



the recitals

**CURRENT
AFFAIRS**

**2026
FEBRUARY**

Editor's Cut

- ▶ Menstrual Hygiene- Fundamental Right
- ▶ Disaster Victims Identification Guidelines
- ▶ Can ED Seize Assets Related to Non-scheduled Offences Under PMLA?
- ▶ SANKALP Scheme
- ▶ Can Satire or Art Threaten National Security?
- ▶ India's New GDP Series
- ▶ Visit of President of France to India
- ▶ Evolving Nature of Trade Agreements
- ▶ US-India Interim Trade Agreement Framework
- ▶ AI Content Labelling Norms

INDEX

EDITOR'S CUT _____ 3 - 20

- Menstrual Hygiene- Fundamental Right
- Disaster Victims Identification Guidelines
- Can ED Seize Assets Related to Non-scheduled Offences Under PMLA?
- SANKALP Scheme
- Can Satire or Art Threaten National Security?
- India's New GDP Series
- Visit of President of France to India
- Evolving Nature of Trade Agreements
- US-India Interim Trade Agreement Framework
- AI Content Labelling Norms

BUDGET 2026 - 27 _____ 21 - 32

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS _____ 33 - 39

SOCIAL ISSUES _____ 40 - 45

- SC Reconsiders Gender Stereotype Handbook
- Annual Statistics Report on Death Penalties
- Refurbished Medical Devices Market in India
- India's Strategy to Tackle the Mental Health Burden

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE _____ 46 - 62

- Proposal to Ban Non-Hindus from Entering Char Dham
- Denotified Tribes
- WhatsApp-Meta Privacy Policy Case
- Does the "Right to Be Forgotten" Apply to Online News?
- Seva Teerth
- PM Rahat
- Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026
- No Confidence Motion Against Lok Sabha Speaker
- What Questions Can Lok Sabha Ask?
- Can An MP And Party Spokesperson Represent a State as Special Public Prosecutor?
- Vibrant Villages Programme-II
- Public Trust Doctrine
- Sound-Mark
- Substantive Motion

- Extent of Permissible Disclosure in Elections of Statutory Bodies
- Parliamentary Friendship Groups
- 'Kerala' is Now 'Keralam'
- Need for Diversity in Judiciary

ECONOMY _____ 63 - 78

- AI-Powered Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE)
- Grain ATMs
- Startup Recognition Framework Revised
- VOPPA Order, 2025
- Yantra India Limited Grated Miniratna Status
- Bee Corridors
- AI-Preneurs of India
- CBDC Based Digital Food Currency
- Network Readiness Index 2025
- MoU between FCI and WFP
- Collateral Free Loan Doubled For MSMEs
- Project Vault
- Access Pass for Fishing in EEZs
- Sunrise Sectors
- SUJVIKA Portal
- Rail Tech Policy and eRCT
- New CPI 2024 Series
- Agristack
- First State Innovation Mission
- Revised Guidelines of Lead Bank Scheme
- Coking Coal Declared Critical Mineral
- RBI ESMA MoU
- National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0
- Challenges in ACC-PLI scheme

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS _____ 79 - 88

- End of New START Treaty
- After BNP's Victory: A New Phase in India-Bangladesh Relations
- India-Malaysia Relations: Expanding Strategic and Economic Cooperation
- India-Israel Special Strategic Partnership
- India-Brazil Partnership Deepens with Rare Earth Mining Agreements
- India Joins Trump's Board of Peace as Observer

INDEX

- Pakistan-Afghanistan Tensions
- Israel-US Joint Strike in Tehran
- U.S. Supreme Court Curbs Trump's Emergency Tariff Powers
- Myanmar Elections 2026
- Opening of the European Legal Gateway Office in New Delhi
- India- Seychelles Relationship Strengthened

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS _____ 89- 92

- India's Bid for Full IEA Membership
- AI Impact Summit 2026
- 39th AU Summit
- UN Launches Road Safety Financing Framework in India
- India Joins Pax Silica
- Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2026
- Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave 2026

DEFENSE AND SECURITY _____ 93 - 97

- RBI Weighs Compensation Framework for Digital Fraud Victims
- DRDO Successfully Demonstrates SFDR Technology
- PRAHAAR
- Tripartite MoU to Create Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority
- IAF To Train British pilots
- India Assumes Command of CTF 154
- Indian Army Showcases Indigenous AI Solutions
- Exercises

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY _____ 98 - 104

- India's Next-Generation Tsunami Warning System (TWS)
- INCOIS & it's New Apps
- Continental Mantle Earthquakes
- Forest Fires in North-East of India
- Global "Beat the Heat" Program
- Thwaites Glacier (Doomsday Glacier)
- CCUS Technologies

- Green Ammonia
- Species in News

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY _____ 105 - 113

- Bharat GenAI
- Model Context Protocol
- Graphics Processing Units
- Mons Mouton
- Biopharma SHAKTI
- Moltbook Platform
- Myoglobin
- India AI Stack
- SPHEREx Mission
- Copernicus Sentinel-2 Mission
- Sarvam AI
- Zeigarnik Effect
- National Biobank For Lysosomal Storage Disorders (Lsds)
- CHaracterising ExOPlanet Satellite (CHEOPS)
- Quorum Sensing
- Bio-Based Chemicals
- SAHI and BODH Initiative
- VoicERA
- Tetrodotoxin (TTX)
- Yuva AI for All Initiative
- Wet Dress Rehearsal
- Exposome
- Panama Disease
- Lenacapavir
- Vikko Sat-1

CULTURE _____ 114 -115

- Thaipusam
- Devnimori Relics
- Bastar Pandum Festival
- C Rajagopalachari
- Ol Chiki Script

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS _____ 116

- Global Teacher Prize 2026
- BAFTA Awards



Menstrual Hygiene- Fundamental Right

The Supreme Court (SC) in *Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Government of India* (2026) delivered a landmark ruling recognizing access to menstrual hygiene as a constitutional right under Article 21 (Protection of life and personal liberty), elevating it from a public health concern to a matter of dignity, equality, and fundamental rights.

Directions Issued by the Court

- **Infrastructure (Toilets & Water):** Every school (government and private, urban and rural) must provide- functional and gender-segregated toilets, usable water connectivity, privacy and accessibility (including for children with disabilities), functional handwashing facilities with soap and water at all times.
- **Free Menstrual Absorbents:** Free **oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins (ASTM D-6954 compliant)** must be provided in all schools. Napkins should be accessible within toilet premises via vending machines, or available through designated authorities.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) corners:** Must be established in schools equipped with spare uniforms, innerwear, disposable bags and essential emergency materials.
- **Safe Disposal Mechanisms:** Schools must install hygienic and environmentally compliant disposal systems in line with the Solid Waste Management Rules. Each toilet must have covered waste bins with regular cleaning and maintenance.
- **Awareness & Curriculum Reform:** NCERT and State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) must incorporate **gender-responsive curricula** on menstruation, puberty, PCOS/PCOD and related health issues. All teachers (male and female) must be sensitized and trained. Boys must be educated to reduce stigma. Information about Jan Aushadhi sanitary napkins and the NCPCR (*National Commission for Protection of Child Rights*) child helpline must be widely publicized across media platforms.
- **Monitoring & Accountability:** District Education Officers (DEO) must conduct annual inspections, assess infrastructure and availability of menstrual products, collect anonymous student feedback, issue compliance notices under RTE Rules and attach inspection reports for transparency.
- **Implementation:** NCPCR and the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) must oversee implementation and initiate action under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 in case of non-compliance.
 - Non-compliant private schools risk **de-recognition** under Section 19 of the RTE Act. Government-run schools' failures will attract **State accountability**.

Case Background: The case originated from a writ petition filed by a social worker seeking directions to the Union and State Governments to provide **free sanitary pads to all female students studying in Classes 6 to 12**, ensure **separate functional toilets for girls in government-aided and residential schools**, and implement proper maintenance and awareness measures relating to menstrual hygiene. The petition raised foundational constitutional questions concerning gender justice and educational access-

- Whether the absence of gender-segregated toilets and lack of access to menstrual absorbents violates the **Right to Equality under Article 14?**
- Whether the **Right to dignified menstrual health forms part of the Right to Life under Article 21?**
- Whether **denial of adequate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities infringe equality of participation and opportunity guaranteed under Article 14?**
- Whether such deficiencies amount to a violation of the **Right to Education (RTE) under Article 21A** and the statutory mandate of the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE Act), 2009**.

What Did the SC Rule?

- **Right to Menstrual Hygiene is an integral part of Article 21**, as it is inseparable from dignity, bodily autonomy, privacy, reproductive health, and meaningful access to education.
- **Denial of gender-segregated toilets and menstrual absorbents violates Article 14 (substantive equality)** because it creates structural disadvantage for adolescent girls.
- **RTE under Article 21A and the RTE Act includes quality and barrier-free access**, and "free education" must remove financial barriers such as the cost of sanitary products.
- **Education is a "multiplier right"**, enabling the exercise of other fundamental freedoms; therefore, menstrual poverty leading to absenteeism or dropout constitutes a constitutional failure.
- **Menstrual poverty as a structural inequality** also causes Stigma and humiliation, Compounded disadvantage in cases of disability. Accordingly, the Court constitutionalized menstrual hygiene as a State obligation, not a welfare discretion.

- **Continuing Mandamus** was issued by the Court, keeping the matter pending to monitor compliance-signalling judicial commitment to structural enforcement rather than symbolic declaration.

Way Forward

- **Dedicated Budgetary Allocation:** Create earmarked funds for MHM infrastructure under Samagra Shiksha and related schemes.
- **Inter-Ministerial Convergence.**
- **Robust Monitoring:** Develop measurable compliance indicators, digital dashboards, and third-party audits.
- **Behavioural Change Campaigns:** Conduct sustained awareness programmes targeting students, teachers, and parents to dismantle stigma.

Significance of the Verdict	Implementation Challenges:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Article 21 • Substantive Equality under Article 14: The verdict operationalizes substantive equality by acknowledging that identical treatment perpetuates inequality. By mandating differential support (free sanitary products, infrastructure), the Court addresses structural gender disadvantage. • Strengthening the RTE (Article 21A): By declaring education a “multiplier right”, the Court links menstrual hygiene to meaningful educational access. It clarifies that “free education” must remove hidden financial and infrastructural barriers. • Recognition of Menstrual Poverty as Structural Inequality: The Court shifts menstrual poverty from a private hardship to a constitutional concern. Absenteeism and dropout are treated as consequences of State inaction, not personal failure. • Intersectional Approach: The judgment recognizes compounded disadvantage faced by girls with disabilities and those from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting evolved equality jurisprudence. • Destigmatisation and Social Transformation: By mandating curriculum reform and sensitization of boys and teachers. • Transformative Constitutionalism: The ruling exemplifies the Constitution as an instrument of social change, aligning law with lived realities of vulnerable groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal Constraints: Providing free sanitary napkins, installing vending machines, upgrading toilets, and ensuring disposal mechanisms across thousands of schools will impose substantial financial burdens on States, particularly fiscally stressed ones. • Infrastructure Deficit: Many rural and government schools already face shortages of functional toilets, continuous water supply and electricity (for vending/incineration systems). Bridging these foundational gaps is a precondition for meaningful compliance. • Monitoring & Compliance Gaps: Annual inspections by DEOs may become procedural unless supported by clear audit metrics, independent verification, and public disclosure mechanisms. Weak local capacity may dilute enforcement. • Inter-Governmental Coordination: Effective implementation requires coordination among multiple departments- Education, Health, Women & Child Development, Rural Development, and Urban Local Bodies. Institutional silos may hinder convergence. • Social Stigma & Cultural Resistance: Deep-rooted taboos surrounding menstruation may discourage open classroom discussions, prevent girls from accessing facilities, and limit parental support. Behavioural change is slower than infrastructural reform. • Supply Chain & Quality Control: Ensuring continuous supply of ASTM-compliant biodegradable napkins across remote regions poses logistical challenges. Monitoring product quality and environmental compliance is equally critical. • Environmental & Waste Management Issues: Improper disposal systems may increase solid waste burden, create health hazards. Sustainable waste management requires technical expertise and maintenance. • Capacity Building of Teachers: Sensitization of teachers- particularly male teachers- requires structured training modules, time allocation, and attitudinal change. • Accountability in Private Schools: Enforcing derecognition provisions under Section 19 of the RTE Act may face resistance, litigation, or regulatory capture.

- **Sustainable Waste Management:** Standardize eco-friendly disposal systems with maintenance protocols.



Disaster Victims Identification Guidelines

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) released the country’s first-ever Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) & Guidelines on **Disaster Victim Identification (DVI)** and Management.

Key Highlights

- **Positioning of DVI within Disaster Management:** DVI is an integral part of disaster management, linking humanitarian response with medico-legal, public health, and administrative systems.
- **Methods of Disaster Victim Identification:** The guidelines adopt a **scientific and humanitarian approach to DVI**, using **primary identifiers**- fingerprints, dental records, and DNA supported by secondary identifiers, based on the condition of remains and data availability. They integrate **humanitarian forensics** to ensure dignity, ethical conduct, cultural sensitivity, and family support. Methods used such as **post-mortem fingerprinting, DNA analysis, forensic odontology, virtual autopsy, and forensic archaeology.**
- **DVI Preparedness and Capacity-Building:** The guidelines emphasize minimum readiness, regular training, robust data systems, and inter-agency cooperation to ensure **timely, scientific, and dignified victim identification** during mass fatality incidents.

- **National Dental Data Registry (NDDR):** The NDDR is proposed to support DVI by using **dental records as a primary identifier**, particularly when bodies are burnt or decomposed. A **centralized, secure, and interoperable registry** will enable faster and accurate identification, reduce over-reliance on DNA analysis, and strengthen disaster preparedness.
- **Four stages of DVI:** (1) Systematic recovery of human remains from the site, along with documentation and preservation measures (2) Ante-mortem (AM) dental data are collected through a centralized registry. (3) Post-mortem (PM) dental records are prepared by qualified forensic odontologists. (4) Both datasets will be compared using specialized software and expert review, leading to outcomes such as positive identification, exclusion, or inconclusive results.

Way Forward

- **Institutionalize DVI Framework** across all States/UTs through formal adoption and integration into disaster management plans.
- **Strengthen Capacity** by training forensic specialists, creating state-level DVI teams, and leveraging institutions like NFSU (*National Forensic Sciences University*).
- **Build Infrastructure** with investment in mortuaries, cold-chain facilities, mobile TMUs, and forensic lab.
- **Improve Coordination** via clear incident command structures, inter-state protocols, and regular multi-agency mock drills.
- **Ensure Ethical Governance** through robust privacy laws, consent mechanisms, and family-centric communication systems.

About the Guidelines on DVI

These guidelines provide a **structured, principles-based framework** for modern DVI practices, incorporating **forensic odontology, DNA analysis/profiling, post-mortem fingerprinting, forensic nursing, humanitarian forensics, and virtual autopsy**, in line with international standards (INTERPOL and other international forensic organization-based).

Secondary identifiers include tattoos, scars and ornaments, which are not considered accurate

Objective:

- Ensure **accurate, timely, and dignified identification** of disaster victims.
- Provide a **uniform national framework** across States/UTs and agencies.
- Integrate **forensic science with humanitarian principles**.
- Enable **legal closure** (death certification, compensation, insurance, repatriation).
- Reduce **misidentification**, delays, and distress to families

Need for the Guidelines	Scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification Failures: Repeated disasters resulted in victims remaining unidentified or wrongly identified. • Institutional Fragmentation: Overlapping and uncoordinated roles of police, health services, forensic science labs (FSLs), disaster agencies and district/state/central authorities. • Absence of National SOP: No uniform, countrywide SOP for DVI before 2026. • Forensic and Environmental Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Commingled and fragmented human remains ○ Rapid decomposition due to heat and humidity ○ Charred bodies or remains displaced by floods ○ Limited mortuary space and weak cold-chain infrastructure • Lessons from Recent Disasters: Air crashes, industrial accidents, floods, bridge collapses, and terror incidents exposed systemic and preparedness gaps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies to all Mass Fatality Incidents covering- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, cyclones, landslides) ○ Human-induced and technological disasters (air/rail accidents, industrial fires, explosions, terrorism).

Significance of DVI Guidelines	Possible Implementation Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanitarian and Rights-Based Approach • Scientific and Legal Robustness: Standardizes use of primary identifiers (DNA, fingerprints, dental records), reducing misidentification and strengthening legal defensibility. • National Standardization: Provides the first uniform national SOP for DVI across States/UTs and agencies. • Improved Disaster Governance: Clarifies leadership, coordination, and accountability within the incident command system. • Faster Identification and Legal Closure: Measures like the NDDR will reduce delays, enabling timely death certification, compensation, and repatriation. • Alignment with Global Best Practices enhancing credibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity and Manpower Gaps: Shortage of trained forensic odontologists, DNA experts, forensic nurses, and DVI coordinators. • Infrastructure Constraints: Inadequate mortuary facilities, cold-chain storage, and forensic lab capacity, especially in districts. • Data Availability and Standardization Issues: Poor, non-uniform, and fragmented AM records, particularly dental data. • Financial and Resource Constraints: High costs of training, infrastructure, digitization, and maintaining national registries. • Ethical and Data Protection Concerns: Ensuring privacy, consent, and restricted use of biometric and genetic data. • Uneven State-Level Adoption: Variations in preparedness, governance capacity, and political priority across States/UTs.



Can ED Seize Assets Related to Non-scheduled Offences Under PMLA?

The Supreme Court (SC) recently stayed a 2025 Delhi High Court (HC) ruling. The SC had limited the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 reopening the debate on the scope of the agency's authority to trace and attach "proceeds of crime."

Case Background

- **The Case:** arose from an ED investigation into alleged **hawala-backed international online cricket betting operations** conducted through UK-based platform Betfair. The ED alleged large-scale illegal betting transactions and issued a **Provisional Attachment Order (2015)** freezing assets worth about ₹20 crore as suspected "proceeds of crime." The action was taken under the PMLA, 2002.
- **Core Issue Involved:** Online betting is **not a scheduled offence** under the PMLA. The ED linked betting income to a separate scheduled offence (such as forgery) to assume jurisdiction. The central legal question- Can income from a non-scheduled activity be treated as "proceeds of crime" merely because a scheduled offence appears somewhere in the transaction chain?
- **Delhi HC Ruling:**
 - **On Maintainability:** The PMLA, 2002 is a self-contained statute *with its own appellate mechanism*. Writ jurisdiction under Article 226 should be used only in exceptional cases. Petitions were dismissed as non-maintainable.
 - **On "Proceeds of Crime":** It adopted a **broad interpretation**: property derived directly or indirectly from a scheduled offence can be attached. Though betting is not scheduled, linked offences like forgery and cheating brought it within PMLA. It applied the "fruit of a poisoned tree" reasoning.
 - **On ED's Action:** It held that the ED met the statutory threshold of "**reason to believe**." Attachment was based on material evidence, not mere suspicion.
- **Appeal in SC:** The Delhi HC's order upholding the ED's attachment under PMLA, 2002 were challenged in SC on the basis that **income from online betting (not a scheduled offence)** cannot be treated as "proceeds of crime" merely by linking it to another offence like forgery. The petition also contended that the HC wrongly examined the merits after declaring the petitions non-maintainable.

Implications of the SC's Stay on Delhi HC Ruling

- **Wider Scope for ED (Interim Stage):** By staying the Delhi HC ruling, the SC has kept open the possibility that the ED can provisionally attach assets even where the core activity (e.g., online betting) is not itself a scheduled offence, provided it is linked to a scheduled offence somewhere in the transaction chain.
- **Expanded Interpretation of "Proceeds of Crime":** The Delhi HC had adopted a broad reading that property derived *directly or indirectly* from a scheduled offence can be attached. The stay signals that the SC will re-examine whether mere linkage to a scheduled offence is sufficient, or whether a stronger causal nexus is required.
- **Autonomy of PMLA Proceedings:** The case reinforces the debate on whether PMLA proceedings are independent of the *trial of the predicate (scheduled) offence*. If upheld broadly, ED may continue attachment even if the underlying offence is yet to be proved.
- **Impact on Future Investigations:** The final ruling will determine threshold of "reason to believe", degree of linkage required between property and scheduled offence and limits on attaching income from otherwise lawful or non-scheduled activities.

Related Judicial Precedent (Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India, 2022)

The SC upheld the constitutional validity of major PMLA provisions and held that:

- Money laundering is a **standalone and continuing offence** independent of the scheduled offence. Prosecution can proceed even if the original crime is closed or the accused is discharged, as long as the "proceeds of crime" are involved.

- Attachment can proceed **even without conviction** in the scheduled offence.
- ED officers are **not police officers**. Consequently, statements recorded by ED officials under Section 50 of the PMLA are admissible in court, even if they constitute confessions.
- ECIR (Enforcement Case Information Report) need not be supplied like an FIR.

About PMLA, 2002

It is a criminal statute enacted to prevent money-laundering and to provide for confiscation of property derived from, or involved in, money-laundering and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Key Provisions of the Act:

- **Offence of Money Laundering (Section 3):** A person commits money laundering if they directly or indirectly engage in, assist, or are involved in handling **proceeds of crime** including their concealment, possession, acquisition, use, or projecting/claiming them as untainted property. The offence is **continuing in nature** as long as the person enjoys the proceeds of crime.
- **Punishment (Section 4):** Rigorous imprisonment of **3 to 7 years** and fine for money laundering; extendable to **10 years** where the proceeds relate to offences under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.
- **Attachment of Property (Section 5):** The Director/authorized Deputy Director may **provisionally attach property** (for up to 180 days) if there is *reason to believe* (recorded in writing), the person possesses **proceeds of crime**, and the property may be concealed or transferred. **Ordinarily**, attachment requires a police report/complaint regarding the **scheduled offence**. Complaint must be filed before the **Adjudicating Authority within 30 days** stating the facts of such attachment.
 - Immediate attachment is allowed to prevent frustration of proceedings.
 - ✓ Scheduled Offences under the act include grave crimes such as **Corruption** (Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988), **Narcotic drugs offences** (NDPS Act 1985), **Terrorism-related offences** (UAPA, 1967), **Cheating, forgery, criminal conspiracy** (IPC/BNS 2023 provisions), **Fraud, counterfeiting, human trafficking, wildlife crimes**, etc. and **cross-border crimes**.
- **Adjudicating Authority (Section 6):** Appointed by the Central Government, it comprises a Chairperson and two Members (law/finance/administration expertise) with a five-year tenure (maximum age 65). Functioning through Benches and guided by natural justice, it is a quasi-judicial body that decides whether attached property is involved in money laundering or not. It exercises civil court-like powers.
- **Adjudication (Section 8):** The Adjudicating Authority issues notice to explain the source of attached property and, after hearing parties, decides if it is involved in money laundering. If confirmed, attachment continues, and the Special Court may order confiscation; otherwise, the property is released.
- **Vesting and Management (Sections 9 and 10):** once a confiscation order is passed, the property vests absolutely in the Central Government, free from encumbrances, and any sham claims may be declared void. The Government appoints an Administrator to manage and dispose of such property.
- **Obligations of Reporting Entities (Sections 11A to 15):** Reporting entities (Banks, financial institutions, intermediaries and others) must verify client identity, maintain transaction and KYC records for five years, report prescribed information, and apply enhanced due diligence for high-risk transactions. The Director may seek information, order audits, or impose penalties for non-compliance, while protecting entities for bona fide reporting.
- **Summons, Search & Seizure (Section 16 to 24):** Authorities may, on recorded “reason to believe,” conduct surveys, search and seize or freeze property, and arrest suspects. Seized assets can be retained for adjudication, and the Act presumes possession and places the burden on the accused to disprove involvement of proceeds of crime.
- **Appellate Mechanism (Section 25 to 42):** Appeals against orders of the Adjudicating Authority or Director lie before the Appellate Tribunal, which follows principles of natural justice and has civil court-like powers. It may confirm, modify, or set aside orders. Further appeal lies to the High Court (HC) within 60 days. Civil courts have no jurisdiction over matters under the Act.

- **Special Courts and Trial (Section 43 to 45):** The Central Government designates Courts of Session as Special Courts to try money-laundering offences and related scheduled offences. These courts can take cognizance directly on complaint, conduct trials under the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), and exercise powers regarding bail. Appeals and revisions from Special Court orders lie before the HC. Offences under the Act are cognizable and non-bailable, with stringent bail conditions (Twin Conditions) which include-
 - **Condition 1:** The Public Prosecutor must be given an opportunity to oppose.
 - **Condition 2:** The Court must be satisfied the accused is not guilty and not likely to commit an offence while on bail.
- **Miscellaneous:** The Act provides penalties for misuse of powers by Officers and non-compliance, allows information sharing with other agencies, bars civil court interference, fixes company liability, gives overriding effect over other laws, and empowers the Central Government to frame rules and ensure coordination.

Challenges Faced by the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002

- **Constitutional Concerns:** Reversal of burden of proof (Section 24); Stringent bail conditions (Section 45); and broad arrest and attachment powers raise Article 14 and 21 concerns.
- **Wide Definition of “Proceeds of Crime”:** Expansive interpretation allows attachment even at early investigation stages. Linked/derivative offences create legal ambiguity.
- **Pre-Trial Attachment:** Property can be attached before conviction, affecting business continuity and property rights.
- **Low Conviction Rate:** High number of investigations but relatively few convictions, raising questions on proportionality of enforcement.
- **Overlap with Predicate Offence Investigation:** Parallel proceedings with police/CBI may create jurisdictional and procedural complexities.
- **Allegations of Selective Enforcement:** Criticism regarding potential misuse against political opponents or dissenters.
- **Compliance Burden on Reporting Entities:** Strict KYC, record-keeping, and enhanced due diligence requirements increase regulatory costs.
- **International Coordination Challenges:** Cross-border asset tracing and mutual legal assistance remain slow and complex.



SANKALP Scheme

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recently criticized the government for the “lackadaisical” implementation of the SANKALP scheme.

About SANKALP Scheme

SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion) is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), launched in **2018**, with World Bank loan assistance. It was initially implemented till **March 2023** but was later extended to March 2024.

- **Total outlay: ₹4,455 crore.**
 - **Funding pattern:** World Bank loan of Rs 3,300 crore, State leverage of Rs 660 crore, and industry leverage of Rs 495 crore.
- **Objective:** To strengthen **short-term skill training**
- **Three Key Result Areas:**
 - Institutional strengthening at National, State & District levels
 - Quality improvement/assurance of skill development programmes
 - Inclusion of marginalized populations

• **Implementation Features:**

- World Bank disbursement linked to achievement of DLIs (Disbursement Linked Indicators).
- **IIM Indore** acts as Independent Verification Agency (IVA).
- Focus on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), District Skill Committees, Skill India Portal, Gender Action Plan, and State Incentive Grants.

Concerns Raised by PAC on SANKALP

- **Severe Underutilization of Funds:** Only **44% of the budgeted allocation** (2017-18 to 2023-24) was disbursed. Of ₹1,606.15 crore released by the World Bank, only **₹850.71 crore was utilized** (as of Dec 2023).
- **Implementation Delays & Shortfalls:** Significant delays in both **financial and physical progress**. Sluggish execution across scheme components.
- **Weak Governance & Monitoring:** Absence of a robust **central monitoring mechanism**. Inadequate adherence to implementation guidelines and gaps in due diligence.
- **Administrative Non-Preparedness:** CAG flagged “non-preparedness” within the Ministry prior to loan commencement, contributing to delays.
- **Lack of Long-Term Integration Strategy:** No clear roadmap for integrating **skilling into school education (primary to higher secondary)**, despite its importance for improving employability outcomes.

Way Forward for Strengthening SANKALP

- **Strengthen Central Monitoring Architecture:** Establish a real-time, dashboard-based monitoring system integrating DLIs, fund flow, and physical targets. Institutionalize periodic third-party audits and outcome evaluations.
- **Improve Fund Utilization & Financial Discipline:** Shift to milestone-based fund release linked to verified performance. Streamline inter-governmental fund transfer mechanisms to reduce delays. Build financial management capacity at State and District levels.
- **Advance Institutional Preparedness:** Ensure pre-launch readiness (guidelines, staffing, IT systems, training of officials). Develop SOPs for implementation uniformity.
- **Deepen Centre-State Coordination:** Strengthen District Skill Committees with clear accountability metrics. Introduce performance-linked incentives for States/UTs.
- **Integrate Skilling with School Education:** Align vocational education with NEP framework from upper primary to secondary levels. Embed career awareness, apprenticeships, and industry exposure early in schooling.
- **Enhance Industry Linkages & Labour Market Alignment:** Regularly update training curricula based on sector skill gap studies. Expand Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and apprenticeship pathways.
- **Focus on Outcome-Based Evaluation:** Track placement rates, wage outcomes, and retention rather than training numbers alone.

Extra Mile: Steps Taken by the Government to Promote Skill Development & Entrepreneurship

- **Skill India Mission (SIM):** Launched in 2015, SIM aims to equip youth with industry-ready and future-ready skills through nationwide training networks under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). It continues as an umbrella mission for skilling initiatives.
- **Skill India Programme:** It was approved for 2022-23 to 2025-26, merging **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0- 2022-26)**, the **Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS)**, and the **Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme** into a single Central Sector Scheme.
 - **PMKVY-** launched in 2015, it provides short-term skill training and upskilling/re-skilling through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to youth nationwide, including rural areas.
 - **JSS-** Originally launched in **1967** as Shramik Vidyapeeth and restructured as JSS in **2000**, it offers vocational skills to non-literates, neo-literates, and school dropouts (up to 12th standard), aged 15-45. Focuses on women, SC, ST, OBC and minorities in rural and low-income urban areas.
 - **NAPS-** Launched in 2016, it promotes apprenticeship by offering financial support for apprentice stipends. Training includes both basic and on-the-job/practical training in industries.

- **Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS):** Introduced in 1950, CTS provides long-term vocational training through ITIs across sectors. It is a continuous flagship programme for creating skilled manpower and promoting self-employment.
- **PM Vishwakarma Yojana:** Launched in **2023**, this Central Sector Scheme provides **end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople (18 trades)**. Components include certification & ID, skill upgradation, toolkit incentive, collateral-free credit support, digital transaction incentives, and marketing assistance. It has an outlay of **₹13,000 crore** for five years (till 2027-28).
- **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY):** Launched in **2014** under NRLM, it aims to enhance rural youth employability and diversify rural incomes.
- **Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETIs):** Launched in **2009**, RSETIs provide **free residential skill training with credit linkage support** to promote rural entrepreneurship. Sponsored by banks, they ensure post-training follow-up.
- **STRIVE:** The **Directorate General of Training (MSDE)** implemented the **STRIVE (Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement)** project, a **World Bank-assisted initiative (2017-2024)** aimed at improving the **relevance and efficiency of skill training** through ITIs and apprenticeship programmes.



Can Satire or Art Threaten National Security?

Recently, a 52-second cartoon video featuring the Prime Minister was blocked from The Wire's social media accounts, reportedly on grounds that it spread unverified information affecting defence, security, reputation, and foreign relations. The Editors Guild of India criticized the move as reflective of growing intolerance toward media scrutiny and satire, warning that it undermines India's democratic credentials.

Related Constitutional Framework	Legal Framework Governing Online Content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 19(1)(a)- Freedom of Speech and Expression: Guarantees freedom of speech, including satire, cartoons, political commentary and artistic expression. • Article 19(2)- Reasonable Restrictions: Speech may be restricted only on specific grounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sovereignty and integrity of India ○ Security of the State ○ Friendly relations with foreign States ○ Public order ○ Decency or morality ○ Contempt of court ○ Defamation ○ Incitement to an offence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 69A, Information Technology Act, 2000: empowers the Union Government to block online content in the interest of sovereignty, security, public order, or other grounds specified under Article 19(2). Such blocking must be supported by written reasons and is subject to review by a designated committee, ensuring procedural safeguards. • The IT (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009: prescribe the procedure and safeguards for blocking online content under Section 69A. However, they have drawn criticism for permitting emergency blocking without hearing the content originator (Rule 9) and for mandating strict confidentiality of blocking requests and actions (Rule 16), raising concerns about transparency and natural justice. • IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026: Reduces takedown compliance time to 3 hours (from 24-36 hours), covers synthetically generated content. It raises concerns of executive overreach, reduced procedural safeguards and chilling effect on free speech. • 'Sahyog' Portal: is an automated system to issue blocking notices. It is criticized for potentially bypassing procedural safeguards under Section 69A of IT Act, 2000.

Judiciary's View on Satire and Artistic Expression:

- **D.C. Saxena v. Chief Justice of India (1997):** The Supreme Court (SC) cautioned that suppressing free speech on public issues stifles democratic debate and may ultimately destabilize society. Open criticism strengthens, rather than weakens, democracy.
- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):** The Court held that online content can be blocked only on grounds specified under Article 19(2). It mandated safeguards such as written reasons, hearing of the originator, and review by a committee- preventing arbitrary censorship of satire or criticism. Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act, 2000.
- **Kama v. M. Jothisorupan (2018):** The Madras High Court described cartoons as exaggerated caricatures and “weapons of ridicule,” recognizing satire as an essential form of political commentary, even if it causes discomfort.
- **Indibly Creative Pvt. Ltd. v. State of West Bengal (2019):** The SC affirmed that satire is a legitimate artistic genre using ridicule and irony to expose societal flaws. Mere criticism or embarrassment to authority is not a ground for suppression.
- **Imran Pratapgarhi v. State of Gujarat (2025):** The SC observed that India, 75 years into its Republic, cannot be so fragile as to treat poetry, satire, or comedy as incitement to hatred. A mature democracy must tolerate artistic expression.

