors, the source of economic value is not a physical product but "creative expression." In other words, this is an idea-driven economy, where imagination and innovation become the primary factors of economic production. Globally, creative industries have now become a part of the economic mainstream, contributing between 0.5% and 7% to the GDP of various countries.

➢ The term "Orange Economy" was first coined by former Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez and Culture Minister Felipe Buitrago. They elaborated on this concept in their 2013 book The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity. The colour orange is widely regarded worldwide as a symbol of creativity, culture, and transformation, which is why it was chosen to represent this economy.

Significance of Orange Economy in the Indian Context:

▪ India's Orange Economy holds special importance for several reasons:

» **A New Avenue for Employment Generation:** Creative industries such as film production, gaming, design, digital marketing, and handicrafts provide direct and indirect employment to millions of people. This sector offers new employment opportunities, particularly for youth and women.

» **Service Sector-Led Development:** The Orange Economy accelerates growth in the service sector, thereby increasing economic activities in allied sectors such

as hospitality, tourism, advertising, logistics, and media.

» **Expansion of Soft Power:** Indian cinema, yoga, cuisine, classical music, and cultural festivals strengthen India's global identity. Thus, this economy enhances not only economic growth but also diplomatic influence.

» **Export Promotion:** Through digital platforms and OTT services, Indian content is reaching global markets, leading to increased exports of cultural products.

- According to major industry reports such as the FICCI-EY report and government estimates, the Indian media and entertainment sector was valued at approximately Rs.2.5 trillion in 2024 and is expected to reach Rs.3.067 trillion by 2027. The sector provides direct and indirect employment to more than 10 million people. Nearly one-third of the total revenue comes from digital media, which is transforming production and distribution models. Significant growth has been observed in online gaming (Rs.232 billion), animation and VFX (Rs.103 billion), and live events (Rs.100+ billion).

- These figures indicate that creativity is no longer merely a means of entertainment but has evolved into a strategic capability.

Key Pillars of Orange Economy:

- The most technological and dynamic component of the Orange Economy is AVGC-XR (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality).

» **Animation and VFX:** India has emerged as a global production base for these services. Indian firms are increasingly contributing to international films, streaming content, and advertisements. Indian artists and engineers are now part of complex global workflows, demonstrating the country's technological depth.

» **Gaming Industry:** India has become one of the largest gaming markets in the world. Gaming is no longer just a pastime but a social space. The accessibility of mobile devices has expanded gaming into smaller towns and rural areas, creating a vast consumer base.

Government Initiatives and Institutional Framework:

- Recognizing the potential of the Orange Economy, the Government of India has undertaken several significant initiatives:

» **Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT):** Established as a National Centre of Excellence, it aims to bridge the gap between training, infrastructure, and industry.

» **Education and Skill Development:** To meet future demand, there are plans to establish AVGC Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges, with the objective of preparing a workforce of 2 million professionals for this sector by 2030.

» **WAVES (World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit):** This platform brings together creators, startups, and policymakers, enabling the exchange of ideas and investment opportunities.

» **Create in India Challenge:** This initiative aims to identify local talent and provide them with a global platform.

Challenges:

Despite rapid growth, India's Orange Economy faces several structural challenges:

- **Intellectual Property Protection:** Creative industries such as film, music, animation,

gaming, and digital content rely heavily on intellectual property. However, piracy, unauthorized duplication, and copyright violations remain widespread in India, discouraging innovation and investment. A robust legal framework and effective enforcement mechanisms are required.

- **Skill Gap:** The expansion of the Orange Economy increasingly depends on emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR). However, the current education and training systems are not sufficiently aligned with these technological advancements, resulting in a mismatch between industry requirements and workforce capabilities.

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** The growth of creative industries requires high-speed internet, digital production tools, recording studios, post-production facilities, and design labs. Such infrastructure is largely limited to metropolitan areas, creating regional disparities and underutilizing talent in rural and semi-urban regions.

- **Limited Access to Capital:** Creative startups primarily invest in intellectual property and innovative ideas rather than traditional physical assets. This often discourages banks and financial institutions from extending credit, limiting access to financial resources for innovation-driven enterprises.

Way Forward:

- For the sustainable and inclusive growth of the Orange Economy, it is essential to adopt a collaborative model involving the government, industry, and academic institutions to create a robust ecosystem that supports innovation, skill development, and entrepreneurship.

- In addition to established creative hubs such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, it is necessary to develop creative clusters in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities to integrate local talent into the formal economy and reduce regional imbalances.

- From an inclusive development perspective, it is also important to incorporate rural art, crafts, and cultural traditions into the creative economy to give global recognition to the "Vocal for Local" initiative and provide international platforms for local creativity.

- Furthermore, emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) should be used to enhance the creative capacities of artists rather than replace them, thereby maintaining a balance between technological progress and human creativity.

Conclusion:

The Orange Economy is an indispensable pillar in realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047. It is an economy based on the inexhaustible resource of human imagination. For India, the Orange Economy is not merely a source of revenue but also a powerful means to enhance its soft power. When Indian films, music, yoga, and cultural heritage reach global audiences through digital platforms, they create a positive image of India. This represents a modern form of cultural diplomacy that strengthens India's influence in trade and bilateral relations.

Short Issues

Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) Policy Rate

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), through its recent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, has decided to keep the key policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25% in its monetary policy review. The decision balances price stability with growth support amid benign domestic inflation and global uncertainties. Simultaneously, the RBI revised its FY26 inflation projection to 2.1%, well below its target rate of 4%.

About RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):

- The MPC is a six-member statutory body established in 2016, based on the recommendations of the Urjit Patel Committee, to ensure rule-based and collective decision-making for monetary policy.
- **Key Details:**
  - » **Objective:** Maintain inflation at 4% (± 2%) while supporting economic growth.
  - » **Composition (6 members):**
    - ➢ **Chairperson:** RBI Governor (ex officio)
  - » **Members:** Three RBI officials (including a Deputy Governor) and three external experts appointed by the Government of India
  - » **Meetings:** At least four times a year (bi-monthly)
  - » **Voting:** Majority vote; the Governor has a casting vote in case of a tie
  - » **Key Tools:** Repo rate, reverse repo rate, cash reserve ratio (CRR), statutory liquidity ratio (SLR), and open market operations (OMO)

Monetary Policy Stance:

- » **Expansionary/Accommodative:** Reduce rates to boost growth
- » **Contractionary/Tight:** Increase rates to control high inflation
- » **Neutral:** Balanced approach between growth and inflation
- The MPC introduces transparency, accountability, and collective decision-making, replacing the earlier single-member system.

Policy Decision:

- **Repo Rate:** Held steady at 5.25%
- **Policy Stance:** Neutral, signalling stability with flexibility to act if conditions change

Rationale Behind Holding Rates:

- **Low Inflation:** Limited price pressures reduce the need for further tightening.
- **Economic Growth:** Robust domestic demand and resilient sectors support continued growth.
- **Global Risks:** Geopolitical uncertainties and commodity price volatility warrant a cautious stance.

Significance:

- **Price Stability:** Inflation remains well within the target, enhancing confidence in the RBI's framework.
- **Policy Predictability:** Stable rates aid borrowing, lending, and investment decisions.
- **Monetary Space:** A neutral stance preserves flexibility for future adjustments based on evolving data.

Conclusion:

By holding the policy rate and revising the FY26 inflation forecast to 2.1%, the RBI signals a prudent, data-driven approach that balances growth with price stability. The role of the MPC ensures transparency, accountability, and collective decision-making, reinforcing the credibility of India's monetary policy framework while providing flexibility to respond to domestic and global economic developments.

'Deep Tech' Start ups

Context:

Recently, the Government of India has officially defined "deep tech start-ups" and laid down specific eligibility criteria for recognition under the Startup India framework. This move, notified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), marks the first time that deep tech ventures have been distinctly recognised within the startup ecosystem, offering them a tailored policy runway to grow and innovate.

What Is a Deep Tech Start up?

- A deep tech start up is defined as an entity primarily engaged in producing solutions based on new knowledge or advancements in scientific or engineering disciplines. Such companies:
  » Invest heavily in research and development (R&D) rather than merely commercial activities.
  » Own, or are in the process of creating, significant novel intellectual property (IP) and take steps to commercialise it.
  » Face extended development timelines, high capital and infrastructure requirements, and significant technical or scientific uncertainty.

Revised Start-up Recognition Criteria:

- The revised notification by DPIIT establishes separate criteria for deep tech start-ups as compared to regular start-ups under the Startup India programme:
  » **Age Limit:** Deep tech start ups can be recognised for up to 20 years from the date of incorporation or registration, compared to 10 years for other start ups.
  » **Turnover Threshold:** The maximum annual turnover for deep tech start ups has been raised to Rs.300 crore, while for regular start ups it remains Rs.200 crore.
  » **Application Requirement:** To be recognised as a deep tech start up, an entity must apply to DPIIT for certification. Recognition is based on an assessment of R&D focus and innovation potential.

Process of Recognition:

- DPIIT is the final authority to determine whether a company qualifies as a start up or a deep tech start up. It evaluates applications based on guidance from an Inter-Ministerial Board of Certification, which includes representatives from DPIIT, the Department of Science and Technology (DST), and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
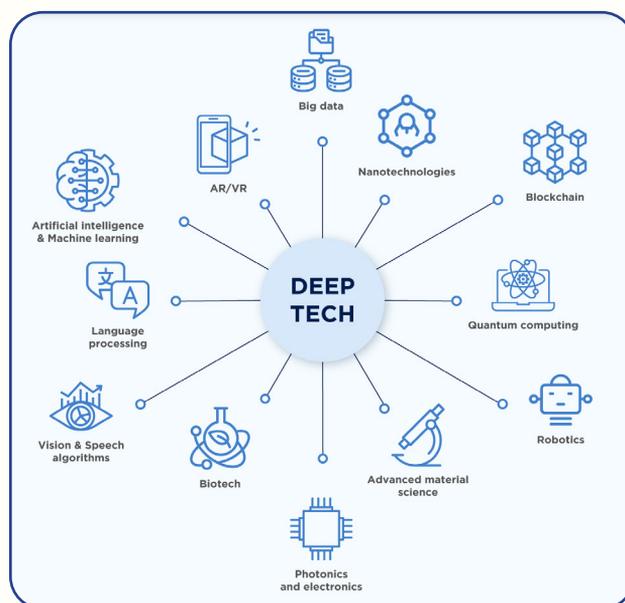
Significance and Implications:

- **Supporting Long Development Cycles:** Deep tech companies often take longer to commercialise innovative technologies. Extended recognition timelines align policy support with the realities of R&D-intensive innovation.
- **Boosting the Innovation Ecosystem:** By carving out a distinct category, the government acknowledges the capital- and time-intensive nature of deep technologies and encourages long-term investments.

- **Enhanced Access to Benefits:** Recognised deep tech start ups can access policy benefits, including faster patent processing, tax exemptions under Section 80-IAC (subject to conditions), and eligibility for funding from schemes such as the Anusandhan National Research Foundation's RDI Fund.

Conclusion:

The formal definition and eligibility criteria for deep tech start ups reflect a strategic policy shift to foster deep science and engineering innovation in India. By providing extended recognition, higher turnover thresholds, and structured evaluation mechanisms, the government aims to strengthen the innovation ecosystem, attract long-term capital, and position India as a global hub for deep technology ventures.

Procurement of Minor Forest Produce Dips

Context:

Government procurement of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) at Minimum Support Price (MSP) witnessed a sharp decline in 2024–25. Data tabled in Parliament shows a drop of over 92% across 19 states compared to 2023–24.

About MFP and MSP:

- **Minor Forest Produce (MFP):** Non-timber forest products of plant or animal origin, including bamboo, honey, lac, medicinal herbs, tendu leaves, gum karaya, and karanj seeds. MFPs are vital for over 100 million forest-dependent people, providing food, medicine, and 20–40% of annual income for many tribal communities.
- **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for MFP:** Decided by the Pricing Cell under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, MSP ensures fair remuneration for tribal gatherers and protects them from market fluctuations. Revisions are typically carried out every three years, though they may occur earlier under special circumstances.

Purpose of MSP for MFP:

- Safeguard tribal communities from exploitation by middlemen
- Enhance income and livelihood opportunities for forest-dependent populations
- Encourage sustainable harvesting of forest resources

Key Legal Framework:

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Recognizes the rights of forest dwellers over non-timber forest products
- **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996:** Empowers tribal communities in forest management and MFP marketing

Economic and Social Significance:

- Provides subsistence and cash income, particularly during non-agricultural seasons.
- Empowers tribal women, who are often central to the collection and processing of MFPs.
- Has the potential to generate 10 million workdays annually, contributing to rural socio-economic development.

Key Schemes and Initiatives for MFP

- **Mechanism for Marketing of MFP through MSP:** Launched in 2013–14, it provides a safety net by offering guaranteed prices for MFPs such as tamarind, honey and mahua. Covers 23–55 MFPs across 27 states
- **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs):** Implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM), these centres organize tribal gatherers into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for primary processing and value addition Focus on transforming tribal gatherers into entrepreneurs through sustainable forest management
- **NSTFDC Financial Assistance:** The National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) provides concessional loans for income-generating activities related to MFP

- **PM-JANMAN Initiative:** Supports Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) through specialized Van Dhan Vikas Kendras

Key Components of MFP Development:

- **Value Addition:** Transition from raw collection to processed products such as jams, powders, and oils
- **Infrastructure Support:** Establishment of storage facilities, warehouses, and processing units
- **Capacity Building:** Training tribal members in sustainable collection, processing, and marketing practices

Challenges Highlighted by the Dip in Procurement:

- Inadequate implementation at the state level
- Delays in fund release and logistical bottlenecks in procurement
- Limited awareness among tribal gatherers regarding MSP and government schemes

Conclusion:

The 92% dip in MFP procurement in 2024–25 highlights serious implementation gaps in the MSP mechanism and allied schemes. Strengthening state-level execution, ensuring timely procurement, enhancing value addition, and empowering tribal communities are essential for securing sustainable livelihoods, promoting forest conservation, and advancing rural economic development in India.