Government's Perspective for Blocking Content:

- **National Security & Sovereignty:** The government may block content on grounds of national security and sovereignty if it is perceived to affect defence preparedness, strategic interests, or foreign relations. Such action is justified under Article 19(2) of the Constitution and Section 69A of the IT Act.
- **Public Order & Prevention of Incitement:** Satire may be claimed to provoke unrest, communal tension, or violence. The State has a duty to prevent disturbance to law and order.
- **Defamation & Reputation of Institutions:** Government may argue that satire spreads misinformation harming the reputation of the nation or public institutions.
- **Misinformation / Fake News Concerns:** With the rise of Synthetically Generated Information (SGI), the line between satire and dangerous misinformation (like deepfakes of public figures) has blurred, necessitating content takedown.
- **Platform Compliance & Preventive Governance:** Under IT Rules, intermediaries face liability risks. Short compliance timelines may encourage pre-emptive takedowns.
- **Foreign Interference:** Unverified narratives can be weaponized by hostile state actors to undermine India's diplomatic relations or defence posture.

Critical Analysis: The Core Democratic Conflict

- **Proportionality Deficit:** Blocking entire accounts or videos for political satire often fails the SC's four-pronged proportionality test laid down in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)* i.e. **legitimate aim, rational nexus, necessity (least restrictive measure) and balancing/proportionality stricto sensu**. Sweeping takedowns rarely satisfy the “least restrictive means” requirement, especially when narrower remedies (disclaimers, targeted removal, counter-speech) are available.
- **The "Spark in a Powder Keg" Test Ignored:** As laid down by SC in *S. Rangarajan v. P. Jagjivan Ram (1989)*, restrictions on speech must have a proximate and direct nexus to public disorder—akin to a “spark in a powder keg.” Invoking “security” for remote or anticipated threats transforms exceptional restrictions into routine censorship.
- **Executive-Centric Blocking Mechanism:** Under Section 69A of the IT Act and the Blocking Rules, the power to issue, review, and maintain confidentiality of blocking orders lies largely within the executive. The absence of mandatory prior judicial approval weakens institutional checks and raises separation-of-powers concerns.
- **The “Heckler's Veto” Problem:** Suppressing satire because it may offend a group effectively empowers the most hypersensitive individuals to dictate public discourse. Courts have consistently rejected this approach, holding that free speech cannot be curtailed merely due to anticipated outrage.



India's New GDP Series

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is releasing a new series of National Accounts Statistics (NAS) with **2022–23** as the base year, replacing the 2011–12 base year. The revised series aims to provide a more **accurate and granular** measurement of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Value Added (GVA).

Why the New GDP Series Matters?

- **Updating the economic structure:** Since the last revision in 2015, India's economy has undergone major transformations. **For example,**
 - Expansion of digital economy and e-commerce
 - Increased formalisation due to GST
 - Changes in consumption and employment patterns
 - Growth of financial and services sectors

Key Structural Changes

- **Base year revision:** The base year updated from 2011–12 to 2022–23, reflecting current economic structure, and improving comparability across time.
- **Improved sector-wise measurement:**
 - **Private corporate sector: Old method:** Entire company's GVA allocated to the sector in which the company has bulk of its activity. **New method:** Activity-wise revenue share approach. Captures sectoral contributions more accurately.
 - **General government sector:** New inclusions are housing services provided to government employees. Better coverage of autonomous bodies, local governments. This improves measurement of government output.

Better Measurement of Household Sector

- **Improved data sources:** Annual use of Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (**ASUSE**), and Periodic Labour Force Survey (**PLFS**). Earlier, data was extrapolated, but direct annual estimation now.

Improved Consumption Estimates

- Private Final Consumption Expenditure (**PFCE**) will be estimated using -

Household Consumer Expenditure Surveys

Production data

Administrative datasets

- This improves measurement of domestic demand, and consumption-driven growth.

Integration of New Data Sources

- **GST data:** Expanded use of GST data, which will be applied for -

Regional output estimation

Corporate value addition measurement

Identification of active companies

- **Impact:** Better measurement of formal economy, and reduced estimation errors.

Financial Sector Improvements

- **Banking sector:** The new series will use the Statistical Table Related to Banks in India (STRBI) published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to estimate the activity of both public sector banks as well as private sector banks.
- **NBFC sector:**
 - The earlier proxy-based approach to estimate the activity of private Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) is being replaced by the use of actual financial data of NBFCs from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
 - Result will be improved financial sector GVA estimates.

Informal Sector and Agriculture

- **Better coverage of informal sector:**
 - Enhanced use of ASUSE data captures insurance agents' activity, informal enterprises, and Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) in the unincorporated sector.
 - **Significance:** Better representation of India's informal economy.
- **Agriculture sector improvements:**
 - Updated methodologies and datasets based on studies by -
 - Inland Grassland and Fodder Research Institute
 - Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute
 - Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute
 - Agricultural Development and Rural Transformation Centre
 - **Impact:** Improved estimation of livestock, fisheries, and fodder production.

Major Methodological Upgrade - Double Deflation

- **Old system - Single deflator method:**
 - Same inflation rate applied to inputs, and outputs, resulting in **overestimation** when input prices fall slower than output prices, and underestimation when input prices rise faster.
 - **Example:** Real GDP growth in 2025 possibly overstated due to this method.
- **New system - Double deflator method:**
 - Separate inflation adjustment for inputs, and outputs, resulting in more accurate real GVA and GDP, sector-specific deflators, and reduced growth distortions.
 - **Significance:** Major statistical reform in GDP estimation.
- **Integration with Supply and Use Tables (SUT):**
 - SUT will be integrated into national accounts. They show production sources, imports, intermediate consumption, final consumption, and exports.
 - **Benefits:** Reduced statistical discrepancy, and improved consistency between production approach, and expenditure approach.
- **Data improvements from States:** Enhanced reporting by States includes local bodies, and autonomous institutions, resulting in increased direct estimation, and reduced imputation.
- **Release timeline:**
 - The new series of national accounts data is released on February 27, 2026.
 - However, it will take almost a year to get a 'back series' that shows GDP data for years before 2022-23 as per the new GDP series.

Possible Impact

- **On growth estimates:** Under the new series, India's full-year GDP growth for FY26 is projected at 7.6% as per the second advance estimates. This is higher than the earlier estimate of 7.4% for FY26 under the old series.
- **International statistical standards:**
 - The 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA 2008) – the international statistical standard for national accounts data – is currently being used by India and other countries to compile GDP.
 - Last year, the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted an updated version of these norms, called SNA 2025.
 - India plans to shift to SNA 2025 in its next base year revision.

Downward Revision in Nominal GDP

- While real growth has been upgraded, the nominal size of the economy has been revised downward.
- India's nominal GDP for FY26 is estimated at Rs. 345.47 lakh crore, about 3.3% smaller than earlier estimates under the old series.
- The size of the economy for FY24 and FY25 has also been revised downward by about 3.8% each.
- Nominal GDP represents the current-price value of the economy and is crucial for calculating fiscal ratios.

Impact on Fiscal Ratios

- Since fiscal indicators such as fiscal deficit-to-GDP and debt-to-GDP are expressed as a percentage of nominal GDP, a lower GDP base automatically increases these ratios.
- The fiscal deficit for FY26 is now estimated at 4.51% of GDP instead of 4.36%, even though the absolute deficit amount remains unchanged.
- Similarly, the debt-to-GDP ratio for FY27 is pegged at 57.5%, compared to the earlier target of 55.6%.
- This makes the government's debt consolidation path toward its FY2031 target of reducing debt to 50% of GDP steeper.

Implications for the \$4-Trillion Economy Goal

- The reduction in nominal GDP under the new series makes this goal more challenging.
- At an exchange rate of Rs. 90.98 per US dollar, India's GDP in 2025-26 is estimated at around \$3.8 trillion.
- Assuming 10% nominal growth and a stable exchange rate, India could cross the \$4-trillion mark in 2026-27.
- However, exchange rate dynamics play a crucial role. A depreciation of the rupee reduces GDP in dollar terms even if rupee GDP rises.
- Thus, both domestic growth and currency stability will determine progress toward the \$4-trillion milestone.

Challenges and Way Forward:

- **Statistical challenges:** Complexity of double deflation, large data integration requirements, and back-series reconstruction difficulties.
 - **Statistical reforms:** Regular base-year revisions (every 5 years), faster release of back-series data, and improved administrative data integration.
- **Institutional challenges:** State-level data quality variations, informal sector measurement gaps, and data lag from surveys.
 - **Institutional measures:** Strengthen State statistical systems, improve survey frequency, and enhance digital data collection.
- **Credibility issues:** Past GDP revisions triggered debates, and there is the need for transparency in methodology.
 - **Global alignment:** Timely adoption of SNA 2025, and improved international comparability.



Visit of President of France to India

- President of France, Emmanuel Macron, undertook an official visit to India. During the visit, he also participated in the **AI Impact Summit** hosted by India.
- The visit also included a bilateral summit in Mumbai with Prime Minister Modi.
- This was Macron's **fourth visit to India** (since 2017) and his first official visit to Mumbai, reflecting the growing depth of India–France strategic ties.

Key Highlights/ Outcome of the French President Visit to India:

- **Shared vision:**
 - At a time of global geopolitical flux, the Indian PM described the Indo-French partnership as a “force for stability”.
 - Both leaders underscored shared principles of rule of law, strategic autonomy, **opposition to hegemony**, and advocacy of sovereign equality, and technological sovereignty.
- **Institutional elevation:** From Strategic to “**Special Global Strategic**” Partnership, marking a qualitative shift in India–France ties across defence, technology, innovation, space, AI governance, and economic cooperation.
- **AI governance (A “Third Way” Approach):**
 - Macron emphasised transparent algorithms, respect for diversity, and ethical AI governance.

- This echoes India’s attempt to promote a “third way” between the American corporate-dominated AI model, and Chinese state-centric digital control.
- Their joint participation in the AI Action Summit in Paris (2025) and the India AI Impact Summit signals growing cooperation in **global norm-setting**.
- **Defence and industrial cooperation (From Buyer-Seller to Co-Production):**
 - **H125 Helicopter:** Both leaders virtually inaugurated the Airbus H125 Helicopter final assembly line in Vemagal, Karnataka.
 - **Dassault Rafale:** Recent developments include expansion of India’s Rafale fleet (Air Force and Navy). French willingness to produce components in India. Joint jet-engine development.
 - **Significance:** Reinforcing Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence, defence technology transfer, etc.
- **Launch of India–France Year of Innovation:** Marked at the iconic Gateway of India, this initiative aims -
 - At deeper integration between two **knowledge-based economies**.
 - To promote joint R&D, enhance digital sovereignty, create high-skilled workforce, and strengthen startup and industrial ecosystems.
- **Space diplomacy (TRISHNA Satellite):** A joint mission between ISRO and CNES, TRISHNA will help monitor and understand **climate change** through advanced thermal infrared observation.
- **Counter-terrorism and strategic signalling:** President Macron paid tribute at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel to victims of the 26/11 attacks, reiterating France’s firm stance against terrorism.
- **Economic and cultural diplomacy:**
 - Amendment of Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) protocol enhances investment climate.
 - Farm-to-plate agricultural tracking projects reflect cooperation in sustainable agriculture and food systems.
 - Macron’s engagement with investors in Mumbai underscores economic partnership.
 - Cultural diplomacy (cinema interaction, museum cooperation) strengthens soft power ties.

Geopolitical Drivers of India–France Convergence



- ❖ **Space Created by American Retrenchment**
 - The US focus on the Western hemisphere and pressure on allies for burden-sharing has encouraged regional self-reliance.
 - This creates space for deeper **India–France, India–EU,** and Indo-Pacific cooperation.
- ❖ **India’s European Pivot**

India increasingly views Europe — particularly France — as:

 - ✓ A source of advanced technology
 - ✓ A partner in economic diversification
 - ✓ A geopolitical balancer
 - ✓ A contributor to India’s strategic autonomy
 - This reflects recognition of internal differentiation within the Western bloc.

Institutionalising Strategic Alignment

- ❖ **Horizon 2047 Framework**
 - Launched in 2023 as a long-term roadmap until India’s centenary of independence.
 - Key pillars include: Defence industrial cooperation; Space collaboration; Energy transition; AI and advanced technologies; Indo-Pacific maritime security.
- ❖ **India – France Annual Defence Dialogue**
 - The 6th India-France Annual Defence Dialogue was held in Bengaluru, Karnataka in February 2026.

Key Challenges

- ❖ Structural dominance of US–China in technology and capital markets.
- ❖ European fragmentation and economic constraints.
- ❖ Limited AI norm-setting capacity relative to major powers.
- ❖ Sensitivities in defence technology transfer and export controls.

Conclusion

Strengthening India–France ties enhance India’s strategic autonomy and flexibility. Multipolarity for India now means building resilient networks across East–West and North–South divides, with the India–France axis central to this transformation.

Evolving Nature of Trade Agreements

- The evolving nature of trade agreements has gained attention after the United States signed several “Agreements on Reciprocal Trade” (ARTs), including a proposed deal with India.
- These agreements raise questions about their compatibility with WTO rules.

Foundations of Global Trade Governance	Preferential Trade Agreements (FTAs) and WTO Exceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade Agreements: Purpose and Scope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formalise economic relations by reducing tariffs and easing market access. ○ Increasingly include regulatory standards, digital trade, and investment rules. • GATT and WTO Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GATT (1947) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Established a rules-based global trading system. ♣ Core principle: Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) — equal treatment to all members. ○ WTO (1995) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Expanded coverage to services (GATS) and intellectual property (TRIPS). ♣ Introduced binding dispute settlement. ♣ Operates on one-country-one-vote principle. ♣ Provides developing countries a platform for collective negotiation. ♣ Objective: Ensure predictability, transparency, and fairness in global trade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article XXIV of GATT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allows exceptions to MFN under: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) ♣ Customs Unions (CUs) • Conditions for Legitimacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must cover “substantially all trade.” ○ Customs unions must adopt a common external tariff from non-member countries ○ Must be notified to the WTO for transparency. • Rise of WTO-Plus Agreements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many modern FTAs go beyond tariffs (labour, environment, digital trade). ○ Example: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Emergence of Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs)

- **Key Features**
 - Not signed under Article XXIV.
 - Not notified to the WTO.
 - Operate outside multilateral oversight.
- **Strategic Orientation**
 - Reflect “America First” trade policy.
 - Alleged asymmetry: U.S. retains tariffs while partners reduce theirs.
 - Raise concerns about legal legitimacy and fairness.

WTO-Plus and Unilateral Provisions in ARTs	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May include obligations beyond WTO norms. • Examples reportedly include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alignment with U.S. national security trade measures. ○ Restrictions on digital duties and data sovereignty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced transparency. • No WTO dispute settlement oversight. • Greater leverage for larger economies over smaller partners.

Implications for India and Developing Countries

- **Policy Dilemmas for India**
 - Whether to enter ART-style agreements outside WTO norms.
 - Safeguarding tariff autonomy and digital sovereignty.

- Balancing bilateral deals with commitment to multilateralism.
- **Impact on Developing Nations**
 - WTO provides collective bargaining strength.
 - Shift toward unilateral reciprocal deals may fragment global trade governance.
 - Reduced policy space for smaller economies.

Conclusion

- Global trade governance is moving from a predominantly multilateral, rules-based system toward a more fragmented landscape shaped by bilateral and unilateral arrangements.
- If ART-style agreements proliferate, they could weaken the WTO's foundational principle of non-discrimination and reshape the balance of power in international trade — posing significant strategic and policy challenges for countries like India.



US–India Interim Trade Agreement Framework

- The United States and India have agreed on a framework for an **Interim Trade Agreement**, aimed at lowering tariffs, expanding market access, and strengthening cooperation in energy, technology, and supply chains.
- The interim pact is designed to deliver early gains while negotiations continue toward a comprehensive **Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)** launched in February 2025.

Objective of the Interim Framework

- Promote reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade.
- Address trade imbalances.
- Create a pathway toward a full BTA.

India's Commitments

- **Tariff Reductions**
 - Eliminate or reduce tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods.
 - Reduce tariffs on U.S. agricultural and food products, *naming specifically: Dried distillers' grains; Red sorghum; Tree nuts; Fresh and processed fruit; Soybean oil; Wine and spirits.*
- **Addressing Non-Tariff Barriers**
 - Tackle barriers affecting U.S. medical devices, ICT goods, and agricultural products.
 - Resolve import licensing delays & related issues within six months.
- **Large-Scale Import Plan**
 - India plans to purchase \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods over five years, including: Energy products; Aircraft; Precious metals; Technology products; Coking coal.

U.S. Commitments

- **Tariff Rollbacks:** Remove tariffs on selected Indian exports:
 - Generic pharmaceuticals
 - Gems and diamonds
- **National Security Tariff Relief**
 - Lift certain tariffs imposed under national security laws on aircraft-related exports.
 - Provide preferential quotas for Indian auto parts at lower tariff rates.
- **18% Reciprocal Tariff**
 - Apply an 18% reciprocal tariff on many Indian goods (textiles, chemicals, machinery, etc.) under existing executive orders.

Preferential Market Access and Rules

- **Sustained Market Access**
 - Both sides agreed to provide preferential access in sectors of mutual interest.
 - Ensure rules of origin primarily benefit domestic producers.
- **Pharmaceuticals**
 - India to receive negotiated outcomes for generic drugs depending on the outcome of a U.S. tariff investigation.

Trade, Technology and Supply Chain Cooperation

- **Technology and Innovation**
 - Expand trade in advanced technology items such as GPUs.
 - Strengthen cooperation in innovation, economic security, and supply chains.
- **Digital Trade**
 - Commit to addressing barriers to digital trade.
 - Work toward mutually beneficial digital trade rules.
- **Addressing Non-Market Practices**
 - Joint effort to counter distortions caused by third-country non-market practices.

Strategic Significance

- Reinforces India–U.S. strategic alignment amid global economic uncertainty.
- Supports supply chain diversification and energy security.
- Signals a shift from prolonged trade disputes toward structured engagement.

Next Steps

- Prompt implementation of the interim framework.
- Continued negotiations toward concluding a comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement.

Conclusion

Strategic considerations (particularly supply chain resilience, technology cooperation, and geopolitical competition) have injected renewed urgency into the partnership.

The infographic features the US and Indian flags at the top. The title is 'United States Dilutes Trade Deal Language: Key Changes in the India–US Agreement'. Below the title, it states: 'The United States has revised its factsheet on the India–US interim trade understanding, softening earlier wording and removing specific claims. Below are the key instances where the language has been modified or diluted.'

I. From "Committed" to "Intends" – \$500 Billion Purchase Target

Earlier Version	Revised Version
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stated that India had "committed to" purchasing over \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods over five years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replaced with "intends to purchase", aligning with the joint statement. Clarifies the non-binding nature of the provision.

II. Removal of Digital Services Tax (DST) Commitments

Earlier Version	Revised Version
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Claimed India would:• Remove its digital services taxes (equalisation levy);• Negotiate bilateral digital trade rules• Prohibit customs duties on electronic transmissions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entire section on digital services taxes and digital trade obligations removed.• The revised text now reflects that India has already phased out its equalisation levy (as of April 2025) and is instead committed to negotiating future digital trade.

III. Agricultural Tariff Language Modified

Earlier Version	Revised Version
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentioned tariff reductions on "certain pulses", a politically sensitive commodity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dropped reference to pulses.• Dried distillers' grains (DDGs);• Red sorghum,• Tree nuts,• Fresh and processed fruit;• Soybean oil;• Wine and spirits.

IV. Alignment with Non-Binding Joint Statement

Earlier Factsheet	Revised Version
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contained language that went beyond the official joint statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modified to reflect non-binding intent consistent with the joint declaration.



AI Content Labelling Norms

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has amended the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021 to mandate labelling of AI-generated content by users and social media platforms.
- The amendment also significantly reduces the content takedown timeline — from the earlier 24–36 hours to just 2–3 hours — for all types of online content, not limited to AI-generated material.

AI-Generated Content Under the 2026 IT Rules

• Mandatory Labelling of Synthetic Content

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026 require social media platforms to prominently label “**synthetically generated**” or **AI-generated images and videos**.
 - Platforms with over five million users must obtain a user declaration for AI-generated content and conduct technical verification before publishing it.
 - According to MeitY, the measure aims to combat deepfakes, misinformation, privacy violations, and threats to national integrity.
- ### • Narrowed Definition and Exemptions
- While the earlier draft had a broader definition of “**Synthetically Generated Information**” (SGI), the final rules provide exemptions.
 - Automatically retouched smartphone photos and film special effects are now excluded from mandatory labelling.

Detecting AI-Generated Content: Platform Responsibilities and Technical Standards

- ✦ The government has directed large social media platforms to **deploy** “reasonable and appropriate technical measures” to detect and prevent unlawful SGI, while ensuring proper labelling, provenance tracking, and identifier requirements for permissible AI-generated content.
 - According to IT Ministry officials, major platforms already possess sophisticated AI tools capable of detecting synthetic content.
 - The new rules formalise and mandate the consistent use of these detection systems rather than introducing entirely new obligations.
 - In addition, several AI companies and digital platforms are part of the **Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA)**, which has developed technical standards to embed invisible digital markers in AI-generated content.
 - These markers can help other platforms identify such content if automated detection systems fail.
- ✦ While the amended rules refer to “**provenance/identifier requirements**,” the government has clarified that it does not intend to endorse any single technological framework. Instead, it seeks to institutionalise the broader objective of reliable AI content detection and traceability through collaborative standards.
 - Provenance and identifier requirements define the necessary, documented record of a resource’s origin, ownership, and history, ensuring authenticity and trust.

Tightened Takedown Timelines Under Amended IT Rules

- ✦ **Government- and Court-Ordered Takedowns:** Platforms must now comply within 2–3 hours, instead of the earlier 24–36 hours.
- ✦ **User Complaints (General Categories):** For issues such as defamation and misinformation, response time has been reduced from two weeks to one week.
- ✦ **Users Reports on Sensitive Content (Rule 3(2)(b)):** The deadline has been cut from 72 hours to 36 hours.
- ✦ The government justified these changes by arguing that longer timelines previously allowed harmful content to cause significant damage before removal, making stricter response windows necessary.

Stricter User Notifications and Liability Warnings

- ✦ The amended IT Rules introduce tighter obligations for platforms to inform and caution users.
- ✦ **More Frequent Policy Reminders:** Platforms must now notify users of their terms and conditions every **three months**, instead of once a year. These notifications must clearly explain consequences of non-compliance and reporting obligations.
- ✦ **Explicit Warnings on AI Misuse**
 - Users must be warned that posting harmful deepfakes or other illegal AI-generated content may lead to:
 - ✓ Immediate content removal
 - ✓ Suspension or termination of accounts
 - ✓ Disclosure of identity to law enforcement agencies

- **Prohibited Synthetic Content**

- The rules strictly prohibit certain types of AI-generated material, including:
 - ♣ Child sexual exploitation and abuse content
 - ♣ Forged documents
 - ♣ Information on developing explosives
 - ♣ Deepfakes falsely impersonating real individuals

Governance and Constitutional Dimensions

- **Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech:** Overbroad or rushed takedowns may chill legitimate expression. Short timelines increase risk of defensive over-removal.
- **Article 21 – Right to Privacy and Dignity:** Faster removal of non-consensual deepfakes strengthens protection of individual dignity.
- **Federal implications:** Allowing multiple State officers enhances decentralised enforcement.

Key Challenges

- **Determining illegality within 2–3 hours:** Legal ambiguity, law enforcement communications may lack clarity.
- **Risk of over-censorship:** It could undermine free speech and digital innovation.
- **Compliance burden on Big Tech:** Real-time moderation requires high-end AI tools and human review. Smaller platforms may struggle disproportionately.
- **Verification mechanisms:** Ensuring authenticity of user declarations. Deploying “reasonable technical measures” without privacy violations.

BUDGET 2026-27

The Union Minister of Finance recently presented the Union Budget 2026-27 in the Parliament. The Budget is divided into two parts: Part A and Part B.

Part A

- The first part of the budget provides an overview of the economy of the previous and current years, and also gives Budget estimates for the next financial year.
- Part A provides the broad framework of expenditure in detail for different sectors, introduces new schemes, and explains the priorities of the government.
- It provides a brief overview of total funds raised by the government through taxes or borrowing, and discusses how the money is to be spent on Budget deficit/surplus. It also presents a complete breakdown of the expenditure of each ministry.

Part B

- The second part of the Budget highlights the government's tax proposals for the next financial year.

PART A

- The first Budget prepared in Kartavya Bhawan, is **inspired by 3 kartavyas**:

- The threefold approach requires a supportive ecosystem.

- The first requirement is to sustain the momentum of **structural reforms**—

continuous, adaptive, and forward-looking.

- A **robust and resilient financial sector** is central to mobilising savings, allocating capital efficiently and managing risks.
- **Cutting-edge technologies**, including AI applications, can serve as force multipliers for better governance.



First Kartavya: To accelerate and sustain economic growth, **interventions are proposed in 6 areas**

- Scaling up manufacturing in 7 strategic and frontier sectors;
- Rejuvenating legacy industrial sectors;
- Creating Champion MSMEs;
- Delivering a powerful push to Infrastructure;
- Ensuring long-term energy security and stability; and
- Developing City Economic Regions.

Scaling up manufacturing in 7 strategic and frontier sectors

1) Biopharma SHAKTI (Strategy for Healthcare Advancement through Knowledge, Technology and Innovation) announced to develop India as a global Biopharma manufacturing hub. It will build the ecosystem for domestic production of **biologics and biosimilars**.

2) India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0 to be launched to produce equipment and materials, design full-stack Indian IP, and fortify supply chains.

- The focus will be on industry-led research and training centres to develop technology and skilled workforce.

3) The **Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme** outlay to be increased from Rs 22,919 crore to Rs 40,000 crore.

4) For a Scheme for Rare Earth Permanent Magnets, **Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors** will be established, to support the mineral-rich States of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing.

5) To enhance domestic chemical production and reduce import-dependency, the government will launch a Scheme to support States in establishing **3 dedicated Chemical Parks**, on a cluster-based plug-and-play model.

6) Strengthening Capital Goods Capability

- **Hi-Tech Tool Rooms** to be established by Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) at 2 locations as digitally enabled automated service bureaus that locally design, test, and manufacture high-precision components at scale and at lower cost.
- A **Scheme for Enhancement of Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE)** to be introduced, to strengthen domestic manufacturing of high-value and technologically-advanced CIE.
 - This can range from lifts in a multi-story apartment, fire-fighting equipment, large and small, to tunnel-boring equipment for building metros and high-altitude roads.
- A **Scheme for Container Manufacturing** has been announced, to create a globally competitive container manufacturing ecosystem, with a budgetary allocation of over Rs 10,000 crore over a 5-year period.

7) Textile Sector

- **Integrated Programme for the Textile Sector**
 - The **National Fibre Scheme** for self-reliance in natural fibres such as silk, wool and jute, man-made fibres, and new-age fibres.
 - **Textile Expansion and Employment Scheme** to modernize traditional clusters with capital support for machinery, technology upgradation and common testing and certification centres.
 - A **National Handloom and Handicraft programme** to integrate and strengthen existing schemes and ensure targeted support for weavers and artisans.
 - **Tex-Eco Initiative** to promote globally competitive and sustainable textiles and apparels.
 - **Samarth 2.0** to modernize and upgrade the textile skilling ecosystem through collaboration with industry and academic institutions.
- **Mega Textile Parks** to be setup in challenge mode with focus on bringing value addition to technical textiles.
- **Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj (MGSS)** initiative will be launched to strengthen khadi, handloom and handicrafts.
 - MGSS will help in global market linkage, branding and will streamline and support training, skilling, quality of process and production.
 - This will benefit the weavers, village industries, One - District – One - Product initiative and rural youth.

Rejuvenating legacy industrial sectors

- A **Scheme to revive 200 legacy industrial clusters** has been announced, to improve their cost competitiveness and efficiency through infrastructure and technology upgradation.
- Reviving and strengthening of traditional industries is important for accelerating and sustaining economic growth and preserving jobs.

Creating Champion MSMEs

Recognising MSMEs as a vital engine of growth, the Budget proposed a **three-pronged** approach to help them grow as Champions.

- **First** is **Equity support** under which, a dedicated **Rs 10,000 crore SME Growth Fund** will be introduced to create future Champions, incentivizing enterprises based on select criteria.

- The **Self-Reliant India Fund** set up in 2021, will be allocated with additional Rs 2,000 crore, to continue support to micro enterprises and maintain their access to risk capital.
- **Second is Liquidity support:** With **TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) Platform**, more than Rs 7 lakh crore has been made available to MSMEs. To leverage its full potential, 4 measures have been proposed:
 - Mandate TReDS as the **transaction settlement platform for all purchases from MSMEs by CPSEs**, serving as a benchmark for other corporates;
 - Introduce a **credit guarantee support** mechanism through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) for invoice discounting on TReDS platform;
 - **Link GeM with TReDS** for sharing information with financiers about government purchases from MSMEs, encouraging cheaper and quicker financing;
 - Introduce TReDS receivables as asset-backed securities, to develop a secondary market, enhancing liquidity and settlement of transactions.
- **Third is Professional support:** Government will facilitate Professional Institutions such as ICAI, ICSI, ICMAI to design short-term, modular courses and practical tools to develop a **cadre of Corporate Mitras**, especially in Tier-II and Tier-III towns.
 - These accredited para-professionals will help MSMEs meet compliance requirements at affordable costs.

Delivering a powerful push to Infrastructure

Public capital expenditure to be increased to **Rs 12.2 lakh crore** in FY 2026-27.

Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund

- The government will set up an **Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund** to strengthen the confidence of private developers regarding risks during infrastructure development and construction phase.
- It will provide prudently calibrated **partial credit guarantees to lenders**.

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)

- Over the years, REITs have emerged as a successful instrument for asset monetisation.
- The Budget proposed to **accelerate recycling of significant real estate assets of CPSEs** through the setting up of dedicated REITs.

Environmentally Sustainable Cargo Movement

- New **Dedicated Freight Corridors** to be established connecting Dankuni in the East, to Surat in the West
- **20 new National Waterways (NW)** to be operationalised over next 5 years, starting with NW-5 in Odisha to connect mineral rich areas of Talcher and Angul and industrial centres like Kalinga Nagar to the Ports of Paradeep and Dhamra.
- A Coastal **Cargo Promotion Scheme to be launched** for incentivising a modal shift from rail and road, to increase the share of inland waterways and coastal shipping from 6% to 12 % by 2047.
- **Training Institutes** to be set up as Regional Centres of Excellence for development of the required manpower, which will benefit youth in the entire stretch of the waterways to train and acquire skills.
- Further, a **ship repair ecosystem** catering to inland waterways will be set up at Varanasi and Patna.

Seaplane VGF Scheme

- To enhance last-mile and remote connectivity, and promote tourism, the Budget proposed to give incentives to indigenize manufacturing of seaplanes.
- A Seaplane VGF Scheme will be introduced to provide support for operations.

Ensuring long term energy security and stability

- An outlay of Rs 20,000 crore over the next 5 years, has been announced for **Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (CCUS)** technologies.
- Aligning with the roadmap launched in December 2025, CCUS technologies will achieve higher readiness levels in end-use applications across five industrial sectors, including, power, steel, cement, refineries and chemicals.

- As a green initiative the CCUS programme aims to reduce carbon emission by either storing or reusing it so that captured carbon dioxide does not enter the atmosphere.

Developing City Economic Regions

- The Budget aims to further amplify the potential of cities to deliver the economic power of agglomerations by mapping **city economic regions (CER)**, based on their specific growth drivers.
- It proposed to focus on **Tier II and Tier III cities**, and even **temple-towns**, which need modern infrastructure and basic amenities.
- An allocation of **Rs 5000 crore per CER over 5 years** is proposed for implementing their plans with a reform-cum-results based financing mechanism.

High-Speed Rail corridors

- Government to develop **Seven High-Speed Rail corridors** between cities as **growth connectors** to promote environmentally sustainable passenger systems.
- These include: Mumbai-Pune; Pune-Hyderabad; Hyderabad-Bengaluru; Hyderabad-Chennai; Chennai-Bengaluru; Delhi-Varanasi; Varanasi-Siliguri.

Reforms across financial markets

- The Budget proposed to set up a **High Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat**.
- **Restructuring of the Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation** has been proposed to achieve scale and improve efficiency in the Public Sector Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
- The vision for NBFCs has been outlined with clear targets for credit disbursement and technology adoption.
- A comprehensive **review of the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules** has been proposed to create a more contemporary, user-friendly framework for foreign investments consistent with India's evolving economic priorities.
- A **market making framework** has been proposed with suitable access to funds and derivatives on corporate bond indices along with a proposal for total return swaps on corporate bonds.
- To encourage the issuance of **municipal bonds** of higher value by large cities, the Budget proposed an incentive of Rs 100 crore for a single bond issuance of more than Rs 1000 crore.
- The current scheme under AMRUT which incentivises issuances up to Rs 200 crore, will also continue to support smaller and medium towns.
- To enhance ease of doing business, individual **Persons Resident Outside India (PROI)** will be permitted to invest in equity instruments of listed Indian companies through the **Portfolio Investment Scheme**.
 - Investment limit for an individual PROI will be increased under this scheme from 5% to 10%, with an overall investment limit for all individual PROIs to 24%, from the current 10%.

Second Kartavya - Fulfil aspirations and build capacity of people

High-Powered Education to Employment and Enterprise Standing Committee

- The Budget proposed to set up a **High-Powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee** to recommend measures that focus on the **Services Sector as a core driver of Viksit Bharat**.
- The Committee will prioritise areas to optimise the potential for growth, employment and exports.
- It will also **assess the impact of emerging technologies**, including AI, on jobs and skill requirements and propose measures.
- The goal is to **make India a global leader in services, with a 10% global share by 2047**.

Medical Infrastructure

- To promote India as a **hub for medical tourism services**, the Budget proposed a Scheme to support States in establishing **five Regional Medical Hubs**, in partnership with the private sector.