NITI Aayog Report on Energy Reforms

Context:

India stands at a pivotal juncture in its development trajectory. The recent NITI Aayog study, Scenarios Towards Viksit Bharat and Net Zero, outlines a vision in which India achieves a $30-trillion economy by 2047 while attaining net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. These ambitious goals, however, are contingent upon bold energy reforms, substantial investments, and careful management of social and resource trade-offs.

Key Findings of the Report:

- The report presents two pathways: a Current Policy Scenario and a more ambitious Net-Zero Scenario. In the latter, India's GDP expands roughly eleven-fold with only modest growth in energy demand. This decoupling is made possible through enhanced energy efficiency, large-scale electrification, and the adoption of circular-economy practices across sectors.
- Electricity emerges as the backbone of the energy system, with its share in final energy demand projected to rise significantly under the Net-Zero Scenario.
- Renewable energy and nuclear power dominate electricity generation by mid-century, while fossil fuels decline to a residual role by 2070.
- Clean technologies such as green hydrogen, bioenergy, and energy storage play a critical role in decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors.
- This pathway allows per-capita energy consumption to rise in line with human development needs while remaining well below OECD levels—demonstrating that high economic growth and emissions control can coexist.

Challenges:

- The scale of the transition is immense. India will require approximately $22.7 trillion in cumulative investments by 2070, with nearly half directed towards the power sector. On an annualised basis, this amounts to around $500 billion per year, far exceeding current levels of clean-energy investment.
  - » **Financing gap:** Even with structural improvements in capital markets, an estimated $6.5 trillion gap remains, likely to be bridged largely through external finance.

» **Land and water constraints:** Competition between renewable energy infrastructure and agriculture intensifies, particularly in water-stressed regions.

The Roadmap to Viksit Bharat: Aligning Growth with Net Zero 2070

Climate Change to align actions across the Centre and states.

Conclusion:

India's net-zero transition is presented not as a constraint on development but as a redefinition of it. If implemented effectively, it can anchor a cleaner, more resilient, and inclusive growth model, setting a global precedent for developing economies. However, delays would raise transition costs and risk carbon lock-in, underscoring the urgency of decisive action in the current decade.
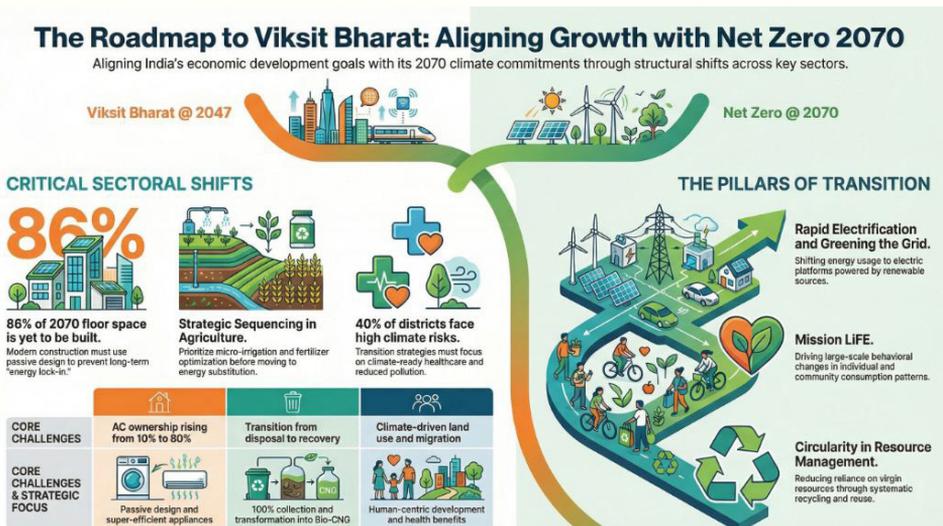
» **Employment shifts:** While the clean-energy transition can generate significant employment, uneven regional impacts necessitate targeted reskilling programmes and social-protection measures to prevent disruption.

Policy Prescriptions for a Sustainable Transition:

- Recognising the magnitude of the challenge, the report outlines several strategic interventions:
  » **Demand-side measures:** Enhancing energy efficiency, promoting behavioural change, enforcing stronger building codes, and adopting urban planning centred on public transport.
  » **Financial reforms:** Deepening bond markets, scaling blended finance, and establishing dedicated green-finance institutions to mobilise domestic and foreign capital.
  » **Institutional coordination:** Adopting a mission-mode governance framework under the Prime Minister's Council on

Network Readiness Index

Context:

Recently, India demonstrated improved performance on the Network Readiness Index (NRI) 2025, climbing four places to secure the 45th rank among 127 economies. The report was released by the Portulans Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based independent research organisation.

About the Network Readiness Index:

- The Network Readiness Index (NRI) assesses how well countries are positioned to leverage network technologies for socio-economic development.
- The index evaluates economies across four pillars "Technology, People, Governance, and Impact" using 53 indicators that measure digital infrastructure, adoption, skills, policy environment, and outcomes.

India shines in Network Readiness Index Report 2025, prepared by Portulans Institute based in Washington DC

India's Performance in NRI 2025:

- India's NRI score improved from 53.63 in 2024 to 54.43 in 2025, reflecting progress in digital ecosystem readiness. This gain in ranking underscores sustained efforts in expanding digital infrastructure, policy reforms, and innovation initiatives.

- The report highlights India's top global performances across several key indicators:
  » 1st rank in annual investment in telecommunication services, AI scientific publications, ICT services exports, and e-commerce legislation.
  » 2nd rank in FTTH/building internet subscriptions, mobile broadband traffic, and international internet bandwidth.
  » 3rd rank in domestic market scale and income inequality.

- These achievements reflect India's expanding digital economy, rising research output, and strengthened connectivity infrastructure. According to the report, India also demonstrates greater network readiness than would be expected based on its income level, ranking 2nd among lower-middle-income countries.

Significance:

- NRI rankings are significant as they provide a multi-dimensional assessment of digital preparedness, encompassing not only infrastructure but also human capital, governance quality, and societal impact. High rankings in telecommunications investment and ICT exports highlight India's role as a global digital services hub, particularly in software and IT-enabled services.

- The improved ranking also aligns with national initiatives such as the widespread rollout of 5G services, expansion of broadband networks under the National Broadband Mission, and increased emphasis on digital education and skill development.

Challenges:

- Despite notable progress, India continues to rank below top-performing economies, indicating scope for improvement in areas such as digital literacy, governance frameworks, and equitable access to digital services.

- Strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure, improving data governance, and accelerating human capital development in emerging technologies will be critical to further enhancing India's network readiness.

Conclusion:

India's rise to the 45th position in the NRI 2025, along with improved scores across key digital indicators, reflects steady progress in building a resilient digital ecosystem. Through targeted infrastructure expansion, supportive policies, and a strong focus on research and innovation, India is enhancing its capacity to leverage network technologies for economic

growth and societal transformation—an essential component of its broader development trajectory.

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu

Context:

Recently, Prime Minister Modi inaugurated Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu is a newly six lane road bridge over the Brahmaputra River in Guwahati, Assam, marking a significant development in the infrastructure landscape of Northeast India. The bridge is named after Kumar Bhaskar Varma, a celebrated 7th century ruler of the ancient Kamarupa Kingdom, known for his contributions to the political and cultural heritage of Assam.

Key Features of the bridge:

▪ The setu spans approximately 1.24 kilometres across the Brahmaputra and forms part of an 8.4 km connectivity corridor linking Guwahati with North Guwahati.

▪ Constructed at an estimated cost of around Rs. 3,030 crore, it is a six lane extradosed Prestressed Concrete (PSC) bridge, the first of its kind in Northeast India.

▪ The extradosed design combines attributes of girder and cable stayed bridges, providing enhanced structural strength and durability while accommodating wide river spans.

▪ Advanced engineering features such as base isolation technology with friction pendulum bearings have been incorporated to address the region's high seismic vulnerability. A Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS) facilitates real time safety and condition assessments.

Key Benefits of Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu:

▪ **Improved Connectivity:** The bridge ensures smooth movement between Guwahati and North Guwahati, significantly reducing travel time and traffic congestion.

▪ **Access to National Institutions and Cultural Sites:** It provides convenient access to important educational, cultural, and administrative centres in North Guwahati, enhancing tourism, education, and governance.

▪ **Development of North Guwahati as a Twin City:** The bridge supports North Guwahati's growth as a complementary urban centre, reducing pressure on the core city and promoting planned urban expansion.

▪ **Boost to Regional Economy:** Improved connectivity encourages trade, investment, and real estate development, while creating employment opportunities during construction and operational phases.

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu: A Landmark of Modern Engineering and Ancient Legacy

About Bhaskaravarman:

▪ Bhaskaravarman ruled Kamarupa (ancient Assam) during the 7th century A.D.

▪ He was a major patron of Sanskrit and Vedic learning, supporting scholars and promoting literary culture.

▪ His reign is remembered for fostering education, arts, and administrative organization in the region.

▪ **Alliances and Diplomacy:**

   » Formed a strategic alliance with King Harshavardhana of Thaneshwar to defeat Shashanka of Bengal, strengthening

Kamarupa's political position.

» Maintained diplomatic relations with China and is recorded to have hosted the Chinese traveler Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), showcasing his kingdom's international engagement.

▪ **Administrative Contributions:**

» Issued the Nidhanpur and Dubi copper plate grants, crucial historical records that provide insight into Kamarupa's governance, land grants, and social organization.

▪ **Legacy in Education:**

» The Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University (KBVSASU) in Nalbari, Assam, honors him today.

» The university specializes in Sanskrit, literature, and ancient studies, continuing his vision of promoting knowledge.

Conclusion:

The Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu represents a blend of engineering innovation, strategic planning, and cultural homage. Its inauguration marks a new chapter in Assam's development trajectory by vastly improving connectivity, reducing travel friction, and potentially spurring socio economic growth across the region.

## Bharat-VISTAAR Digital Platform

Context:

Recently, The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare launched Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources), an AI-enabled digital platform, aims to provide farmers with data-driven, customized advisory services, enhancing decision-making and productivity at the farm level.

Features of Bharat-VISTAAR:

▪ **Multilingual AI Platform:** Initially available in Hindi and English, with plans to expand to 11 regional languages, making it accessible to farmers across India.

▪ **Integrated AgriStack & ICAR Knowledge Base:** Combines portals under the AgriStack framework and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) package on farm practices with AI systems.

▪ **Farmer-Centric Support:** Provides guidance on weather forecasts, soil health, crop management, pests and diseases, and market prices.

▪ **Central Scheme Integration:** Includes information on schemes like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Soil Health Card, with plans to cover all major central agricultural schemes.

▪ **Direct Query System:** Farmers can ask questions in their local language, receiving immediate advice on sowing, crop protection, and market rates.
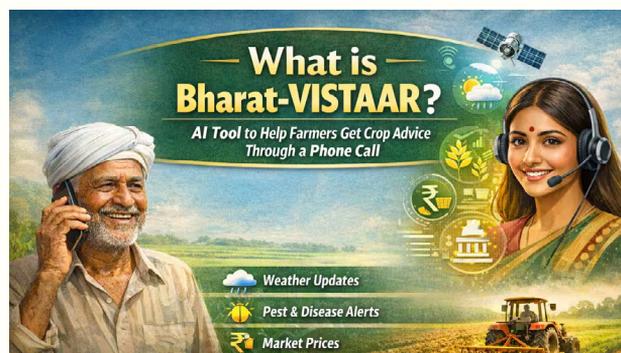
Significance for Indian Agriculture:

▪ **Enhanced Productivity:** AI-driven insights allow farmers to optimize irrigation, fertilization, and pest management.

▪ **Risk Reduction:** Predictive analytics help anticipate weather events, pest outbreaks, and market fluctuations, reducing crop losses.

▪ **Decision-Making Efficiency:** Direct advisory reduces the need for multiple office visits or navigating complex digital tools.

▪ **Inclusive Access:** Multilingual support ensures equitable access for small and marginal farmers, bridging the digital divide.

AI in Agriculture: Applications and Benefits:

▪ **Precision Farming:** AI-powered drones and IoT sensors monitor crop health and soil moisture, optimizing resource use.

▪ **Weed & Pest Management:** Robots and computer vision systems target affected areas, reducing chemical use.

▪ **Predictive Analytics:** Machine learning forecasts market trends, optimal harvest times, and climate risks.

▪ **Supply Chain Optimization:** Real-time tracking improves transportation efficiency and reduces spoilage.

▪ **Autonomous Machinery:** AI-driven tractors and equipment mitigate labor shortages.

Policy and Strategic Implications:

▪ **Digital Empowerment:** Bharat-VISTAAR aligns with Digital India and Atmanirbhar Bharat missions, promoting technology adoption in agriculture.

▪ **Sustainable Agriculture:** Data-driven practices reduce resource wastage and promote environmentally sustainable farming.

▪ **Innovation and Research:** Launch of AI Hackathon and Agri Kosh AI Strategy Roadmap encourages innovative solutions to agricultural challenges.

▪ **Global Positioning:** Strengthens India's role in AI-driven agri-tech solutions, setting an example for emerging economies.

Conclusion:

Bharat-VISTAAR represents a paradigm shift in Indian agriculture, leveraging artificial intelligence to empower farmers, increase productivity, and enhance sustainability. By integrating technology, policy, and knowledge systems, it bridges the gap between scientific research and field-level application, ensuring India's agriculture remains resilient, efficient, and future-ready.

National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0

Context:

Recently, The Government of India launched the National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 (NMP 2.0), the second phase of its asset monetisation programme to unlock the value of public assets and mobilise investment without increasing the fiscal burden. Prepared by NITI Aayog in consultation with infrastructure line ministries, NMP 2.0 reflects the Asset Monetisation Plan 2025 30 announced in the Union Budget 2025 26.