- These Hubs will serve as integrated healthcare complexes that combine medical, educational and research facilities.
- They will have AYUSH Centres, Medical Value Tourism Facilitation Centres and infrastructure for diagnostics, post-care and rehabilitation.
- These Hubs will provide diverse job opportunities for health professionals including doctors and **Allied Health Professionals (AHPs)**.
- Existing institutions for AHPs to be upgraded and new AHP Institutions to be established in private and government sectors. **100,000 AHPs** to be added over the next 5 years
- The government will establish **three new All India Institutes of Ayurveda**.
- The **WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre** in Jamnagar will be upgraded to strengthen evidence-based research, training and awareness for traditional medicine.

Veterinary services

- Government to scale up availability of veterinary professionals by **more than 20,000**.
- A **loan-linked capital subsidy support scheme** will be launched for establishment of veterinary and para vet colleges, veterinary hospitals, diagnostic laboratories and breeding facilities in the private sector.

Orange Economy

- India's **Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector** is a growing industry, projected to require **2 million professionals by 2030**.
- To fulfil this need, the Budget proposed to support the **Indian Institute of Creative Technologies, Mumbai** in setting up AVGC Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges.

Education

- The Indian design industry is expanding rapidly and yet there is a shortage of Indian designers.
- The Budget proposed to establish a new **National Institute of Design** to boost design education and development in the eastern region of India.
- The Government will support States, in creating **5 University Townships** in the vicinity of major industrial and logistic corridors.
- These planned academic zones will host multiple universities, colleges, research institutions, skill centres and residential complexes.
- In the **Higher Education STEM institutions**, prolonged hours of study and laboratory work pose some challenges for girl students.
- The Budget proposed to establish 1 girls' hostel in every district through Viability Gap Funding/capital support.
- To **promote Astrophysics and Astronomy** via immersive experiences, 4 Telescope Infrastructure facilities will be set up or upgraded - the National Large Solar Telescope, the National Large Optical Infrared Telescope, the Himalayan Chandra Telescope and the COSMOS 2 Planetarium.

Tourism

- National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology **to be upgraded to National Institute of Hospitality**. It will function as a bridge between academia, industry and the government.
- A pilot scheme has been proposed for **upskilling 10,000 guides in 20 iconic tourist sites** through a standardized, high-quality 12-week training course in hybrid mode, in collaboration with an Indian Institute of Management.
- A **National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid** to be established to digitally document all places of significance—cultural, spiritual and heritage.
- It will create a new ecosystem of jobs for local researchers, historians, content creators and technology partners.

Heritage and Culture Tourism

- 15 archeological sites including Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Adichanallur, Sarnath, Hastinapur, and Leh

Palace to be developed into vibrant, experiential cultural destinations

- Excavated landscapes will be opened to the public through curated walkways. Immersive storytelling skills and technologies will be introduced to help conservation labs, interpretation centres, and guides.

Sports

- **Khelo India Mission** to be launched to transform the sports sector over the next decade. The Mission will facilitate:
 - An integrated talent development pathway, supported by training centres;
 - Systematic development of coaches and support staff;
 - Integration of sports science and technology;
 - Competitions and leagues to promote sports culture and provide platforms;
 - Development of sports infrastructure for training and competition.

Third Kartavya: Aligned with vision of Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas & requires targeted efforts in the following 4 areas

1. Increasing Farmer's Incomes

Amrit Sarovars

- **Integrated development of 500 reservoirs and Amrit Sarovars**, will be taken up.
- This will **strengthen the fisheries value chain** in coastal areas and enable market linkages involving start-ups and women-led groups together with **Fish Farmers Producer Organisations (Fish FPOs)**.
- India possesses one of the world's largest networks of **inland reservoirs**, spanning about **31.5 lakh hectares** offering significant potential for inland fisheries development.
- To address water conservation and livelihood challenges, Mission Amrit Sarovar has led to the development of **68,827 Amrit Sarovars**, including 1,222 Sarovars linked to fisheries, supporting fish farming and aquatic biodiversity.

Animal Husbandry

- To provide quality employment opportunities in rural and peri-urban areas, Government will support the animal husbandry sector in entrepreneurship development through:
 - A credit-linked subsidy programme;
 - Scaling-up and modernisation of livestock enterprises;
 - Enhance creation of livestock, dairy and poultry-focused integrated-value chains; and Encourage creation of Livestock Farmer Producers Organisations.

High Value Agriculture

- The Budget laid stress on High Value Agriculture by supporting high value crops such as coconut, sandalwood, cocoa and cashew in the coastal areas.
- A dedicated programme for Indian cashew and cocoa will be launched.
- This will make India **self-reliant in raw cashew and cocoa production** and processing, enhance export competitiveness and transform Indian Cashew and Indian Cocoa into premium global brands by 2030.
- A dedicated programme will be launched to rejuvenate old, low-yielding orchards and expand high-density cultivation **of walnuts, almonds and pine nuts**.
- The Union government will partner with State Governments to promote focused cultivation and post-harvest processing to **restore the Indian Sandalwood ecosystem**.
- A **Coconut Promotion Scheme** will be launched to increase production and enhance productivity through various interventions.

Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources)

- The government will launch Bharat-VISTAAR, a **multilingual AI tool to integrate the AgriStack portals and the ICAR package on agricultural practices** with AI systems.
- This will enhance farm productivity, will lead to better farmer decision making and reduce risk through customized advisory support for the farmer.

SHE-Mart

- Taking forward the success of the Lakhpati Didi scheme, the Budget has made provisions for Self-Help Entrepreneurs through SHE-Mart.
- Under this initiative, **community-owned retail outlets** will be established in every district as a platform to sell products made by women, where items produced by SHGs and rural women will get access to new markets.
- Women engaged in animal husbandry, agriculture-related activities and other occupations will no longer remain limited to subsistence livelihoods but will move forward as entrepreneurs.

2. Empowering Divyangjan: The Budget has introduced two major initiatives aimed at enhancing skill development and access to assistive technologies for persons with disabilities (Divyangjan).

Divyangjan Kaushal Yojana

- Under Divyangjan Kaushal Yojana, the government will provide **industry-relevant, customised training** to Divyangjan in sectors such as Information Technology, AVGC, hospitality, and food and beverage services.
- These sectors offer task-oriented and process-driven roles that are well-suited to persons with different types of disabilities.
- It aims to ensure dignified and sustainable livelihood opportunities by aligning training modules with specific functional needs of different Divyang groups and the requirements of industry.

Divyang Sahara Yojana

- Divyang Sahara Yojana is focused on **improving access to high-quality assistive devices** for eligible Divyangjan and senior citizens.
- Government will support **Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO)** to scale up production of assistive devices, invest in research and development, and integrate advanced technologies, including AI, into product design.
- In addition, the scheme proposes strengthening existing **PM Divyasha Kendras** and setting up **Assistive Technology Marts** as modern retail-style centres.
- These centres will allow Divyangjan and senior citizens to see, try and purchase assistive products in an accessible and user-friendly environment

3. Commitment to Mental Health and Trauma Care

NIMHANS expansion

- Reaffirming the commitment to mental health, the Budget 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**, and will continue to focus on high-quality treatment, training, and research in the field of neurosciences and mental healthcare.

Upgradation of existing institutes

- National Mental Health Institutes in **Ranchi** and **Tezpur** will be upgraded to Regional Apex Institutions.
- This will strengthen specialised mental health care, education, and trauma services in their regions.

Emergency and trauma care centres

- The Budget proposed establishing Emergency and Trauma Care Centres in every district hospital nationwide.
- These centres will provide affordable, 24x7 access to critical emergency medical services and mental health

care for all citizens.

- These steps aim to reduce regional disparities, improve access for the poor and vulnerable, and address the burden of rising mental health disorders across age groups, genders and regions.

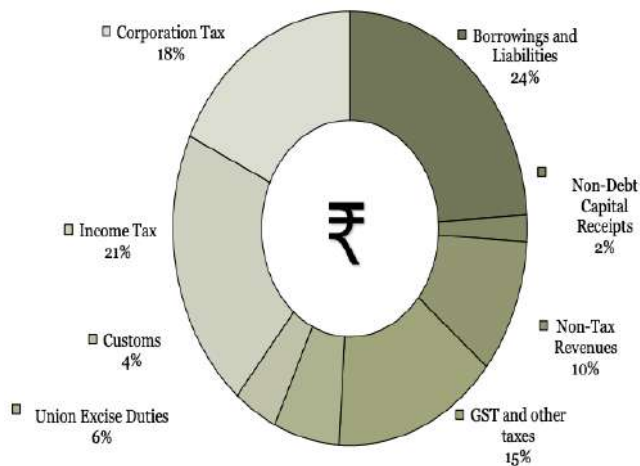
4. Focus on the Purvodaya States and the North-Eastern Region

- The Budget proposed the development of an **integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor** with a well-connected node at Durgapur, creation of **5 tourism destinations** in the 5 Purvodaya States, and the provision of 4,000 e-buses.
- The North-Eastern Region is a civilizational confluence of Theravada and 18 Mahayana/Vajrayana traditions.
- A **Scheme for Development of Buddhist Circuits** in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura will be launched.
- It will cover preservation of temples and monasteries, pilgrimage interpretation centers, connectivity and pilgrim amenities.

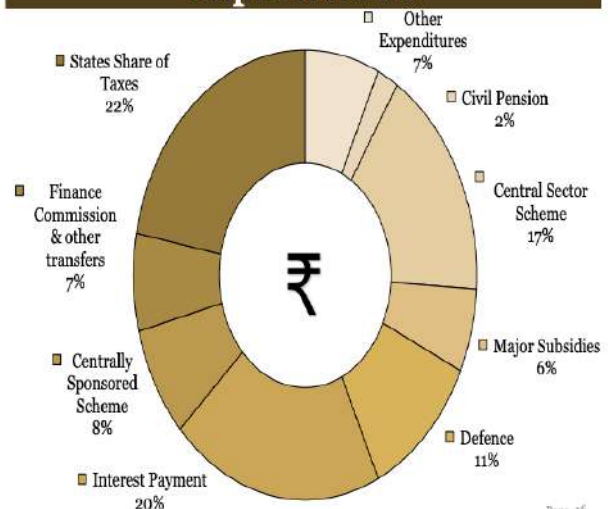
Budget Estimates

- The **non-debt receipts** and the **total expenditure** are estimated as Rs 36.5 lakh crore and Rs 53.5 lakh crore respectively.
- The Centre's **net tax receipts** are estimated at **Rs 28.7 lakh crore**.
- The **gross market borrowings** are estimated at **Rs 17.2 lakh crore** and the net market borrowings from dated securities are estimated at Rs 11.7 lakh crore.
- The Revised Estimates (RE) of the non-debt receipts are Rs 34 lakh crore of which the Centre's net tax receipts are Rs 26.7 lakh crore.
- The RE of the total expenditure is Rs 49.6 lakh crore, of which the **capital expenditure is about Rs 11 lakh crore**.
- In line with the new fiscal prudence path of debt consolidation, the **fiscal deficit** in Budget Estimates (BE) 2026-27 is estimated to be **4.3% of GDP**.
- The **debt-to-GDP ratio** is estimated to be **55.6% of GDP** in BE 2026-27, compared to 56.1% of GDP in RE 2025-26. The government aims to reduce this ratio to 50% by FY31, with a margin of plus or minus 1%.

Rupee Comes From



Rupee Goes To



Direct Taxes

The Budget proposed a number of Direct tax reforms to simplify the tax regime and ensure better compliance by the citizens.

New Income Tax Act

- The Income Tax Act, 2025 will come into effect from 1st April 2026.
- The **simplified Income Tax Rules and Forms** will be notified in due course giving adequate time to taxpayers to familiarize themselves with its requirements.
- The forms have been redesigned for simpler understanding and compliance for ordinary citizens.

Ease of Living

- The Budget proposes that any interest awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal to a natural person will be exempt from Income Tax, and any Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on this account will be done away with.
- It proposes to reduce Tax Collected at Source (TCS) rate on the sale of overseas tour program package from the current 5% and 20% to 2% without any stipulation of amount.
- Further, TCS for pursuing education and for medical purposes under the Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS) will be reduced from 5% to 2%.
- Supply of manpower services is proposed to be brought within the ambit of payment to contractors for the purpose of TDS to avoid ambiguity. Thus, TDS on these services will be at the rate of either 1% or 2% only.
- Simplified TDS provisions for manpower supply will benefit labour intensive business.

Ease for Taxpayers

- A scheme for small taxpayers is proposed wherein a rule-based automated process will enable obtaining a lower or nil deduction certificate instead of filing an application with the assessing officer.
- For the ease of taxpayers holding securities in multiple companies, the budget proposes to enable depositories to accept Form 15G or Form 15H from the investor and provide it directly to various relevant companies.
- It extends time available for revising returns from 31st December to up to 31st March with the payment of a nominal fee.
- The Budget proposes to stagger the timeline for filing of tax returns. Individuals with ITR 1 and ITR 2 returns will continue to file till 31st July and non-audit business cases or trusts are proposed to be allowed time till 31st August.
- Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number (TAN) for property transactions when purchasing property from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) will be replaced with resident buyers PAN based challan.
- To address practical issues of small taxpayers like students, young professionals, tech employees, relocated NRIs, a one-time 6-month foreign asset disclosure scheme has been announced to disclose income or assets below a certain size.

Rationalising Penalty and Prosecution

- To rationalize penalty and prosecution, the Budget proposes to reduce the multiplicity of proceedings. **Assessment & penalty proceedings will be integrated by way of a common order for both.**
- In order to reduce litigations, taxpayers will be allowed to update their returns even after reassessment proceedings have been initiated, at an additional 10% tax rate over and above the rate applicable for the relevant year.
- The Budget **extends the provisions for immunity** from penalty and prosecution in the cases of under reporting, **to misreporting as well.**
- Taxpayer will need to pay 100% of the tax amount as an additional income tax over and above the tax and interest due.

- Non-production of books of account and documents, and requirement of TDS payment, where payment is made in kind, will be decriminalised.
- Non-disclosure of non-immovable foreign assets with aggregate value less than Rs 20 lakh will be provided immunity from prosecution with retrospective effect from October 2024.

Cooperatives

- Presently, deduction is allowed to a primary cooperative society engaged in supplying milk, oilseeds, fruits or vegetables raised or grown by its members.
- This **deduction will be extended** to a primary cooperative society for **supply of cattle feed and cotton seed** produced by its members.
- Further, **inter-cooperative society dividend income** will be allowed as deduction under the new tax regime to the extent it is further distributed to its members.
- As an additional measure to support **National Cooperative Federations**, exemption will be allowed for a period of 3 years, to dividend income received by a notified national cooperative federation, on their investments made in companies up to January 2026.
- This exemption would be allowed only for dividends further distributed to its member co-operatives.

Supporting IT sector as India's growth engine

- India is a global leader in software development services, IT enabled services, knowledge process outsourcing services and contract R&D services relating to software development.
 - These business segments are quite inter-connected with each other. All these services are proposed to be **clubbed under a single category Information Technology Services** with a common safe harbour margin of 15.5% applicable to all.
 - The threshold for availing safe harbour for IT services has been enhanced substantially from Rs 300 crore to Rs 2,000 crore.
 - Safe harbour for IT services shall be approved by an automated rule-driven process without any need for tax officer to examine and accept the application.
 - Once applied by an IT Services company, the same safe harbour can be continued for a period of 5 years.
- For IT services companies who want to conclude Advance Pricing Agreement (APA), the Budget announced **fast track Unilateral APA process** for IT services, to conclude it within a period of 2 years.
- The period of 2 years can be extended by a further period of 6 months on taxpayer's request.

Attracting global business and investment

- Any foreign company that provides cloud services to customers globally by using data centre services from India will be provided **tax holiday till 2047**.
- A **safe harbour of 15%** on cost will be provided if the company providing data centre services from India is a related entity of the foreign company.
- Exemption from income tax for 5 years to be provided to any non-resident who provides capital goods, equipment or tooling, to any toll manufacturer in a bonded zone.
- To encourage vast pool of global talent to work in India for a longer period of time, exemption will be provided to global (non-India sourced) income of a non-resident expert, for a stay period of 5 years under notified schemes.
- Further, all non-residents who pay tax on presumptive basis, will be exempted from Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT).

Tax Administration

- In a significant step towards strengthening tax administration, the Budget proposes the constitution of a **Joint Committee of Ministry of Corporate Affairs and Central Board of Direct Taxes** for incorporating the requirements of Income Computation and Disclosure Standards (ICDS) in the Indian Accounting Standards (IndAS) itself.

- Separate accounting requirement based on ICDS will be done away with from the tax year 2027-28.
- The definition of accountant for the purposes of Safe Harbour Rules will also be rationalized.

Other Tax Proposals

- In the interest of minority shareholders, buyback for all types of shareholders will be taxed as Capital Gains.
- It requires promoters to pay an additional buyback tax, making effective tax 22% for corporate promoters and 30% for non-corporate promoters.
- TCS rate for sellers of specific goods namely alcoholic liquor, scrap and minerals will be rationalized to 2% and on tendu leaves will be reduced from 5% to 2%.
- **Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on Futures** to be raised to 0.05% from present 0.02%. STT on options premium and exercise of options to be raised to 0.15% from the present rate of 0.1% and 0.125% respectively.

Indirect Taxes

The proposals for Customs and Central Excise aim to further **rationalize** the tariff structure, support domestic manufacturing, promote export competitiveness, and correct inversion in duty.

Marine, leather, and textile products

- The limit for duty-free imports of specified inputs used for processing seafood products for export, to increase from the current 1% to 3% of the Free On Board (FOB) value.
- The duty-free imports of specified inputs, which is currently available for exports of leather or synthetic footwear to be allowed.

Energy transition and security

- The basic customs duty (BCD) exemption given to capital goods used for manufacturing Lithium-Ion Cells for batteries to be expanded to battery energy storage systems too.
- BCD on import of sodium antimonate for use in manufacture of solar glass to be exempted.

Nuclear Power: The existing **BCD exemption** on imports of goods required for Nuclear Power Projects will be **extended till the year 2035**.

Critical Minerals: The BCD to the import of capital goods required for processing of critical minerals to be exempted.

Biogas blended CNG: The entire value of biogas while calculating the Central Excise duty payable on biogas blended CNG to be excluded.

Civil and Defence Aviation: BCD on components and parts required for the manufacture of civilian, training and other aircrafts to be exempted.

- BCD on raw materials imported for manufacture of parts of aircraft to be used in maintenance, repair, or overhaul requirements by units in the Defence sector to be exempted.

Electronics: BCD on specified parts used in the manufacture of microwave ovens to be exempted.

Special Economic Zone

- A special one-time measure, to facilitate sales by eligible manufacturing units in Special Economic Zone to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional rates of duty is proposed.
- The quantity of such sales will be limited to a prescribed proportion of their exports.

Ease of Living

- To enhance ease of living, the tariff rate on all dutiable goods imported for personal use will be reduced from 20% to 10%.
- BCD on 17 drugs or medicines will be exempted.
- 7 more rare diseases will be added for the purpose of exempting import duties on personal imports of drugs, medicines and Food for Special Medical Purposes (FSMP) used in their treatment.

Ease of Doing Business

- Cargo clearance approvals from various Government agencies to be seamlessly processed through a single and interconnected digital window by the end of the financial year.
- For goods not having any compliance requirement, clearance to be done by Customs immediately after online registration is completed by the importer.
- **Customs Integrated System (CIS)** will be rolled out in 2 years as a single, integrated and scalable platform for all the customs processes.
- Utilization of non-intrusive scanning with advanced imaging and AI technology for risk assessment will be expanded in a phased manner with the objective to scan every container across all the major ports.
- The Provisions governing baggage clearance will be revised during international travel. Revised rules will enhance duty-free allowances in line with the present day travel realities.
- Further, honest taxpayers, willing to settle disputes will be able close cases by paying an additional amount in lieu of penalty.

New export opportunities

- Fish catch by an Indian fishing vessel in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or on the High Seas will be made free of duty. Landing of such fish on foreign port will be treated as export of goods.
- Complete removal of the current value cap of Rs 10 lakh per consignment on courier exports. It supports aspirations of small businesses, artisans and start-ups to access global markets through e-commerce.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

International Places in News

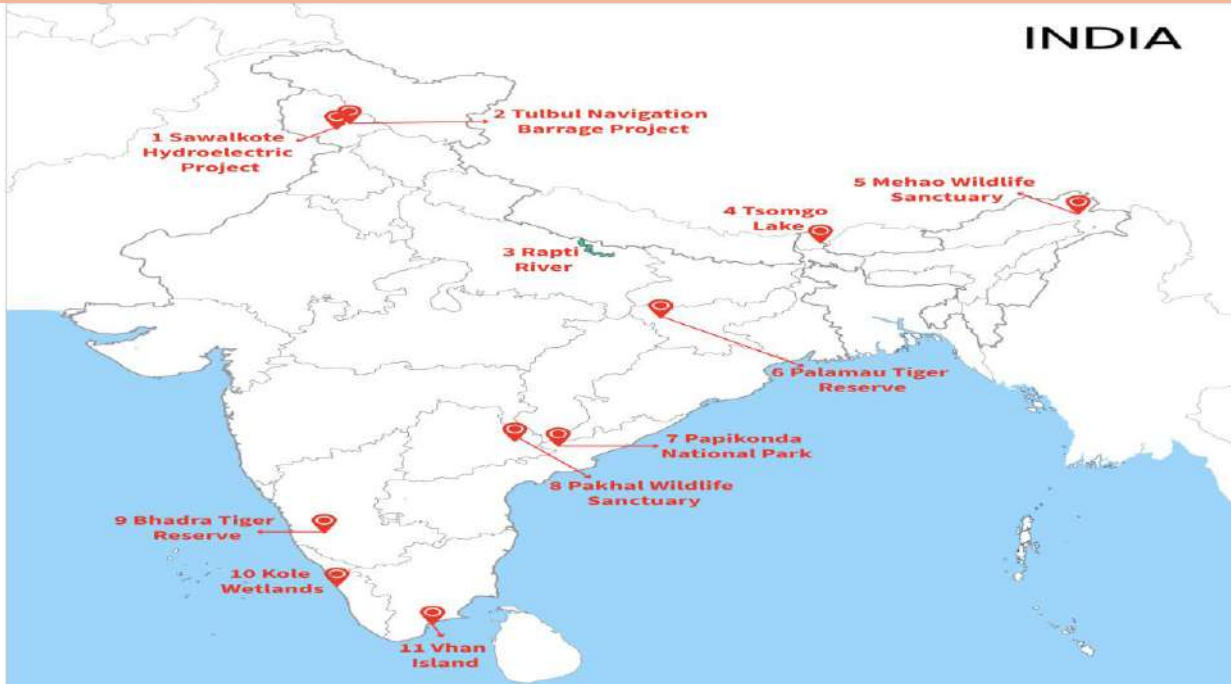


1	Hudson River	<p>New York and New Jersey recently sued the Trump administration for freezing \$16 billion in federal funding for a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: New York State, USA; last section (~34 km) forms boundary with New York & New Jersey. • Origin: Adirondack Mountains near Mount Marcy; main headstream from Lake Tear of the Clouds. • Type: Lower course is a tidal estuary (Hudson fjord) due to glaciation & sea-level rise. • Major Tributary: Mohawk River.
2	El Chichon Volcano	<p>Unusual changes inside the crater of Chichón volcano in southern Mexico have raised fresh concerns among volcanologists.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: North-central Chiapas, Mexico. • Type: Stratovolcano; composed of lava domes + tuff ring (ash ring). • Tectonic Setting: Part of the Chiapanecan volcanic arc (~150 km long); lies between Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt & Central American Volcanic Arc.
3	Mt. Aconcagua	<p>Recently, the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh flagged off a joint mountaineering expedition to Mount (Mt.) Aconcagua.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Argentina (near Chile border); Part of the Principal Cordillera mountain range of the Andes, forming the Argentina-Chile boundary. • Height Rank: Highest in South America; part of the Seven Summits. • Origin: Formed by subduction of Nazca Plate beneath South American Plate; volcanic origin but not active. • Type: Fold mountain; sedimentary & metamorphic rocks.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glacier: Ventisquero Horcones Inferior (largest).
4	Thwaites Glacier	<p>It is melting at an unprecedented rate because of climate change fueled by human activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as “Doomsday Glacier”; Location: West Antarctica • Importance: Contributes ~4% of annual global sea-level rise. Its potential collapse could destabilize the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.
5	Phoenicia	<p>Archaeologists excavating near ruins on the island of Sardinia discovered an Iron Age scarab amulet that originated from ancient Phoenicia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Eastern Mediterranean coast (modern Lebanon). • Trade Network: Mediterranean-wide; reached Spain & possibly British Isles. • Writing: 22-letter Phoenician alphabet → basis of Greek & Latin alphabets. • Major Cities: Tyre, Sidon, Berot (Beirut).
6	Lake Urmia	<p>Recently, after the communal prayer in Tehran for rain, the government mounts cloud seeding in the lake Urmia basin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: North-West Iran; one of the largest inland saline lakes. • Type: Endorheic (no outlet); highly saline (~¼ salinity of Dead Sea). • Inflow Rivers: Talkheh (North-East); Zarineh & Simineh (South). • Status: Ramsar Site; UNESCO Man & Biosphere (MAB).
7	Charax Spasinou	<p>Deep in the deserts of Iraq, the lost city of Charax Spasinou has finally been found.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Near Confluence of Tigris & Choaspes (Karun) rivers; near modern Iraq-Iran border (head of Persian Gulf). • Foundation: c. 324 BCE, likely by Alexander the Great • Political History: Rebuilt by Hyspaosines → capital of Characene kingdom. • Significance: Major Gulf port; trade link between Mesopotamia & India.
8	Taftan	<p>Taftan Volcano in southeastern Iran has nudged upward by about 3.5 inches in 10 months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Southeast Iran, near Pakistan border; tallest peak in SE Iran. • Type: Stratovolcano; twin summits- Narkuh & Matherkuh. • Tectonic Setting: Makran volcanic arc; subduction of Arabian Plate beneath Eurasian Plate. • Activity: Only active volcano of Makran arc; no recorded historic eruptions.
9	Kordofan Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Central-southern Sudan; between Darfur (West) & White Nile valley (East). • Divisions: North Kordofan (Capital: El Obeid), South Kordofan (Kadugli) and West Kordofan (Al Fula). • Physiography: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ North: Desert, sandy soils, acacia scrub. ○ South: Clay plains; Nuba Mountains. • Significance: Conflict-prone; strategic due to oil & proximity to South Sudan.
10	Takeshima	<p>South Korea recently protested a Japanese government-backed “Takeshima Day” event, calling it an unjust assertion of sovereignty over disputed islands also claimed by Japan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Sea of Japan (East Sea); roughly equidistant from Japan & Korean Peninsula.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names: Takeshima (Japan), Dokdo (South Korea) and Liancourt Rocks (named by French whalers, 1849). • Control & Claim: Administered by South Korea (police presence). Claimed by Japan; ongoing territorial dispute.
--	--

National Places in News



1	Sawalkote Hydroelectric Project	<p>India has begun work on the Sawalkote Hydroelectric Project in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K)- the first new project approved after the abrogation of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Chenab River, Ramban district, J&K. • Type & Capacity: Run-of-the-river; 1,856 MW (largest in J&K).
2	Tulbul Navigation Barrage Project	<p>The Jammu & Kashmir government is working with the government to revive the Tulbul Navigation Project (TNP).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as Wular barrage, work began on the project began in 1984. However, it was halted after Pakistan’s objections citing Indus Water Treaty (IWT). • The project aimed to have a uniform flow of water in the Jhelum – one of three rivers in the Kashmir Valley that fall within the ambit of the now suspended IWT – throughout the year to ensure navigation in the water body. • TNP envisaged a lock-and-control structure on the Jhelum at its confluence with the Wular lake. • The project aimed to store 30,000 acre-feet of water in the lake during high-discharge periods and utilise it during low-discharge periods to ensure uniform water level in the river.
3	Rapti River	<p>The National Green Tribunal directed the Uttar Pradesh government to restore Suav’s (major tributary of the Rapti river) status from “drain” to “river” in official records and gazetteer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type: Major left-bank tributary of Ghaghara River; Ancient Name: Iravati. • Origin: Nepal near Rukumkot in the Mahabharat range of the lesser Himalayas.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course: Flows through Nepal → enters eastern Uttar Pradesh. • Major Tributaries: Burhi Rapti, Rohini.
4	Tsomgo Lake	<p>Over 2,700 tourists left stranded due to heavy snowfall near Tsomgo Lake were rescued.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: East Sikkim; glacial lake • Water Source: Snowmelt • Flora: Rhododendron (State tree), primula, poppy • Significance: Sacred; seasonal colour change of lake used by monks for predictions
5	Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>Recently, the Arunachal Pradesh government granted permission to capture the tiger that killed a head constable along the Roing-Mayodia road inside Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Arunachal Pradesh (Lower Dibang Valley district). • Named After: Mehao Lake (core zone). • Rivers/Streams: Ashupani, Deopani, Enjopan, Diphu, Jowe. • Forest Types: Tropical Evergreen, Subtropical & Temperate, Temperate Broadleaf and Temperate Conifer.
6	Palamau Tiger Reserve	<p>The south division of Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR) launched a new initiative titled 'Vanjeevi Didi' across 17 identified villages to train educated women to become PTR ambassadors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Chhotanagpur Plateau, Jharkhand; includes Betla National Park. • Project Tiger: Among the first 10 tiger reserves (1973). • Unique Fact: Early tiger census (pugmark method) conducted in 1932 (J.W. Nicholson). • Rivers: North Koel, Auranga, Burha (perennial).
7	Papikonda National Park	<p>The adult male tiger, named 'Explorer', was reintroduced into the wild in the Papikonda National Park (PNP) as part of Operation Stripes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Along Godavari River; East & West Godavari districts, Andhra Pradesh. • Mountains: Highest peak- Devara Konda and prominent peak- Verala Konda. • Status: Recognized as Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (BirdLife International). • Unique: Indigenous dwarf goat breed- "Kanchu mekha".
8	Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>Scientists from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) have identified a new species of flowering plant in Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuary and named it as <i>Dicliptera pakhalica</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Warangal district, Telangana. • Key Feature: Pakhal Lake (man-made; built in 1213 CE by Kakatiya ruler Ganapati Deva).
9	Bhadra Tiger Reserve	<p>A black panther and a leopard were recently spotted drinking water side by side, creating a rare and unforgettable moment in the wild.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Western Ghats, Karnataka (Chikkamagaluru & Shivamogga districts). • Status: 25th Project Tiger reserve (1998); also an Elephant Reserve. • Terrain: Saucer-shaped; drained by Bhadra River.

10	Kole Wetlands	<p>A recent scientific study conducted at the Kole wetlands, a Ramsar-listed ecosystem in Kerala, has documented a total of 12 species of pygmy grasshoppers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Central Kerala; Thrissur & Malappuram districts. • Meaning: ‘Kole’ = bumper crop (Malayalam). • Type: Low-lying floodplain wetland; monsoon submergence → water drained via bunds for paddy cultivation (~300 yrs old practice). It is subject to seasonal saline ingress. • Status: Important Bird Area (BirdLife International); Ramsar Site (2002). • Significance: Among Kerala’s largest & highly productive yet threatened wetlands.
11	Vhan Island	<p>A 10-year artificial reef restoration of Vaan Island yielded socio-ecological benefits of ₹61.67 crore- over twice its inflation-adjusted cost, per Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: One of 21 islands in Gulf of Mannar (declared Marine Biosphere Reserve, 1989); part of Tuticorin group, Tamil Nadu. • Degradation: Area shrank ~92% (1969-2015) due to coral mining, reef loss & sea-level rise. • Restoration (since 2015): 10,600 artificial reef modules deployed, area increased to >2.3 ha.

Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) Sites



S.No.	IVC Site	Description
1	Harappa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Bank of Ravi River, Sahiwal District, Punjab (Pakistan). • Excavation: Daya Ram Sahni (1921). • Key Features: First IVC site discovered (hence "Harappan Civilization"); 6 Granaries in a row; Working floors; Coffin burials (unique to this site); H-Cemetery (Post-Harappan); Copper scale; Crucibles (made of coarse, heat-resistant clay (terracotta)) were used for smelting.
2	Kalibangan (Black Bangles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Ghaggar River, Hanumangarh, Rajasthan. • Excavation: B. B. Lal & B. K. Thapar (1961-69) • Key Features: Earliest ploughed field (pre-Harappan phase); Fire Altars (suggesting ritualistic fire worship); Camel bones; Wooden drainage (unusual, as most used burnt bricks); Evidence of surgery (trepanned skull).
3	Banawali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Fatehabad, Haryana. • Excavation: R.S.Bisht (1974) • Unique Fact: Lacked a systematic drainage system (unlike other major cities); Radial town planning (not a strict grid).
4	Rakhigarhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Hisar, Haryana (Ghaggar-Hakra River basin). • Significance: Currently recognized as the largest site of the IVC (surpassing Mohenjo-daro). • Key Features: Planned streets; drainage; terracotta wheels; seals; and evidence of a massive town spread over 350+ hectares.
5	Mohenjo Daro (Mound of the Dead)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Bank of Indus River, Larkana, Sindh (Pakistan). • Excavation: R. D. Banerji (1922). • Key Features: Great Bath (ritual purification); Large Granary; Multi-pillared Assembly Hall; Planned grid system with advanced drainage. • Artifacts: Dancing Girl (Bronze/Lost-wax technique); Pashupati Seal (Proto-Shiva); Priest-King statue; Woven cotton fragments.
6	Chanhu Daro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Sindh, Pakistan (South of Mohenjo-daro). • Excavation: N. G. Majumdar (1931) and Ernest J.H. Mackay (1935-36) • Key Features: Only IVC city without a citadel; Major industrial hub for Bead-making, shell-cutting, and seal-making; Inkpot; Footprints of a dog chasing a cat on a brick.
7	Sutkagen Dor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Dasht River, Makran Coast (near Iran border). • Surveyed by Sir Aurel Stein (1929) and excavated by George F. Dales (1960s). • Significance: Westernmost point of IVC; fortified coastal trading port; served as a vital trade link between the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia.
8	Dholavira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Khadir Bet in Kutch, Gujarat. • Excavation: R. S. Bisht (1989-2005) • Unique Planning: Only site divided into three parts (Citadel, Middle Town, Lower Town). • Key Features: Sophisticated water harvesting system with 16 giant reservoirs; 10-letter Signboard (large Indus script symbols); UNESCO World Heritage Site (2021).