About NMP 2.0:

▪ The National Monetisation Pipeline is a systematic framework to mobilise public assets (brownfield infrastructure) through private participation, recycling them to generate funds for new infrastructure investment. While asset ownership remains with the government, monetisation creates revenue streams for reinvestment in productive capital.

▪ Under NMP 2.0, the government aims to generate Rs.16.72 lakh crore between FY 2026 and FY 2030 by unlocking value from over 2,000 assets across 12 sectors including highways, railways, power, ports, coal and mines. This figure also includes an estimated Rs.5.8 lakh crore of private sector investment.

Significance:

▪ **Boosting Infrastructure Financing Without Fiscal Strain**: NMP 2.0 helps reduce dependence on direct budgetary expenditure for capital projects. By recycling existing assets, it creates new resources for infrastructure investment without worsening fiscal deficits.

▪ **Enhancing Private Sector Participation:** By inviting private capital into infrastructure through diverse monetisation models, the initiative strengthens the PPP ecosystem, augments long term investment flows and enhances operational efficiency of public assets.

▪ **Potential Multiplier Impact:** According to

estimates, monetisation under NMP 2.0 could contribute to a significant boost in GDP over the next 5 10 years by enabling new capital expenditure and economic activity, possibly adding around Rs.40 lakh crore to India's economy through investment multipliers and reinvestment of proceeds.
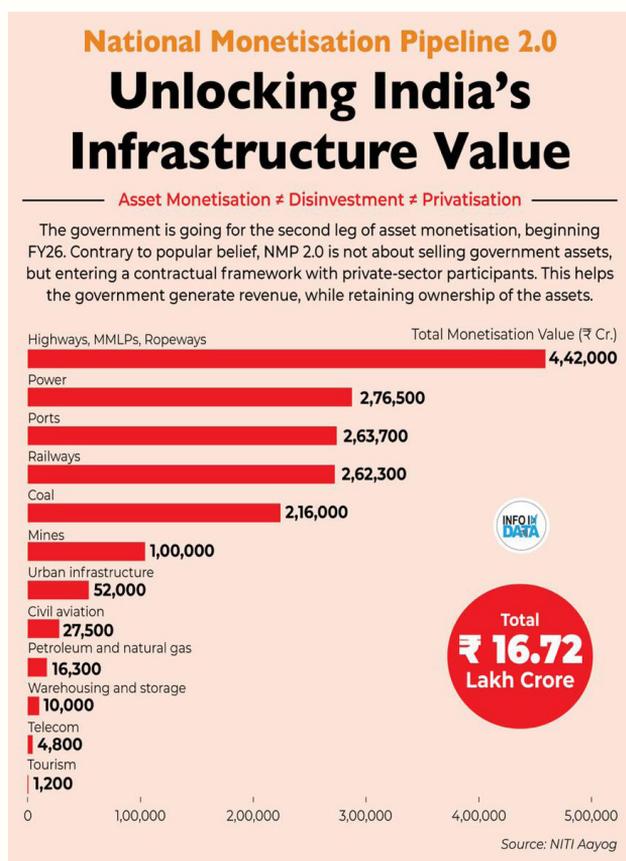
- **Alignment With National Infrastructure Goals:** The roadmap aligns with India's broader infrastructure expansion ambitions and long term growth strategy, supporting connectivity, energy transition, logistics efficiency and urban development.

National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0
Unlocking India's Infrastructure Value

— Asset Monetisation ≠ Disinvestment ≠ Privatisation —

The government is going for the second leg of asset monetisation, beginning FY26. Contrary to popular belief, NMP 2.0 is not about selling government assets, but entering a contractual framework with private-sector participants. This helps the government generate revenue, while retaining ownership of the assets.

Total Monetisation Value (₹ Cr.)

Sector	Value
Highways, MMLPs, Ropeways	4,42,000
Power	2,76,500
Ports	2,63,700
Railways	2,62,300
Coal	2,16,000
Mines	1,00,000
Urban infrastructure	52,000
Civil aviation	27,500
Petroleum and natural gas	16,300
Warehousing and storage	10,000
Telecom	4,800
Tourism	1,200

INFO IN DATA

Total ₹ 16.72 Lakh Crore

Source: NITI Aayog

Challenges and Criticisms:

- **Execution Risk:** The ambitious target of monetising a diverse set of assets depends heavily on effective implementation, regulatory frameworks, market demand conditions and investor confidence.
- **Valuation and Pricing:** Accurate valuation of public assets and transparent pricing

mechanisms are critical to ensure that monetisation yields fair value for the nation and protects public interest.

- **Social and Strategic Concerns:** There are debates about the extent of private participation in public infrastructure, especially in critical sectors, and the need for safeguards to ensure continuity of services and equity considerations for users.

Conclusion:

The National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 represents a significant policy initiative to harness India's existing infrastructure assets for financing future development. Its Rs.16.72 lakh crore target by FY 2030 underscores a strategic shift toward asset recycling, market participation, and capital mobilisation to accelerate infrastructure growth while managing fiscal constraints.

India's Defence Budget: Policy Shift Towards Modernisation and Capability Creation

Context:

The current global security environment is undergoing a phase of rapid transformation, where the traditional concept of warfare has now evolved into multi-domain conflict. Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based warfare systems, drone swarm technology, cyber-attacks, electronic warfare and space-based surveillance mechanisms have today become key determinants of any country's military capability. This transformation becomes even more significant for India as it is situated in a complex geopolitical environment where, on the one hand, there are military tensions with China along the northern borders, and on the other hand, persistent strategic challenges from Pakistan along the western frontier. Additionally, new dimensions such as maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region and protection of supply chains have also become central to national security policy. Therefore, in the face of changing geopolitical and security challenges, modernisation of the defence sector has become essential to ensure preparedness.

In the context of these emerging challenges, an unprecedented allocation has been made for the defence sector in the Union Budget-2026. This budget does not merely indicate financial growth but also points towards a structural shift in India's defence policy where the focus is moving away from traditional 'force maintenance' to 'capability creation'. This development is extremely important not only from the perspective of internal security but also in terms of technological self-reliance, industrial development and strategic autonomy.

Key Provisions of Defence Budget-2026:

- In the Union Budget 2026, an allocation of approximately Rs.7.85 lakh crore has been made for the defence sector, reflecting an increase of about 15 percent compared to the previous financial year. This amount constitutes approximately 14–15 percent of the total Central Government expenditure, clearly indicating that national security remains among the top priorities of the government.

- The most significant aspect of this budget is the increase in capital expenditure, under which approximately Rs.2.19 lakh crore has been allocated. About Rs.1.85 lakh crore has been earmarked for capital acquisition, which will be used for the procurement of new military equipment, aircraft, naval platforms and advanced surveillance systems. In addition, approximately Rs.1.39 lakh crore has been reserved for procurement from domestic defence industries, with the objective of promoting indigenous defence manufacturing.

- The allocation for the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has also been increased, which will encourage indigenous technological development, innovation and the creation of advanced defence systems. This allocation is an attempt to reduce import dependency in India's defence sector and move towards self-reliance.

Major Highlights of the Defence Budget:

➤ An allocation of Rs.7.85 lakh crore has been made to the Ministry of Defence in the Union Budget 2026–27, which is the highest among all ministries.

➤ This allocation reflects an increase of 15.19% over the Budget Estimates (BE) of FY 2025–26 and constitutes 14.67% of the total Central Government expenditure.

➤ Rs.1.39 lakh crore has been allocated for procurement from domestic defence industries with the aim of promoting indigenous defence manufacturing.

➤ An allocation of Rs.12,100 crore has been made for the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme in FY 2026–27, reflecting a notable increase of 45.49% compared to FY 2025–26 at the initial stage.

➤ The allocation for DRDO in FY 2026–27 stands at Rs.29,100.25 crore, which is higher than Rs.26,816.82 crore in FY 2025–26.

➤ India is currently the fourth largest military spender in the world after the US, China and Russia.

Strategic Significance:

▪ The real importance of the increase in defence expenditure in Budget-2026 lies in its strategic implications. Traditionally, India's military structure has been manpower-intensive, where deployment of a large number of troops formed a primary component of defence strategy.

▪ However, modern warfare has become technology-driven, where network-centric warfare systems, precision-guided weapons, real-time surveillance and data-based decision-making play a crucial role.

▪ This budget attempts to move India towards a technology-intensive military framework. Investment in advanced Air Force platforms, naval assets, drone systems and electronic warfare capabilities will strengthen India's multi-domain warfare capability.

▪ Such investment is particularly important for enhancing surveillance capacity along the northern borders and strengthening naval dominance in maritime regions.

▪ Additionally, increasing emphasis on information warfare and cyber security

will prepare India for future hybrid wars. Thus, Budget-2026 is not limited to the procurement of military equipment but represents a step towards building a comprehensive defence strategy.
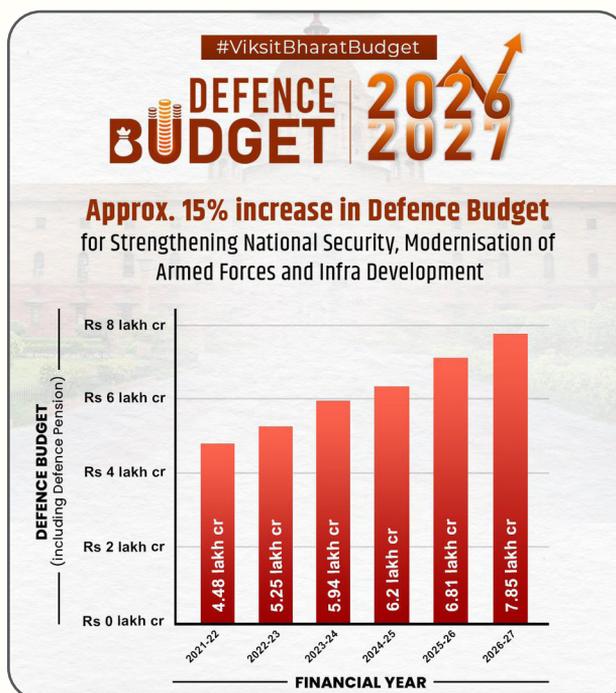
Self-Reliance and Defence Industrial Base:

▪ Self-reliance in the defence sector (Atmanirbhar Bharat) has emerged as a major pillar of India's long-term strategic policy. The allocation reserved for procurement from domestic defence industries in Budget-2026 is a significant initiative in this direction. Its objective is not only to reduce import dependency but also to develop domestic manufacturing capacity and promote defence exports.

▪ Through private sector participation, defence start-ups and the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, India can develop a robust defence industrial base. Moreover, coordination between civilian and military technologies (civil-military fusion) can facilitate the development of dual-use technologies, which will prove beneficial for both economic development and national security.

- If these initiatives are implemented effectively, India will not only be able to meet its defence requirements domestically but will also be able to establish its presence in the global defence export market.

Challenges:

- **High Burden of Salary and Pension Expenditure:** Although sufficient resources have been allocated to the defence sector in Budget-2026, a significant portion of defence expenditure is still spent on salaries and pensions. This limits the resources available for military modernisation and procurement of new equipment.
- **Complexity in Defence Procurement Process:** The complexity and long timelines involved in the defence procurement process often hinder the timely availability of modern military equipment, thereby affecting the process of capability creation.
- **Limited Technological Capacity of Domestic Industry:** The technological capacity of domestic defence industries, particularly in advanced aerospace and electronics sectors, is still not at par with global standards, which affects the goal of self-reliance.
- **Limited Investment in Research and Development (R&D):** Inadequate investment in defence research and development hampers indigenous technological advancement.
- **Technological Dependence:** Dependence on foreign countries for advanced military technologies remains a major challenge in achieving self-reliant defence production.
- **Need for Institutional and Policy Reforms:** These challenges cannot be addressed merely through financial allocation but require institutional reforms and efficient policy-making to accelerate defence modernisation.

Way Forward:

- India needs to adopt a long-term strategy for defence modernisation. Policy reforms are essential to ensure a faster and more transparent procurement process, active participation of the private sector and promotion of research and innovation.
- Defence production can be enhanced through Public-Private Partnerships. In addition, structural military reforms such as theatre commands can ensure better utilisation of resources.
- Greater emphasis must also be placed on quality standards and global collaboration to promote defence exports. This will not only provide economic benefits but also strengthen India's strategic autonomy.

Conclusion:

The Union Budget-2026 represents a significant turning point in India's defence policy, where the focus is not merely on increasing military expenditure but on long-term capability creation. If institutional reforms and technological innovation are given equal importance along with financial resources, India will be able to effectively address future security challenges. Thus, defence expenditure in this budget is not only a means to strengthen national security but also an important step towards enhancing India's strategic self-reliance and global power status.

Short Issues

Project Kusha

Context:

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh recently stated that India is advancing towards a home-grown long-range air defence system under Project Kusha, aimed at matching the capabilities of Russia's S-400 Triumf and the US's MIM-104 Patriot.

About Project Kusha:

- Project Kusha is an indigenous long-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system to protect strategic military and civilian assets. Developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation, the ER-SAM system is designed to engage aerial threats up to 400 km.

- DRDO leads development with Bharat Electronics Limited responsible for radars and integration. It will integrate with the IAF's Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS), enabling real-time tracking, threat assessment, and coordinated engagement.

Key features:

- **Three-Tier Architecture:** The system uses three interceptor variants:
  - » **M1:** ~150 km range
  - » **M2:** ~250 km range
  - » **M3:** ~350–400 km range
- This layered structure ensures redundancy. Interceptors target fighter jets, UAVs, cruise missiles, precision-guided munitions, and some ballistic threats, achieving speeds up to Mach 5.5 with advanced seekers for terminal guidance.
- **Radars, Sensors and Network-Centric Warfare**
  - » Project Kusha integrates long-range surveillance and fire-control radars with command nodes, synthesising data from ground, airborne, and potential space assets. This network-centric design allows simultaneous multi-target tracking, automated threat prioritisation, and coordinated engagements across the battlespace, fully integrated with IACCS.

- **Part of Mission Sudarshan Chakra:**
  - » Project Kusha forms the long-range backbone of Mission Sudarshan Chakra, India's plan for a multi-layered air and missile defence shield by 2035. It complements QRSAM, VSHORADS, laser weapons, and ballistic missile defence systems.
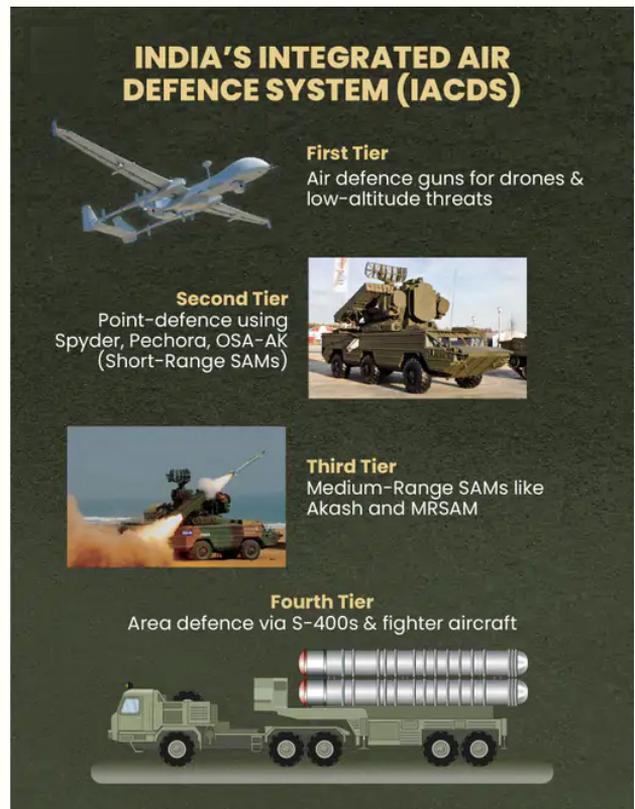
Implications:

- Currently, India relies on imported S-400 systems from Russia. Project Kusha reduces dependence by offering indigenous production, upgrade sovereignty, deployment flexibility, and potential export opportunities, mitigating geopolitical and logistical constraints.

Kusha vs S-400 vs Patriot:

Feature	Project Kusha	S-400 Triumf	MIM-104 Patriot
Origin	India	Russia	United States
Max Range	~400 km (M3)	Up to 400 km	~160 km (varies by variant)
Focus	Multi-layered aerial defence	Long-range multi-target	Strong ballistic missile focus (PAC-3)
Integra-tion	Native IACCS integration	Imported system	NATO-integrated
Strategic Control	Full domestic control	Suppli-er-de-pendent	Supplier-

▪ While the S-400 is battle-proven and the Patriot has a strong combat record, Project Kusha offers India full software control, integration flexibility and upgrade sovereignty.

Conclusion:

Phased testing of M1, M2, and M3 interceptors continues, aiming for induction around 2030. Beyond missile performance, Project Kusha's success depends on the robustness of India's integrated air defence grid, marking a milestone in strategic self-reliance.

AMCA Project: India's Indigenous Fifth-Generation Fighter

Context:

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has shortlisted three contenders to design and develop prototypes for the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), India's ambitious indigenous fifth-generation stealth fighter. The shortlisted entities are Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL), two consortia led by L&T, Bharat Forge for making fighter jets.

About the AMCA:

▪ The AMCA is a single-seat, twin-engine, all-weather multirole stealth fighter being developed for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Navy.

▪ Designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), an autonomous design body under the Ministry of Defence, the aircraft aims to combine advanced stealth capabilities with supercruise performance, internal weapons bays, and multirole operational versatility.

AMCA
INDIA'S FUTURE READY FIGHTER
Cost : ₹15,000 crore to develop the first five jets
Length 17.6 m
Wingspan 11.13 m
Maximum Take-off Weight 25,000 kg
Maximum Speed 2,600 kmph (Mach 2.15)
Service Ceiling 20,000 m
Performance Can achieve supersonic speed without afterburners (supercruise)
Combat Range 1,620 km
Payload Capacity 6,500 kg

Intended Roles and Capabilities:

▪ Air supremacy and ground-strike operations
▪ Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD)
▪ Electronic warfare missions
▪ Optimised design for low radar cross-section and supercruise capability
▪ Planned to replace the Sukhoi Su-30MKI, the backbone of the IAF fighter fleet

Timeline:

▪ Serial production is expected to begin by 2035, with over 125 aircraft planned for induction. The AMCA will make India one of the few countries operating fifth-generation fighters alongside the United States (F-22/F-35), China (J-20), and Russia (Su-

57).

Development History:

- The AMCA programme originated as the Medium Combat Aircraft (MCA) programme, launched in 2010, parallel to the Indo-Russia Sukhoi/HAL FGFA project. Originally envisioned as a 20-tonne-class fighter, the current AMCA design has evolved into a 25-tonne-class aircraft, reflecting advancements in avionics, stealth coatings, and engine technology.
- As of February 2025, the programme is in the prototype development phase, following the completion of:
  » Feasibility study
  » Preliminary design stage
  » Detailed design phase
- Currently, the AMCA is India's only fifth-generation fighter under development, symbolising a significant leap in domestic aerospace capability.

Strategic and Industrial Significance:

- **Boosting Indigenous Capability:** The AMCA programme seeks to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and cultivate a self-reliant aerospace industrial base.
- **Technological Advancement:** Prototype funding and development are expected to encourage innovations in stealth technology, avionics, propulsion systems, and composite materials.
- **Enhancing Air Power:** The AMCA will modernise India's fighter fleet, complementing acquisitions such as Rafale jets and P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft, thereby enhancing operational flexibility and strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific region.

Way Forward:

The shortlisted firms will now receive government funding to build AMCA prototypes. Final manufacturing rights will be granted following successful prototype validation, ensuring a multi-stage, quality-driven approach to development. With private sector participation

at the forefront, the AMCA project exemplifies India's strategic ambition to emerge as a hub for advanced military aviation technology, potentially transforming the country's aerospace and defence landscape by the mid-2030s.

India's Rs. 3.25 Lakh Crore Defence Push

Context:

Recently, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved the purchase of 114 additional Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) at a cost of Rs. 3.25 lakh crore. This marks one of the largest defence acquisitions in recent years and comes amid India's need to strengthen its aerial combat capabilities, given that the IAF currently operates below its sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. Eighteen aircraft will be delivered in fly-away condition from France, while the remaining 90 will be manufactured domestically under the "Make in India" initiative.

About the Defence Acquisition Council:

- The DAC, chaired by the Defence Minister, is the apex decision-making body for defence procurement in India. It grants Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for acquisition proposals, approves long-term plans, and ensures the timely execution of approved programmes.
- The council's approval enables the Rafale deal to move into detailed technical and commercial negotiations, reflecting India's focus on structured and efficient defence planning.

Boost to Indigenous Manufacturing:

- A key feature of this acquisition is domestic production. Around 90 aircraft will be assembled in India, supporting technology transfer, employment generation, and skill development in the aerospace sector.
- This "Buy & Make" model strengthens self-reliance in defence production, reduces dependency on foreign suppliers, and

reinforces India's strategic autonomy in critical military technologies.

21st Century: Strengthening Strategic Autonomy

₹3.25 Lakh Crore Defence Push
The DAC approved the purchase of 114 additional Rafale fighter jets.

The "Buy & Make" Model
18 jets delivered from France; 90 manufactured domestically under "Make in India".

4.5-Generation Combat Power
Omnirole fighters featuring AESA radar, and Meteor BVR missiles.

About Rafale:

- The Rafale is a 4.5-generation, twin-engine, omnirole fighter capable of executing air superiority, ground attack, reconnaissance, and nuclear deterrence missions in a single sortie. Its advanced avionics include the RBE2 AESA radar, the SPECTRA electronic warfare suite, and modular data fusion systems.

- Powered by Snecma M88 engines, it can supercruise at speeds of up to Mach 1.8, with a combat radius exceeding 1,000 km. Its weapons suite includes Meteor BVR missiles, SCALP/Storm Shadow cruise missiles, and Exocet anti-ship missiles. IAF-specific modifications enhance survivability, high-altitude performance, and operational flexibility.

Strategic and Operational Significance:

- This acquisition addresses critical capability gaps in India's fighter fleet, ensuring preparedness amid ongoing security challenges along the western and northern borders.

- By expanding the Rafale fleet to 176 aircraft, including 26 naval Rafale-M jets for carrier

operations, India strengthens deterrence and operational readiness across multiple domains.

Conclusion:

Beyond its operational benefits, the deal consolidates India's defence partnership with France, fostering long-term strategic and technological collaboration. By combining advanced foreign technology with domestic manufacturing, the acquisition advances India's goal of strategic autonomy while demonstrating its capability to integrate high-end defence systems into its armed forces.

Odisha Revises Maoist Surrender Policy

Context:

Recently, the Odisha government revised its Maoist Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy for the second time in less than three months. The update relaxes eligibility criteria, allowing persons from outside Odisha involved in CPI (Maoist) activities to surrender, provided their involvement is certified by the police and no rehabilitation benefits have been availed elsewhere. The revision supports the state's goal of eliminating Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) by March 31, 2026, in line with the Union Home Ministry's target.

About Naxalite–Maoist Insurgency:

- The Naxalite–Maoist insurgency is a long-standing armed conflict in India rooted in Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), targeting state machinery to establish a communist society.

- Originating in 1967 in Naxalbari, West Bengal, it spans the "Red Corridor," primarily affecting tribal-dominated areas in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

- Driven by socio-economic inequality and Maoist ideology, the insurgency is led by the CPI (Maoist) through armed violence.

About the Policy:

- The Odisha scheme offers incentives for surrendered Maoists:
  - » Politburo/Central Committee members: up to Rs.1.10 crore
  - » State Committee members: Rs.55 lakh
  - » Regional Committee members: Rs.33 lakh
- An additional Rs.10 lakh fixed deposit for high-bounty cadres; spouses are treated separately.
- In 2025, 317 Maoists were neutralised, 862 were arrested, and nearly 2,000 surrendered. Naxal-affected districts declined from 126 (2014) to 11 (2025), and the number of most-affected districts fell from 36 to 3, nearly collapsing the Red Corridor.

Key Achievements in LWE Reduction:

- **Violence Reduction:** Violent incidents fell by 53%; security force deaths by 73%; civilian deaths by 70% (2014–2024).
- **Security Infrastructure:** 12,000 km of roads, 586 fortified police stations, 361 camps, and 68 helipads were constructed.
- **Technology & Communication:** Over 8,500 mobile towers improved intelligence reach.
- Financial Choking: Over Rs.92 crore in assets were seized by the NIA and state agencies.
- **Capacity Building:** Rs.3,331 crore under SRE and Rs.3,817.59 crore under SCA were allocated; investments were made in special forces, hospitals, and skill centres.

Benefits of the Revised Policy:

- **Weakens Maoist Cadres:** Encourages the surrender of top- and mid-level leaders.
- **Enhances Security:** Reduces incidents in previously insurgency-prone areas.
- **Socio-Economic Reintegration:** Provides professional training and employment for former insurgents.
- **Cross-State Coordination:** Disrupts inter-state Maoist networks.

Conclusion:

Odisha's revised policy, combined with central interventions, fortified police stations, infrastructure expansion, mobile connectivity, financial inclusion, and education, reflects a multi-dimensional strategy to eradicate LWE. Security operations, alongside rehabilitation and socio-economic integration, bring India closer to a Naxal-free future by March 2026, serving as a model for effective internal security governance.

Two Top Maoist Leaders Surrender in Telangana

Context:

Recently, two senior leaders of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), carrying a combined bounty of Rs.3.5 crore, surrendered to the Telangana Police in the Komaram Bheem Asifabad district, marking a significant breakthrough in India's counter-insurgency efforts.

About Naxalism in India:

- Naxalism, also referred to as Naxal, Naxalite, or Naksalvadi represents militant left-wing movements rooted in far-left communist ideologies that advocate armed struggle to address socio-economic inequalities and perceived state injustices. It remains one of India's most persistent internal security challenges.
- The movement originated in Naxalbari village (Darjeeling, West Bengal) in 1967 under leaders such as Charu Majumdar, Jangal Santhal, and Kanu Sanyal, who mobilised landless peasants against feudal exploitation. It soon spread to less-developed rural regions of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh, evolving into diverse underground groups and ultimately consolidating as the CPI (Maoist).

Causes of Naxalism:

- At its core, Naxalism reflects deep-seated socio-economic inequalities:
  - » Landlessness and agrarian distress among marginalised communities

» Exploitation and displacement of tribal populations due to resource extraction and development projects

» Poverty, unemployment, absence of basic services, and ineffective governance in remote regions

» Perceptions of state oppression, compounded by instances of police excesses which have, at times, reinforced support for insurgent narratives

Historical Evolution:

▪ Naxalism has passed through distinct phases:

» **Phase 1 (1967–74):** Emergence with the Naxalbari uprising, formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist), and early armed mobilisation

» **Phase 2 (1980s):** Revival with groups such as the People's War Group (PWG) and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), expanding the insurgency into central and eastern India

» **Phase 3 (2000–Present):** Formation of CPI (Maoist) and intensified operations across the "Red Corridor," involving parallel administrations and guerrilla warfare

▪ **Current Status and Trends:**

» The geographical footprint of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has significantly declined, from 126 most-affected districts in 10 states in 2014 to about 12 districts in early 2025 most prominently in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh.

Policy Response and Challenges:

▪ The Government of India has adopted a multi-pronged strategy combining security measures and development initiatives:

» **Security operations:** Including specialised counter-insurgency units and joint command structures for inter-state coordination

» **Development programmes:** Aspirational Districts Programme, infrastructure expansion, skill development initiatives,

and rights-based legislations such as the Forest Rights Act to empower tribal communities

» **Rehabilitation and surrender policies:** Incentivising cadres to reintegrate into mainstream society

▪ However, challenges remain in terms of difficult terrain, guerrilla tactics, intelligence gaps, socio-economic grievances, and the need to ensure equitable governance to diminish insurgent support.