9	Surkotada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Kutch, Gujarat. • Excavation: J. P. Joshi (1964) • Key Features: Only site providing actual remains of horse bones; Stone-fortified settlement; Pot burial (another unique burial type).
10	Lothal (The Manchester of IVC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Near Sabarmati/Bhogava River, Gulf of Khambhat, Gujarat. • Excavation: S.R. Rao (1954). • Key Features: Brick Dockyard (World's earliest); Double Burial (Male and Female together); Persian Gulf Seal (evidence of long-distance trade); Rice husk remains; Bead-making factory; Chessboard-like game.

SC Reconsiders Gender Stereotype Handbook

The Supreme Court has signalled a shift in its approach to gender sensitivity by moving beyond the 2023 *Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes*, issued under former CJI D Y Chandrachud. Current Chief Justice Surya Kant described the handbook as overly academic and stressed the need for more practical, ground-level judicial training.

The observations arose during a suo motu hearing of an Allahabad High Court ruling that had controversially termed certain acts—such as grabbing a victim’s breasts and loosening her pyjama string—as mere “preparation” rather than an “attempt” to rape. The Supreme Court had earlier stayed the judgment and, later, formally set it aside.

The bench directed the trial court to proceed with attempt-to-rape charges, underscoring the judiciary’s commitment to a more sensitive and legally sound interpretation in sexual assault cases.

Shift from Handbook to Institutional Training

- During the hearing, the Supreme Court questioned the practical utility of the 2023 Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes.
- The bench observed that the handbook relied on “forensic meanings” — technical or clinical interpretations — which may not reflect survivors’ lived realities or common social understanding.
- CJI Surya Kant described the document as “**too Harvard-oriented**,” suggesting it was overly theoretical and disconnected from India’s ground realities.
- The Court noted that merely issuing a handbook to guide High Court judges “serves no purpose” if it does not translate into meaningful change.
- Instead of relying on advisory texts, the bench emphasised the need for structured institutional reform.
- **Role of the National Judicial Academy**
 - The Court directed the National Judicial Academy (NJA), **Bhopal**, to constitute a committee of domain experts, academics, and lawyers to **draft practical training guidelines**.
 - These will become part of the NJA’s curriculum for High Court judges.
 - Once finalised, judges will undergo batch-wise training focused on handling sexual assault cases with sensitivity and legal clarity.
 - Senior advocates have been engaged to assist in refining the new guidelines, ensuring they balance legal precision with survivor-centric sensitivity.

Inside the 2023 Gender Stereotypes Handbook

- Released in August 2023, the 35-page Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes aimed to eliminate patriarchal language and biased reasoning from judicial decisions.
- In his foreword, then CJI D.Y. Chandrachud emphasised that language shapes justice, warning that stereotypes distort the law’s application to women.
- **Reforming Courtroom Language**
 - A major section of the handbook provided a glossary identifying “Incorrect” (stereotype-promoting) terms and suggesting “Preferred” alternatives.
 - **Examples of Suggested Changes**
 - “Adulteress” → “Woman who has engaged in sexual relations outside marriage”
 - “Eve teasing” → “Street sexual harassment”
 - “Child prostitute” → “Child who has been trafficked”
 - “Housewife” → “Homemaker”
 - Avoiding terms like “fallen woman” or “woman of easy virtue”
 - On “survivor” vs “victim,” it stated that both are valid but the individual’s preference should be respected.

- **Challenging Judicial Reasoning Patterns**
 - Beyond vocabulary, the handbook sought to dismantle stereotypes in judicial thinking, particularly in sexual offence cases.
 - **Inherent Characteristics** - It rejected assumptions such as:
 - Women are overly emotional or illogical
 - All women want children
 - Young women cannot take major life decisions
 - The handbook clarified that gender does not determine rationality or autonomy.
 - **Gender Roles** - It challenged beliefs that:
 - Working women are negligent mothers
 - Women must be submissive
 - It reaffirmed constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.
- **Approach to Sexual Violence Cases**
 - The handbook addressed evidentiary misconceptions in rape trials:
 - Clothing, alcohol consumption, or lifestyle do not imply consent.
 - Lack of physical resistance does not equal consent.
 - Absence of injuries does not invalidate testimony.
- **Judicial Precedents Cited**
 - The handbook grounded its guidance in Supreme Court rulings, including:
 - *State of Punjab v. Gurmit Singh (1996)* — Survivor testimony is inherently credible.
 - *State of Jharkhand v. Shailendra Kumar Rai (2022)* — Banned the “two-finger test”.

Annual Statistics Report on Death Penalties

The *Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report (2016-2025)* was released recently by **The Square Circle Clinic**.

The **Square Circle Clinic (formerly Project 39A)** is a criminal justice research and legal aid programme that originated at **National Law University (NLU), Delhi** and is now based at **NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad**.

About Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report (2016-2025)

The report marks **10 years of nationwide empirical tracking** of the death penalty in India analyzing **sentencing, confirmations, commutations, acquittals, mercy petitions, and procedural compliance** across Sessions Courts, High Courts (HCs), and the Supreme Court (SC). It goes beyond moral debate to **map systemic trends and failures** in the administration of capital punishment.

Key Highlights and Concerns Raised

- **Scale of Death Penalty Use in Lower Courts: 1,310** death sentences on **1,279 individuals** by Sessions Courts between **2016-2025**, across **822 cases**. In **2025 alone**, trial courts sentenced **128 persons** to death in **94 cases**, showing that **lower courts continue to impose death sentences frequently**, despite growing appellate scepticism.
- **Record-High Death Row Population: As of December 2025, 574 persons** were on death row (**550 men, 24 women**). This is the **highest death row population since 2016**, even though confirmations by higher courts have steadily declined. The rise reflects **slow appellate processes, frequent remands, and delayed finality**, rather than increased judicial endorsement of the death penalty.
- **Appellate Courts Rarely Uphold Death Sentences: Acquittals consistently outnumber confirmations-** by nearly **4 times in HCs and 2 times in the SC**.

HCs considered 842 (of 1310) death sentences in confirmation proceedings but upheld only **70 (8.31%)**. HCs set aside or modified **~90%** of death sentences they considered in **2025 alone**.

SC: decided 153 death sentence cases of which only 19 (12.41%) were confirmed. No death sentence has been confirmed since 2023. In **2025**, the Court acquitted **10 death row prisoners, the highest number in a decade**.

- **High Incidence of Wrongful Convictions:** Over the decade, **364 people were wrongly convicted** and later acquitted. Many spent **5-10 years on death row**, with an **average incarceration of ~9.4 years** before acquittal. The report concludes that wrongful convictions are **systemic**, caused by faulty investigations, weak or mishandled forensic evidence, poor-quality prosecution, and unfair and hurried trials.
- **Crisis in Sentencing Process:** Despite SC sentencing guidelines requiring detailed consideration of mitigating factors. Between **2023-2025**, **~95% of death sentences** were imposed **without compliant sentencing hearings**. Sentencing hearings were often conducted **immediately after conviction**, denying the accused a meaningful opportunity to present mitigating evidence.
- **Women and the Death Penalty:** **10 women were sentenced to death in 2025**, the **highest figure since 2016**.
- **Nature of Offences:** **Murder simpliciter** accounted for the largest share of death sentences. Followed by murder with sexual offences, non-homicidal child rape and dacoity with murder. This indicates that death penalty use is **not confined to exceptional categories** like terrorism.
- **Shift Towards Life Imprisonment Without Remission:** Courts increasingly commute death sentences to **life imprisonment without remission**, often for the convict's natural life. In **2025**, **all SC commutations** were to life imprisonment **without remission**. While viewed as an alternative to death, the report flags concerns about excessive punishment, proportionality, rehabilitation and reform.
- **Mercy Petitions:** **19 mercy petitions were rejected** and **5 accepted** in the last decade. Mercy relief often came **after 15+ years on death row**, raising humanitarian and constitutional concerns.

Reasons for Lower Death Penalty Confirmations	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial court Scepticism: Acquittal rates exceed confirmation rates in HCs (~4x) and SC (~2x). • Defective Investigations: Poor forensic practices, evidence tampering, weak circumstantial chains, non-uniform availability of judgments especially under POCSO, affecting transparency and accountability. • Unfair trials: Hasty proceedings, denial of effective legal representation, non-examination of experts. • Non-Compliance With Sentencing Law: Mitigating factors often ignored despite Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022) guidelines which mandate psychological evaluations, prison conduct reports, and mitigation hearings. • Constitutional Elevation of Sentencing Safeguards: In Vasanta Sampat Dupare v. Union of India (2025) compliant sentencing hearings were held integral to Articles 14 & 21. • "Rarest Of Rare": Increasing reliance on life imprisonment without remission as an alternative. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Laid down by the SC in Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980), the rarest of rare doctrine holds that the death penalty may be imposed only in exceptional cases involving offences such as brutal murder, rape with murder, terrorism, treason, or mass violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict Enforcement of Sentencing Guidelines. • Professionalize Investigation and Prosecution: Forensics, evidence handling, witness examination. • Early Judicial Scrutiny at trial stage to prevent wrongful convictions. • Uniformity in Judgments especially under POCSO, across states. • Revisit The Death Penalty Framework in light of persistent errors, delays, and constitutional costs. • Develop a Compensation Framework for wrongful death-row incarceration.

Refurbished Medical Devices Market in India

- Recently, the Department of Pharmaceuticals informed the Rajya Sabha that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has constituted a committee to draft a policy on the regulation of refurbished medical devices.
- The panel will define their scope, establish methods to assess safety, performance, and remaining useful life, and recommend guidelines for disposal and waste management.
- The core debate now centres not on whether refurbished medical devices should be allowed, but on how they should be effectively regulated while **balancing healthcare access and industrial policy considerations**.

About Refurbished Medical Devices

- Refurbished medical devices are previously used equipment restored to original operating standards and resold at lower prices.
- **Cost Advantage Over New Equipment**
 - Refurbished systems offer significant cost savings:

- The price differences make advanced diagnostics more accessible, particularly for hospitals in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- For district hospitals, standalone diagnostic centres, and smaller private facilities, refurbished equipment reduces upfront capital costs.
- This supports decentralisation of healthcare and improves access to advanced diagnostics outside major urban centres.
- **Dependence on Imports**
 - Despite growth in domestic manufacturing, India remains reliant on imports for advanced imaging and specialised devices due to technological complexity and global supply chain dominance.
 - Refurbished equipment is commonly sourced from countries like the US, Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands, where hospitals upgrade systems before the end of their functional life.

Current Government Policy on Refurbished Medical Devices

- India does **not** have a specific regulatory pathway for refurbished medical devices under the **Medical Devices Rules, 2017**.
- Although all medical devices were brought under phased regulation from 2017 and notified as “drugs” in 2020 under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, no separate licensing mechanism exists for refurbished products.
- **Imports Governed by Waste Management Rules**
 - At present, refurbished device imports are regulated primarily under the **Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016**.
 - Imports are allowed only after obtaining:
 - No-objection certificates from an expert committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
 - Technical inputs from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)
 - Import authorisation from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade
 - Earlier bans on used critical-care devices were relaxed in December 2022, permitting certain high-end equipment under strict scrutiny.
- **Recent Approvals and Regulatory Clash**
 - In November 2025, a MoEFCC technical committee approved several refurbished devices for reuse.
 - However, in January 2025, CDSCO stated that refurbished devices **cannot be imported** for sale due to the absence of licensing provisions under the Medical Devices Rules.
 - This contradiction created regulatory inconsistency between environmental approvals and medical device regulation.
- **Policy Ambiguity and Industry Concerns**
 - India lacks a statutory definition distinguishing “used,” “refurbished,” “reconditioned,” or “remanufactured” devices.
 - This creates uncertainty around classification, licensing, compliance, patient safety, and domestic manufacturing policy.

Refurbished Medical Devices: Industry Divide and Policy Debate

- The absence of a clear pathway under the Medical Devices Rules has created uncertainty for both industry and policymakers.
- A key tension lies between promoting domestic manufacturing under Make in India and ensuring affordable access to advanced diagnostics, particularly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- **International Manufacturers’ Perspective**
 - The Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI), representing global manufacturers, maintains that refurbished devices are regulated globally rather than prohibited.
 - It contends that regulated imports can improve affordability, expand access, support healthcare training goals, and complement industrial initiatives such as Electronics Repair Services Outsourcing.

- **Domestic Manufacturers' Concerns**

- The Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMeD) strongly opposes easing restrictions without robust regulatory standards aligned with global benchmarks.
- Domestic players argue refurbished devices carry risks of **unclear usage history**, inconsistent performance, limited traceability, and shorter lifespan.
- They warn that legalising such imports could undermine indigenous manufacturing & innovation, weaken emergency preparedness, and turn India into a destination for end-of-life equipment.

India's Strategy to Tackle the Mental Health Burden

The Economic Survey recently flagged a worrying rise in **digital addiction** and **screen-related mental health issues**, especially among children and adolescents. Responding to these concerns, the February 1 Union Budget announced steps to strengthen India's mental health infrastructure.

Key measures include the proposal to set up a second National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in north India, alongside plans to upgrade premier mental health institutions in Ranchi and Tezpur. These steps aim to improve regional access, reduce pressure on existing facilities, and expand specialised mental healthcare services across the country.

India's Mental Health Burden

- The country accounts for nearly one-third of global cases of suicide, depression, and addiction, making mental health a major public health challenge.
- **High Suicide Burden Among Youth**
 - Data from the National Crime Records Bureau and the Sample Registration System under the Ministry of Home Affairs show that:
 - Suicide is among the leading causes of death for Indians aged 15–29 years.
 - Young people are particularly vulnerable due to academic pressure, unemployment, social stress, and digital addiction
- **Economic Cost of Mental Illness:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO):
 - India is expected to lose \$1.03 trillion between 2012 and 2030 due to mental health conditions.
 - Losses: Reduced productivity, healthcare costs, and premature mortality.
- **Large Treatment Gap**
 - 70%–92% of people with mental disorders do not receive proper care.
 - Key reasons include: Lack of awareness; Social stigma; Severe shortage of trained mental health professionals.
- **Shortage of Mental Health Professionals:** As per the Indian Journal of Psychiatry:
 - India has 0.75 psychiatrists per 1,00,000 people
 - WHO recommends at least 3 psychiatrists per 1,00,000
 - This gap severely limits access to diagnosis, counselling, and treatment.
- **Low Budgetary Priority**
 - Although overall health spending has increased since FY2014–15, mental health has received: Only ~1% of the total health budget.
 - Limited funding has constrained infrastructure, manpower, and outreach services

Mental Health Infrastructure in India: Expanding Access Beyond Hospitals

- To meet the rising demand for mental health services, the government has integrated mental healthcare into primary healthcare under Ayushman Bharat.
- Mental health services are now part of the Comprehensive Primary Health Care package delivered through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Health and Wellness Centres).
- Over 1.73 lakh sub-health centres and primary health centres have been upgraded into Ayushman Arogya Mandirs

- These centres provide basic mental health screening, counselling, and referrals, reducing dependence on specialised hospitals
- **Strengthening Specialist Capacity**
 - Over 20 Centres of Excellence sanctioned for postgraduate training in mental health
 - 47 postgraduate departments in mental health established nationwide
 - These initiatives aim to increase the availability of psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health specialists, especially in underserved regions.
- **Tele-Mental Health Support: Tele MANAS**
 - India has complemented physical infrastructure with digital outreach through Tele MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States):
 - 24x7 free mental health support via helplines 14416 or 1-800-891-4416
 - Launched in October, 2022
 - 53 operational cells across 36 States and UTs
 - Backed by 23 specialised mentoring institutes

Where Does India Fall Short on Mental Health Funding?

- India’s mental health budget has increased from ₹683 crore in 2020–21 to ~₹1,898 crore in 2024–25.
- However, experts argue that this rise masks a deeper **problem of chronic underinvestment**.
- The allocation remains below 2% of the total health budget, which itself is only around 2% of India’s GDP—far short of what the scale of the mental health burden demands.
- **Mismatch Between Spending and Need**
 - The underinvestment becomes stark when weighed against:
 - India’s high suicide and depression burden
 - Massive treatment gaps
 - Economic losses due to untreated mental illness
 - Despite these realities, mental health continues to receive low fiscal priority.
- **Overemphasis on Tertiary Institutions**
 - A major concern is where the money goes. A significant portion of allocations continues to be directed toward tertiary institutions such as NIMHANS and newly established centres of excellence.
 - While important, experts argue that:
 - Tertiary institutions alone cannot mainstream mental healthcare in a country of India’s size. They serve a limited population and are often concentrated in urban areas
 - They stress the need for targeted funding for **grassroots mental health programmes**, including:

Community-based services	Early intervention models	Preventive and promotive mental healthcare
--------------------------	---------------------------	--
 - Such approaches are more effective in reaching underserved populations and reducing long-term disease burden.
- **Utilisation Gap Compounds the Problem:** Beyond low allocations, there is also a utilisation issue. Health experts argue that better utilisation requires decentralised planning and community-led models, not just increased funding.

Way Ahead


The government is pivoting to a whole-of-community approach, integrating mental well-being into schools and strengthening workplace policies to address stress and burnout—signalling a shift from curative to preventive, community-based care.

Proposal to Ban Non-Hindus from Entering Char Dham

Committees of the Chota Char Dham shrines- Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath in Uttarakhand are considering banning non-Hindus from temple premises. The proposal was raised by the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC), citing priests’ demands, while the Gangotri and Yamunotri committees are reviewing similar moves.

View of Critics on the Proposal to Bar Non-Hindus:

- **Violation of Freedom of Movement (Article 19):** Critics invoke **Article 19(1)(d)**, which guarantees the **right to move freely throughout India**. Restrictions are permissible only in the **interest of the public**, or for the **protection of Scheduled Tribes**. A religion-based entry bar serves **community interests**, not public interest, and therefore fails the constitutional test.
- **Article 25 Is Not Absolute:** While Articles 25 and 26 protect religious freedom, critics stress that these rights are **subject to public order, morality, health, and other fundamental rights**. Temple-entry restrictions cannot override **individual constitutional freedoms** without strong justification.
- **Failure to Meet the Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Test:** Critics contend that Hinduism does not mandate the exclusion of non-Hindus from temples. The committee must prove that **allowing non-Hindus undermines the religious character** of the shrine. The **Sabarimala (2018)** judgment is cited to show that **custom alone is insufficient**.
 - In the **2018 Sabarimala judgment**, the SC held that excluding women from



About BKTC

It is the statutory body responsible for the **administration, governance, and financial management** of the Badrinath and Kedarnath temples in Uttarakhand.

Legal Basis: The BKTC derives its authority from the **United Provinces Shri Badrinath and Kedarnath Temples Act, 1939**, which was **amended in 1948**.

Composition (President + 7 members) are nominated by the Uttarakhand government. Up to **2 Vice-Presidents** (allowed by 2025 amendment).

Key Functions:

- Administration and governance of temple affairs and funds.
 - **Ownership of temple funds** is legally vested **in the deity** of Badrinath or Kedarnath; the committee only holds and manages these funds in trust.
- Appointment of **Rawal** (head priest), **Naib Rawal** (assistant priest).

State Government Role:

- **Executive Appointment:** It appoints the **Mukhya Karyadhikari (Chief Executive Officer)** of BKTC after consultation with the committee President.
- **Supervisory Authority:** It can **supersede the committee’s decisions** when required.
- **Control over Religious Functionaries:** While the committee may terminate the **Rawal or Naib-Rawal**, such decisions are **appealable to the state government**.
- **Financial Oversight:** It appoints the **auditor** for temple accounts and endowments.
- **Administrative Accountability:** It requires the committee to submit **periodic reports** on temple administration as prescribed.

What is the Proposed Bar on Non-Hindus Based On?

Constitutional Justification Cited by the Committee	Judicial Precedent Supporting Restricted Entry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Article 25 & Article 26: Temple entry rules fall within the domain of religious autonomy, protected under Articles 25 and 26. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. ○ Article 26: Gives religious denominations the right to manage their own religious affairs. ● Article 25(2)(b) Clarification: This provision includes Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains within the legal definition of Hindus for temple-entry purposes. Hence, the committee argues the move is not exclusionary within the broader Hindu fold. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court (2024): It directed temple authorities to display boards stating that non-Hindus are not allowed beyond the kodimaram (flagpole). The court accepted the argument that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Temples are religious spaces, not tourist sites. ○ Non-Hindu practices (non-vegetarian food, prayers of other religions) within temple premises can erode religious sanctity. <div style="border: 1px solid #ADD8E6; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px; background-color: #E6F2FF;"> <p>The court held that protecting Hindu religious practices outweighed concerns about non-Hindus’ sentiments. This ruling is cited as legal support for similar restrictions elsewhere.</p> </div>

entering the temple based on Lord Ayyappa's celibacy was **not an essential religious practice (ERP)**, and therefore unconstitutional, allowing their entry into the temple.

- Originating in the 1950s, the **ERP doctrine** holds that only those practices integral to a religion are protected under **Article 25**.
- **Risk of Discrimination and Exclusion:** The proposal could encourage **religious profiling** at temple entrances and lead to **arbitrary or selective enforcement**. This undermines India's **pluralistic ethos** and could set a precedent for exclusion in other public religious spaces.
- **Practical and Administrative Concerns:** High-footfall pilgrimage and tourist sites make **religious verification impractical**. Critics question who determines religious identity and how constitutional authorities, foreign visitors, or devotees of mixed faith would be treated.
- **Political and Symbolic Objections:** Opposition parties argue the move is **symbolic politics rather than religious necessity**. This could invite prolonged litigation and politicize temple administration.

Way Forward

- **Legal Clarity First:** Any restriction should comply with Articles 19, 25, and 26 and pass the **ERP test**.
- **Focus on Conduct, Not Identity:** Enforce rules on **behaviour and sanctity** rather than religious identity.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:** Engage priests, devotees, legal experts, and the state to build consensus.
- **Judicial Review:** Seek authoritative adjudication to prevent prolonged constitutional disputes.

Denotified Tribes

Denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes are seeking a separate column in the 2027 Census and demanding constitutional recognition through a distinct Schedule, similar to Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs/STs) and other backward classes (OBCs), to ensure formal identification and targeted welfare measures.

- ✓ In February 2027, India will conduct a caste enumeration for the first time since 1931.

Key Challenges Faced by DNT Communities

- **Political Misclassification:** Many DNTs were absorbed into SC, ST, or OBC lists. Leaders argue that they are crowded out in SC lists by politically stronger communities, cannot enter ST lists due to high eligibility thresholds and are lost within OBC lists.
- **Graded Backwardness Within DNT:** Till the 1960s, most DNTs were similarly backward. Settled communities later leveraged land/business resources, but Nomadic communities remained severely deprived socially, economically, and educationally.

Who are Denotified Tribes (DNT)?



- ◆ DNTs are communities that were once labelled as "criminal tribes" under the colonial **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871** (amended in 1924), which allowed the British government to register, surveil and control entire communities on the presumption that they were "addicted" to non-bailable offenses.
 - ◆ Many of these were nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, and community leaders argue that several had resisted colonial rule and were therefore stigmatized.
 - ◆ After the Act was repealed in 1952, these communities were "denotified" and came to be collectively known as Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT/NT/SNT).
- Historical Classification and Its Evolution:** The last caste census before Independence was conducted in 1931, and the **Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936** laid the foundation for the Scheduled Castes category. However, DNT/NT/SNT did not receive a coherent or uniform constitutional status after Independence.
- ◆ **Successive Attempts at Classification:** Over the decades, several commissions attempted to identify and classify these communities:
 - ▶ **Ananthasayanam Ayyangar Committee 1949** (on the report of this committee the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed)
 - ▶ **First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar (1953)**
 - ▶ **Lokur Committee (1965)**
 - ▶ **Mandal Commission (1980)**
 - ▶ **Renke Commission (2008)**
 - ▶ **Idate Commission (2017):** It identified over **1,200 DNT/NT/SNT communities** and noted that **267 communities had never been classified** as SC, ST, or OBC. It strongly recommended that the classification process be completed.
 - ◆ **Ethnographic Study (2019-2023):** In 2019, a Special Committee under NITI Aayog assigned the task of classification to the **Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)** and **Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)**. Their study categorized **268 previously unclassified communities**, found **63 communities "not traceable"** and recommended:
 - ▶ Inclusion of **179 in SC/ST/OBC lists**; Fresh classification of **85 communities** out of 179,
 - ▶ Reclassification of **9**

- **Continuing Stigmatization:** Despite repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, local police allegedly continue to treat them as “habitual offenders”. Historical stigma persists socially and institutionally.
- **Lack of Community Certificates:** Even where schemes exist (e.g., **SEED scheme**), states are reportedly not issuing proper DNT certificates. Without certificates, communities cannot access welfare benefits.

The Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (**SEED**), launched in 2022, by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, is a ₹200 crore central sector scheme for the welfare of DNT/NT/SNT communities. It provides competitive exam coaching, health insurance (₹5 lakh/family), housing aid, and livelihood initiatives to families with annual incomes below ₹2.5 lakh.

- **Lack of Reliable Population Data:** There is no definite national population figure. Without enumeration, policy advocacy remains weak.

Why is Categorization Necessary?	Implications of Separate Recognition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Welfare: Parliamentary Standing Committee (2022) warned delay in classification increases suffering. Without classification, communities cannot access SC/ST benefits. • Administrative Clarity: Wrong categorization traces back to colonial census errors- Tribes classified as castes and vice versa. • Organizational Mobilization: Without a complete national list, Communities remain fragmented, and advocacy becomes difficult. • Effective Implementation of Schemes: The slow uptake of the SEED scheme is attributed to unclear classification and the non-issuance of DNT certificates, with only ₹69.3 crore spent out of the ₹200 crore allocated (as of December 2025). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Welfare & Quotas: Through a separate constitutional Schedule instead of competing within SC/ST/OBC categories. • Administrative Clarity: Clear classification would streamline implementation of schemes and reduce ambiguity in beneficiary identification. • Statistical Visibility: Separate enumeration would generate reliable population data, strengthening policy planning, budgeting, and evidence-based interventions. • Recognition of Historical Stigma • Political Consolidation: A distinct category could enhance bargaining power, representation, and organized advocacy at both State and national levels. • Internal Sub-classification Possibility: Separate recognition may allow graded backwardness within DNT communities to be addressed more effectively.

WhatsApp-Meta Privacy Policy Case

A Supreme Court (SC) bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V.M. Pancholi recently criticized WhatsApp LLC and Meta Platforms over their data-sharing policy, stating that citizens’ privacy cannot be compromised and companies cannot exploit personal data under the guise of business operations.

Case Background

- **Trigger (2021 Privacy Policy Update):** WhatsApp introduced a “take-it-or-leave-it” privacy policy update permitting expanded data sharing with its parent company, Meta Platforms, particularly for advertising and business integration. Users were required to accept the terms to continue using the service.
- **Regulatory Intervention by CCI:** The Competition Commission of India (CCI) initiated a Suo motu investigation, holding that WhatsApp, given its dominant position in India’s messaging market, imposed unfair conditions on users.
 - It ruled that the policy amounted to abuse of dominant position under the Competition Act, 2002. In Nov. 2024 CCI imposed a ₹213.14 crore penalty on Meta and directed a five-year restriction on sharing WhatsApp user data with other Meta entities for advertising purposes.
- **Appeal before NCLAT:** Meta challenged the order before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) which upheld the finding of abuse of dominance and retained the monetary penalty. However, it set aside the five-year data-sharing ban, reasoning that cross-platform data integration is a standard business practice and that such a structural remedy was disproportionate. It also noted that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 would govern data privacy issues going forward.

- **Appeal before the SC:** Dissatisfied with the penalty and NCLAT’s verdict, Meta approached the SC. Apart from this 2021 policy dispute, a broader challenge to WhatsApp’s **2016 data-sharing policy** which allowed sharing user data with Facebook (post its 2014 acquisition)- is also pending before the SC. In 2017, the Court referred the matter to a Constitution Bench, raising issues of informed consent and the right to privacy.

Arguments by Meta and WhatsApp	What did the SC Say?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent-Based Data Sharing: Data sharing occurs only with user consent. Users have an “opt-out” option. The 2021 policy did not compel unlawful data extraction. • End-to-End Encryption: Message content is protected through end-to-end encryption. WhatsApp cannot access, read, or monetize the content of chats. Therefore, privacy of communications remains intact. • Limited Scope of Data Sharing: Data sharing is primarily for integration and service improvement. • Regulatory Framework Exists: The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 now provides a statutory framework for data governance. Privacy issues should be addressed under data protection law rather than competition law. • Compliance with Earlier Directions: Meta deposited the ₹213.14 crore penalty. Newspaper notices were issued informing users about policy changes. The NCLAT had already set aside the five-year embargo on data sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy as a Constitutional Right: Companies cannot “play with” citizens’ privacy and described the policy as potentially amounting to a “decent way of committing theft of private information”. • Illusion of Consent: It questioned whether a “take-it-or-leave-it” framework amounts to genuine consent as ordinary users may not understand complex legal language. Opt-out mechanisms were seen as impractical and opaque. • Network Effect and Monopoly Concern: It noted WhatsApp’s dominant position in India observing that opting out of WhatsApp is akin to “opting out of the country.” The Bench suggested that monopoly power weakens the voluntariness of consent. • Data as Economic Value (Beyond Privacy): It shifted the debate beyond privacy to the economic value of behavioural data, questioning who benefits from monetizing users’ digital footprints and raising concerns over “rent-sharing of data” and unfair commercial gain. • Interim Safeguards: The Court indicated that unless Meta files an undertaking not to share data, the appeal may be dismissed or strict interim directions issued.

Core Constitutional Position Emerging in the Case:

- **Privacy is non-negotiable**, even in commercial digital ecosystems.
- Consent must be **informed, granular, and meaningful**, not coercive.

Dominant digital platforms cannot rely on formalistic compliance.

- Data may not be treated purely as a commodity; its economic exploitation raises constitutional concerns.

Does the “Right to Be Forgotten” Apply to Online News?

The Supreme Court (SC) recently issued notice on a plea filed by IE Online Media Services Private Limited (*The Indian Express* digital) challenging a December 2025 Delhi High Court (HC) judgment, bringing into focus whether the “Right To Be Forgotten” (RTBF) can be used to seek deletion or de-indexing of past news reports after an accused has been discharged.

What is meant by RTBF?

RTBF refers to an individual’s claim to have his/her personal data removed, erased, or de-indexed from digital platforms when its continued availability causes harm or is no longer justified. It is rooted in the broader **Right to Privacy (as recognized in Puttaswamy, 2017)** flowing from **Article 21**, particularly in the digital age where information remains permanently accessible and searchable.

Legal Position of RTBF in India: India does not yet have a separate, codified right explicitly termed “RTBF”. The closest statutory equivalent is found in the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act)**, which provides a **Right to Erasure**.

- **Right to Erasure under DPDP Act, 2023:** It is a **user-initiated right** that imposes obligations on **data fiduciaries** (entities collecting and processing personal data) for deletion of a user's personal data when consent has been withdrawn or the purpose for which the data was collected has been fulfilled. However, the Act does not automatically mandate erasure in all cases; it balances competing legal obligations.

Case Background

- **Origin of the Dispute:** The dispute arises from a defamation suit filed by a banker who was named in three news reports published by IE Online Media Services Pvt. Ltd. in **2020, 2023 and 2024**, in connection with a money laundering investigation. After being discharged, the banker sought **removal and de-indexing** of the URLs, arguing that their continued online availability harmed his reputation despite exoneration.
- **Trial Court Order:** In **2025**, the Patiala House Court granted an interim injunction directing removal of the URLs, citing adverse reputational impact and the permanence of digital records.
- **Delhi High Court Ruling:** In **December 2025**, the Delhi HC upheld the order, holding that media freedom is not absolute and must be balanced against an individual's right to dignity under Article 21.
- **Appeal before the SC:** IE Online Media Services challenged the ruling before the SC, arguing that the reports were accurate and based on public records, and that invoking the "Right to be Forgotten" to remove such content could distort historical facts and create a chilling effect on press freedom.
- **Core Constitutional Issue Involved in the Case:** The RTBF debate in India involves constitutional balancing between competing fundamental rights- **Article 21** (Right to privacy, dignity, reputation) and **Article 19(1)(a)** (Freedom of speech and expression, including press freedom). The central question remains- **Can true and accurate public records & court proceedings be erased in the name of dignity, or does such erasure risk rewriting history and chilling free expression?**

European Framework-GDPR: The most developed articulation of RTBF exists under the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** of the European Union (EU), where it is formally termed the **Right to Erasure**. Under GDPR an individual can request deletion of personal data when:

- The data is no longer necessary for its original purpose.
- Consent is withdrawn and no other legal basis exists.
- The data was processed unlawfully.
- The individual objects to processing and no overriding legitimate grounds exist.

If the data has been made public, controllers must take **reasonable steps** to inform other processors to erase links, copies, or replications.

Is RTBF an Absolute Right?

Both in Europe and in evolving Indian jurisprudence, the right is **not absolute**. Data controllers may refuse deletion where processing is necessary for:

- Freedom of expression and information.
- Compliance with legal obligations.
- Public interest (e.g., public health, official duties).
- Scientific, historical, or statistical research.
- Establishing, exercising, or defending legal claims.