Conclusion:

The surrender of high-ranking Maoist leaders marks a significant milestone in India's fight against Left-Wing Extremism, demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated security and rehabilitation strategies. However, the persistence of Naxalism highlights the need to address socio-economic inequalities, resolve land disputes, and uplift tribal communities through inclusive governance. India's objective of eliminating Naxalism by 2026 will depend on sustaining security gains alongside targeted development interventions to ensure a peaceful and development-oriented environment in affected regions.

Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) Technology

Context:

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted a flight demonstration of Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha. This landmark test marks a significant stride in India's indigenous missile propulsion capabilities and overall defence technological prowess.

What is SFDR Technology?

▪ Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) is an advanced air-breathing propulsion system designed primarily for long-range air-to-air

missiles. Unlike conventional solid rocket motors, which carry both fuel and oxidiser and burn out shortly after launch, SFDR uses atmospheric air as the oxidiser.

▪ This enables sustained combustion of solid fuel at supersonic speeds, resulting in longer range, higher speed, and better energy retention—critical attributes for modern aerial combat and beyond-visual-range engagements.

▪ The system consists of key components such as a nozzle-less booster, a solid fuel ducted ramjet motor, and a fuel flow controller. In the recent flight demonstration, all subsystems performed as expected after an initial boost to the required Mach number using a ground-based booster motor, thereby validating the technology's readiness for future integration.

SFDR (Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet) Air-to-Air Missile
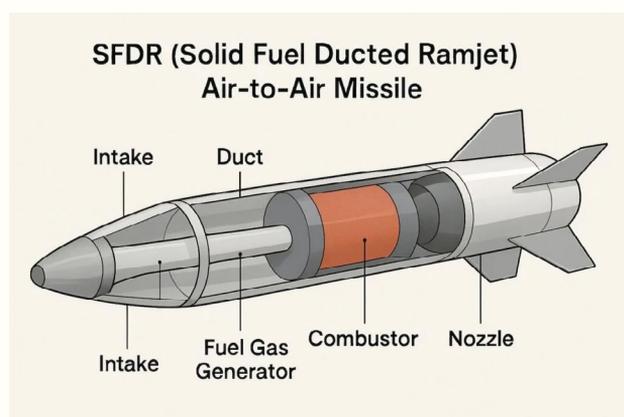
Strategic Significance:

▪ The successful SFDR demonstration places India among an elite group of nations possessing this complex missile propulsion technology, which has historically been limited to a few advanced defence powers. This capability significantly enhances India's prospects for developing next-generation long-range air-to-air missiles, which are vital for ensuring air superiority and providing a tactical edge over adversaries in high-intensity conflict scenarios.

▪ The advanced propulsion system enables missiles to maintain sustained thrust throughout their flight, increasing the no-escape zone and improving the probability of intercept against agile, high-speed targets. This technological leap complements India's ongoing efforts to modernise its aerial combat arsenal and reinforces self-reliance in critical defence technologies.

Implications for Future Missile Programmes:

▪ Experts suggest that SFDR technology will serve as a foundational element in the development of next-generation Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missiles (BVRAAMs), such as the Astra Mk-3 (Gandiva).

▪ These missiles are expected to achieve extended engagement ranges, possibly exceeding 300 km, thereby addressing capability gaps in India's current missile inventory and enhancing the Indian Air Force's operational reach.

Conclusion:

The successful flight demonstration of SFDR technology by DRDO from the Chandipur test range represents a pivotal advancement in India's defence R&D landscape. By mastering this sophisticated propulsion system, India not only strengthens its strategic deterrence profile but also expands its missile technology base for future aerospace applications. This achievement underscores India's growing technological maturity and its commitment to building world-class defence capabilities through indigenous innovation.

India's First Anti Terror Policy

Context:

On 23 February 2026, the Government of India officially unveiled PRAHAAR, the country's first comprehensive national counter terrorism policy and strategy. This landmark doctrine seeks to transform India's approach to terrorism from disparate responses into a unified, proactive, and intelligence driven national strategy.

About Terrorism:

▪ Terrorism in India is defined as the unlawful use of violence, including bombings, firearms, and hazardous materials, designed to threaten the nation's unity, integrity, or security, or to intimidate the public.

Definition:

▪ **Legal Definition:** Under Section 113 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, a terrorist act is committed when someone threatens the nation's unity, integrity, or security, or causes fear through the use of explosives, firearms, or other lethal means.

▪ **Key Legislation:** The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is the primary law used to combat such activities.

Why PRAHAAR Was Needed:

▪ Despite decades of counter terror efforts, India has continued to face cross-border terrorism, evolving internal extremist threats, and the use of technology-enabled tactics. Terror groups and hostile entities have increasingly exploited drones, encrypted communication, cyber platforms, crypto funding, and the dark web to recruit, plan, and execute attacks. Global organisations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS also attempt to influence and radicalise vulnerable people within India.

▪ With this changing threat landscape, previous reactive practices were deemed insufficient. PRAHAAR aims to provide a national playbook — bridging intelligence, operational responses, legal action, societal engagement, and international cooperation under one coherent doctrine.

Core Features of the PRAHAAR Doctrine:

▪ **Prevention:** Intelligence led proactive measures via MAC and JTFI to thwart terror plots.

▪ **Response:** Graded, proportionate actions, scaling from local police to NSG for major incidents.

▪ **Coordination:** Whole-of-government and society approach for better inter-agency cooperation.

▪ **Rule of Law:** Counter-terror actions respect constitutional rights and judicial oversight.

▪ **Addressing Root Causes:** Tackles radicalisation through community engagement, education, and rehabilitation.

▪ **International Cooperation:** Intelligence sharing, extradition, legal assistance, and multilateral coordination.

▪ **Recovery & Resilience:** Rapid post-incident recovery including healthcare, economic, and social support.

Significance and Implications:

▪ PRAHAAR represents a paradigm shift in India's security architecture:

  » It formalises national doctrine, rather than ad hoc or reactive counter terror measures.

  » Encourages interagency integration, reducing operational silos across states and the Centre.

  » Bridges technology and human intelligence, recognising the digital dimension of modern terrorism.

  » Balances security imperatives with rights protection, crucial for maintaining democratic norms.

Conclusion:

PRAHAAR marks India's first cohesive anti terror policy, articulating a structured, intelligence-driven doctrine rooted in zero-tolerance. Its holistic framework spans prevention, response, coordination, legal safeguards, societal resilience, and global partnerships. As terrorism evolves in complexity, PRAHAAR positions India to respond systematically and proactively to both traditional and emerging threats.

Power Packed News

PM Modi Conferred with the 'Knesset Speaker's Medal'

- Recently, during his visit to Israel, PM Modi was awarded the Knesset Speaker's Medal, the highest honor of the Israeli Parliament, for his contributions to strengthening India-Israel strategic relations. The medal was presented by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana following the Prime Minister's address to the Parliament.
- Prime Minister Modi is the first global leader to receive this prestigious medal. The honor acknowledges his role in elevating bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership during his historic visit to Israel in July 2017.
- Prime Minister Modi is among the few global leaders to have received the highest civilian honors from both Israel and Palestine. In 2018, he was also awarded Palestine's Grand Collar Medal. These honors reflect the growing cooperation between the countries in defense, technology, agriculture, and innovation sectors.

Rajaji Utsav 2026 Held at Rashtrapati Bhavan

- In memory of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, India's first and last Indian Governor-General, 'Rajaji Utsav' was organized at Rashtrapati Bhavan on February 23, 2026. President Droupadi Murmu unveiled Rajaji's statue near the 'Grand Open Staircase' at Ashok Mandap, replacing the previously installed statue of British architect Edwin Lutyens. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described this as a significant step towards shedding colonial mindset.
- As part of the celebrations, an exhibition based on Rajaji's life and works was organized at Amrit Udyan and the Cultural Centre from February 24 to March 1. The event included film screenings and cultural performances.
- Rajaji was not only a freedom fighter but also a distinguished thinker, jurist, and writer. He translated the Ramayana and Mahabharata into English and Tamil.

New Initiative Under the United Nations Road Safety Fund

- Under the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF), a new road safety initiative has been launched in Rajasthan, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The project aims to strengthen institutional capacity, promote sustainable financing, improve data-driven decision-making, and implement targeted corrective measures.
- Despite having only 1% of the world's vehicles, India accounts for approximately 11% of global road accident deaths. In 2023, around 4.80 lakh accidents resulted in 1.72 lakh deaths, which increased to 1.77 lakh in 2024. About 67% of the deceased were in the 18–45 age group.
- Road accidents cause an estimated annual economic loss of 3–5% of India's GDP. This initiative aligns with the United Nations' 2021–2030 Decade of Action for Road Safety, which aims to reduce road traffic deaths by half by 2030.

Five OTT Platforms Blocked Over Alleged Obscene Content

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has ordered the blocking of five Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms — Mood XVIP, Koyal PlayPro, Digi Movieplex, Feel, and Jugnu — over

allegations of broadcasting obscene and sexually explicit content. The action was taken under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which empowers the central government to restrict access to online content in the interest of public decency, sovereignty, and law and order.

- According to officials, these platforms were allegedly violating regulatory standards by streaming pornographic content. The action was carried out in accordance with the procedure laid down under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These rules mandate a three-tier self-regulatory mechanism, age-based content classification, and a grievance redressal system for OTT platforms.

VoicERA: India's Open-Source Voice AI Stack

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology launched an open-source Voice AI stack named VoicERA during the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026'. The platform is built on India's National Language Infrastructure, Bhashini, and has been developed to enable multilingual voice-based services.
- Developed in collaboration with EkStep Foundation, IIIT Bengaluru, and AI4Bharat, the platform will function as a national execution layer for voice and conversational AI systems. VoicERA is modular, interoperable, and cloud-deployable, ensuring secure and scalable deployment across government departments, research institutions, and startups.
- It will promote voice-enabled services in areas such as agricultural advisory, educational assistance, grievance redressal, and citizen services, thereby strengthening digital inclusion.

Launch of the PM RAHAT Scheme

- The Government of India has launched the PM RAHAT (Road Accident Victim Hospitalization and Assured Treatment) Scheme to provide timely and cashless medical treatment to road accident victims.
- Under this national emergency treatment program, eligible victims will receive cashless treatment up to Rs.1.5 lakh for a period of seven days from the date of the accident.
- The scheme aims to reduce mortality by ensuring prompt medical assistance during the "Golden Hour." It establishes better coordination between the emergency response system, police, and hospitals. Stabilization care has been made mandatory, and medical confirmation in serious cases must be ensured within 48 hours. The scheme is financed through the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund.

Bharat Taxi

- The Government of India has launched a cooperative ride-hailing platform named Bharat Taxi, aimed at making urban transport more equitable and affordable.
- Operated through Sahakar Taxi Cooperative Limited, drivers will participate as cooperative stakeholders under the designation "Sarathi." The platform follows a zero-commission model and charges only a nominal daily fee, thereby increasing drivers' earnings.
- The app will offer two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws, and taxi services. The fare structure will be transparent and surge-free, potentially up to 30% cheaper compared to private platforms. This initiative marks a significant step toward worker empowerment, a competitive marketplace, and an inclusive urban transport system.

Zimbabwe Begins Distribution of Lenacapavir HIV Prevention Injection

- Zimbabwe has begun distributing the long-acting Lenacapavir injection for HIV prevention, which is administered twice a year, with each dose providing protection for six months. Zimbabwe is among the leading countries adopting this extended-effect preventive injection.
- Given the large number of deaths caused by HIV/AIDS in the country over the past two decades, approximately 46,500 high-risk individuals have been targeted in the first phase.
- Beneficiaries will receive the second dose after six months. The injection is being provided free of cost to vulnerable groups, particularly young women, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.
- The drug, developed by California-based biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, is supported by the Global Fund under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

India–Japan Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' Begins

- The seventh edition of the India–Japan joint military exercise 'Dharma Guardian' commenced on February 24, 2026, at the Foreign Training Node in Chaubatia, Uttarakhand, between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF).
- The exercise, being conducted from February 24 to March 9, aims to strengthen bilateral defense cooperation and enhance operational coordination and interoperability. A total of 120 soldiers from both countries are participating, including personnel from the Indian Army's Ladakh Scouts and Japan's 32nd Infantry Regiment.
- The exercise focuses on strengthening joint capabilities in semi-urban operational environments. Key activities include establishing a temporary operational base, developing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) networks, and conducting cordon and search operations. The exercise seeks to improve operational readiness through the integrated use of modern technology.

India–Nepal MoU on Biodiversity Conservation

- On February 25, 2026, India and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation in the fields of forests, wildlife conservation, biodiversity, and climate change. The agreement was signed in New Delhi between India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Nepal's Ministry of Forests and Environment. Considering the shared ecosystems and transboundary wildlife habitats, priority has been given to landscape-level cooperation.
- The restoration of wildlife corridors for the conservation of species such as elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, and snow leopards will be emphasized. Additionally, the exchange of technical expertise and best practices will be promoted to prevent forest and wildlife crimes and strengthen enforcement capacity. The initiative will encourage transboundary conservation and the development of smart green infrastructure.

Tarique Rahman Sworn in as Prime Minister of Bangladesh

- Following parliamentary elections, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairman Tarique Rahman was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. President Mohammed Shahabuddin

administered the oath of office and secrecy to him at the Jatiya Sangsad. The ceremony took place a few hours after newly elected BNP Members of Parliament were administered the parliamentary oath by Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M. Nasir Uddin.

- The 60-year-old Rahman returned to Bangladesh on December 25, 2025, after nearly fifteen years in exile. During his stay abroad, he resided in the United Kingdom and mobilized international support for his party. As Prime Minister, he will lead a cabinet comprising 25 ministers and 24 state ministers. The new government was formed following the BNP's victory in the February 2026 elections, raising expectations of potential policy shifts in the country's political direction.