Thus, RTBF requires balancing privacy with transparency & public record preservation.

Judicial Evolution of RTBF in India:

- **November 2025- Patiala House Court:** Ordered Google to remove links to news reports and court records relating to a banker later acquitted, citing reputational harm and dignity concerns.
- **March 2025- Punjab & Haryana HC:** Directed removal of a petitioner's name from court proceedings related to an FIR, observing that criminal accusations should not continue to haunt individuals after exoneration.
- **February 2025- Rajasthan HC:** Held that juveniles enjoy an "absolute right" to be forgotten under the Juvenile Justice framework to protect rehabilitation and future prospects.
- **July 2024- SC:** Stayed a Madras HC order directing removal of a judgment from Indian Kanoon, observing that court judgments are public records and media platforms are entitled to publish them as they are.

Seva Teerth

The Prime Minister recently inaugurated *Seva Teerth* in Delhi- an integrated complex housing the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) along with Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2- signalling a major administrative consolidation and shift in the functioning of the Union executive.

About Seva Teerth

- **Meaning and Philosophical Foundation:** *Seva Teerth* combines two Sanskrit terms- **Seva** (service) and **Tirtha** (a sacred place or spiritual crossing that helps one overcome obstacles). Together, the term symbolically redefines governance as a sacred duty of public service rather than an exercise of authority.
 - It reflects a shift from "*satta*" (power) to "*seva*" (service)- emphasising responsibility, compassion, and citizen-centric administration. The concept aligns with the ethos of "*Nagrik Devo Bhava*" (citizen is akin to divinity), positioning governance as accountable, ethical, and service-oriented.
- **Institutional Integration:** Developed as part of the **Central Vista Project**, *Seva Teerth* consolidates key executive institutions- Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Cabinet Secretariat and National Security Council Secretariat that were earlier dispersed across multiple ageing buildings.
 - **Kartavya Bhavan 1 & 2** function as central secretariat buildings accommodating major ministries, including- Finance, Defence, Health & Family Welfare, Corporate Affairs, Education, Culture, Law & Justice, Information & Broadcasting, Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Chemicals & Fertilisers, and Tribal Affairs. This consolidation addresses earlier fragmentation, coordination delays, high maintenance costs, and inefficient inter-ministerial communication.
- **Architectural Philosophy and Design:**
 - **Design Influences:** It draws inspiration from Chalukyan temple architecture (11th-13th century Karnataka) and Buddhist stupas, reflected in stone screen-work entrances and geometric floral motifs.
 - **Material & Visual Identity:** It is constructed in white and red sandstone, with metal-clad domes inspired by stupa forms- conveying durability, dignity, and continuity with India's institutional heritage.
 - **Modern Features:** Includes open-plan collaborative offices, a high-tech "India House" for international summits, high-performance building systems, and 4-star green building standards.

Functional and Technological Features:

- **Digitally Integrated Offices-** seamless data-sharing and communication.
- **Structured Public Interface Zones-** organized citizen access.
- **Centralized Reception Systems-** streamlined visitor management.
- **Collaborative Workspaces-** improved inter-ministerial coordination.
- **Smart Access Control Systems-** biometric and secure entry mechanisms.
- **Advanced Surveillance Networks-** high-level security infrastructure.
- **Emergency Response Infrastructure-** disaster and crisis preparedness.
- **Encrypted Communication Systems-** secure executive functioning.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Compliance:** It incorporates renewable energy, water conservation, waste management, and energy-efficient construction systems. The complex adheres to modern green building standards while ensuring long-term operational resilience.

PM Rahat

The Prime Minister approved the launch of the **PM RAHAT (Road Accident Victim Hospitalization and Assured Treatment) Scheme**.

What is the PM RAHAT Scheme

It is a **national emergency healthcare initiative** to provide **immediate cashless medical treatment to road accident victims** in India.

Objective

- **To ensure no life is lost** due to lack of immediate medical care after a road accident.
- To remove **financial barriers** that delay treatment.
- To improve coordination between emergency responders, hospitals, and police.

- To provide a structured, timely response during the **critical "Golden Hour"**- the first 60 minutes after an accident, when prompt treatment can drastically reduce fatalities.
 - ✓ Studies indicate that nearly **50% of road accident deaths are preventable** if victims receive medical care within the Golden Hour.

Significance of PM RAHAT

- **Life-Saving Focus:** Encourages victims to be admitted immediately without fear of treatment costs.
- **Financial Protection:** Reduces out-of-pocket expenditures for families during emergencies.
- **Strengthening Emergency Care:** Integrates medical response with police and ambulance services.
- **Encourages Good Samaritans:** Clear guidelines and cashless treatment provision reduce hesitation among bystanders to assist victims.

Key Features & Benefits:

- **Cashless Treatment Cover:** Every eligible road accident victim is entitled to **cashless medical treatment up to ₹1.5 lakh per person irrespective of the type of road**- national highway, state highway, city roads or rural roads.
- **Coverage Duration:** Treatment costs are covered for **up to 7 days** from the date of the accident.
- **Stabilization Window:** For **non-life-threatening cases**, up to 24 hours of stabilization care and for **life-threatening cases**- up to 48 hours of critical stabilization, pending police authentication.
- **Integration with Emergency Services:** PM RAHAT is linked with the **Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) 112** helpline. Victims, bystanders or Rah-Veer (Good Samaritan) can dial **112** for nearest hospital details and ambulance request.
- **Technology-Driven Framework:** The scheme uses a **digital ecosystem** to ensure seamless operations:

Component	Purpose
eDAR (Electronic Detailed Accident Report)	Captures accident details by police
TMS 2.0 (Transaction Management System)	Handles treatment claim processing
Police Authentication	Confirms eligibility and case severity

- **Funding & Reimbursement Mechanism:** Treatment costs are reimbursed to hospitals through the **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund (MVAFF)**.
 - ✓ If the offending vehicle is **insured**, money is drawn from **insurance company contributions**.
 - ✓ For **uninsured and hit-and-run cases**, **Government of India budgetary funds** cover payments.
- **Timely Payment:** Claims approved by the **State Health Agency** must be paid to hospitals within **10 days**, ensuring **financial certainty** for healthcare providers.
- **Grievance Redressal & Accountability:** Each district will nominate a **Grievance Redressal Officer**. The Officer operates under the **District Road Safety Committee**, chaired by the District Collector / DM / Deputy Commissioner. This ensures accountability and timely resolution of issues faced by accident victims or their families.

Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026

The Parliament passed the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026 which seeks to amend the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 which consolidated and replaced three major labour laws Trade Unions Act, 1926, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

- ✓ The 2020 Code governs recognition of trade unions, notice periods for strikes and lock-outs, standing orders, investigation and settlement of industrial disputes.

Proposed Amendments:

- The Bill contains savings provisions under **Section 104 (2020 Code)** to maintain continuity and prevent legal confusion. It addresses potential misunderstandings about the delegation of power to repeal previous laws within the Code.
- The amendment seeks to avoid any future unwarranted complications by clearly stating that repeal has occurred through the operation of Section 104 itself.
- **Retrospective Operation:** The amendment is deemed to have come into force on **21 November 2025**. This ensures legal continuity and removes any scope for litigation over the status of the repealed laws between commencement and amendment.

Significance

- **Doctrinal Clarity:** Reinforces the principle that repeal flows from **Parliamentary authority**, not executive delegation. Avoids possible constitutional challenges on excessive delegation.

- **Transition Stability:** Ensures seamless migration from legacy labour laws to the Labour Codes regime.
- **Strengthening Labour Code Architecture:** The broader reform framework includes 4 Labour Codes, aimed at:
 - Consolidation and simplification of labour laws.
 - Uniform wage standards.
 - Formalization of employment relations.
 - Structured dispute resolution mechanisms.

No Confidence Motion Against Lok Sabha Speaker

Lok Sabha (LS) Speaker Om Birla has decided, on moral grounds, to refrain from presiding over House proceedings until the no-confidence motion against him- moved by 118 Members of Parliament (MPs) from Opposition parties- is resolved. The debate and voting on the resolution are scheduled for March 9, when Parliament reconvenes for the second phase of the Budget Session.

Procedural Framework (Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure):

- **Notice of Resolution (Rule 200):** Any member intending to move the resolution must submit **written notice** to the **Secretary-General of the LS** and furnish the **full text of the resolution**. The notice may be given by one or more members. At least fourteen days' prior notice is mandatory before the resolution can be moved.
- **Admissibility Requirements (Rule 200A):** For the resolution to be admissible, it must:
 - Be **specific with respect to charges**.
 - Be **clearly and precisely worded**.
 - Not contain arguments, inferences, ironical expressions, imputations or defamatory statements.

This ensures procedural discipline and prevents politically motivated or vague allegations.

- **Leave of the house (Rule 201):** After the 14-day period, a motion seeking **leave of the House** to move the resolution is entered into the **List of Business**. The date is fixed by the presiding officer (Deputy Speaker, or another person under Article 95(2)). The member in whose name the motion stands must formally move it when called. **No speech is permitted at this stage**.
- **Threshold Support Requirement:** The presiding officer asks members in favour of granting leave to rise. At least **50 members must rise in support**.
 - **If fewer than 50 members rise**, Leave is refused and the motion fails at the threshold stage.
 - **If 50 or more members rise**, Leave is granted and the presiding officer fixes a date for discussion (within **10 days** from the date leave is granted).

Why was No-Confidence Motion Introduced Against the Speaker?

Opposition parties alleged that he conducted LS proceedings in a **blatantly partisan manner**, favouring the ruling party and curbing Opposition voices. **Key Reasons Cited by the Opposition include:**

- ✓ **Denial of Opportunity to Speak:** Opposition MPs, including **Rahul Gandhi- Leader of Opposition (LoP)**, were allegedly prevented from raising issues of public importance- particularly references to former Army chief **M. M. Naravane's** unpublished memoir relating to the 2020 Galwan Valley clash.
- ✓ **Suspension of MPs:** Eight Congress MPs were suspended during the Budget Session amid disruptions.
- ✓ **February 4 Incident:** The Speaker reportedly advised **Narendra Modi** not to attend the House citing possible disruptions by Congress MPs.
- ✓ **Allegations Against Women MPs:** Congress women MPs accused the Speaker of making "false and defamatory" allegations against them.

What is a No-Confidence Motion Against the Speaker?

A **no-confidence motion against the Speaker of the LS** or a **resolution for removal of the Speaker** is a constitutional mechanism to remove the Speaker from office before the end of the LS's term.

Constitutional Basis: Under Article 94(c) of the Constitution, the Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the House of the People (LS) may be removed from office by a resolution of the House passed by a majority of all the then members of the House (effective majority), provided that at least fourteen days' prior notice of the intention to move such a resolution has been given.

- ✓ **Article 96** provides that the Speaker or Deputy Speaker shall not preside over the House while a resolution for their removal is under consideration. However, they may participate in the proceedings and have the right to speak. The Speaker is entitled to vote in the first instance on the resolution but does not have a casting vote in the event of a tie.

- **Discussion Stage (Rules 202 & 202A):** On the appointed day, the resolution is included in the List of Business. Discussion is **strictly confined to the charges mentioned in the resolution**. No extraneous political debate is permitted.
- **Time Limits on Speeches (Rule 203):** For ordinary speeches- maximum **15 minutes**, unless otherwise permitted. The **mover of the resolution** may be allowed longer time at the discretion of the Chair.
- **Voting:** After discussion, the resolution is put to vote. It must be passed by a **majority of all the then members of the House (effective majority)**. Voting may be by Voice vote, Division or Other prescribed methods.
- **Consequences:**
 - **If Passed:** The Speaker/Deputy Speaker is **immediately removed from office** but he/she continues as an **ordinary MP**.
 - **If Defeated:** The Speaker/Deputy Speaker continues in office and the process ends unless a fresh notice is given.

Past Instances of Removal Motions Against LS Speakers:

- **1954: Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar**, the first Speaker of the Lok Sabha, faced a removal motion- the first such instance in parliamentary history.
- **1966:** a motion was moved against **Sardar Hukam Singh**.
- **1987:** a similar motion was brought against **Balram Jakhar**.

In all three cases, the motions did not succeed, and the Speakers continued in office.

What Questions Can Lok Sabha Ask?

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has recently informed the **Lok Sabha Secretariat** that **questions related to PM CARES Fund**, the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (**PMNRF**), and the National Defence Fund (**NDF**) are inadmissible in Lok Sabha (LS) as they are made up of **voluntary public contributions** and not from allocations from the Consolidated Fund of India.

Who Decides What Questions can be Asked in Lok Sabha

- **Initial scrutiny:** Questions submitted by MPs are examined by the **LS Secretariat** for compliance with the *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha*.
- **Final authority:** The **Speaker of the LS** takes the final decision on admissibility.
- **Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in LS:** It governs the admissibility of questions asked by Members of Parliament (MPs) to Ministers during Question Hour. A question must seek information on a matter of **public importance** within the special cognizance of the concerned Minister. It must also satisfy specified conditions, including that it:
 - Does not relate to **official secrets**.
 - Is not **sub judice**.
 - No Irony or Defamation; No Repetition
 - Falls within the **primary concern of the Government of India**.
 - Does not pertain to bodies or persons **not primarily responsible to the Government of India** (as cited under Rule 41(2)(viii) & 41(2)(xvii)).
 - Not ordinarily exceed 150 words.

About the Funds

- ❖ **PM CARES Fund:** A public charitable trust created in 2020 to mobilize funds for national emergencies, notably the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ❖ **Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)-** Established in 1948 to assist refugees from Pakistan; currently provides relief to families of victims of natural disasters, major accidents, and riots.
- ❖ **National Defence Fund (NDF)-** Established in 1962. Utilized for the welfare of Armed Forces personnel (including Para Military Forces) and their dependents; administered by an Executive Committee chaired by the Prime Minister.

RTI Status of These Funds:

- ❖ **NDF** – Covered under the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- ❖ **PM CARES & PMNRF** – Their status under the RTI Act is currently under judicial consideration before the Delhi High Court.

Are these bodies part of the Government of India?

Whether these funds qualify as "government bodies" is a matter of executive interpretation and judicial review, not Parliament's determination. The executive's position can be legally challenged before courts.

What Happens after a Question is Admitted in the LS?

- **Forwarded to the concerned Ministry:** Once deemed admissible by the Speaker, the question is sent to the relevant ministry/department.
- **Time to respond:** The ministry is given **15 days** to prepare and submit its reply.
- **Objection by Ministry (if any):** If the ministry believes the question:
 - Violates admissibility rules,
 - Involves highly confidential or national security matters, or
 - May adversely affect India's foreign relations.It may formally request the **LS Secretariat** to disallow it, stating reasons.
- **Transparency:** The LS Secretariat publishes data on the number of questions received and answered, ensuring procedural transparency.

Can A Government Body (PMO) Pre-emptively Ask Questions Not To Be Admitted?

Such a step is considered **highly unusual**. The **power to decide admissibility rests solely with the Speaker of the LS**. Admissibility is assessed **question-by-question**, based on its specific content and compliance with Rule 41.

If a ministry finds a specific question problematic, it requests the Secretariat to disallow that specific question, rather than issuing a general directive against a topic.

Implications of a Government Body Pre-emptively Seeking to Block Questions:

- **Institutional Friction:** It risks encroaching upon the **Speaker's exclusive authority** over admissibility, potentially disturbing the separation between executive and legislative domains.
- **Weakening Parliamentary Oversight:** Questions are a core accountability tool under Articles 75(3) and 118 (collective responsibility and rule-making power of Parliament). Pre-emptive restriction may dilute legislative scrutiny.
- **Precedent Risk:** If normalized, it could set a precedent for the executive to shield **entire subjects** from parliamentary interrogation, undermining deliberative democracy.
- **Transparency Concerns:** Limiting questions on certain bodies may fuel perceptions of opacity, especially where public funds or public interest are involved.
- **Judicialization of Parliamentary Procedure:** Such disputes could increasingly be litigated, drawing courts into politically sensitive questions about the nature of specific funds or bodies.
- **Political Optics:** It may be viewed as executive overreach, intensifying opposition-government confrontation and affecting public trust.

Can An MP And Party Spokesperson Represent a State as Special Public Prosecutor?

In a key ruling, a Mumbai Sessions Court rejected a plea to remove Rajya Sabha MP and lawyer Ujjwal Nikam as Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) in a 2012 murder case, holding that his role as SPP does not constitute an "office of profit" under Article 102(1)(a) of the Constitution, thereby allowing him to continue.

What Did the Court Rule

The Mumbai Sessions Court rejected Vijay Palande's plea and allowed Ujjwal Nikam to continue as Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) ruling that-

- **No "Office of Profit" Violation (Article 102):** The court held that Article 102(1)(a) concerns disqualification for being an MP, not eligibility to function as an SPP. It observed that Palande had misconceived the scope of Article 102.
- **SPP Is Not a Permanent Government Office:** The court accepted that an SPP's appointment is contractual and case-specific, not a permanent civil post. Hence, it does not amount to holding an "office of profit."
- **No Bar Under CrPC / BNSS:** There is no statutory prohibition under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) or the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, preventing an MP from serving as SPP.

Case Background

- **The 2012 Murder Case:** Vijay Palande is accused of murdering Delhi-based businessman Arunkumar Tikku in 2012. Ujjwal Nikam has been serving as SPP in the trial since then.
- **Fresh Plea After Rajya Sabha Nomination (2025):** After Nikam was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 2025, Palande sought his removal as SPP, questioning whether a sitting MP can continue in that role.
- **Grounds of Challenge:**
 - ✓ **Article 102(1)(a)- Office of Profit:** which disqualifies a person from being an MP if they hold an "office of profit" under the Union or State government was invoked by Palande as he argued that since Nikam was appointed by the State government and paid from the public exchequer, his role as SPP amounted to an "office of profit."
 - ✓ **Section 24, CrPC- Appointment of Public Prosecutors:** Palande contended that Nikam's statutory appointment by the State reinforced his claim that the post falls within the scope of Article 102.
 - ✓ **Alleged Political Influence:** The plea also alleged that Nikam's political affiliation with the BJP and his role as party spokesperson could enable him to exercise undue influence in the trial.

- **Limited Judicial Interference in Executive Appointments:** The court reiterated that appointment of an SPP is a policy decision of the State government, and courts ordinarily do not interfere in such matters.

Relevant Judicial Precedents

- **Jaya Bachchan v. Union of India, 2006:** Concerned disqualification of a Rajya Sabha MP for holding the post of Chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh Film Development Council. The Supreme Court (SC) held that an “office of profit” is one **capable of yielding pecuniary gain**, regardless of whether the person actually draws remuneration. If the office carries emoluments, it may attract disqualification.
- **Srimati Kanta Kathuria v. Manak Chand Surana, 1969:** Clarified the meaning of “office.” An office implies a **substantive, permanent position** that continues irrespective of the holder.
- **State of Maharashtra v. Prakash Prahlad Patil, 2009:** Held that courts should not ordinarily interfere with executive policy decisions.

Vibrant Villages Programme-II

The Union Home Minister launched the ₹6,839 crore Vibrant Villages Programme-II in Assam.

Key Features of VVP-II

- **Saturation-Based Approach:** All selected villages in identified border blocks will receive complete coverage in key infrastructure domains.
- **Four Thematic Areas of Infrastructure Saturation:**
 - **All-Weather Road Connectivity:** Connecting unconnected villages and upgradation of rural roads
 - **Telecom Connectivity:** Mobile towers and broadband penetration
 - **Television Connectivity:** Access to national broadcasting networks
 - **Electrification:** Grid-based supply and renewable energy solutions
- **Convergence Model:** The programme leverages existing central schemes through Inter-ministerial coordination, resource pooling and convergence of welfare and infrastructure schemes.
- **Livelihood Promotion:** Through tourism and cultural heritage promotion, skill development & entrepreneurship, cooperative societies, agriculture, horticulture and medicinal plant cultivation.
- **Strategic Village Identification:** Villages are selected based on proximity to international borders, security sensitivity and strategic relevance.

What is VVP-II?

The **VVP-II** is a **Central Sector Scheme** (100% funded and implemented by the Central Government) approved in April 2025 with an outlay of **₹6,839 crore (till FY 2028-29)** for the development of villages along **International Land Borders (ILBs)**, excluding those under VVP-I.

- ✓ **VVP-I** approved in 2023 as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** (jointly funded by the Centre and States and implemented by State Governments to address State List subjects), aimed at developing **662 villages in 46 blocks** along the northern border. It covered villages in Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Ladakh, focusing on infrastructure, livelihood generation, and reducing outmigration in border areas.

Coverage: 1,954 villages across 334 blocks in 17 States/UTs, including Assam, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Implemented By: Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Objectives: To-

- ✦ Improve living standards in border villages.
- ✦ Generate sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- ✦ Prevent outmigration, community participation in border management.
- ✦ Strengthen border security and curb trans-border crime.
- ✦ Integrate border populations with the national mainstream.

Public Trust Doctrine

The **Andhra Pradesh High Court (HC)** in *Sankula Nagarjuna vs. State of Andhra Pradesh (2026)* recently dismissed a writ petition challenging the closure of an alleged 30-foot road, holding that **banks and bunds of water bodies are integral parts of the water body**, and any encroachment violates the **Public Trust Doctrine**.

What is the Public Trust Doctrine (PTD)

It is a principle of environmental law which holds that certain natural resources such as water bodies, forests, air, and ecologically sensitive lands are held by the State **in trust for the public** and cannot be transferred, alienated, or used in a manner that harms public interest or future generations.

Objectives of the PTD:	Core Features of PTD:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect natural resources from degradation and encroachment. • Prevent alienation of natural resources for private or non-public purposes. • Impose a fiduciary duty on the State to act as trustee, not owner. • Promote sustainable development by balancing ecology and growth. • Enable judicial review of State actions affecting public resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State is a trustee, not an absolute owner. • The doctrine protects intergenerational equity. • It restricts arbitrary executive discretion over natural resources. <p>Constitutional Backing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 21 (Right to life- includes right to a healthy environment); • Article 48A (State's duty to protect environment); • Article 51A(g) (Fundamental duty of citizens to protect the environment).

• **Indian Environmental Jurisprudence:** The Supreme Court (SC) constitutionalized the doctrine in the 1990s, integrating it with sustainable development, precautionary principle and intergenerational equity. The scope expanded from navigable waters to include lakes, ponds, rivers, forests and biodiversity, air and ecological systems.

Related Landmark Judgments



- ◆ **Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India, 1996:** Linked environmental protection with Article 21 and expanded sustainable development principles.
- ◆ **M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath, 1996:** Recognized PTD in India. Held that the State is trustee of natural resources and cannot permit their private exploitation.
- ◆ **Hinch Lal Tiwari v. Kamala Devi, 2001:** Directed removal of encroachments from ponds and restoration of water bodies.
- ◆ **Intellectuals Forum, Tirupathi v. State of A.P., 2006:** Held that governmental actions affecting public resources require rigorous scrutiny consistent with sustainable development.

Significance	Challenges in Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Environmental Safeguard • Promotes Intergenerational Justice • Limits State Power: Prevents arbitrary executive disposal of natural resources. • Supports Sustainable Development: Ensures ecological considerations are central in development decisions. • Strengthens Environmental Litigation: Provides a strong doctrinal basis for courts to strike down environmentally harmful actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre-State Jurisdictional Conflicts: Natural resources fall under overlapping constitutional entries, creating federal tensions. • Development vs. Conservation: Infrastructure and industrial expansion often conflict with ecological preservation. • Evidentiary and Procedural Rigor: Environmental writ petitions require strict pleadings and documentary proof. • Expanding Scope: Uncertainty exists regarding climate stability, air quality and transboundary environmental harms.

Sound-Mark

Kingfisher's iconic jingle "Oo la la la le o" secured a sound-mark registration recently.

What is a Sound Mark?

- A **sound mark** is a **non-conventional trademark** where a specific sound functions as a **source identifier** for goods or services. Instead of a logo or word, the consumer identifies the brand through an audio cue. Examples of well-known sound marks: Yahoo! "Yodel" (India's first registered sound mark, 2008), Netflix "Ta-dum" and Nokia start-up tune.
- The key principle involved: **If consumers associate the sound exclusively with one commercial source, it can qualify for trademark protection.**

Legal Framework in India

Rule 26(5) of the Trade Marks Rules, 2017 provides for the registration of a soundmark with following conditions-

- Applicant must submit the sound in **MP3 format**.
- Applicant must ensure it does not exceed **30 seconds**.
- Applicant must provide a recording that allows **clear and easy replay**.
- Applicant must attach a **graphical representation of the musical notation**.

This enables registration of a non-visual mark in a visual trademark registry. Before 2017, applicants mainly relied on written descriptions or sheet music. The applicant must explicitly state that the mark is a “**sound mark**”; otherwise, it may be treated as a word or device mark.

Registration Process of a Sound Mark (India):

- **Examination (Including Test of Distinctiveness):** The Registrar examines **distinctiveness** of the sound and similarity with earlier marks. The sound must not be common, generic, or purely functional and create a clear association with a single commercial source.
 - Likely objections arise for one/two-note tunes, common chimes or nursery rhymes, regionally associated music and functional sounds (e.g., engine noise, can opening). If inherent distinctiveness is weak, the applicant may prove **acquired distinctiveness** through long use, advertising expenditure, market surveys and media recognition.
- **Publication:** If accepted, the mark is published in the Trademark Journal. Opposition if any by third parties, matter proceeds to hearing.
- **Registration:** Certificate is issued if unopposed or successful which is valid for **10 years**, renewable indefinitely.

Significance of a Sound Mark

- **Protection of Non-Visual Branding:** Extends trademark law beyond words and logos to **auditory identity**, securing investment in sonic branding.
- **Commercial Asset Creation:** A registered sound becomes an **intangible intellectual property asset** that can be licensed, franchised, or monetized.
- **Relevance in Digital Economy:** With voice assistants, podcasts, OTT platforms, and mobile apps, consumer interaction is increasingly audio-driven making sound marks strategically valuable.

Substantive Motion

Recently, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey moved a substantive motion against Congress leader and Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi, seeking cancellation of his Lok Sabha (LS) membership and a lifetime ban from contesting elections.

In parliamentary practice, a **motion** is a formal proposal made by a member of the House requesting the House to take a specific action, express an opinion, adopt a resolution or make a decision on a matter. It is the procedural instrument through which the House exercises its deliberative and decision-making authority. As per Lok Sabha Rules, motions are classified into three broad categories- 1) **Substantive Motion**, 2) **Substitute Motion**, 3) **Subsidiary Motions**.

What is a Substantive Motion?

A substantive motion is a self-contained independent proposal submitted for the approval of the House and drafted in such a way as to be capable of expressing a decision of the House.

- ✓ The Speaker decides if a motion is “substantive” or if the matter can be raised through other means.

Core Elements of a Substantive Motion: A substantive motion must contain the following elements:

- ➔ **Independence:** It must not derive its validity from another motion.
- ➔ **Self-Contained Drafting:** The wording must be complete and clear enough to stand on its own.
- ➔ **Decision-Oriented Structure:** It must be framed in a way that allows the House to adopt, reject, or modify it through voting.
- ➔ **Formal Notice and Admissibility:** It must comply with procedural rules and be admitted by the Speaker.

Examples of Substantive Motions:

- ➔ **All Resolutions:** The rules explicitly state that **all resolutions are substantive motions**
- ➔ **Motion of Thanks:** The **Motion of Thanks** on the President’s Address is a classic example. It seeks formal approval and expresses the House’s response.
- ➔ **Election / Appointment Motions:** For example, motion for appointment of Deputy Chairman in the Rajya Sabha.
- ➔ **Motions Concerning Conduct of High Dignitaries:** If discussion relates to the conduct of a Minister, the Speaker, Constitutional functionaries or any person holding high office. Such discussion must be initiated through a **proper substantive motion**, not casually raised during debate.
- ➔ **Motion Against a Member:** If a member gives notice for- cancellation of another member’s membership, censure or removal from office. Such action requires a substantive motion, because:
 - ✓ It seeks a definite decision of the House.
 - ✓ It is independent in nature.
 - ✓ It has serious legal and political consequences.

Substantive Motion vs Other Motions

- **Substitute Motion** are moved in place of an original motion regarding a policy, situation, statement, or other matter. Although they may independently express an opinion, they are not truly substantive because they depend on the original motion for their relevance and consideration.
- **Subsidiary Motions** depend on or relate to another motion or ongoing proceedings. They cannot independently express the decision of the House and have meaning only in reference to the original motion. They are of three types:
 - **Ancillary Motions:** Regular procedural steps in House business (e.g., "That the Bill be taken into consideration," "That the Bill be passed.").
 - **Superseding Motions:** Moved during a debate to replace or delay the main question (e.g., recommitting a Bill to a Select/Joint Committee, recirculating it, or adjourning consideration).
 - **Amendments:** Motions that modify a Bill, resolution, motion before the final decision.

Core Distinction Feature	Substantive Motion	Substitute Motion	Subsidiary Motion
Independence	Yes	No (depends on original motion)	No
Can express final decision?	Yes	Conditionally	No
Procedural status	Primary	Derivative	Auxiliary

Procedural Significance of Substantive Motion

If the motion is accepted by the House it-

- **Triggers Formal Debate:** Unlike "Short Duration Discussions" where there is no formal motion before the House, a substantive motion ensures a structured debate ending in a decision.
- **Requires Voting:** A substantive motion is specifically designed to be voted upon.
- **Records the Will of the House:** Once passed, it becomes a formal "Resolution" or "Order." It is the most powerful way the House communicates its collective stance.
- **Enables Accountability:** By requiring a formal motion for things like the conduct of high dignitaries, the rules prevent members from making casual or "off-the-cuff" allegations during general debates.

Extent of Permissible Disclosure in Elections of Statutory Bodies

Ahead of the Bar Council of Delhi elections, the Council uploaded a voter list containing advocates' mobile numbers, addresses, and photographs, leading to widespread unsolicited campaign outreach. A petition before the Delhi High Court (HC) challenges the disclosure, raising a broader question: how much personal information can a statutory professional body place in the public domain in the name of elections?

What the Law Says?

- Bar Councils, constituted under the **Advocates Act, 1961**, are statutory bodies performing public functions and are therefore bound by



Objections Raised in the Petition:

- **Alleged Privacy Violation:** The petition terms the voter list publication as an **unauthorized disclosure and misuse of sensitive personal data** of advocates. It states that advocates have faced **unsolicited calls, messages, and canvassing** due to the disclosure.
- **Constitutional Grounds (Article 21):** It invokes the Supreme Court's (SC) judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India, 2017 and argues that the disclosure violates the **right to privacy under Article 21**. It claims the action fails the **tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality**. While elections are a legitimate aim, publishing such extensive data is **neither essential nor proportionate** for free and fair elections.

In Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India, 2017 case the SC held that the right to privacy under Article 21 includes **informational privacy**. It affirmed that individuals have control over how and when their personal data is shared, and that unauthorized dissemination even by non-State actors may violate this right. The Court also warned that seemingly routine data points, when aggregated digitally, can create detailed personal profiles, heightening privacy risks.

- **Risk of Harm:** Public disclosure may enable **stalking, harassment, intimidation, identity theft, cyber fraud, and data mining**.
- **Violation of Bar Council Rules:** Cites the **Bar Council of India (BCI) Rules**, which require the electoral roll to include only serial number, state roll number, name of advocate and address. It argues that publishing **mobile numbers and photographs** goes beyond what is permitted while referring to Section 13 of the **Bar Council of Delhi Rules**, which mandates strict adherence to BCI Rules.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** It contends that data collected for enrolment/regulatory purposes **cannot be repurposed or publicly disclosed without consent** and asserts that the Council was legally bound to process and disclose data **only for the specific purpose for which it was collected**.

constitutional limitations, including fundamental rights. Their obligations extend equally to actions in the digital sphere.

- Under the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, **consent is the central principle** governing personal data processing. Processing is generally lawful only when based on **free, informed, specific, and unambiguous consent**, unless covered by a statutory exception.

Implications	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening Informational Privacy Jurisprudence: The dispute could clarify how purpose limitation and data minimization apply to statutory bodies conducting elections. Courts may more clearly define what constitutes “necessary” disclosure in electoral contexts. • Expanded Accountability of Statutory Bodies: In <i>Dhrona Diwan v. Election Commission of India</i> (2025), the Delhi HC held that the Election Commission’s duty under Article 324 extends to preventing misuse of digital campaign material, affirming that constitutional oversight applies equally in the digital sphere. • Irreversibility of Digital Disclosure & Right to be Forgotten: Once uploaded, personal data can be endlessly copied, remaining accessible even after elections conclude. This engages the evolving Right to be Forgotten, which supports removal or restricted access to data when its continued public availability lacks legitimate purpose. • Precedent for Professional Regulators: The ruling in this case could influence how other statutory bodies (medical, chartered accountancy, company secretaries, etc.) and member databases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict Application of Purpose Limitation: Limit disclosures to what is demonstrably essential for conducting free and fair elections (e.g., name, enrolment number), avoiding blanket public uploads of contact details. • Data Minimization and Tiered Access: Publish only core electoral data publicly; provide additional details, if necessary, through controlled, authenticated access mechanisms. • Consent and Opt-Out Mechanisms • Technical Safeguards: Use encryption, CAPTCHA barriers, restricted downloads, and anti-scraping protections to prevent bulk harvesting of data. • Comprehensive Election Data Policy: Frame transparent, written guidelines aligning electoral practices with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, constitutional privacy standards, and proportionality principles.

Parliamentary Friendship Groups

Lok Sabha Speaker recently constituted Parliamentary Friendship Groups with more than 60 countries to bolster global democratic ties.

What are Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFGs)?

- PFGs are country-specific groups of MPs formed to promote regular engagement between the legislatures of two nations. They serve as instruments of **parliamentary diplomacy**, complementing executive-led foreign policy.
- In India, the initiative has been led by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, with PFGs constituted with over 60 countries in the first phase including Sri Lanka, Germany, United States, Russia, Japan, France, United Kingdom, Israel, Australia and Bhutan. These groups:
 - Include MPs from across political parties.
 - Engage directly with counterpart legislators.
 - Facilitate structured dialogue beyond formal diplomatic channels.

Objectives of PFGs

- **Institutional Dialogue:** Regular legislature-to-legislature engagement and exchange of best practices.
- **Support Diplomacy:** Complement executive foreign policy and build political consensus.
- **Issue Cooperation:** Collaborate on trade, technology, climate, and democratic challenges.

Working Mechanism: PFGs typically operate through:

- Delegation visits and reciprocal parliamentary exchanges.
- Thematic dialogues (e.g., climate legislation, digital regulation).
- Study tours and committee-level interactions.
- Participation in multilateral parliamentary forums.

They are informal but structured platforms not treaty-making bodies and function primarily as facilitators of understanding and goodwill.

'Kerala' is Now 'Keralam'

The Union Cabinet recently approved a proposal to alter the name of the State of Kerala to "Keralam," setting in motion the constitutional process required for the change.

✓ The Kerala Legislative Assembly in 2024 unanimously passed a resolution requesting the Union Government to amend the First Schedule of the Constitution under Article 3 to reflect the name "**Keralam.**"

Why did Kerala Seek Name Change?

- **Linguistic Authenticity:** The State is called "**Keralam**" in **Malayalam**, the official and majority language. However, in the **First Schedule of the Constitution**, it is recorded as "Kerala." The Kerala Legislative Assembly argued that since States were reorganised on **linguistic basis in 1956**, the constitutional name should reflect the native linguistic form.
- **Cultural Identity and Dignity:** The Assembly stated that using "Keralam" restores historical continuity, indigenous pronunciation and cultural self-respect. It reflects the long-standing demand dating back to the **Aikya (Unified) Kerala movement (1920s)**, which sought a State for Malayalam-speaking people.
- **Historical Usage:** The name "Kerala" is mentioned in Ashoka's Rock Edict II (257 BCE) as "Keralaputra," linked to the Chera dynasty. Some scholars trace "Keralam" to "Cheram," where *cher* means "to join" and *alam* means land, referring to the Chera region.
- **Consistency with National Trend:** India has witnessed similar changes restoring indigenous names (e.g., Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru). The move is seen as part of a broader effort to align official names with local linguistic forms.

Procedure for Changing the Name of a State:

- **Initiation by the State:** The proposal must originate from the **State Government/Legislative Assembly** through a formal resolution.
- **Examination by the Union Government:** The proposal is examined by the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**. MHA seeks **No Objection Certificates (NOCs)** from key agencies such as Ministry of Railways, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Survey of India, Registrar General of India and (Where relevant) Ministry of External Affairs. This ensures there are no administrative, security, cartographic, postal, or diplomatic complications.
- **Constitutional Requirement under Article 3:** A Bill to alter the name of a State can be introduced in Parliament **only on the recommendation of the President**. The President must first refer the Bill to the concerned State Legislature for its views. After the specified period expires, Parliament may pass the Bill by a **simple majority**.
- **Parliamentary Approval & Notification:** Once passed by Parliament and assented to by the President, the First Schedule of the Constitution is amended. The new name comes into effect upon notification.

Significance of the Name Change to "Keralam"

- **Linguistic Assertion:** Reinforces the principle of **linguistic reorganization (1956 on Fazl Ali Commission recommendation)** and aligns the constitutional name with Malayalam usage ("Keralam").
- **Cultural Identity & Symbolism:** Strengthens sub-national identity rooted in language and history, reflects indigenous pronunciation rather than anglicized usage.
- **Administrative & Legal Clarity:** Ensures uniformity between constitutional records and vernacular identity. Avoids dual usage (Kerala vs. Keralam) in official contexts.

Need for Diversity in Judiciary

P. Wilson, senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP, recently introduced a private member Bill to amend the Constitution to bring diversity in judiciary.

What does the Constitution provide?

- **Article 124:** Judges of the Supreme Court (SC) are appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI.
- **Article 217:** Judges of a High Court (HC) are appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI, the Chief Justice of the concerned HC, and the Governor of the State.
- **Article 130:** The seat of the SC shall be in Delhi, or at such other place(s) as the CJI may decide with the approval of the Central Government.

What is this Bill about?

The Bill seeks to address the “**diversity deficit**” and **access-to-justice concerns** in India’s higher judiciary by proposing following changes-

- **Social Diversity in Judicial Appointments:** It mandates **proportionate representation (as per population)** for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), religious minorities and women for appointments in the **SC and HCs**. It also sets a **90-day timeline** for the Centre to notify Collegium recommendations.
- **Regional Benches of the SC:** It proposes to establish permanent regional benches at New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. These benches will have full jurisdiction except constitutional matters (to remain with the Constitution Bench in Delhi).

Need for the Bill:

- **Diversity Deficit in Higher Judiciary:** Between January 2021 and January 2026, out of 593 HC appointments, only 26 were SC, 14 ST, 80 OBC, 37 minorities, and 96 women reflecting continued underrepresentation and concerns over inclusivity in the higher judiciary.
 - **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice** has repeatedly noted the "diversity deficit" and recommended that the Collegium system must ensure adequate representation of marginalized sections.
- **Access to Justice Challenges:** The SC currently functions only from Delhi resulting in high litigation costs for litigants from distant states. There are over 90,000 pending cases (as of January 2026).
 - **229th Law Commission Report (2009)** explicitly recommended setting up non-constitutional regional benches of the SC (Cassation Benches) in four zones- Delhi (Northern), Chennai/Hyderabad (Southern), Kolkata (Eastern), and Mumbai (Western) to clear the backlog and improve access.
- **Delay in Appointments:** Frequent delays in government notification of Collegium recommendations.
- **Demand for Data-Driven Policy:** Lack of updated caste census data affects proportional reservation policies.

Challenges Hindering Diversity in Judicial Appointments

- **Opaque Collegium Process:** Lack of transparent criteria and publicly available data limits accountability.
- **Absence of Constitutional Mandate:** No formal reservation policy in higher judiciary appointments.
- **Elite-Dominated Talent Pool:** Overrepresentation of senior advocates from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Informal Networks & Nepotism** within the legal fraternity.
- **Structural Barriers:** Marginalized groups face limited access to quality legal education, mentorship, and elevation opportunities.

Way Forward

- **Broader Appointments Mechanism:** Revive a reformed version of the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) with wider representation- including members from the legislature, Bar, and academia drawing from comparative models like the UK and South Africa.
- **Institutionalized Representation:** Provide structured and measurable guidelines to ensure social diversity in appointments.

AI-Powered Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE)

- At the **India AI Impact Summit** held at Bharat Mandapam, senior policymakers and global experts deliberated on the theme ‘Global Mission on AI for Energy Scaling through citizen-centric India Energy Stack’.
- Reflecting the global interest in India’s AI-energy convergence model, the Indian government highlighted how AI can become a game changer for India’s rapidly expanding Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) sector.

Understanding Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE):

- DRE refers to small-scale, decentralised renewable power systems (few kW to MW scale) located near the **point of consumption** — such as rooftop solar systems, small wind turbines, biomass-based units, and solar pumps.
- Unlike conventional centralised grids, DRE promotes energy **decentralisation**, local generation, and consumer participation.

India’s Renewable Energy Landscape:

- **Key data points:**
 - 52% (about 272 GW) of India’s total installed power capacity is now from non-fossil fuel sources.
 - Of this 272 GW, Solar capacity is ~140 GW.
 - DRE: 38 GW. Nearly 18 GW was added in the DRE segment in the last 15 months.
- **Public expenditure:** Approximately \$9 billion on rooftop solarisation, and \$4 billion on PM-KUSUM.
- **Major schemes driving DRE expansion:** Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri KUSUM Yojana.
- **Enabling factors:** This rapid scale-up was enabled through technology integration benefiting consumers, vendors, banks, field workers, and DISCOMs.

Why AI is Crucial for the Next Phase of Energy Transition?

- **Structural challenges in the grid:**
 - Transformers designed for unidirectional power flow. Emergence of ‘prosumers’ (consumers who also generate electricity). Increased stress on distribution networks.
 - Need for demand response management and predictive maintenance.
- **AI applications in DRE:**
 - AI can enable -
 - Weather forecasting and predictive analytics for solar generation.
 - Asset performance monitoring across geographies.
 - Peer benchmarking for rooftop systems.
 - B2B electricity trading enablement.
 - Predictive load management.
 - Grid stability management.
 - **Government’s emphasis:** AI will move the system from reactive governance to predictive governance — enabling India to “act, not react”.

AI as Development Infrastructure:

- AI should be viewed as core development infrastructure, similar to power grids, DISCOMs, and smart meters.
- This aligns with India’s digital public infrastructure (**DPI**) approach — suggesting the creation of an India Energy Stack, analogous to India Stack in fintech.
- **Strategic vision:**
 - Scale AI deployment — not treat it as pilot projects.
 - Build interoperable digital architecture for energy markets.

Governance and Regulation	Key Challenges and Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Energy transition increases system complexity. ○ AI innovation does not automatically equal progress. ○ Poor digital regulation (e.g., social media concentration) led to Big Tech dominance. ● Key governance principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open standards (like TCP/IP model). ○ Open-source AI systems. ○ Prevent monopolisation by global AI giants. ○ Promote local solutions tailored to farms, grids, and decentralised energy systems. ● This raises critical questions about data sovereignty, digital regulation, energy security, and technological self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Legacy grid infrastructure constraints: Build an India Energy Stack - interoperable digital layers for generation, distribution, trading. ● DISCOM financial stress: Promote open-source AI ecosystem - encourage startups, enable local innovation, avoid concentration risks. ● Data governance, cybersecurity risks and risk of AI monopolisation: Strengthen regulatory frameworks, anti-monopoly safeguards, data privacy protections. ● AI-energy integration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invest in AI-driven grid modernisation - smart transformers, real-time load balancing, AI-based forecasting. ○ Integrate AI with climate goals - support India's Net Zero 2070 target, align with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Grain ATMs

- The Bihar government has approved the installation of grain ATMs in Patna as a pilot project.
- A grain ATM or **Annapurti** (meaning “provider of grain”), like a banking ATM, is an automated machine that dispenses food grains (wheat and/or rice).
- It can **release 50 kg of grain in five minutes** and **reduce waiting times by 70%** for Public Distribution System (PDS) beneficiaries.
- It can also address other inefficiencies in the long process of dispensing grains requiring authentication, the weighing of grains, and other steps.
- The **World Food Programme (WFP)** has developed the technology behind the machine and has worked in collaboration with the **Food Corporation of India** and various state governments.
- The machines can work 24x7 like ATMs, and can be powered through solar energy.
- They also require internet connectivity to access the PDS database and the individual profile of a Below Poverty Line (BPL) cardholder.
- PDS beneficiary has to swipe their beneficiary or grain ATM card on a PoS machine, linked to the ration card (provided under the National Food Security Programme) or to their Aadhar card.
- Once the grain is dispensed, the beneficiary's PDS data is updated, and a slip is also issued for confirmation and as a physical record.

Implementation

- Till now, **six states** have installed the machines on a pilot basis. So far, only urban areas have grain ATMs, but the Central government plans to expand the project to the Panchayat levels in the coming years.
- As this is a Central government project, the Centre seeks a nod from the respective state government, which must provide space for the machine.
- Once installed, the Central and the state governments share the cost incurred for its maintenance and security.

Startup Recognition Framework Revised

- The government has revised the startup recognition framework under the Startup India Action Plan, with an aim to strengthen India's innovation ecosystem and support the next phase of startup growth.

- The revision seeks to provide a more **predictable, inclusive and future-ready policy environment** for founders, while **encouraging the flow of long-term capital** into high-technology and research-driven sectors.

Impact

- The revision will lead to an increase in the number of startups eligible for incentives.
- It will help to boost innovation in the deep-tech sector and strengthen India's position in the global tech space.
- It will improve investor confidence due to longer policy support guidelines.

VOPPA Order, 2025

- The Union Government has strengthened regulatory oversight across the edible oil value chain through the **Vegetable Oil Products, Production and Availability (Regulation) Amendment Order, 2025 (VOPPA Order, 2025)**, under **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**.
- The amended Order mandates **compulsory registration** of all manufacturers, processors, blenders and re-packers of edible oils on the **National Single Window System (NSWS)** and the **VOPPA portal**.
- Further, all registered entities are required to **file monthly returns covering production, stocks, imports, dispatches, sales and consumption** of various edible oil products, including crude and refined vegetable oils and other notified products.
- This framework aims to **promote transparency, enable data-driven policy decisions** and **strengthen national food security**.
- As part of a nationwide compliance drive, the **Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD)** has **conducted inspection drives** to encourage compliance, as part of a broader effort to ensure effective monitoring of the edible oil sector.
- Under **Section 6A of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955**, action including inspection and confiscation may be initiated in cases of contravention.
- Alongside enforcement, the Department is undertaking **capacity-building initiatives** by conducting awareness building workshops, to facilitate compliance.

Yantra India Limited Grated Miniratna Status

- Yantra India Limited (YIL) has recently been granted the Miniratna Category-I status.
- YIL is one of the **seven new Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)** created after the former Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) was corporatised in 2021.
- It functions under the administrative control of the **Department of Defence Production**.
- The **major products** of YIL include carbon fibre composites, assembly products for medium and large calibre ammunition, assembly products for armoured vehicles, assembly products for artillery guns and Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) etc.

Revised norms

Enhanced turnover threshold

- ✔ The **turnover limit** for recognition as a startup has been **increased from Rs 100 crore to Rs 200 crore**.
- ✔ This has been done considering the evolving startup ecosystem and the need to support enterprises at different stages of their business lifecycle.
- ✔ This will allow more mature startups to avail government benefits.

Dedicated category for Deep Tech Startups

- ✔ A new sub-category of Deep Tech Startup has been introduced for entities working on advanced and breakthrough technologies.
- ✔ The core attributes of Deep Tech Startups have been finalised to ensure clarity, consistency and objective identification.
- ✔ Recognising the long gestation periods, high research and development intensity and capital-intensive nature of deep technology enterprises, the **eligibility criteria for this category have been expanded**.
- ✔ The **age limit for recognition** has been extended **from 10 years to 20 years**, while the **turnover ceiling** has been **raised to Rs 300 crore**.

Inclusion of cooperative societies

- ✔ The framework now allows **cooperative societies to qualify for startup recognition**.
- ✔ Accordingly, Multi-State Cooperative Societies registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002, as well as Cooperative Societies registered under State and Union Territory Cooperative Acts, are now eligible for startup recognition.
- ✔ This has been done to promote innovation-driven growth at the grassroots level in agriculture, allied sectors, rural industries and community-based enterprises,

- In 2025, the government had already granted Miniratna-I Status to three of the seven DPSUs - **Munitions India Limited, Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited and India Optel Limited.**
- Miniratna status provides CPSEs with operational and financial autonomy, flexibility in decision-making processes, and an enhanced competitive edge in their respective sectors.

Bee Corridors

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHA) has announced a first-of-its-kind initiative to create pollinator or Bee Corridors along national highways as part of its sustainable infrastructure programme.
- The project marks a **shift from ornamental roadside plantations to ecological vegetation**, with continuous stretches of bee-friendly plants and flowering trees.
- The initiative is intended to **address growing ecological stress on honeybees** and other pollinators, which affects pollination services, agricultural productivity and ecological balance.
- Under the plan, NHA will align its plantation activities to develop dedicated pollinator corridors comprising a **mix of trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses.**
- The corridors will include nectar- and pollen-rich species, allow flowering weeds to bloom, and retain natural elements such as dead wood and hollow trunks that support pollinators.
- Species selected for plantation include **neem, karanj, mahua, palash, bottle brush, jamun and siris.**

Eligibility criteria for Miniratna status

Miniratna Category-I status:

- ✓ The CPSEs which have made **profit in the last three years continuously**;
- ✓ Have **pre-tax profit of Rs 30 crores** or more in at least one of the three years; and
- ✓ Have a **positive net worth** are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-I status.

Miniratna Category-II status:

- ✓ The CPSEs which have **made profit for the last three years continuously**; and
- ✓ have a **positive net worth** are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-II status.
- ✓ Additionally, both categories are subject to following norms:
 - The company should not have defaulted in the repayment of loans/interest payment on any loans due to the government.
 - The company shall not depend upon budgetary support or government guarantees.

Implementation

- Based on **agro-climatic suitability**, the corridors will be developed along highway stretches and vacant NHA land parcels.
- The plantation design will ensure staggered flowering across seasons to maintain a near-continuous blooming cycle.
- NHA plans to develop at least three pollinator corridors during 2026-27 and **plant around 40 lakh trees** along national highways in the same period, about 60% of them under the Bee Corridor initiative.
- The programme is expected to strengthen pollinator conservation while reinforcing **environmentally responsible highway development.**

AI-Preneurs of India

- Atal Innovation Mission, under NITI Aayog, has launched AI-Preneurs of India.
- It is a flagship coffee table book chronicling the journeys of 45 pioneering AI startups shaping solutions for real-world challenges.
- AI-Preneurs of India features startups working across 30+ sector domains, including healthcare, education, sustainability, mobility, sports analytics, deep tech, and social impact.
- Drawing from a nationwide network of Atal Incubation Centres (AICs), the book reflects the geographic and thematic diversity of India's AI innovation landscape, extending far beyond traditional technology hubs.
- These startups are not just building cutting-edge technologies; they are developing AI solutions that are grounded in India's realities and aligned with national priorities.
- The book showcases how public innovation infrastructure, sustained incubation support, and mission-led governance are enabling Indian startups to deliver scalable impact with global relevance.

- It positions India not merely as a consumer of frontier technologies, but as a global contributor shaping responsible AI pathways.

CBDC Based Digital Food Currency

- A Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Digital Food Currency pilot has been launched in Gujarat.
- The initiative has been launched by the **Union Government in collaboration with the RBI and the Government of Gujarat** under the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Ahmedabad, Anand, Valsad and Surat districts.
- The CBDC pilot represents an important extension of the Digital India vision into the PDS.

Network Readiness Index 2025

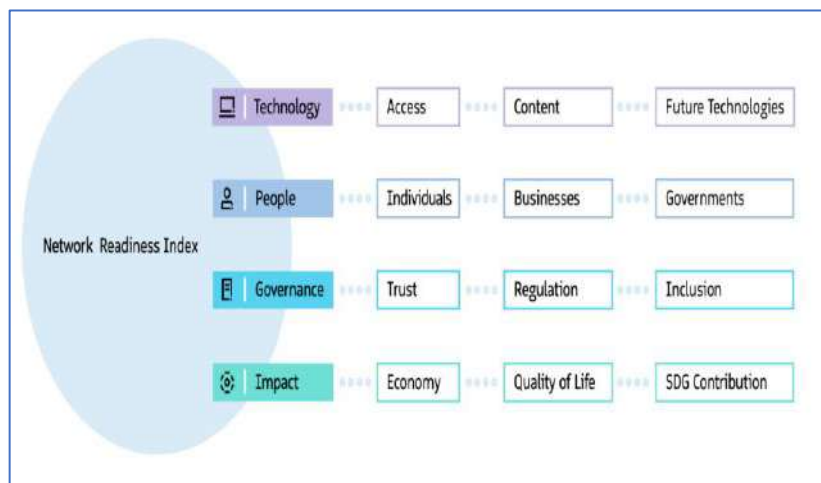
- India has improved its position by four slots and is now placed at **45th rank** on the Network Readiness Index 2025 (NRI 2025).
- NRI is one of the leading global indices on the **application and impact of information and communication technology (ICT)** in economies around the world.
- It is prepared by the **Portulans Institute**, an independent, non-profit research and educational institute based in **Washington DC**.
- NRI 2025 maps the network-based readiness landscape of **127 economies** based on their performance in **four pillars: Technology, People, Governance and Impact**.
- Each of these pillars is comprised of **three sub-pillars** covering a total of **53 indicators**.
- Globally, the **United States** maintained its top position for the fourth consecutive year, followed by **Finland** (2nd) and **Singapore** (3rd).
- India has greater network readiness than would be expected given its income level. It is **ranked 2nd in the group of lower-middle-income countries**. Furthermore, India has

Implementation framework

- Under the CBDC framework, **digital coupons** generated through the Reserve Bank of India will be credited directly to beneficiaries' digital wallets as **programmable digital currency (Digital Rupee)**.
- Beneficiaries can redeem their entitled quantity of foodgrains at Fair Price Shops (FPS) through seamless QR code-based or coupon code-based transactions.
- The system will address challenges related to biometric authentication and electronic-Point of Sale (e-POS) operational issues while ensuring secure, traceable and real-time transactions.
- It will enhance awareness of entitlements, simplify access, improve transaction efficiency, and generate a real-time digital trail, thereby enhancing transparency, monitoring and accountability.
- FPS dealers will also receive their margins on a real-time basis, creating a mutually beneficial ecosystem.
- As part of its scale-up strategy, subsequent phases will extend to the Union Territories of Puducherry, Chandigarh, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.

Reforms in PDS

- Over the past several years, the Department of Food and Public Distribution has undertaken extensive digital transformation of India's food security ecosystem. Key initiatives include:
- End-to-end digitisation of ration cards and nationwide portability under the **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) framework**;
- **Deployment of e-POS devices** for Aadhaar-enabled authentication and real-time transaction capture;
- Implementation of data-driven validation through the **Rightful Targeting Dashboard**.
- Digital supply-chain optimisation through **Ann Chakra**;
- Strengthened grievance redressal mechanisms such as **Ann Sahayata** to enhance transparency, efficiency and citizen-centric service delivery.
- The CBDC-based Digital Food Currency pilot represents the next stage of this reform journey by integrating a programmable sovereign digital payment layer into the PDS architecture.



emerged as a **leader in several categories:**

- **1st rank** in Annual investment in telecommunication services; AI scientific publications; ICT services exports; and E-commerce legislation.
- **2nd rank** in Fiber to the home (FTTH)/Building Internet subscriptions; Mobile broadband internet traffic within the country; and International Internet bandwidth.
- **3rd rank** in Domestic market scale; and Income Inequality.

MoU between FCI and WFP

- Food Corporation of India (FCI) and World Food Programme (WFP) have signed an MoU for **supply of rice** in support of global humanitarian operations aimed at combating hunger.
- FCI will supply **two lakh metric tonnes of rice** to WFP at Rs 2,800 per quintal.
- The MoU will be valid until 2031 and its validity will be extended beyond five years by mutual consent. The rate will be revised on an annual basis as both agencies decide.
- It also reinforces India's role as a trusted and responsible contributor to global food systems.

Collateral Free Loan Doubled For MSMEs

- The Reserve Bank has doubled the limit for collateral-free loans from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh for credit to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- Limited access to formal credit has long been a challenge for the sector, particularly for micro and small enterprises.
- The proposal is expected to **ease financing constraints** for small businesses, many of which struggle to provide adequate collateral despite being viable and employment-generating enterprises.
- By doubling the limit, RBI aims to encourage banks to lend more freely to MSMEs, **reduce their dependence on informal sources of finance** and support their expansion and working capital needs
- With higher collateral-free limits, banks may be better positioned to assess cash flows and business viability rather than relying solely on asset-backed lending, thereby facilitating a more inclusive credit environment.

Project Vault

- The United States recently launched Project Vault, an independently governed and operated **public-private partnership** aimed at establishing a **strategic domestic reserve of critical minerals in the United States**.
- It aims to **store 60 critical minerals** listed in the U.S. Geological Survey's 2025 Critical Minerals List to strengthen the resilience of civilian industries against supply chain disruptions.

World Food Programme (WFP)



- ✓ **Headquartered in Rome**, WFP is the **food-assistance branch of the United Nations** and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- ✓ WFP was **established in 1961** after the 1960 FAO Conference, when the US Food for Peace Programmes, proposed establishing a multilateral food aid programme.
- ✓ It aims to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal of eliminating the need for food aid itself.
- ✓ It has been awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace 2020** for its efforts to combat hunger, bettering conditions for peace in conflict-affected areas and preventing the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict.

WFP and India

- ✓ WFP has been working in India since 1963, with work transitioning from food distribution to technical assistance since the country achieved self-sufficiency in cereal production.
WFP mainly assists India in the following areas:
- ✓ Transforming the targeted public distribution system, fortification of government distributed food, mapping and monitoring of food insecurity.
- ✓ WFP is also supporting the government's Poverty and Human Development Monitoring Agency in establishing a State-level Food Security Analysis Unit, working towards the goal of achieving Zero Hunger.
- ✓ It also aims to enable people with a high risk of malnutrition, especially women, children and adolescent girls, to have improved nutrition by 2025. & beyond

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

- ✓ FCI was **set up in 1965**, under the Food Corporation Act, 1964, as the country was facing major shortage of food grains, especially wheat.
- ✓ **Headquartered in New Delhi**, it is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**.
- ✓ Since its inception, FCI has played a significant role in India's success in transforming the crisis management oriented food security into a stable security system.

- The partnership is backed by \$10 billion in financing by the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) and an additional \$2 billion in private funds.
- EXIM will provide long-term loans to purchase and store critical minerals in the country.
- The project aims to reduce dependence on foreign-controlled supply chains prone to geopolitical risks and economic coercion.

Alternate supply chains

- Project Vault will initially focus on building and securing domestic manufacturing capacity in critical minerals, with a broader focus on **allied engagement** to strengthen shared supply chains through partnerships.
- The development will also help non-Chinese producers, who have struggled in competing against cheaper Chinese mining.
- Diversified purchases by the United States could directly contribute to the **strengthening of alternative supply chains globally** if partner countries also agree to trade minerals between each other at border-adjusted price floors (minimum price).
- The U.S. administration has already signed 11 new bilateral agreements, with Japan, the EU, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, announcing action plans to develop border-adjusted price mechanisms.

Need for a strategic reserve

- The concept of strategic reserves in the United States goes back to 1975 when it established its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to protect its economy from the energy shocks caused by the 1973 Arab oil embargo.
- In the 21st century, critical minerals are foundational to modern economic and technological power, and China dominates different stages of mineral production such as mining, processing, and magnet manufacturing.
- In 2025, China responded against U.S. tariffs by restricting exports of rare earth magnets, causing a near shutdown of the operations of car manufacturing in the United States and across the world.
- The disruption forced production lines to rethink shifting some production to China, whose finished exports had minimum restrictions.
- Thus, there are growing risks due to the concentration of critical minerals and rare earth elements in the hands of one player, which directly **affects access, affordability, and geopolitical leverage**.
- In this context, Project Vault is intended to function as a long-term insurance for domestic manufacturers, who could procure minerals without geographic restrictions, based on supply availability and commercial considerations, and store them.
- Thus, Project Vault represents not just another industrial policy but a **new strategic doctrine**, in which critical minerals and rare earth elements are not just commodities but strategic assets that underpin comprehensive national power.

Access Pass for Fishing in EEZs

The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has launched the Access Pass for Fishing in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for all 13 coastal states and UTs.

Background

- The EEZ is defined under the **1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** as a maritime zone extending from **12 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles** from a country's coastline.
- Within this zone, the nation has exclusive rights to explore, conserve, and utilise marine resources, including fisheries, energy generation, and mineral extraction.
- India has a coastline of approximately 11,099 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about **24 lakh square kilometres**.
- This vast area represents a critical component of India's natural capital

Features of the Access Pass

- The Access Pass is designed to simplify and regulate offshore fishing in India's EEZ.
- **Only mechanised fishing vessels and large motorised vessels above 24 metres** are required to obtain the pass.
- Traditional non-motorized fishing crafts are exempted from the requirement of an Access Pass. This ensures that small and artisanal fishers remain protected, and their livelihoods safeguarded.
- The pass will be issued free of cost, entirely through the online **Registration and Licensing of Fishing Craft (ReALCRaft) portal**, in a time bound manner.
- Once approved, the pass is delivered digitally to the fisher's registered mobile number or email, ensuring transparency and ease of access.
- The access pass framework marks a pivotal transition for India's fisheries sector, moving from nearshore-dependent fishing to a future-ready offshore regime.
- This transformative initiative is designed to enhance fishers' incomes, strengthen seafood exports, promote sustainable resource utilization, and advance India's inclusive Blue Economy.

Other initiatives

- Further, the Department of Fisheries plans to roll out structured training and **capacity-building programmes** to equip fishers with deep-sea fishing skills, safety awareness and export-grade handling practices.
- A **Joint Working Group** of Department of Fisheries with Ministry of Cooperation has also been constituted.
- It will actively promote the participation of small-scale fishermen and strengthen fisheries cooperatives in deep-sea fishing, post-harvest management, processing and export value chains.

and offers immense opportunities for sustainable fisheries development, livelihood generation, food security, and export growth.

- India's EEZ remains **significantly under-utilised**, despite scientific assessments indicating substantial potential for **high-value oceanic resources**, particularly tuna and tuna-like species.
- At present, most Indian fishing activity remains limited to 40–50 nautical miles from the coastline.

ReALCRaft portal

- The ReALCRaft portal provides **web-based, citizen-centric services to marine fishers** and coastal States/UTs for the registration and licensing of fishing vessels, transfer of ownership and related processes, thereby promoting **ease of doing business**.
- It is developed as a national online platform by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** and **Department of Fisheries**.
- The portal is also integrated with **Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA)** and the **Export Inspection Council (EIC)** for issuance of **Fish Catch and Health Certificates**.
- These are key requirements for exporting seafood to premium international markets.
- This integrated digital system ensures **end-to-end traceability**, sanitary compliance, and eco-labelling, thereby **enhancing global competitiveness** of Indian marine products.

Sunrise Sectors

- State Bank of India (SBI), has announced the launch of 'CHAKRA' – Centre of Excellence (CoE) for financing sunrise sectors that are critical to India's economic development.
- The centre will serve as a knowledge-led platform to enable financing for next-generation, technology-driven and sustainability-focused sunrise sectors.
- The Centre will focus on **eight sunrise sectors** namely Renewable Energy, Advanced Cell Chemistry & Battery Storage, Electric Mobility, Green Hydrogen, Semiconductors, Decarbonisation, Smart Infrastructure, and Data Centre Infrastructure.
- By 2030, these eight sunrise sectors are expected to entail capital investment of over Rs 100 lakh crore.
- The CoE's focus lies in enabling these capital-intensive sectors by directing capital flows responsibly, strengthening risk assessment capabilities and developing innovative financing structures aligned with evolving business models and policy priorities.
- The Centre will facilitate structured engagement with development finance institutions, multilateral agencies, banks, NBFCs, industry bodies, corporates, start-ups, academia and policy think-tanks.

SUJVIKA Portal

- The Ministry of Science and Technology has launched SUJVIKA, an **AI-driven biotech product data portal**.
- The SUJVIKA portal is a **trade statistics digital intelligence platform** that presents authenticated biotechnology **product import data** in a structured format.
- It provides **sector-wise insights** into biochemical products, industrial enzymes and other biotech imports, enabling researchers, startups and industry to identify high-value imports, assess import dependence and prioritise indigenisation and R&D efforts.
- The portal is also aimed at **supporting evidence-based planning** and **strengthening public–private partnerships** in biomanufacturing.

- The integration of biotechnology with artificial intelligence will accelerate research, reduce timelines and improve precision in diagnostics, gene sequencing and drug discovery.

Rail Tech Policy and eRCT

The Ministry of Railways recently launched the RailTech Policy and complete digitisation of the Railway Claims Tribunal (RCT).

Rail Tech policy

- The objective of the Rail Tech Policy, is to promote large-scale adoption of technology (AI, drones, IoT etc) in the Railways. It aims to engage innovators, startups, industry and institutions to promote innovation in Railways.
- It simplifies the selection of innovators and introduces a dedicated **Rail Tech Portal** for innovation.
- The goal is to shift away from the earlier complex system of vendor selection based strictly on rigid specifications and create a simplified, innovation-driven framework focused on trial and adoption of new technologies.
- The policy has been designed after studying successful models such as the iDEX initiative in defence, the startup frameworks in the Ministry of Electronics & IT, and telecom sector innovation policies.
- Innovation challenges can be initiated by any innovator or departmental user, with a single-stage detailed submission of proposals.
- The policy provides a user-friendly interface, increases the **scale-up grant** more than three times and doubles the maximum grant for prototype development and trials.
- As per the funding structure, if a startup or innovator proposes a viable technological solution, the Railways would support up to 50% of the development funding required. Once the project proves successful, substantial long-term orders would be placed to enable scaling of the solution.



- ✦ India is projecting biotechnology as one of the key driving forces of the next industrial revolution, with the target of developing a **Rs. 90.86 lakh crore (US\$ 1 trillion) bioeconomy by 2047**.
- ✦ The number of **biotech startups** in India have risen sharply from fewer than **100 in 2014 to over 11,000 at present**.
- ✦ India's **bioeconomy has expanded nearly 16-fold**, from Rs. US\$ 10 billion in 2014 to US\$ 165.7 billion in 2024, placing the country among the leading global biotech destinations and vaccine manufacturing hubs.
- ✦ The integrated **BioE3 Policy** — Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment — aims to promote biotechnology for economic development, environmental sustainability, and employment generation.
- ✦ It is further supported by entities such as Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) to strengthen indigenous capabilities and expand India's bioindustrial base.
- ✦ Infrastructure development includes the establishment of the **National Biofoundry Network**, comprising six specialised biofoundries and 21 advanced bio-enabler facilities, along with a network of 95 bio-incubators. These facilities are **supporting over 1,800 incubatees** nationwide.
- ✦ Furthermore, a **countrywide funding challenge** has been launched recently with a corpus of **Rs 2,000 crore** (US\$ 220.10 million) within the overall Rs 1 lakh crore (US\$ 11.01 billion) Research, Development, and Innovation program.
- ✦ This will further boost biotech enterprises that are ready for large-scale growth.
- ✦ Advancements in pioneering areas such as space biotechnology, genome sequencing through the GenomIndia Project, and gene therapy trials are now establishing the country as a global biotech capital.