Mumbai to Host the Earthshot Prize 2026

- Mumbai has been selected as the host city for the Earthshot Prize 2026, marking the first time this prestigious global environmental award will be held in India. The announcement was made during Mumbai Climate Week, highlighting India's growing global role in addressing climate change.
- Established in 2020 by Prince William of the United Kingdom, the award promotes innovative solutions for protecting the planet.
- In the 2026 edition, a total of 15 innovative solutions will be recognized across five major categories: Protect and Restore Nature, Clean Air, Revive Oceans, Build a Waste-Free World, and Fix Our Climate. The multi-day event will honor global environmental leadership, promote collaborative efforts toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and underscore India's commitment to climate action.

Vibrant Villages Programme-II Launched in Assam

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched the Vibrant Villages Programme-II in Cachar district of Assam, aimed at the comprehensive development of border areas. With an outlay of over Rs.6,800 crore, the scheme will be implemented until the financial year 2028–29 and will follow a saturation-based approach across 15 states and 2 Union Territories.
- The programme seeks to develop infrastructure in border villages, create sustainable livelihood opportunities, and improve the quality of life of local residents. The initiative aligns with the national vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047."
- Under the scheme, strengthened village infrastructure will enable residents to play a supportive role in border security, thereby helping prevent cross-border crimes and reinforcing the internal security framework.

Noted Author Manishankar Mukhopadhyay Passes Away

- Renowned Bengali author Manishankar Mukhopadhyay, popularly known by his pen name "Shankar," passed away in Kolkata on February 20, 2026. He had been suffering from age-related ailments.
- Shankar was among the most widely read contemporary Bengali writers. His novel Chowringhee vividly portrays the complexities of urban life and remains one of his most celebrated works. He also authored notable novels such as Jana Aranya and Seemabaddha, which depict the moral and social struggles of ordinary people. Several of his literary works were adapted into films.

- In 2021, he was honored with the Sahitya Akademi Award and received several other prestigious recognitions, including the Bankim Award.

New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact Receives Global Support

- The New Delhi Declaration on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence, adopted during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, has been endorsed by 89 countries and international organizations. Bangladesh joined as the 89th signatory. The declaration focuses on promoting the responsible use of artificial intelligence for economic development and social welfare, guided by the principle of "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" (for the welfare and happiness of all).
- The summit provided a common platform for policymakers, industry experts, innovators, and startups to deliberate on AI-driven solutions. It witnessed participation from over 500 AI experts, more than 100 founders and CEOs, 150 academicians, and around 400 Chief Technology Officers. The event recorded attendance of over five lakh visitors.

Manipuri Film 'Boong' Wins BAFTA Award

- The Manipuri film Boong won the BAFTA Award for Best Children's and Family Film at the 79th British Academy Film Awards held in London. Produced by Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment, the film was directed by debut filmmaker Laxmipriya Devi.
- The film stars Gugun Kipgen and Bala Hijam in lead roles. Boong secured the award by surpassing films such as Lilo & Stitch, Arco, and Zootropolis 2.
- At the ceremony, the film One Battle After Another won six awards, including Best Film, while Paul Thomas Anderson received the Best Director award. Gothic horror films Sinners and Frankenstein also won three awards each. Indian actress Alia Bhatt attended the event as a guest presenter.

Noted Odia Singer Geeta Patnaik Passes Away

- Renowned Odia playback singer Geeta Patnaik passed away on February 15, 2026, at the age of 73 due to a brain stroke. She had a strong presence in the Odia music industry for several decades and made significant contributions to enriching regional musical traditions.
- Geeta Patnaik was especially known for her creative collaboration with legendary singer Akshaya Mohanty, with whom she lent her voice to many popular songs.
- During her long musical career, she sang numerous memorable songs in Odia films as well as independent music. Among her popular songs, "Phur Kina Udigala Bani" from the film Jajabara gained special recognition. Her distinctive singing style and melodious voice earned her a respected place in the Odia music world. Her demise is considered an irreparable loss to the regional music industry.

India's Exports Rise by 13.17% in January 2026

- According to data released by the Ministry of Commerce, India's total exports (including goods and services) recorded a year-on-year growth of 13.17% in January 2026. During this period, total exports rose to $80.45 billion, up from $71.09 billion in January 2025.
- However, total imports also increased by 18.76%, rising from $76.48 billion to $90.83 billion during the same period.

- As a result, India's total trade deficit in January 2026 widened to $10.38 billion, nearly doubling compared to $5.39 billion in the previous year. Merchandise exports increased slightly from $36.34 billion to $36.56 billion, while services exports registered significant growth, rising from $34.75 billion to $43.90 billion. This growth reflects India's expanding participation in global trade.

Approval for First Road-Cum-Rail Tunnel Project

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved India's first underwater road-cum-rail tunnel project under the Brahmaputra River in Assam. The 33.7-kilometre four-lane access-controlled greenfield project, to be developed at a cost of Rs.18,662 crore, will be constructed under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode. The project includes a 15.79-kilometre twin tunnel beneath the river.
- The new route will connect Gohpur on National Highway-15 with Numaligarh on National Highway-715, reducing the distance between the two towns from 240 kilometres to 34 kilometres. Consequently, travel time will decrease from six hours to just 20 minutes. The project is expected to benefit Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and other northeastern states, while promoting regional connectivity and economic development.

Uday Kotak Appointed Chairman of GIFT City

- Industrialist and banker Uday Suresh Kotak has been appointed Chairman of Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Company Limited (GIFT City Company Limited). The appointment was made through a resolution passed by the Gujarat government on February 13, 2026, and has come into immediate effect until further orders. He has replaced Hasmukh Adhia, who had been serving as the Non-Executive Chairman of the company since June 2023.
- Uday Kotak is the founder and director of Kotak Mahindra Bank and has provided significant leadership in developing the banking group for nearly four decades. He served as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the bank until September 1, 2023, after which he assumed the role of Non-Executive Non-Independent Director from September 2, 2023.
- Located in Gujarat, GIFT City is India's first operational smart city and houses the country's first and only International Financial Services Centre (IFSC).

Mia Amor Mottley re-appointed as Prime Minister of Barbados

- Barbados Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley has secured a historic third consecutive victory in the general elections. Her party, the Barbados Labour Party (BLP), won all 30 seats in the lower house of Parliament, securing a clean 30–0 mandate. This marks the third consecutive time the party has won every seat in the House of Assembly. Opposition leader Ralph Thorne described the results as disappointing, though he thanked voters for a clean and peaceful election campaign.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Mottley on her victory. The two leaders last met in November 2024 during the India–CARICOM Summit held in Georgetown, Guyana. Barbados is an island nation in the Caribbean region, located in the Atlantic Ocean. Its capital is Bridgetown, and it functions as a unitary parliamentary republic. The official currency of the country is the Barbadian dollar.

Tropical Cyclone Gezani

- In February 2026, Tropical Cyclone 'Gezani' caused widespread devastation and is being counted among the deadliest cyclones in the Southwest Indian Ocean region. The cyclone primarily affected Madagascar and Mozambique.
- It originated as a tropical disturbance on February 4, 2026, and rapidly intensified into an "Intense Tropical Cyclone."
- On February 10, 2026, Gezani made landfall near Toamasina on the eastern coast of Madagascar, with wind speeds exceeding 185 km/h and gusts reaching up to 250 km/h. By February 20, 2026, it had completely dissipated.
- **Madagascar**: The cyclone caused severe destruction, resulting in at least 59 deaths and affecting approximately 478,000 people. Nearly 75% of Toamasina's infrastructure was damaged.
- **Mozambique:** After crossing Madagascar, the cyclone re-intensified over the Mozambique Channel and passed very close to the Mozambican coast (about 15 km offshore), causing flooding and damage there as well.

Inauguration of New PMO 'Seva Teerth' & Central Secretariat Buildings

- On February 13, 2026, the Prime Minister formally inaugurated the new Prime Minister's Office complex named 'Seva Teerth,' along with Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2 under the Central Secretariat. Prior to this historic relocation, the final Union Cabinet meeting was held at South Block, marking the end of a significant chapter in the use of colonial administrative complexes such as North and South Block. These buildings were constructed during the British era by architect Herbert Baker and housed colonial administrative offices before independence.
- The Prime Minister's Office is now being relocated to the newly constructed 'Seva Teerth' complex along with key ministries, including the National Security Council Secretariat and the Cabinet Secretariat. Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2 will house several departments, including the Ministries of Finance, Defence, Health, Education, and Agriculture. These complexes have been designed with digitally integrated office infrastructure and adhere to 4-star GRIHA sustainability standards, promoting administrative efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Retail Inflation at 2.75% in January as per Revised CPI

- According to the revised Consumer Price Index (CPI), India's retail inflation stood at 2.75% year-on-year in January 2026. This marks the first major revision in the CPI series in over a decade, with the base year updated from 2012 to 2024. Although retail inflation in December was 1.33%, the January rate remained within the Reserve Bank of India's tolerance band.
- As per data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, rural inflation was recorded at 2.73%, while urban inflation stood at 2.77%. Food inflation was 2.13%. In the revised CPI series, the weight of food items has been reduced, thereby lowering their impact on overall inflation.
- The rise in inflation was primarily driven by price increases in personal care products, education services, social security services, clothing, and footwear. Additionally, notable increases were observed in the costs of restaurant and housing services.

Indian Navy Assumes Command of Combined Task Force 154

(CTF 154)

- The Indian Navy has achieved a significant milestone by assuming command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154 under the Bahrain-based Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). In a ceremony held in Manama on February 11, 2026, Indian Navy Commodore Milind M. Mokashi officially took over the responsibility from the Italian Navy.
- Established in May 2023, CTF 154 focuses on training and capacity building for multinational maritime security operations. The task force emphasizes Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), international law, maritime rescue, and leadership development. CTF 154 is one of the five operational task forces under the CMF, dedicated to enhancing maritime stability in the Middle East.
- This is the first time India has led a multinational task force within the CMF framework. India became an Associate Partner of the CMF in November 2022 and joined as a full member in 2023. The move strengthens India's image as a "Preferred Security Partner" and reflects its expanding strategic outreach in the Indian Ocean region. The CMF comprises 47 member countries and was established in February 2002. Its five Combined Task Forces are:
    » CTF 150 – Maritime security operations outside the Arabian Gulf
    » CTF 151 – Counter-piracy operations
    » CTF 152 – Maritime security operations inside the Arabian Gulf
    » CTF 153 – Red Sea maritime security
    » CTF 154 – Maritime security training
- Through this leadership role, the Indian Navy will coordinate with 47 member nations, promoting global maritime security and a rules-based maritime order.

Uttar Pradesh Budget 2026–27

- Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Khanna presented the state budget for FY 2026–27 on February 11, 2026, with a total outlay of Rs.9,12,696.35 crore, approximately 12.9% higher than the previous year. The budget includes Rs.43,565.33 crore for new schemes and primarily focuses on capital expenditure, fiscal discipline, strengthening law and order, and expanding health infrastructure.
- About 19.5% of the total budget has been allocated for capital expenditure, while education, medical and health services, and agriculture have been allotted 12.4%, 6%, and 9% respectively. The fiscal deficit for FY 2026–27 has been fixed at 3% of GSDP.
- An allocation of Rs.14,997 crore has been made for medical education and Rs.37,956 crore for the health department. Medical colleges will be established in 16 underdeveloped districts under the PPP model, and Rs.1,023 crore has been proposed for 14 new medical colleges. The state government has also allocated substantial resources for upgrading police infrastructure. Additionally, the establishment of a Data Authority and the development of eight data center parks are seen as significant steps toward strengthening the digital economy.

India–Thailand Joint In-Situ Air Exercise

- A joint in-situ air exercise is being conducted between the Indian Air Force and the Royal Thai Air Force to enhance operational coordination and interoperability. An in-situ exercise involves joint training under real flying and combat-related conditions, enabling both forces to operate in a coordinated manner close to actual operational environments.

- India has deployed its frontline air assets, including Su-30MKI fighter aircraft, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) platforms, and IL-78 mid-air refueling aircraft.
- The Thai Air Force is participating with its Gripen multirole fighter aircraft, promoting joint flight operations and tactical coordination. The primary objective of the exercise is to enhance mutual understanding, coordination, and mission efficiency in air operations between the two countries. This initiative is a significant step toward strengthening bilateral defense cooperation under India's "Act East Policy" and Thailand's "Act West Policy."

Rajasthan Budget 2026–27

- Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Diya Kumari presented the state budget for FY 2026–27 on February 11, 2026, with special emphasis on youth employment generation and infrastructure development.
- Under the Chief Minister Self-Employment Scheme, interest-free loans up to Rs.10 lakh have been announced, which are expected to benefit around 30,000 youth. Additionally, a proposal has been made to establish the Rajasthan Examination Agency on the lines of the National Testing Agency to conduct online examinations.
- For infrastructure development, a plan has been formulated to construct 42,000 kilometers of roads and 250 Atal Pragati Paths at a cost of Rs.500 crore. Drinking water projects worth Rs.24,000 crore have also been approved, under which three lakh new tap connections will be provided within one year under the "Har Ghar Nal" scheme.
- For industrial development, new industrial parks will be developed at a cost of Rs.350 crore, and 3,600 hectares of land will be developed in the Jodhpur–Pali–Marwar industrial region. The budget aims to promote inclusive development and expand employment opportunities in the state.

RBI's New Measures to Strengthen Cooperative Banks

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken several significant steps during 2025–26 to modernize the financial health, governance, and digital reach of cooperative banks.
  » For Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs), the limit for individual housing loans has been increased from 10% to 25% of total loans and advances.
  » From January 19, 2026, loans extended by banks to the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) for onward lending to cooperative societies have been included under the "Priority Sector Lending" category.
  » Eligible Urban Cooperative Banks can now open new branches up to 10% of the number of branches in the previous financial year (maximum of five branches) without prior RBI approval.
  » Through amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, the maximum tenure of directors in cooperative banks has been increased from 8 years to 10 years.
  » A Shared Service Entity (SSE) named "Sahakar Sarthi" has been established for rural cooperative banks to provide technical and audit services.
  » The National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation Ltd (NUCFDC) has been approved as an umbrella organization for Urban Cooperative Banks.
  » Licensing fees for onboarding on the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) have been reduced.