E-RCT

- The E-RCT system will enable end-to-end computerisation and digitisation of the Railway Claims Tribunal (RCT).
- It will transform the filing, processing and adjudication of claims by making the process faster and more transparent.
- There are 23 RCT benches across the country and filing claims currently pose challenges, especially for passengers who may be travelling across states when an incident occurs. Determining the appropriate jurisdiction for filing a claim often becomes a significant issue.
- The reform aims to make claim filing simple, digital and accessible from anywhere in the country. The entire process, from e-filing to case information systems will be digitised and AI-enabled.
- If the model proves successful, similar digital solutions could be extended to other tribunals such as the Central Administrative Tribunal.

New CPI 2024 Series

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the new Consumer Price Index (CPI) data based on the **updated base year 2024**, placing retail inflation in January at 2.75%.

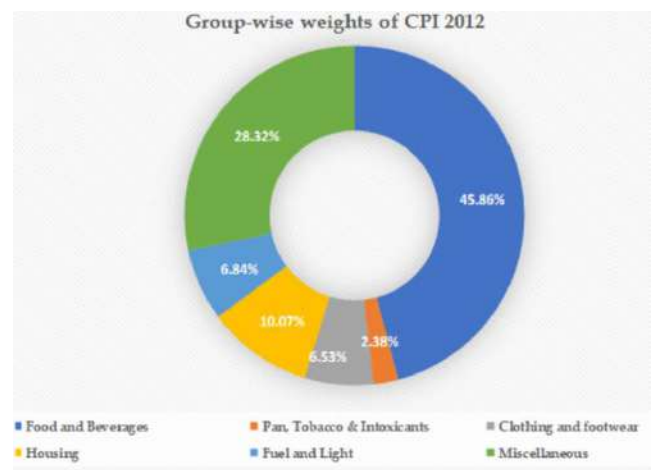
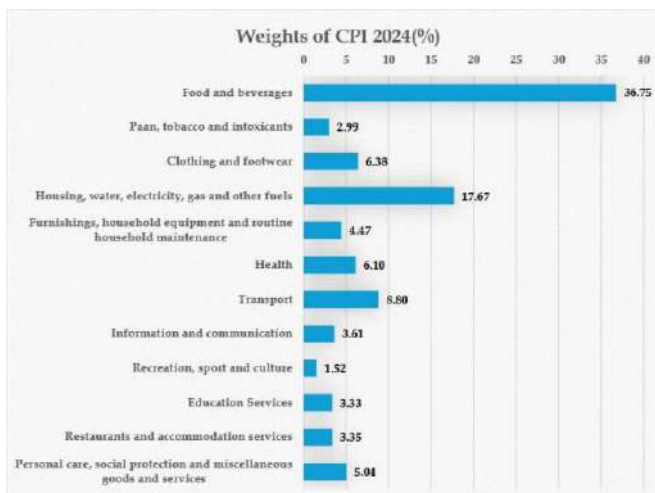
- The base year has been **updated from 2012 to 2024**. This means that the **price index is given a value of 100 for 2024** and changes from these price levels are then calculated to arrive at inflation rates for each good or service.
- The consumption basket has also been reconstituted based on the **2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)**, so that the prices are measured as per the latest consumption patterns and not the 2011-12 survey.
- The new **CPI basket contains 358 goods and services, up from 299** in the previous basket. Within this:
 - Goods items are increased from 259 to 308.
 - Services items are increased from 40 to 50.
- This expansion **strengthens the representation of the services sector**, which has assumed greater importance in household expenditure over time.

Significance

- ❖ **CPI inflation**, which measures the change in consumer prices of hundreds of goods and services in a given month compared to the same month in the previous year, is an important economic indicator as it directly influences the level of interest rates set by the RBI.
- ❖ The RBI has a legal mandate to target a **CPI inflation rate of 4%** in the medium term within a **tolerance band of 2-6%**.
- ❖ As such, if inflation is seen above 4% on a sustained basis, the RBI increases its policy repo rate to weaken demand and bring down inflation.
- ❖ The Indian economy has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, with consumption behaviour, market structures, and composition of household expenditure having evolved over time.
- ❖ These changes, reflect in the new CPI inflation series, with the weight of food coming down from 45.86% to 36.75%, in line with Engel's Law.
- ❖ Named after German statistician and economist **Ernst Engel**, the economic theory states that as the income of a household rises, the proportion it spends on food reduces.
- ❖ Improvement in the measurement of consumer inflation could also enhance the targeting efficiency of welfare schemes, ensuring that benefits, subsidies, and social transfers are better aligned with actual regional price realities.

Key Enhancements

- The new CPI has included **rural house rent** for the first time to improve coverage of rural housing consumption.
- Strengthened representation of modern consumption items such as online media services and fuels (CNG/PNG).
- Improved coverage of data available on digital and administrative sources, including telephone charges, rail fare, air fare, fuel, postal charges and online media and streaming services (OTT subscriptions).



International COICOP - 2018 Framework

- The CPI 2024 series adopts the **Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP) 2018**, replacing the earlier structure comprising six broad groups.
- This is the latest classification system developed by **United Nations Statistics Division**. Under the revised framework, expenditure is classified into 12 divisions at the first level, and 358 items at the last level of hierarchy which enables:
 - Classification of items according to their usage;
 - Ensures **global comparability** of India's CPI;
 - Enables more granular dissemination of indices and inflation rates.

Price Collection Methodology

- CPI 2024 marks the introduction of **Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)** for price data collection.
- Under CAPI, price data are collected electronically using handheld devices with in-built validation checks, standardized item specifications, and real-time monitoring capabilities.
- The transition to CAPI enhances data quality, timeliness and consistency.
- However, physical market price collection continues to form the backbone of CPI compilation.

AgriStack

- The launch of Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources) was recently announced.
- Bharat-VISTAAR is a **multilingual AI tool** to **integrate the AgriStack portals and the ICAR package on agricultural practices** with AI systems
- No separate budget allocation; Provide **real-time, validated advisory services** farmers.
- Enable **two-way communication** (farmer feedback); Ensure **Centre-State convergence**.
- **AI chatbots & voice bots** (local language support).

AgriStack

- AgriStack is a **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** for the farm sector, an initiative under the **Digital Agriculture Mission (DAM)**.
- It was **launched in 2024** as part of the Centre's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Mission in the agriculture sector to consolidate data on a single platform.
- It will enhance farm productivity, enable better decisions for farmers and reduce risk by providing customised advisory support.
- AgriStack comprises **three foundational registries or databases** in the agriculture sector: the *Farmer Registry*, *Geo-referenced village maps* and the *Crop Sown Registry*, all created and maintained by the State Governments or Union Territories.

Benefits for Farmers

- The government aims to integrate AgriStack Registries with all its major agricultural schemes and services, including Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Minimum Support Price (MSP)-based procurement, fertiliser distribution, loans, insurance, storage, and advisory services, in a phased manner. Some states have already taken initiatives in this direction.



Farmer Registry

- Under the AgriStack, farmers are given a **digital identity (Farmer ID)** similar to Aadhaar, which is linked dynamically to the State's land records, livestock ownership, crops sown, demographic details, family details, schemes and benefits availed.
- The government aims to create **digital identities for 11 crore farmers**, of which 8.62 crore have been created so far.
- The Centre has allocated financial support to states to create their respective registries under the **Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2024-25**.
- With the creation of the farmers' registry, a farmer would be able to access benefits and services digitally, avoiding paperwork, with little to no need to physically visit offices or service providers.
- The Centre aims to complete the Farmer Registry with dynamic Records of Rights (RoR) synchronisation by March 2027. In the North Eastern States, the target is set to March 2028.

Crop Sown Registry (CSR)

- It includes details on crops planted by farmers. This is recorded through mobile-based Digital Crop Surveys on the ground each season.
- A pilot on the Digital Crop Survey was conducted in 11 states to develop the Crop Sown Registry in 2023-24.
- The government targets to **cover all 30 crore farm plots in 604 districts** in the country by the Kharif season 2026.
- More than 70% of the plots in the targeted villages have already been covered under the CSR initiative.

Geo-referenced Village Maps data

- This Registry comprises geographic information of land records linked with their locations (latitudes and longitudes).
- So far, 5.4 lakh village maps have been geo-referenced out of the total 6.75 lakh villages. The target is to cover all villages by March 2027.

- States such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have demonstrated how Farmer Registry linked platforms have enabled faster approvals, reduced documentation for MSP-based procurement/Fertilizer distribution, and leak-proof DBT.
- Similarly, the government has started using Farmer ID for registration of new farmers under PM KISAN, while some states are using it for enrolment of farmers under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- In Madhya Pradesh, the AgriStack-enabled fertiliser distribution model has been tried to address artificial shortages, inequitable access, and diversion.
- In Maharashtra, the AgriStack was used to disburse Kisan Credit Card loans on a pilot basis.

First State Innovation Mission

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), under NITI Aayog, recently launched the **country's first State Innovation Mission (SIM) in Tripura**.
 - SIM is part of the approved **AIM 2.0 programme**, under the aegis of NITI Aayog's **State Support Mission (SSM)**.
 - SIM is designed as a long-term institutional mechanism to support States and UTs in building robust, inclusive, and context-specific innovation ecosystems aligned with national priorities and local strengths.
- Through SIM, AIM will work closely with the Government of Tripura to support the design and implementation of a long-term innovation and entrepreneurship strategy.
- SIM will also strengthen the innovation ecosystem through capacity building, policy support, partnerships, peer learning, and programmatic interventions across the innovation lifecycle.
- The SIM framework for Tripura includes:
 - Institutionalization of SIM under the **Tripura Institution for Transformation (TIFT)**. Inauguration of **T-NEST (Tripura – Nurturing Entrepreneurship and Startups)** as a dedicated incubation and innovation facility to incubate startups and promote Make from Tripura solutions.
 - Creation of **Innovation Centres** in each of the 8 district linked to T-NEST to promote innovation among women and tribal communities.

{For more on Atal Innovation Mission (AI), refer The recitals August 2025}

Revised Guidelines of Lead Bank Scheme

- The RBI recently released draft guidelines to revise the Lead Bank Scheme (LBS) aiming to streamline its operations and enhance its effectiveness in coordinating development activities at the district level.
- The guidelines aim to fine tune the objectives of the scheme; the structure, membership and agenda of various fora under the scheme.

Lead Bank Scheme

- Introduced in **1969**, LBS seeks to improve credit flow to priority sectors while promoting financial inclusion across rural and semi-urban areas.
- The scheme was formulated on the recommendation of the **Gadgil Study Group and Banker's Committee (Nariman Committee)**.

Revised guidelines

- A designated commercial bank in each district will serve as the Lead Bank, responsible for coordinating credit activities of financial institutions and stakeholders to promote financial inclusion.
- Focus will be on strengthening State Level Bankers' Committees (SLBCs) and Lead District Manager offices, ensuring better coordination among banks, government bodies, and other development agencies.
- SLBC Convenor Banks will regularly review operational challenges, liaise with state government officials, and provide support to expand banking coverage.
- The guidelines emphasize a **bottom-up approach** for credit planning, estimating block-wise and activity-wise potential for different sectors to prepare targeted credit plans.
- Banks are also expected to **monitor the Credit-Deposit (CD) Ratio**, which measures credit disbursed relative to deposits mobilized, and achieve a benchmark of 60% across rural and semi-urban branches on an all-India basis.
- Additionally, convenor banks are encouraged to highlight infrastructure or administrative challenges—such as road or digital connectivity, power supply, law and order, and security issues—that may hinder banking expansion and financial inclusion.

Coking Coal Declared Critical Mineral

- As part of ongoing structural reforms in the mining sector, the Union Government has **notified Coking Coal as a Critical and Strategic Mineral** under the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act)**.
- The move aims to recognize the strategic role of coking coal in ensuring mineral security and meet the requirements of the domestic steel sector.
 - China is the world's largest producer of coking coal (metallurgical coal), accounting for over 60% of global production.

Coking Coal

- Coking coal (metallurgical coke) is a **high grade of bituminous coal**, essential for manufacturing steel.
- When heated in the absence of air, it forms coke, a porous, strong carbon material essential for blast furnace operations, as it acts as both a **fuel and reducing agent** in iron ore smelting.
- It has **high carbon concentration and low ash, sulphur and phosphorus content**.
- It is distinct from thermal coal, which is used for power generation.
- The **leading producers** of coking coal are China, Australia, Russia, USA and Canada.

Benefits

- Mining of critical minerals is exempt from public consultation requirements and permits the utilisation of degraded forest land for compensatory afforestation, measures that are also expected to encourage greater private sector participation & adoption of advanced mining technologies
- The move is expected to facilitate faster approvals, improve ease of doing business, and accelerate exploration and mining activities, including of deep-seated deposits.
- The reform is anticipated to reduce import dependence, strengthen supply-chain resilience for the steel sector, and support the objectives of the National Steel Policy.
- It will enable optimal utilisation of domestic coking coal resources, reinforce national mineral security and help to build a resilient, self-reliant industrial ecosystem.

RBI ESMA MoU

- The RBI signed an MOU with the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA).
- The primary objective of the MoU is to enable **formal recognition of the Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL)** and other RBI-regulated Central Counterparties (CCPs) by ESMA.

Background

- Under the European Market Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR), CCPs based outside the European Union must be recognised by ESMA to provide clearing services to EU financial firms and trading venues.

Coking Coal in India

- ❖ India has an estimated **37.37 billion tonnes** of coking coal resources, largely located in Jharkhand, with additional reserves in Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.
- ❖ Despite this domestic availability, **imports of coking coal** have increased from **51.20 million tonnes in 2020–21 to 57.58 million tonnes in 2024–25**.
- ❖ Currently, around 95% of the coking coal requirement of the steel sector is met through imports, leading to significant foreign exchange outgo.

Central Counterparties (CCPs)

- Central counterparty clearing house is operated by banks in each country and **helps to facilitate trading**.
- CCP mainly work towards establishing efficiency and stability in the financial markets.
- The **main functions** performed by the CCP are **clearing and settlement**.
- It acts as a counterparty for both buyers and sellers **acting as an intermediary** in their transactions.
- It **collects money from both the buyers and sellers**, which helps the CCP to **guarantee terms of the trade** that takes place between both these parties.
- The money collected is enough to cover the potential losses in case any party fails to follow through the contract.
- Thus, it reduces counterparty, operational, settlement, market, and legal risks for traders.
- In India, a CCP is authorised by the RBI to operate under Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007

Clearing Corporation of India (CCIL)

- CCIL was established in 2001 to provide guaranteed clearing and settlement functions related to transactions in G-Secs, derivative markets and foreign exchange.
- It led to substantial advances in transparency, market efficiency, liquidity, and risk management practices in these markets, along with savings with respect to settlement costs.

- ESMA withdrew recognition for 6 Indian CCPs in 2022 after determining that regulatory cooperation arrangements required under EU rules were not in place.
- Following the withdrawal, European banks faced higher capital charges on exposures linked to Indian clearing houses.
- This increased the cost of trading Indian bonds and limited participation by EU-based institutions.

MoU

- MoU does not create any legally binding obligations, confer any rights or supersede any domestic laws.
- It establishes a framework for ESMA to place reliance on RBI's regulatory and supervisory activities of Indian CCPs while safeguarding the EU's financial stability.
- RBI and ESMA will consult, cooperate and exchange information with each other with regard to the covered CCPs.
- Restoring recognition is expected to reduce high capital charges for European banks operating in India.

National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0

- The Ministry for Finance launched the second phase of asset monetisation pipeline of Central ministries and public sector entities - National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 (NMP 2.0).
- Developed by NITI Aayog, NMP 2.0 is based on the mandate for **Asset Monetisation Plan 2025-30**.

NMP 2.0

- NMP 2.0 will broadly follow the concept of asset monetisation as laid out in NMP 1.0.
- It aims to unlock value from underutilised public infrastructure assets through transfer of assets for a limited period, divestment of portions of listed entities, securitisation of cash flows, or strategic commercial auctions.
- In line with NMP 1.0, NMP 2.0 shall focus on **core assets** only. Monetisation of non-core assets (such as land, building, real estate assets) has been included in NMP 2.0 where the project envisages further development on these assets.

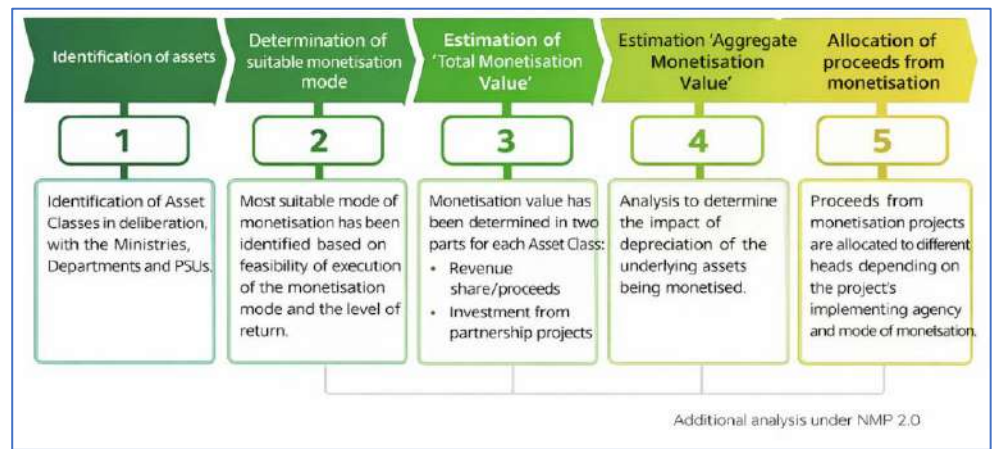
Background

- At its core, NMP is an attempt to solve a problem that governments face worldwide - how to finance massive infrastructure expansion without inflating public debt or crowding out private investment.
- It is not about selling assets. Ownership of the underlying public assets largely remains with the state. Only the right to operate, maintain and earn revenue from these assets is transferred for a defined period.
- It allows the government to unlock capital while retaining long-term strategic control.
- The first phase of the pipeline (NMP 1.0) was launched in 2021. It showed that monetisation projects had led to greater involvement of institutional investors such as pension and sovereign wealth funds in the development of India's infrastructure.
- Further, the progress made under NMP 1.0 has led to the creation of Public Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs), allowing citizens to directly participate in infrastructure development in India.
- **89% (around Rs 5.3 lakh crore)** of the NMP 1.0 target of Rs 6 lakh crore had been achieved during 2021-22 to 2024-25.

- While the formation of National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC) has increased focus on land monetisation initiatives across various Departments and PSUs, pure commercial sale in which the proceeds are not being used to develop an equivalent asset has been kept outside the purview of NMP 2.0.
- NMP 2.0 estimates aggregate monetisation potential of **Rs 16.72 lakh crore**, including private sector investment of Rs 5.8 lakh crore. This is **2.6 times higher** than that under NMP 1.0.
- The sectors included are highways, Multi-Modal Logistics Parks, ropeways, railways, power, petroleum and natural gas, civil aviation, ports, warehousing and storage, urban infrastructure, coal, mines, telecom and tourism.
- An empowered **Core Group of Secretaries on Asset Monetisation (CGAM)** under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary will continue to monitor the progress of the Asset Monetisation programme.

- The approach to estimation of monetisation potential under NMP 2.0 is divided into **five stages**.

- The proceeds from asset monetisation projects are allocated to four different heads depending on the implementing agency of the project, as well as the project's mode of monetisation.



- **Consolidated Fund of India:** Any type of Government revenue from a monetisation project that is implemented by a Central Ministry (for example, revenue share, premium, lease rental, royalty) shall flow to Consolidated Fund of India.
- **PSU/Port Authorities allocation:** Proceeds from monetisation activities undertaken by PSUs shall accrue to the concerned PSU (similar norm shall be followed for Major Port Authorities).
- **State Consolidated Fund:** Certain projects under NMP 2.0 are expected to generate revenues to the State Governments, especially those belonging to the mines and coal sectors (royalty payments). These proceeds shall accrue to State Consolidated Fund.
- **Direct investment (private):** This head shall record the investment by the private sector in monetisation projects that involve construction and/or major maintenance components.
- It is estimated that largest portion of the proceeds under NMP 2.0 shall accrue to Consolidated Fund of India, followed by direct investment (private), PSU or Port Authority allocation and State Consolidated Fund.

Advantages

- Monetisation proceeds create non-debt capital receipts that can be reinvested in new capital expenditure projects, reducing pressure on the government's fiscal deficit and allowing it to maintain high levels of infrastructure spending.
- By offering **medium-term visibility of assets and investment opportunities**, it encourages private sector involvement in infrastructure management through mechanisms such as PPP concessions, INVTs, revenue sharing, and securitisation.
- This can improve operational efficiency and bring in specialised expertise.
- It significantly contributes to economic expansion by accelerating infrastructure investment, stimulating private sector activity, and increasing productive capacity, potentially having a multiplier effect on GDP over the next decade.

Challenges in ACC-PLI scheme

- The Advanced Chemistry Cell Production Linked Incentive (ACC-PLI) scheme has been facing implementation issues.
- Advanced Chemistry Cells are the components of modern batteries using technologies such as **lithium-ion** to run electric vehicles and are different from the classical lead-acid batteries that start a car or run inverters.
- The ACC-PLI scheme was launched by the **Ministry of Heavy Industries in 2021**. It envisaged battery cell manufacturing capacity of **50 GWh by 2026**.
- With an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore, ACC-PLI sought to attract large companies by mandating a **minimum investment of Rs 1,100 crore**. In return, companies would receive a maximum subsidy of Rs 2,000 per KWH.
- Another mandate was that companies should ensure **25% of the manufacturing was local within two years, and 60% within five years**.

- Currently, **China is the dominant supplier** of such cells. The scheme aimed to build a local battery supply chain (cathode, anode, electrolyte) to **reduce import dependence** by mobilising private investments and global tech partnerships.
- This would **lower battery costs**, and **accelerate electric vehicle (EV) and energy storage adoption**.

Implementation issues

- ❖ As of October 2025, however, **only 1.4 gigawatt-hour (GWh) worth of battery cells have been commissioned** on time, while 8.6 GWh is under development but delayed.
- ❖ As none of the three companies who won the auctions have started selling batteries, **zero incentives have been disbursed** to any beneficiary against the targeted Rs 2,900 crore by October 2025.
- ❖ A company has **scaled back its expansion plans** and other beneficiaries are yet to commission their ACC battery manufacturing facilities.
- ❖ India lacks a mature cell manufacturing ecosystem, including critical mineral refining and cell component production, which leaves the industry almost entirely dependent on imports from China.
- ❖ Industry stakeholders have highlighted **delays in visa approvals for Chinese technical specialists** required for equipment installation, further slowing progress.
- ❖ In addition, issues such as an aggressive two-year installation timeline and high domestic value-add requirements pose significant challenges for PLI beneficiaries with no prior experience in battery manufacturing.
- ❖ Against an estimated 1.03 million jobs, the scheme has generated only 1,118 jobs (0.12%).

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

End of New START Treaty

- The expiry of the **New START Treaty**, on February 5, ends five decades of legally binding nuclear limits between the US and Russia.
- It raises concerns of a renewed nuclear arms race and weakened global strategic stability.

Cold War Arms Control Efforts

- **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)**
 - Initiated in 1969 amid intensifying US–Soviet nuclear rivalry.
 - 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty: Limited missile defence systems.
 - Interim SALT Accord: Froze expansion of ICBM arsenals.
- **SALT II and Breakdown**
 - Signed in 1979; capped nuclear delivery vehicles (ICBMs, SLBMs, bombers) at 2,250 each.
 - Never ratified after Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
 - US withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002, accelerating erosion of Cold War arms control.

Post–Cold War Nuclear Reductions

- **START I (*Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*) (signed in 1991; came into force 1994)**
 - Limited warheads to 6,000 and nuclear delivery vehicles to 1,600.
 - Introduced intrusive verification (inspections, data exchanges).
 - Expired in 2009 (*15 years treaty*) after reductions were completed.
- **START II (1993) and Collapse**
 - Aimed to cut warheads to 3,000–3,500.
 - *Never entered into force*; Russia withdrew in 2002 after US exited ABM Treaty.
- **Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, 2002)**
 - Reduced operationally deployed warheads to 1,700–2,200 by December 31, 2012.
 - Served as a temporary bridge until replaced by New START.

New START: The Last Major Treaty	After New START: Emerging Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signing (2010); entered in force (2011) and Key Limits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signed by Obama and Medvedev. ○ Capped warheads at 1,550 and delivery vehicles at 800. ○ Required significant reductions compared to earlier treaties. • Strong Verification Mechanism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allowed 18 annual on-site inspections per side. ○ Ensured transparency through regular data exchanges. • Extension and Expiry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Extended in 2021 for five years. ○ Expired on February 5, 2026, without replacement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of Binding Limits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No legal caps on US and Russian arsenals. ○ US holds ~5,277 warheads; Russia ~5,449 (2025 estimates). • Reduced Transparency & Escalation Risks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loss of inspections and verification. ○ Heightened risk of miscalculation amid geopolitical tensions. • Weakening of Nuclear Deterrence Stability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shift from regulated deterrence to open-ended competition. ○ Signals erosion of long-standing arms control norms. • Global Non-Proliferation Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Could weaken the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime. ○ Risk of broader arms race involving other nuclear powers.

Conclusion

- The expiry of New START marks the end of the last remaining pillar of US–Russia nuclear arms control.
- Without a successor framework, the world faces heightened strategic uncertainty, diminished transparency, and the growing possibility of a new nuclear arms race in an already volatile global order.

After BNP's Victory: A New Phase in India–Bangladesh Relations

- The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, won a decisive mandate in Bangladesh's recent elections.
- The polls followed Sheikh Hasina's ouster (August 2024), marking a major political shift. The outcome could redefine the trajectory of India–Bangladesh ties.

India and the BNP: A Complicated Legacy

- **Historical Background**
 - BNP was founded in 1978 by General Ziaur Rahman.
 - Led for decades by Khaleda Zia; now headed by Tarique Rahman.
 - India's ties with BNP have historically been cautious and sometimes strained.
- **Tensions During 2001–2006**
 - BNP–Jamaat -e-Islami coalition tenure saw strained relations with India.
 - Concerns over insurgent groups operating from Bangladeshi soil.
 - Security issues affected India's Northeast.
- **Hasina Era (2008–2024)**
 - Sheikh Hasina strengthened counter-terror cooperation with India.
 - Crackdown on insurgents improved bilateral security ties.
 - However, anti-terror measures were also used against BNP and Jamaat leaders.
- **Post-Hasina Political Shift**
 - Awami League barred from contesting elections.
 - BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as dominant forces.
 - Sheikh Hasina currently in India, adding diplomatic sensitivity.

India's Diplomatic Pivot After BNP's Victory	Key Challenges for India in the Post-Hasina Era
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swift Outreach from India<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ PM Narendra Modi congratulated Tarique Rahman promptly.➔ Signals India's willingness to engage constructively with the new government.• BNP's Moderated Tone<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Rahman avoided anti-India rhetoric during and after the campaign.➔ Emphasised unity, minority safety, and inclusive governance.➔ Foreign policy line: "Bangladesh Before All" and "Friend Yes, Master No."• Sovereignty and Non-Interference<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ BNP stresses equality and self-respect in external relations.➔ Zero tolerance for interference, while maintaining cooperation.• Jamaat's Position<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Adopted conciliatory language towards neighbours.➔ Focus on ties with the Muslim world.➔ No overt emphasis on Pakistan in official messaging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Hasina Extradition Issue<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Her presence in India may become politically contentious.➔ Pressure could mount on BNP to seek her extradition.• Sustaining Economic Interdependence<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia.➔ Stability in trade, textiles, and energy cooperation is vital.• Security Cooperation<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Preventing resurgence of insurgent or extremist activity.➔ Maintaining intelligence-sharing and counter-terror coordination.• Connectivity and Development Projects<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Continued support for infrastructure linking Northeast India.➔ Sensitive handling required amid possible anti-India sentiment.• People-to-People Engagement<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Bangladeshis travel to India for healthcare and tourism.➔ Expanded visa facilitation could strengthen goodwill.• Migration Concerns<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Politically sensitive issue in Indian border states.➔ Requires cooperative and balanced management.• Guarding Against Strategic Drift<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Avoiding Bangladesh's tilt toward Pakistan or China.➔ Strong bilateral engagement key to preserving regional stability.

Conclusion

- The BNP's return to power marks a decisive political transition in Bangladesh and a critical test for India–Bangladesh relations. While historical mistrust and sensitive issues persist, early diplomatic signals from both sides suggest cautious optimism.
- The future of bilateral ties will depend on sustained dialogue, security cooperation, economic continuity, and careful handling of political sensitivities in the post-Hasina era.

India–Malaysia Relations: Expanding Strategic and Economic Cooperation

During PM Modi's recent visit to Kuala Lumpur, India and Malaysia signed 11 agreements, deepening their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Key Outcomes

• Strategic Agreements

- 11 MoUs signed covering defence, semiconductors, digital technologies, health, and energy.
- Landmark framework agreement on semiconductor cooperation to integrate into global supply chains.

• Economic Initiatives

- Promotion of trade settlement in Indian Rupee and Malaysian Ringgit to reduce currency dependence.
- Invitation to Malaysian investment in electronics, AI, renewable energy, and healthcare.

• Counter-Terrorism Commitment

- Reaffirmed zero tolerance for terrorism and opposition to cross-border terrorism.

- Emphasis on global cooperation against terror financing and misuse of emerging technologies.

• Multilateral Coordination

- Alignment on Indo-Pacific stability and ASEAN centrality.
- Malaysia reiterated support for India's UNSC reform aspirations.



India - Malaysia Bilateral Relationship

- ❖ **Historical and Civilisational Links**
 - Over two millennia of interaction through trade, religion, and cultural exchange across the Indian Ocean.
 - Indian influences visible in Malaysia's language, traditions, and socio-cultural heritage.
 - Formal diplomatic ties established soon after India's independence.
- ❖ **Political and Diplomatic Engagement**
 - Elevated to a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2024)**.
 - Regular high-level visits and coordination in multilateral forums (UN, ASEAN-led mechanisms).
 - Malaysia supports India's bid for permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.
- ❖ **Trade and Economic Cooperation**
 - **Bilateral Trade and Investment**
 - Malaysia is India's **3rd largest trading partner in ASEAN**.
 - Bilateral trade reached **US\$ 19.86 billion (2024–25)**.
 - Malaysia's FDI in India (2000–2025): **US\$ 1.27 billion**.
 - **Key Trade Items**
 - **India's Exports:** Petroleum products, engineering goods, dairy, organic chemicals.
 - **India's Imports:** Vegetable oils, machinery, electrical equipment, minerals.
 - **Strategic Connectivity**
 - Malaysia's location along the **Strait of Malacca and South China Sea** makes it vital for India's Act East Policy and maritime strategy.
- ❖ **Defence and Security Cooperation**
 - **Maritime and Strategic Convergence**
 - Growing cooperation in joint exercises, maritime security, and counter-terrorism.
 - Shared concerns over Indo-Pacific stability, piracy, and freedom of navigation.
 - **Intelligence and Capacity Building**
 - Increased intelligence sharing and joint training initiatives.
 - Convergence on combating terrorism and radicalisation at global platforms like FATF.
- ❖ **Diaspora and People-to-People Ties**
 - Indian diaspora in Malaysia exceeds **3 million** (predominantly Tami), playing key roles in politics, business, and culture.
 - During the visit, PM Modi highlighted the deep-rooted presence of Tamil, underscoring that it is not just a diaspora language but a public and historical language in Malaysia.
 - Strong links through education, tourism, and cultural exchanges.
 - India announced a new **Consulate General in Malaysia** to strengthen diaspora outreach.

India–Israel Special Strategic Partnership

- At the invitation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a two-day state visit to Israel.
- During the visit, India and Israel elevated their relationship to a **“Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity,”** ushering in a new chapter in bilateral ties.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

- **Elevation to Special Strategic Partnership**
 - 27 outcomes announced, including 17 agreements across sectors.
- **Technology and Emerging Domains**
 - Launch of a **Critical and Emerging Technologies Partnership** covering AI, quantum, cybersecurity, and critical minerals.
 - Establishment of an **Indo-Israel Cyber Centre of Excellence** in India.
 - Joint Commission on Science and Technology elevated to ministerial level.
 - MoU on geophysical exploration using AI and advanced technologies.
- **Defence and Counter-Terrorism**
 - Roadmap for joint development, production, and technology transfer.
 - Strong condemnation of terrorism in all forms, including cross-border terrorism.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation**
 - Progress in negotiations for a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
 - Agreement to enable **UPI usage in Israel**, expanding digital public infrastructure.
 - Expanded cooperation in digital health, civil nuclear energy, space, and finance.
- **Agriculture and Rural Development**
 - Target to expand **Centres of Excellence** established in India with Israeli cooperation to **100**.
 - Launch of “Villages of Excellence” initiative.
 - Establishment of an **India-Israel Innovation Centre for Agriculture**.
- **Connectivity and Regional Cooperation**
 - Cooperation on the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** and **I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) initiative**.
 - Discussions on West Asian tensions, with India reiterating support for dialogue and peaceful resolution.