» Rural cooperative banks have now been brought under the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme, making grievance redressal easier.

▪ These measures are aimed at enhancing governance standards, financial stability, and digital accessibility in the cooperative banking sector.

India Hosts First Sherpa Meeting Under BRICS Presidency 2026

▪ India hosted the first BRICS Sherpa and Sous-Sherpa meeting in New Delhi under its 2026 BRICS Presidency. The meeting was chaired by India's BRICS Sherpa and Secretary (Economic Relations), Sudhakar Dalela, with Deputy Sherpa Shambhu L. Hakki also in attendance. Senior officials from member and partner countries, including Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates, participated in the meeting.

▪ The central theme of the meeting was "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability," reflecting India's people-centric approach to BRICS cooperation. Discussions prioritized multilateral collaboration in areas such as health, agriculture, labor, disaster risk reduction, climate change, energy, innovation, information and communication technology, security, and economic and financial sectors.

▪ Ahead of the upcoming BRICS Summit, the meeting laid the foundation for India's 2026 agenda and marked an important step toward enhancing coordination, resilience, and sustainable development among member nations.

'White Revolution 2.0' Initiative for the Dairy Sector

▪ The Central Government has launched a cooperative initiative named "White Revolution 2.0" to strengthen the dairy sector and promote women's economic empowerment. Implemented by the Ministry of Cooperation, the programme aims to increase milk procurement by dairy cooperative societies by 50% over the next five years. It is estimated that by 2028–29, daily milk procurement by dairy cooperatives will reach 1,007 lakh kilograms.

▪ Under this strategy, dairy cooperative societies will be expanded to regions where their presence has been limited. The programme includes the formation and strengthening of approximately 1.20 lakh new and existing dairy cooperative societies, multi-purpose dairy cooperative societies, and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.

▪ Additionally, the development of new milk distribution routes and infrastructure facilities such as collection units, testing equipment, and bulk milk coolers has been proposed. The initiative is financed through the National Programme for Dairy Development 2.0 and is a significant step toward social and economic empowerment, considering that women constitute nearly 70% of the dairy workforce.

Launch of 'Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana'

▪ The Delhi Government launched the 'Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana' on February 10, 2026, to promote girls' education and economic security. It is an upgraded version of the 2008 Ladli Scheme. Under the scheme, each eligible girl will receive financial assistance of up to Rs.56,000 in multiple stages from birth until graduation or diploma-level education. The amount will be invested in structured financial instruments to ensure growth over time.

▪ Upon maturity, the accumulated amount will be directly transferred to the beneficiary's

Aadhaar-linked bank account. The scheme will benefit only those girls born in Delhi whose family's annual income does not exceed Rs.1.20 lakh. A maximum of two living girls per family will be eligible.

- Registration can be done at birth or at key stages such as school admission and enrollment in higher education. The initiative aims to prevent disruptions in girls' education due to financial constraints and ensure their long-term economic empowerment.

Three-Hour Deadline for Removal of Deepfake Content

- The government has mandated a three-hour deadline for social media platforms to remove AI-generated or deepfake content. This provision has been implemented through amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- The revised rules provide a formal and legal definition of AI-generated content, clearly categorizing synthetic material. Once flagged by the government or a court, digital platforms must remove such content within the stipulated timeframe. Platforms will not be permitted to remove AI labels or suppress related metadata.
- These compliance requirements came into effect on February 20, 2026. The regulatory framework aims to ensure transparency in the digital ecosystem and curb the spread of misleading and disinformation-based content.

'Khanjar' Exercise

- The 13th edition of the India–Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise "KHANJAR" was recently conducted from February 4 to 17, 2026, at Misamari in Assam. The exercise symbolizes the strengthening defense ties between the two countries.
- The Indian Army's Parachute Regiment (Special Forces) and Kyrgyzstan's "Scorpion" Brigade participated in the exercise.
- The primary focus of the exercise was on international counter-terrorism operations, urban warfare skills, and special operations in mountainous terrain. During the drills, modern weapons, surveillance equipment, and tactical techniques were jointly demonstrated.
- The exercise not only enhances military interoperability but also builds mutual trust in addressing security challenges in the Central Asian region.
- The 'Khanjar' exercise was first initiated in 2011 and is conducted alternately in both countries. The 12th edition was held in Kyrgyzstan, while the 13th edition was hosted by India. The exercise is an important pillar of security cooperation under India's "Connect Central Asia" policy.

Extended Recognition for DeepTech Startups under Startup India

- According to a Gazette notification issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), DeepTech startups have been formally recognized under the Startup India programme.
- Under the new framework, the eligibility period for DeepTech startups has been extended to 20 years from the date of incorporation, which is double that of general startups. Additionally, the maximum annual turnover limit for DeepTech startups has been set at Rs.300 crore, compared to Rs.200 crore for regular startups.

- The government defines DeepTech startups as companies that invest a significant portion of their revenue or funding into research and development (R&D), typically characterized by long development cycles, high capital investment, and greater technological uncertainty. Sectors such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and climate technology have been included under the DeepTech category.
- This policy shift is expected to improve access to growth capital, grants, and institutional financing, while accelerating the transition from laboratory research to commercialization.

Historic Electoral Victory of Sanae Takaichi in Japan

- Under the leadership of Japan's first woman Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, the ruling coalition secured a historic electoral victory on February 8, 2026. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won 316 out of 465 seats in the lower house, marking its best performance to date. With the support of its coalition partner, the Ishin Party, the government secured a two-thirds majority, significantly strengthening its legislative position.
- Takaichi is known as a staunch conservative and is often referred to as the "Iron Lady." She has been a close associate of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and is a strong supporter of increasing defense spending and continuing "Abenomics" policies.
- The victory has paved the way for proposed tax cuts and increased defense expenditure reforms. However, financial markets witnessed some volatility over concerns regarding the financing of proposed sales tax relief measures.
- The active participation of young voters was notable in the election, many of whom supported Takaichi's direct leadership style. The victory is seen as a significant shift in Japan's traditionally male-dominated political structure and signals potential changes in the country's domestic economic policies and regional security priorities.

Kotak Mahindra Bank Issues Fully Digital FPI License

- Kotak Mahindra Bank has achieved a significant milestone in India's financial sector by issuing a Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) license through a completely digital process, becoming the first custodian bank in the country to do so.
- The entire FPI account opening process was completed online, with electronic signatures used at every stage, eliminating the need for any physical documentation from investors.
- The bank has so far issued two FPI licenses, both granted through digitally signed documents. This initiative has made it simpler and more transparent for foreign investors to invest in Indian markets. The move represents a major step toward promoting a paperless investment system in India and has been enabled by the unified digital framework implemented by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in January 2026.

Rouble Nagi Wins Global Teacher Prize 2026

- Indian educator and social worker Rouble Nagi has been awarded the prestigious Global Teacher Prize 2026. The award was presented to her during the World Government Summit held in Dubai. She received a prize amount of 1 million US dollars (approximately Rs.8.3–9 crore).
- Rouble Nagi was honored for bringing transformative change to underprivileged communities through art-based education. Through her "Rouble Nagi Art Foundation," she has established

more than 800 learning centers across India.

▪ She has uniquely transformed slum walls into "Living Walls of Learning" to spread literacy, hygiene awareness, and environmental consciousness. She was selected from over 5,000 nominations received from 139 countries.

▪ She plans to utilize the prize money to establish a state-of-the-art skill-cum-learning centre in Kashmir.

▪ The award is presented by the Varkey Foundation in collaboration with UNESCO and is often referred to as the "Nobel Prize of Education."

India Wins Under-19 Cricket World Cup 2026

▪ On February 6, 2026, India defeated England in the final to win the Under-19 Cricket World Cup for a record sixth time.

▪ The match, played in Harare, Zimbabwe, witnessed India registering the largest victory by runs in the tournament's history. Batting first, India scored 411 runs for the loss of nine wickets. Vaibhav Suryavanshi played a spectacular innings of 175 runs off 80 balls, putting the team in a commanding position.

▪ Chasing a target of 412 runs, England were bowled out for 311 runs, despite a fighting century by Caleb Falconer.

▪ Vaibhav Suryavanshi was awarded both Player of the Match and Player of the Series for his outstanding performance. The Indian team remained unbeaten throughout the tournament, demonstrating strategic excellence and collective performance. This historic victory reaffirmed India's continued dominance at the junior cricket level and highlighted the country's strong emerging talent pool.

India Becomes the World's Second-Largest Mobile Manufacturer

▪ India has achieved a remarkable milestone in the field of electronics manufacturing over the past decade. The country has now become the world's second-largest mobile phone producer after China. The value of mobile production has increased from Rs.18,900 crore in 2014–15 to over Rs.5.45 lakh crore in 2024–25. In 2014–15, only 26% of mobile phones sold in India were domestically manufactured; this figure has now risen to 99.2%. The number of mobile manufacturing units in the country has grown from just 2 in 2014 to more than 300 today.

▪ India has also become a net exporter of mobile phones. Mobile exports have surged from Rs.1,556 crore in 2014 to a record Rs.2 lakh crore in 2024–25. Over the past ten years, the sector has generated approximately 1.2 million direct and indirect employment opportunities.

▪ This transformation is largely attributed to the Government of India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and the "Make in India" initiative. Global technology giants such as Apple, Samsung, and Google have established India as a key manufacturing hub. Additionally, the recent Semiconductor Mission and infrastructure improvements have further strengthened this ecosystem. This progress is not only accelerating India's digital economy but also positioning the country as a "trusted partner" in the global supply chain.

Veerabhadran Ramanathan Awarded the 2026 Crafoord Prize

▪ Renowned climate scientist of Indian origin, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, has been awarded the prestigious Crafoord Prize 2026 in the field of Geosciences. The award is presented by the

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences for lifetime outstanding contributions to Earth sciences and is often regarded as the "Nobel Prize of Geosciences."

▪ Ramanathan received the award for his long-term research on climate change, particularly his work on super-pollutants. In 1975, while working at NASA, he made the significant discovery that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) absorb heat very efficiently and can warm the atmosphere more than carbon dioxide. This research highlighted the impact of human-made technologies on climate change.

▪ His pivotal role in the Indian Ocean Experiment led to the identification of atmospheric brown clouds over South Asia, establishing links between air pollution, weakening of the Indian monsoon, and accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers. He currently serves as Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

9th Edition of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha'

▪ The ninth edition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship student interaction programme, Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC), was held on February 6, 2026. This year, the programme was organized for the first time in a multi-location format, with sessions conducted in five cities — New Delhi, Coimbatore, Raipur, Dev Mogra, and Guwahati.

▪ The event was broadcast live on Doordarshan, the Prime Minister's YouTube channel, and the Ministry of Education's digital platforms. The initiative aims to help students effectively cope with examination stress and present exams as a positive experience. It plays an important role in strengthening students' holistic development, mental health, and self-confidence in alignment with the National Education Policy 2020.

▪ For the ninth edition, more than 4.5 crore participants registered on the MyGov portal, while approximately 4.81 crore students across the country took part in pre-event activities.

RCB Wins 2026 Women's Premier League Title

▪ Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won the Women's Premier League (WPL) title on February 5, 2026. In the final held in Vadodara, RCB defeated Delhi Capitals by six wickets to claim the trophy for the second time.

▪ Delhi Capitals, batting first, scored 203 runs for the loss of four wickets, with Jemimah Rodrigues contributing a crucial 57 runs. Chasing the target, RCB successfully achieved the highest-ever run chase in a Women's Premier League final, securing victory in 19.4 overs.

▪ Team captain Smriti Mandhana played a match-winning innings of 87 runs off 41 balls and was named Player of the Final. With this victory, RCB became the first franchise to win both the IPL and the Women's Premier League titles. Sophie Devine of Gujarat Giants was awarded Player of the Tournament, while Nandini Sharma received the Emerging Player award.

68th Annual Grammy Awards 2026

▪ The 68th Annual Grammy Awards were held on February 2, 2026, at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, hosted by renowned comedian Trevor Noah. This marked his sixth and final time hosting the prestigious ceremony. This year, Kendrick Lamar received the highest number of nominations (nine), while Lady Gaga secured seven nominations.

▪ At the ceremony, pop star Bad Bunny achieved a historic milestone by winning the Album of the Year award. Additionally, the first-ever Grammy win by a K-pop artist was seen as a

significant moment reflecting the growing representation of Asian artists in the global music industry.

- The music documentary Music by John Williams, based on the life of legendary composer John Williams, was also honored. With this award, the film's director Steven Spielberg achieved EGOT status by winning an Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Oscar.
- The spiritual leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, at the age of 90, received his first Grammy Award in the category of Best Audio Book, Narration & Storytelling Recording for his spoken-word album Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This achievement highlights that the Grammy Awards are increasingly recognizing intellectual and spiritual contributions beyond mainstream entertainment.

Rusoma Orange Festival in Nagaland

- The fifth edition of the two-day Rusoma Orange Festival was held from January 30, 2026, in Rusoma village near Kohima, Nagaland. Based on the theme "Abundance of Rusoma," the festival aimed to promote village welfare and honor the contributions of local orange growers. The event has emerged as an important initiative for branding regional agricultural products, promoting rural entrepreneurship, and strengthening the local economy.
- At present, nearly 470 out of 570 families in the village are engaged in orange cultivation, making it the primary source of livelihood for the community. The festival featured cultural programmes, traditional games, local cuisine, and exhibition stalls related to orange saplings. It also sought to provide national and international recognition to the unique taste and quality of Rusoma oranges.
- The local administration has set a target to expand orange orchards to 100 hectares over the next six to seven years. The festival represents a positive step toward promoting regional self-reliance through an integrated model of agro-based tourism and rural development.

Michael Nobbs Passes Away

- Michael Nobbs, former head coach of the Indian men's hockey team and a distinguished Australian player, passed away at the age of 72.
- He was appointed head coach of the Indian men's hockey team in 2011, at a time when India had failed to qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Under his leadership, the Indian team participated in the 2012 London Olympics, marking an important phase in the rebuilding efforts of Indian hockey.
- As a player, Michael Nobbs represented Australia in 76 international matches between 1979 and 1985. He was part of the Australian squad at the 1981 Hockey World Cup held in Bombay and also represented his country at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. His contributions to international hockey established him as an experienced strategist.
- Apart from India, he also served as the head coach of Japan's national hockey team. During India's transitional phase in hockey, his role was significant in restructuring the team, improving fitness standards, and developing a competitive mindset. His demise is regarded as a major loss to the global hockey community.

1. With reference to India's external sector in FY25–26, consider the following statements:

1. India's services exports exceeded merchandise exports in growth momentum.
2. India emerged as the world's largest recipient of remittances.
3. Foreign exchange reserves provided import cover of less than six months.

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

2. Which of the following sectoral trends highlighted in the Economic Survey 2025–26 reflects India's structural transformation?

1. Horticulture production surpassing foodgrain production
2. Manufacturing growth supported by PLI schemes and semiconductor initiatives
3. Services sector accounting for over half of GDP and majority of FDI inflows

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

3. With reference to the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026, consider the following statements:

1. The Rules have been notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
2. They replace the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.
3. The Rules will come into effect from April 1, 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

4. With reference to the Union Budget 2026–27, consider the following statements:

1. The fiscal deficit for FY 2026–27 is projected at 4.3% of GDP.
2. The debt-to-GDP ratio is estimated to increase compared to Revised Estimates of 2025–26.
3. Gross market borrowings are estimated at Rs.17.2 lakh crore.

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

5. The three "Kartavyas" articulated in Union Budget 2026–27 include:

1. Accelerating and sustaining economic growth
2. Ensuring cooperative federalism
3. Fulfilling aspirations and building capacities
4. Ensuring inclusive growth

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

6. With reference to capital expenditure (capex) in Budget 2026–27, consider the following statements:

1. Capex is increased to Rs.12.2 lakh crore.
2. Capex constitutes about 4.4% of GDP.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A: 1 only
B: 2 only

C: Both 1 and 2

D: None

7. Which of the following infrastructure initiatives were announced in Budget 2026–27?

1. Seven new high-speed rail corridors
2. Operationalisation of 20 national waterways
3. Bharat Mala Phase III exclusively for border roads

   Select the correct answer:

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 1 and 3 only

C: 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, and 3

8. Which of the following are part of manufacturing and strategic industry initiatives in Budget 2026–27?

1. Biopharma SHAKTI Programme
2. Rare Earth Corridors
3. National Textile Mission 2.0

   Select the correct answer:

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 1 and 3 only

C: 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, and 3

9. With reference to the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), consider the following statements:

1. It extends the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to Fifth Schedule areas.
2. It mandates consultation with Gram Sabhas for land acquisition and resettlement.
3. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal ministry for PESA implementation.

   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

10. Which of the following rights are recognised under the Forest Rights Act, 2006?

1. Individual forest land rights up to a maximum of 4 hectares
2. Community rights over Minor Forest Produce such as bamboo and tendu leaves
3. Ownership rights over sub-surface minerals in forest areas

   Select the correct answer using the code given below:

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 1 and 3 only

C: 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, and 3

11. With reference to Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology, consider the following statements:

1. It is an air-breathing propulsion system.
2. It carries both fuel and oxidiser onboard throughout its flight.
3. It enables sustained thrust at supersonic speeds.

   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

12. With reference to the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS), consider the following statements:

1. MPLADS is a Central Sector Scheme fully funded by the Government of India.
2. Funds under MPLADS are released directly to Members of Parliament.
3. The scheme was launched in the early 1990s.

   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

13. With reference to India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, consider the following statements:

1. Platforms must obtain verifiable parental consent for processing data of users below 18 years.
2. Behavioural tracking and targeted advertising directed at children are explicitly prohibited.
3. The Act mandates a nationwide ban on social media use for children below 16 years.
   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. Consider the following statements regarding the 15th Census of India (2011):

1. The 2011 census recorded India's population at 1.21 billion, showing a 17.70% increase compared to the previous decade.
2. The most populous state was Uttar Pradesh, and the least populous state was Sikkim.
3. The state with the highest population density was Bihar (1102 per km²), and the state with the lowest density was Arunachal Pradesh (17 per km²).
   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 Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP), consider the following statements:

1. MSP for MFP is decided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
2. MSP for MFP aims to protect tribal gatherers from market price volatility.

3. Revision of MSP for MFP is mandatory every year.
   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

16. Which of the following legal provisions empower tribal communities with respect to Minor Forest Produce (MFP)?

1. Forest Rights Act, 2006
2. Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996
3. Biological Diversity Act, 2002
   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

17. According to the Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006) judgment, which of the following principles must govern the appointment of a State DGP?

1. Selection from among the three senior-most IPS officers empanelled by the UPSC
2. Fixed minimum tenure of two years
3. Appointment at the absolute discretion of the State Government
   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

18. With reference to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of India, consider the following statements:

1. The MPC is a statutory body established on the recommendation of the Urjit Patel

Committee.

2. The primary objective of the MPC is to maintain inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of ±2%.

3. All members of the MPC are appointed by the Reserve Bank of India.

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

19. Consider the following statements regarding the role of the Speaker in defection cases:

1. The Speaker acts as a quasi-judicial authority under the Tenth Schedule.

2. The Speaker's decision on disqualification is completely immune from judicial review.

3. Judicial review is permissible in cases of mala fides, perversity, or unreasonable delay.

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

20. Under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which of the following actions can lead to the disqualification of a legislator?

1. Voluntarily giving up the membership of the political party

2. Voting or abstaining contrary to the party whip without prior permission

3. An independent member joining a political party after election

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 2 only

C: 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, and 3

21. Consider the following statements regarding PM CARES Fund:

1. It was established as a public charitable trust.

2. It is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

3. It is not classified as a public authority under the RTI Act.

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

22. With reference to snakebite envenoming in India, consider the following statements:

1. India accounts for nearly half of global snakebite deaths.

2. Snakebite envenoming has been classified by the World Health Organization as a high-priority neglected tropical disease.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A: 1 only

B: 2 only

C: Both 1 and 2

D: None

23. With reference to NITI Aayog, consider the following statements:

1. It was established by an Act of Parliament.

2. It replaced the Planning Commission in 2015.

3. It promotes cooperative federalism through a Governing Council comprising Chief Ministers and Lt. Governors.

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

24. With reference to the Network Readiness Index (NRI), consider the following statements:

1. It is released by the World Economic Forum.
2. It assesses countries on their ability to leverage network technologies for socio-economic development.
3. It evaluates economies across four pillars: Technology, People, Governance, and Impact.

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

25. With reference to CAR T-cell therapy, consider the following statements:

1. It involves engineering a patient's own T cells to recognize cancer cells.
2. It is currently approved for the treatment of certain blood cancers.
3. It primarily uses B cells extracted from bone marrow.

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

26. With reference to Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), consider the following statements:

1. It was launched in 2015 under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
2. It is implemented by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
3. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with cost sharing between Centre and States.

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

27. With reference to the removal of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, consider the following statements:

1. The removal of the Speaker is governed by Article 94 of the Constitution.
2. A minimum notice period of 14 days is required before moving a resolution for removal.
3. The resolution requires a simple majority of members present and voting.
4. The Speaker is barred from participating in the proceedings during the discussion on the resolution.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A: 1 and 2 only
B: 1,3 and 4 only
C: 1, 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

28. In the context of parliamentary democracy, the impartiality of the Speaker is essential because:

1. The Speaker adjudicates under the Anti-Defection Law.
2. The Speaker certifies Money Bills.
3. The Speaker controls the legislative agenda and speaking time.

Which of the above statements are correct?

A: 1 and 2 only
B: 2 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

29. Consider the following statements regarding anti-corruption institutions in India:

1. Lokpal is a statutory body established under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.
2. The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is a constitutional body.
3. The Prevention of Corruption Act (1988, amended 2018) criminalises both bribe-

taking and bribe-giving.

4. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 provides safeguards against victimisation of informants.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 1,3 and 4 only

C: 1, 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

30. Consider the following statements regarding the Naxalite–Maoist insurgency:

1. It originated in Naxalbari village of West Bengal in 1967.

2. It seeks to overthrow the Indian state through armed struggle inspired by Maoist ideology.

3. The insurgency is primarily concentrated in urban metropolitan regions.

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

31. With reference to the Ken–Betwa Link Project (KBLP), consider the following statements:

1. It is India's first major river-linking project under the N3ational Perspective Plan.

2. It aims to transfer surplus water from the Betwa River to the Ken River.

3. It primarily benefits the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

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

32. Consider the following statements regarding the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:

1. It replaced the Mental Health Act, 1987.

2. It decriminalised suicide attempts.

3. It guarantees the right to affordable and quality mental healthcare.

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

33. With reference to the newly revised Consumer Price Index (CPI) series released in January 2026, consider the following statements:

1. The base year has been revised from 2012 to 2024.

2. The number of items in the consumption basket has been reduced.

3. The revision aims to better reflect changing consumption patterns and digitalisation.

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. With reference to the Indus Waters Treaty, consider the following statements:

1. It was signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan with the World Bank as a broker.

2. India has unrestricted rights over the Western Rivers.

3. The Treaty provides a graded dispute resolution mechanism.

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

35. Consider the following facts about Sawalkote Hydropower Project:

1. Total capacity is 1,856 MW.
2. Stage I capacity is higher than Stage II.
3. Estimated construction time is about 9 years.
   Which of the 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 pangolins in India, consider the following statements:

1. Pangolins are the only mammals wholly covered in keratin scales.
2. Both Indian and Chinese pangolins are listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
3. Pangolins are migratory mammals found only in arid desert ecosystems.
   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

37. Consider the following regarding the protection status of pangolins:

1. Indian Pangolin – Endangered (IUCN)
2. Chinese Pangolin – Critically Endangered (IUCN)
3. Both species are listed under Appendix I of CITES
   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

38. Consider the following statements regarding India–Bangladesh economic relations:

1. Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia.

2. Bilateral trade stood at approximately USD 14 billion in FY 2023–24.
3. India has extended over USD 8 billion in Lines of Credit (LoC) to Bangladesh.
   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

39. With reference to the PM RAHAT Scheme, consider the following statements:

1. It provides cashless treatment up to Rs.1.5 lakh per road accident victim.
2. The treatment coverage is available for up to 30 days from the date of accident.
3. The scheme focuses on providing immediate care during the "Golden Hour."
   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

40. With reference to Project Kusha, consider the following statements:

1. It is an indigenous long-range surface-to-air missile system.
2. It is being developed by Bharat Electronics Limited.
3. It is designed to engage aerial threats up to approximately 400 km.
   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. Which of the following correctly matches the stellar remnant with the physical limit associated with it?

1. White Dwarf – Chandrasekhar Limit
2. Neutron Star – Tolman–Oppenheimer–Volkoff (TOV) Limit
3. Black Hole – Schwarzschild Radius
   Select the correct answer:

A: 1 and 2 only
B: 2 only
C: 2 and 3 only
D: 1, 2, and 3

42. With reference to the Ol Chiki script, consider the following statements:

1. It was created by Pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925.
2. It was originally designed for the Mundari language.
3. It provides a phonetic writing system for the Santhali language.
   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. With reference to the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), consider the following statements:

1. It is a single-seat, twin-engine, fifth-generation stealth fighter.
2. It is being developed exclusively for the Indian Air Force.
3. It is designed as an all-weather multirole aircraft.
   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

44. With reference to the IndiaAI Mission, consider the following statements:

1. It was approved in March 2024 with an outlay exceeding Rs.10,000 crore.
2. It aims to develop indigenous Large Multimodal Models (LMMs).
3. It is implemented directly by NITI Aayog.
   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

45. Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act amends which of the following legislations?

A: Information Technology Act
B: Right to Information Act
C: Indian Evidence Act
D: Official Secrets Act

46. Consider the following statements regarding BHASHINI:

1. It operates under the Digital India Programme.
2. It aims to promote multilingual access to digital services.
3. It focuses only on text translation services.
   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

47. The Essential Religious Practices (ERP) doctrine originated in which of the following cases?

A: Kesavananda Bharati Case
B: Shirur Mutt Case
C: Minerva Mills Case
D: SR Bommai Case

48. With reference to the SANKALP Scheme, consider the following statements:

1. It was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in 2017.
2. It is implemented by the Ministry of Labour

and Employment.

3. It receives financial support from the World Bank.

   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

49. Consider the following regarding the Public Accounts Committee (PAC):

1. It consists of 22 members from both Houses of Parliament.
2. Ministers can be members of the Committee.
3. The Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
4. Since 1967, by convention, the Chairman is from the Opposition.

   Which of the statements given above are correct?

A: 1 and 2 only

B: 1,3 and 4 only

C: 1, 2 and 3 only

D: 1, 2, 3 and 4

50. With reference to India's immunisation initiatives, consider the following statements:

1. The Universal Immunisation Programme was launched in 1985.
2. Mission Indradhanush aims to achieve 90% full immunisation coverage.
3. U-WIN Portal is used for tracking vaccination of pregnant women and children.

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

ANSWER

1	A	11	C	21	B	31	C	41	D
2	D	12	B	22	C	32	D	42	B
3	D	13	A	23	C	33	B	43	B
4	B	14	D	24	C	34	B	44	A
5	B	15	B	25	A	35	D	45	B
6	C	16	A	26	A	36	A	46	A
7	A	17	A	27	A	37	D	47	B
8	A	18	A	28	D	38	D	48	B
9	A	19	B	29	B	39	B	49	B
10	A	20	D	30	A	40	B	50	D