India–Israel Bilateral Relationship

- **Background and Evolution**
 - Full diplomatic relations were established in 1992.
 - Earlier engagement was limited due to India’s support for Palestine and Cold War alignments.
 - Post-1991 economic liberalisation accelerated ties.
 - In 2017, PM Modi’s historic visit elevated relations to a Strategic Partnership.
- **Defence and Security Cooperation**
 - Defence is the core pillar of the relationship.
 - Israel is among India’s top defence suppliers (missiles, UAVs, radar, surveillance systems).
 - Strong intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism cooperation.
 - Shared commitment against cross-border threats.
- **Agriculture and Water Management**
 - Israel has helped establish Centres of Excellence across Indian states.
 - Focus areas: horticulture, drip irrigation, precision farming, desert agriculture.
 - Improved productivity and water-use efficiency for Indian farmers.
- **Trade, Innovation and Technology**
 - Trade diversified beyond diamonds into pharmaceuticals, chemicals, electronics and high-tech sectors.

- o Bilateral trade peaked at US\$ 10.77 billion (FY 2022–23) (excluding defence).
- o Recent decline due to regional instability and trade disruptions.
- o Strong collaboration in start-ups, research, and innovation ecosystems.
- o Israel’s “Start-Up Nation” model complements India’s digital economy.
- Strategic Convergence in West Asia
 - o Growing openness in engagement with Israel while maintaining balanced ties with Arab states and Iran.
 - o Regional stability critical for India’s diaspora and energy security interests.

Conclusion

- The elevation to a **Special Strategic Partnership** reflects the maturity and multidimensional nature of India–Israel ties. Defence cooperation remains central, but the partnership now extends deeply into technology, innovation, agriculture, connectivity, and digital infrastructure.
- For India, the relationship balances strategic autonomy with regional diplomacy in West Asia, while enhancing innovation-driven growth and security cooperation.

India–Brazil Partnership Deepens with Rare Earth Mining Agreements

India and Brazil strengthened their strategic partnership during President Lula da Silva’s visit to New Delhi, signing multiple agreements including a significant pact on rare earth and critical minerals cooperation.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

- **Rare Earth and Critical Minerals Agreement**
 - o Strategic pact to secure access to rare earth minerals.
 - o Aims to reduce overdependence on China’s processing dominance.
 - o Brazil holds significant reserves, with only 30% explored.
- **Steel and Mining Cooperation**
 - o Agreements signed on steel mining and mineral supply chains.
 - o Brazil’s iron ore capacity can support India’s infrastructure growth.
- **Digital Partnership:** Joint declaration on emerging technologies:

AI	Semiconductors	Blockchain	Supercomputing
----	----------------	------------	----------------

- o Reflects India’s digital strength and Brazil’s tech ambitions.
- **Trade Expansion and Visa Facilitation**
 - o Target to increase bilateral trade to \$30 billion by 2030.
 - o Brazil extended business visas for Indian passport holders to 10 years.

India–Brazil Bilateral Relationship



- ◆ **Historical and Strategic Foundations**
 - ✓ Diplomatic relations established in 1948.
 - ✓ Partnership rooted in democratic values, South–South cooperation, and multilateral engagement.
 - ✓ Cooperation spans trade, defence, energy, and global governance.
- ◆ **Multilateral Convergence**
 - ✓ Both are key members of: BRICS; G20; IBSA Dialogue Forum; BASIC.
 - ✓ Both advocate UNSC reform and a multipolar world order.
- ◆ **Trade and Economic Relations**
 - ✓ Brazil is India’s largest trading partner in Latin America.
 - ✓ Bilateral trade fluctuates between \$12–15 billion annually.
 - ✓ **India’s Exports** - Organic chemicals, diesel oil, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, textiles, iron & steel.
 - ✓ **India’s Imports** - Crude oil, soya oil, gold, raw cane sugar, iron ore, copper ore, manganese, agricultural commodities.
 - ✓ Trade engagement is anchored in the India-MERCOSUR Preferential Trade Agreement, with plans for expansion.
- ◆ **Energy and Climate Cooperation**
 - ✓ Brazil: Global leader in biofuels.
 - ✓ India: Expanding solar and green energy initiatives.
 - ✓ Cooperation under the Global Biofuels Alliance.
 - ✓ Renewable energy and clean technology central to ties.

Conclusion

- The rare earth agreement marks a strategic deepening of India–Brazil ties, reinforcing cooperation in critical minerals, digital technology, energy transition, and trade.
- The partnership reflects a broader alignment among major Global South democracies seeking supply chain resilience, technological advancement, and a more balanced global economic order.

India Joins Trump’s Board of Peace as Observer

- The US-hosted “Board of Peace” held its first meeting in Washington to discuss Gaza’s reconstruction.
- India participated as an observer, signalling cautious engagement without full membership.
- The initiative’s expanded mandate beyond Gaza has raised concerns about sidelining the United Nations.

India’s Observer Status: A Strategic Balancing Act

- **Cautious Engagement**
 - India initially stayed away when the board was announced at Davos.
 - Participation as an observer allows diplomatic engagement without formal endorsement.
- **Questions of Legitimacy**
 - The board excludes key permanent UN Security Council members such as Russia, China, France, and the UK.
 - Its expanded mandate to address “global conflict” has raised concerns about parallel multilateralism.
- **Flexibility and Exit Option**
 - India views the initiative as closely tied to President Trump’s personal leadership.
 - Observer status provides room to reassess depending on the board’s future direction and durability.

[For more about the “Board of Peace” refer *The Recitals* – January 2026]

Pakistan–Afghanistan Tensions

- Pakistan and Afghanistan have entered a fresh phase of hostilities, with cross-border strikes and strong rhetoric marking what Pakistan has described as an “open war” with the Taliban-led Afghan government.
- While the immediate trigger relates to cross-border militant attacks, the tensions are deeply embedded in decades of political mistrust, territorial disputes, and strategic rivalry dating back to 1947.

Conclusion

- Pakistan–Afghanistan tensions are not merely episodic or regime-specific; they are rooted in unresolved border disputes, historical grievances, strategic rivalries, and competing regional alignments.
- Despite shifts in leadership and global interventions, distrust has remained a defining feature of bilateral relations — making lasting stability between the two neighbours a complex and uncertain prospect.

Enduring Fault Lines in Bilateral Relations

- **Durand Line Dispute** - Afghanistan refuses to formally recognise the Durand Line as the international border, creating recurring tensions over sovereignty and territorial claims.
 - ✓ The 2,640-km Durand Line was drawn in 1893 by Sir Mortimer Durand, dividing Pashtun tribal lands.
 - ✓ Originally intended to define spheres of influence, it later became a de facto boundary under British India.
 - ✓ After 1947, Pakistan inherited this position, but Afghanistan rejected the border’s legitimacy.
 - ✓ Kabul even opposed Pakistan’s entry into the UN and continues to contest the border’s finality.
- **Trade and Strategic Leverage** - Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of using transit routes and trade access as tools of political pressure, deepening mistrust.
 - ✓ Afghanistan, being landlocked, depends heavily on transit through Pakistan.
 - ✓ Pakistan has denied overland trade between India and Afghanistan via Wagah, fuelling resentment.
 - ✓ Restrictions on goods through Karachi port or land routes are seen by Kabul as political coercion.
- **Mutual Resentment** - Many Afghans view Pakistan as interfering in their internal affairs. Pakistan considers itself a long-term supporter of Afghanistan, having hosted millions of refugees and backed resistance movements.
- **The India Factor** - Pakistan remains wary of India’s engagement in Afghanistan, fearing strategic encirclement. Afghan governments, including the Taliban, resist limitations on their foreign policy choices, further complicating ties.

Israel–US Joint Strike in Tehran

- Israel launched a daylight strike on Tehran, describing it as a pre-emptive action. US President Trump confirmed American participation, declaring the start of major combat operations aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.
- The operation was jointly conducted, named **Operation Epic Fury** by the US Department of Defense.
- Iran retaliated swiftly, expanding the confrontation beyond Israel to US bases across the Gulf region, raising fears of a wider Middle East war.

Iran's Retaliation

- **Strikes on Israel**
- **Expansion of Attacks to US Targets**
 - Iran widened its retaliation by targeting US-linked military facilities in the Gulf, including:

Al Udeid Airbase (Qatar)	Al-Salem Airbase (Kuwait)	Al-Dhafra Airbase (UAE)	US Fifth Fleet Headquarters (Bahrain)
--------------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------------------
 - Reports also indicated explosions in Saudi Arabia and attacks on US bases in Jordan, signalling regional escalation.

Trigger: Collapse of Nuclear Talks

- **Stalled Diplomacy**
 - The escalation followed the breakdown of indirect US–Iran nuclear negotiations in Geneva, mediated by Oman.
 - Iran insists on its right to enrich uranium for peaceful use.
 - The US demands strict limitations on Iran's nuclear programme.
- **Rising Political Rhetoric**
 - President Trump labelled Iran an “imminent threat” and the world’s “number one terror sponsor.” Frustration over stalled talks appears to have contributed to the military action.

India's Diplomatic Test

- Less than two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel, India urged restraint, de-escalation, and dialogue as the conflict widened.
- **Diaspora and Evacuation Concerns**
 - India faces significant exposure in the region:

~10,000 Indians in Iran	Over 41,000 in Israel	8–9 million across the Gulf
-------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------
 - Embassies issued advisories amid airspace closures and flight disruptions. India's response draws on past evacuation experience during earlier Israel–Iran tensions.
- **Strategic and Economic Stakes**
 - **Energy Security**
 - ♣ Nearly 60% of India's energy imports originate from West Asia.
 - ♣ Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz could severely affect oil supplies.
 - **Diplomatic Balancing**
 - ♣ The US–Israel partnership complicates India's position, given its strategic ties with Israel and longstanding engagement with Iran.
- **Strategic Autonomy Under Pressure**
 - India's approach mirrors its stance during the Russia–Ukraine war:
 - ♣ Avoiding public condemnation
 - ♣ Maintaining open communication channels
 - ♣ Prioritising national interests

- o However, as US involvement deepens and the regional conflict widens, India’s diplomatic space for calibrated neutrality may shrink, testing its ability to balance strategic autonomy with regional realities.

Conclusion

What began as a targeted operation now risks spiralling into a broader regional conflict — with global implications for energy security, geopolitical alignments, and diplomatic stability.

U.S. Supreme Court Curbs Trump’s Emergency Tariff Powers

- The U.S. Supreme Court, in a 6–3 ruling, struck down President Donald Trump’s tariffs imposed under the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)**, 1977.
- The judgment reinforces constitutional limits on executive power and has wide implications for global trade, including India.

Constitutional Issue: Executive vs Legislative Authority

- **Congressional Power Over Tariffs**
 - o The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the authority to levy taxes and tariffs.
 - o The Court ruled that using IEEPA to impose sweeping tariffs exceeded presidential authority.
- **Nature of IEEPA**
 - o Primarily used for sanctions and asset freezes.
 - o Does not explicitly authorise tariffs.
 - o Trump was the first President to invoke it for broad tariff imposition.

Challenges and Way Forward

- Ongoing executive-legislative tensions over trade authority.
- Risk of protectionism through alternative legal provisions.
- WTO-consistent, transparent trade measures neglected
- For India: diversify export markets and strengthen strategic trade negotiations.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court’s ruling marks a constitutional correction, limiting the expansion of executive emergency powers into broad economic policymaking. While it may reduce tariff unpredictability, trade weaponisation linked to national security and geopolitics is likely to persist.

Trump’s Tariff Strategy



Trade as Economic and Foreign Policy Tool

- ✓ Tariffs were used to generate revenue and pressure trade partners.
- ✓ Targeted countries included China, Canada, Mexico, India, and Brazil.

“Liberation Day” Tariffs (April 2025)

- ✓ Reciprocal tariffs justified under a declared national emergency.
- ✓ Linked to trade deficits, fentanyl trafficking, and migration concerns.

Alternative Tariff Mechanisms After the Judgement

- ✦ Following the ruling, the administration signalled possible reliance on other statutory provisions:
 - ✓ **Section 122 (Trade Act, 1974)**
 - Allows temporary (up to 150 days) tariffs up to 15% for balance-of-payments crises.
 - After the judgement, President Trump used this section to impose 15% tariff on all imports.
 - ✓ **Section 301 (Trade Act, 1974)**
 - Targeted tariffs after investigation of unfair trade practices.
 - Previously used against India’s Digital Services Tax.
 - ✓ **Section 232 (Trade Expansion Act, 1962)**
 - Permits sector-specific tariffs on national security grounds.
 - India faces 232 tariffs on steel, aluminium, automobiles, and copper derivatives.
 - Some relief possible under recent U.S.–India trade understandings.

Myanmar Elections 2026

- The recent elections in Myanmar have brought the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to power with a landslide victory, closing the political cycle that began with the February 2021 military coup.
- The outcome raises serious concerns for India amid Myanmar’s continuing instability.

- Myanmar’s parliament is expected to convene in March to elect a president, with a new government set to take over in April.
- The elections are unlikely to mark the end of the coup, and instead represent an effort by the military regime to normalise and legitimise its post-coup rule.

India’s Strategic and Security Concerns

- **Border Instability**
 - 1,643-km porous India–Myanmar border vulnerable to spillover effects.
 - Rebel and ethnic militias reportedly control about 42% of Myanmar’s territory.
- **Refugee and Security Pressures**
 - ~31,000 refugees in Mizoram from Myanmar (as of February 2026).
 - Sharp rise in cross-border arms trafficking and synthetic drug seizures.
 - Increased insurgent activity, including NSCN-IM consolidation in Sagaing region.
- **Infrastructure Risks:** Key connectivity projects such as:
 - Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
 - India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway
 - Risk of delays or disruption due to instability.

Opening of the European Legal Gateway Office in New Delhi

- India and the European Union marked a significant step in strengthening mobility cooperation with the launch of the **European Legal Gateway Office** in New Delhi — the first such EU office in a partner country.
 - The initiative was announced at the 16th EU–India Summit. It aligns with the newly adopted EU–India 2030 Strategic Agenda.
 - It follows the signing of the Comprehensive Framework for Cooperation on Mobility.

About European Legal Gateway Office

- It will facilitate safe, legal, and well-informed migration from India to EU member states.
- With its focus primarily on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, it will support Indian students, researchers, and professionals.

Strategic Importance for India

- ➔ **India as a Global Talent Hub**
 - ➔ Young population with expanding digital and scientific capabilities.
 - ➔ Growing contributor to global technology and innovation ecosystems.
- ➔ **Strengthening Bilateral Ties**
 - ➔ Deepens India–EU cooperation in technology, skills, and workforce mobility.
 - ➔ Enhances structured migration pathways while reducing irregular migration risks.

Broader Implications

- ➔ Reflects an emerging global workforce model.
- ➔ Encourages legality, transparency, and fairness in talent flows.
- ➔ Strengthens economic interdependence between India and the EU.
- ➔ Aligns mobility with prosperity, security, and sustainability objectives

India, Seychelles Relationship Strengthened

- PM Modi held bilateral talks with visiting Seychelles President Patrick Herminie in New Delhi, where both countries strengthened defence and maritime cooperation and adopted a new Joint Vision framework.
- The visit coincided with the **50th anniversary of Seychelles’ independence** and **50 years of diplomatic relations** between India and Seychelles.
- During the visit, Seven MoUs were signed across sectors, including: Pharmacopoeial cooperation (health sector); Meteorological collaboration; Cultural exchange programme (2026–2030).

Key Highlights: India–Seychelles Partnership

1. Elevation of India–Seychelles Partnership

- Adoption of Joint Vision (SESEL)**
 - Both countries adopted the Joint Vision for Sustainability, Economic Growth and Security through Enhanced Linkages (SESEL).
 - Emphasis on sustainability, security, & economic cooperation
- Shared Maritime and Democratic Values**
 - Reaffirmed partnership rooted in history, kinship & democratic principles.
 - President Herminie's visit within 100 days of inauguration highlights strategic importance of India.

2. Defence and Maritime Cooperation

- Core Pillar of Bilateral Ties**
 - Maritime security & defence cooperation remain central.
 - Focus on countering piracy, international crime, & maritime threats.
 - Collaboration in maritime surveillance & defence capacity development.
- Colombo Security Conclave Membership**
 - Seychelles welcomed as a full member of the Colombo Security Conclave.
 - Strengthens regional maritime security architecture in the the Indian Ocean

3. Expanding Cooperation in New Areas

- Renewable Energy and Climate Solutions**
 - Commitment to collaborate in renewable energy & climate resilience.
- Marine Research and Data Sharing**
 - Cooperation in ocean observation, maritime scientific research, and data exchange.
 - Capacity-building & technical expertise sharing.
- Digital and Capacity-Building Initiatives**
 - Agreements on digital transformation & training programmes for civil servants.
 - Collaboration between metrological authorities.

4. Special Economic Package for Seychelles

- Financial Assistance**
 - \$175 million** package announced:
 - \$125 million** Line of Credit (Rupee-denominated)
 - Remaining as **Grant Assistance**
- Focus Areas**
 - Public Housing
 - Infrastructure and Mobility
 - Maritime Security
 - Capacity-Building

Strategic Significance

- **Indian Ocean Region Stability**
 - Reinforces India's **Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions)**.
 - Enhances peace and stability in the Western Indian Ocean.
- **People-Centric and Economic Ties**
 - Tourism cooperation highlighted as key economic pillar for Seychelles.
 - Growing Indian tourist presence supported by improved air connectivity.

Conclusion

As strategic maritime neighbours, both nations aim to strengthen regional stability and build a shared future in the Indian Ocean region.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

India's Bid for Full IEA Membership

- At its recent ministerial meeting in Paris, the **International Energy Agency (IEA)** acknowledged progress on India's request for full membership.
- India is currently an associate member, but full membership requires overcoming significant legal hurdles.

Evolving Role of the IEA

- **From Oil Security to Energy Transition**
 - Expanded focus to renewable energy, decarbonisation, and climate action.
 - Launched programmes on critical minerals and clean technologies.
- **Changing Global Energy Landscape**
 - Emerging economies like India and China now drive global energy demand.
 - IEA members once represented over 60% of global energy demand; this fell to 40%
 - Including associate members, the IEA network now covers nearly 80% of global energy demand.

India's Quest for Full Membership

- **Why India Seeks Full Membership?**
 - Gain voting rights and decision-making authority.
 - Access deeper institutional influence in global energy governance.
 - Strengthen its role in shaping energy transition and climate policy.
- **Legal and Structural Challenges**
 - IEA membership is restricted to OECD countries.
 - India does not plan to join the OECD.
 - Granting India membership would require:
 - ♣ Amending the IEA's founding charter, or
 - ♣ Creating a special exception.
 - ♣ Brazil has also sought full membership, raising broader reform questions.

Conclusion

India's bid for full IEA membership reflects its rising importance in global energy governance. However, structural constraints within the IEA's OECD-based framework make membership a complex and politically sensitive process.

iea The International Energy Agency: Origins and Mandate

Establishment and Background

Founded in 1974 after the global oil crisis triggered by the Arab oil embargo during the Yom Kippur War.

- Created by 17 OECD countries to strengthen collective energy security.

Core Objectives

- 1. Ensure stable oil supplies.
- 2. Coordinate emergency responses to supply disruptions.
- 3. Mandate minimum strategic oil reserves for members.

Emergency Mechanism

The IEA's primary objective was to safeguard stable oil supplies and anticipate future disruptions through coordinated action.

- A key feature of its framework is the requirement that each member maintain minimum strategic oil stocks to cushion supply shocks.
- This emergency mechanism has been activated multiple times, including during the 1991 Gulf War and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Membership Structure

Currently has **33 full members** (Colombia joined after becoming an OECD member).

- Full membership restricted to OECD countries.

Expansion Beyond OECD: Associate Membership

In 2015, the IEA created an associate membership category for non-OECD countries.

- Associates can participate in discussions but lack voting rights.
- India became an associate member in 2017.
- There are currently 13 associate members.

AI Impact Summit 2026

The **AI Impact Summit (New Delhi, Feb 2026)** culminated in 88 countries and international organisations adopting the **New Delhi Declaration on AI** (voluntary and non-binding in nature).

- The declaration calls for democratised, accessible, and responsible AI to deliver inclusive global impact.
- Switzerland will host the 2027 AI Summit in Geneva, strengthening its role in digital policy and responsible AI governance.

Evolution of Global AI Summits

- 2023 – **Bletchley Park** (UK): Focus on AI safety and risk mitigation.
- 2024 – **Seoul**: Continued dialogue without a formal institutional framework.
- 2025 – **Paris AI Action Summit**: Shift toward rapid innovation; US pushed back against “safety-first” restrictions.
- 2026 – **New Delhi**: Broader consensus on democratic diffusion, inclusion, and development-focused AI governance.

India’s Core Priorities at the Summit

- **Democratising AI Access**
 - Expand AI benefits to the Global South.
 - Improve representation of diverse languages in large language models (LLMs).
- **Safe and Trusted AI**: Promote balanced innovation with safeguards and risk management.
- **Domestic Ecosystem Building**
 - Position India as a global AI hub.
 - Promote AI adoption in healthcare, agriculture, and education.
- **Thematic Focus Areas**

Human capital
and inclusion

Innovation
and efficiency

Economic
development
and resilience

Democratising
AI resources

Key Outcomes and Controversies

- **Diplomatic Success**
 - 88 signatories, including US, China, France, Australia, and UK.
 - Broader participation compared to previous summits.
 - India joined the US-led Pax Silica initiative on resilient supply chains.
- **Investment Commitments**
 - \$250 billion total commitments announced.
 - \$20 billion earmarked for frontier deep-tech research.
- **Indigenous Milestone**
 - Sarvam AI launched India’s first domestically trained multi-billion parameter LLMs under the IndiaAI Mission.
- **Operational Challenges**
 - Crowd management issues and political protests.
 - Controversy over misrepresentation of imported tech as indigenous.
- **Major Investment Announcements**
 - **Domestic Commitments**
 - ♣ Reliance Industries: ₹10 lakh crore for AI infrastructure over 7 years.
 - ♣ Adani Group: Comparable large-scale investment pledge.
 - **Global Tech Expansion**
 - ♣ Google: \$15 billion AI and data centre investments, including subsea cable plans.
 - ♣ OpenAI–Tata partnership: 100 MW data centre leasing and enterprise AI deployment.
 - ♣ Anthropic–Infosys collaboration.

- ♣ Yotta Data Services: \$2 billion GPU-powered expansion.

New Delhi Declaration: Core Provisions

- **Democratic Diffusion of AI**
- **Institutional Platforms**
 - **Global AI Impact Commons:** Shared database of AI applications.
 - **Trusted AI Commons:** Tools and benchmarks for secure AI.
 - **International AI for Science Network:** Collaboration among global institutions.
- **Social and Workforce Dimension**
 - AI for Social Empowerment Platform.
 - AI Workforce Development Playbook and Reskilling Principles.
 - Guiding principles for resilient and efficient AI systems.

Conclusion

- The Delhi AI Declaration reflects India’s attempt to shape global AI governance around inclusivity, access, and development rather than pure technological dominance.
- By securing wide international endorsement, India positions itself as a bridge between major powers and the Global South—advocating AI that is democratic, trusted, and development-oriented.

39th AU Summit

- The 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
 - An Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) is a regular, scheduled meeting of its principal organs—the Assembly of Heads of State and Government and the Executive Council.
- **Theme** - “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”.

About African Union (AU)

- It is a continental intergovernmental organisation comprising 55 African countries.
- It was officially launched in 2002 in Durban, South Africa, replacing the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was founded in 1963.
- **Headquarters** - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- **Objectives**
 - Promote unity and solidarity among African states
 - Defend sovereignty and territorial integrity
 - Accelerate political and socio-economic integration
 - Promote peace, security, democracy, and human rights
 - Advance sustainable development under **Agenda 2063** (long-term development blueprint for Africa)
- **Major Initiatives**
 - African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – aims to create the world’s largest free trade area by number of countries
 - Conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions in regions such as Sudan and Somalia

UN Launches Road Safety Financing Framework in India

- The United Nations, in partnership with four Indian States — Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam — has launched a road safety financing framework.
- The initiative will be coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office.
- Funding will be provided through the UN Road Safety Fund.
- The initiative aims to strengthen institutional capacity and reduce the human and economic costs of road accidents in India.
- **Objectives of the Initiative**
 - Strengthen national and state-level capacities to implement road safety action plans.
 - Reduce road fatalities and serious injuries that often lead to long-term disabilities.
 - Improve systemic planning and financial mechanisms for road safety interventions.

Road Safety Concerns in India

- As per the experts, the world is not on track to meet the target of reducing road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% by 2030 under the **Decade of Action for Road Safety** (2021–2030).

- India records approximately 600 deaths daily due to road crashes — nearly 25 deaths every hour.
- Beyond fatalities, many victims suffer life-long disabilities.
- The World Bank estimates that road accidents cost India nearly 7% of its GDP, reflecting a major socio-economic burden.

India Joins Pax Silica

- India formally joined the Pax Silica group, aligning with the United States and key global partners to build resilient supply chains for electronics and critical minerals.
- The joining event took place during the **AI Impact Summit** (New Delhi), marking India’s official inclusion in the grouping.
- Pax Silica held its inaugural summit at the U.S. Institute of Peace in December 2025.

[For detailed discussion on Pax Silica, refer *The Recitals* – January 2026]

Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2026

- The 62nd MSC (Feb 13-15, 2026) was held in Munich, Germany. It focused on geopolitical and technological challenges to European security, NATO’s role, and strategic competition.
- India was represented by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. At the conference, he reiterated India’s commitment to strategic autonomy, amid debate over India’s interim trade agreement with the United States and its energy ties with Russia.

Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave 2026

- The Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave 2026 was a national-level event held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.
- Organized by the **Ministry of Education** and anchored by **the IIT Madras Bodhan AI Foundation**, it served as a pre-summit to the India AI Impact Summit.
- The conclave marked a major step toward integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) across India’s education ecosystem, bringing together senior officials, academic leaders, industry experts, and AI-driven startups.
- A key highlight was the initiation of the **Bharat EduAI Stack**—an open, interoperable architecture to build and scale AI-powered learning solutions nationwide.
- The conclave addressed four core verticals:
 - AI for School Education
 - AI for Higher Education
 - AI for Skilling & Workforce Readiness
 - AI Research & Deep Technology
- The conclave represents a decisive move toward building a sovereign, scalable, and inclusive AI-driven education ecosystem, positioning India as a global leader in ethical and transformative AI deployment.

About MSC

- MSC is the world's premier independent forum on international security policy.
- Held annually in February in Munich, it promotes “**peace through dialogue**” by bringing together global leaders, defence officials, and experts to address urgent security challenges.
- The MSC serves as a critical platform for **transatlantic coordination, trust-building, and strategic dialogue**, shaping global security discourse in an increasingly multipolar and uncertain world.
- **Founding Vision**
 - ✓ Established in **1963** by Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin.
 - ✓ Conceived as a platform to foster dialogue and prevent conflict during the Cold War era.
- **Growth Over Time**
 - ✓ Evolved into a leading global venue for transatlantic coordination and broader international security discussions.
 - ✓ Now addresses emerging geopolitical, technological, and strategic issues.
- **Purpose and Objectives**
 - ✓ Promote international conflict resolution.
 - ✓ Encourage candid dialogue among policymakers and security experts.
 - ✓ Strengthen alliances and multilateral cooperation.
 - ✓ Provide an informal setting for high-level diplomatic engagement.

RBI Weighs Compensation Framework for Digital Fraud Victims

- The RBI proposed a draft framework to compensate customers up to ₹25,000 for small-value digital fraud losses, including certain cases involving user error. The pay-out will be made from surplus income accrued on the **Deposit Education and Awareness Fund**, which also includes unclaimed deposits.
- **Logic Behind the Scheme**
 - **Small-Value Frauds Dominate**
 - ♣ ~ 65% of digital frauds in India are low-value (often under ₹55,000), representing over two-thirds of cases but less than 15% of the total fraud value
 - ♣ Capping at ₹25,000 enables relief to many victims without excessive fiscal burden.
 - **Low Recovery Rates**
 - ♣ In large-value card/internet frauds (₹1 lakh+), recovery was minimal (₹139 crore out of ₹1,457 crore in 2023-24).
 - ♣ Highlights need for structured compensation rather than relying on recovery mechanisms.

Consumer protection

As part of customer-centric measures, the RBI will issue three separate draft guidelines for public consultation.

- The first will address **mis-selling of financial products**, seeking to ensure greater transparency and accountability on the part of banks and financial institutions.
- The second set will focus on **loan recovery practices**, including the conduct and engagement of recovery agents, to prevent harassment and unfair treatment of borrowers.
- The third will deal with **limiting customer liability** in cases of unauthorised electronic banking transactions.

DRDO Successfully Demonstrates SFDR Technology

- The DRDO successfully conducted a flight demonstration of **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)** technology from the Integrated Test Range off the Odisha coast.
- With this achievement, India joins a select group of nations possessing **SFDR technology**, a critical capability for developing **long-range air-to-air missiles**.
- About SFDR
 - SFDR is an advanced air-breathing missile propulsion technology developed by the DRDO.

Key Features of the Proposed Framework

- **Compensation Cap:** Compensation capped at ₹25,000 or 85% of the fraud value, whichever is lower. Victim must bear at least 15% of the loss.
 - ➔ RBI to bear 70% of the compensated amount; banks to contribute 15%.
- **Scope:** Focus on small-value digital fraud cases.
- **User Error Coverage:** Possible compensation even if OTP/credentials were shared under deception.
- **One-Time, No-Questions-Asked Relief:** Compensation available only once in a lifetime. Designed to encourage learning and prevent repeated negligence.
- Shift from liability-based approach to consumer-centric compensation model.
- **Additional Preventive Measures**
 - ➔ Lagged Credits: Delay in crediting high-risk transactions.
 - ➔ Enhanced Authentication: Extra safeguards for vulnerable users.
 - ➔ Risk Profiling: Behaviour-based differentiated security measures.

Existing RBI Framework on Customer Liability

- The RBI first issued detailed instructions in 2017 to limit customer liability in unauthorised electronic banking transactions.
- These guidelines classified liability based on factors such as:
 - ➔ Delay in reporting unauthorised transactions
 - ➔ Negligence on the part of banks or customers
 - ➔ Nature of the fraud (system failure vs. customer compromise)
- Under this regime, customers could enjoy zero or limited liability if they reported fraud promptly. However, the framework did not mandate direct compensation for small-value losses, especially in cases involving partial customer fault, such as OTP sharing under deception.
- With rapid technological changes and growing fraud sophistication, RBI reviewed the adequacy of these rules, leading to the proposed revisions.

- It uses **atmospheric oxygen to burn solid fuel**, enabling sustained supersonic speeds and extended engagement ranges.
 - ♣ Unlike conventional rockets that carry both fuel and oxidizer, SFDR uses atmospheric oxygen for combustion.
 - ♣ This reduces onboard weight and allows for a larger and more effective warhead.
- **Core Components of SFDR**
 - **Solid-Fuel Booster** - Accelerates the missile initially to the required supersonic speed.
 - **Ramjet Engine** - Sustains high-speed flight using air-breathing propulsion.
 - **Nozzle-less Booster & Flow Controller** - Utilises a thrust-modulated ducted rocket system.
 - ♣ Allows controlled thrust during flight for optimised performance and better targeting accuracy.

PRAHAAR

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has released PRAHAAR, India's **first** publicly articulated **National counter-terror (CT) strategy document.**
- The eight-page framework consolidates existing mechanisms and outlines India's comprehensive approach to tackling terrorism.

Core Framework of PRAHAAR

- **Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception**
 - Recognises threats from cross-border terrorism, global jihadist networks (Al-Qaeda, ISIS), and emerging technologies such as drones, encrypted platforms, dark web tools, crypto-financing, cyberattacks, and CBRN (*chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials*) risks.
 - Avoids associating terrorism with any religion or identity.
- **Seven-Pillar Strategy**
 - **Intelligence-Led Prevention** – Proactive disruption through real-time inter-agency coordination.
 - **Swift and Proportionate Response** – Policed action backed by specialised forces.
 - **Capacity Aggregation** – Modernisation, standardised training, and better coordination.
 - **Rule of Law and Human Rights** – Commitment to due process and civil liberties.
 - **De-radicalisation & Community Engagement** – Outreach, rehabilitation, and targeted interventions.
 - **International Alignment** – Intelligence sharing, legal cooperation, and multilateral engagement.
 - **Recovery and Resilience** – Whole-of-society approach for post-incident recovery. Anchored in a zero-tolerance political stance on terrorism.



What Is New in PRAHAAR?

❖ Unified Public Framework

- Does not create new agencies or powers but consolidates existing tools (e.g., MAC, NIA, NSG, UAPA, CAPFs) into a single national doctrine.

❖ Formal Recognition of Key Principles

- Explicit emphasis on **human rights and rule of law**.
- Links security with socio-economic development (education, employment, welfare schemes).
- Clear diplomatic messaging rejecting religious profiling.

Comparison with Western Strategies

❖ Scope and Detail

- PRAHAAR is concise and principle-based.
- US and UK strategies are more detailed, operational, and include measurable goals and structured oversight mechanisms.

❖ Oversight and Accountability

- PRAHAAR does not specify public reporting or independent review systems.
- Western frameworks mandate periodic reviews and legislative oversight.

❖ Ideological Coverage

- PRAHAAR focuses mainly on cross-border and jihadi threats.
- Western models explicitly address a broader ideological spectrum, including right-wing extremism.

Strengths and Limitations

❖ Strengths

- Unified articulation of India's CT approach.
- Explicit rejection of religious profiling.
- Integration of security and development.

❖ Weaknesses

- Limited operational detail and measurable benchmarks.
- Absence of structured oversight mechanisms.
- Implementation challenges at grassroots policing levels.

Conclusion

PRAHAAR success will depend on effective implementation, inter-agency coordination, capacity-building at local levels, and translating policy intent into measurable outcomes.

Tripartite MoU to Create Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority

- The Centre signed a tripartite agreement with the Nagaland Government and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) to establish the **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)**.
- The FNTA is designed as a model of “**devolutionary autonomy**”, granting substantial administrative and financial powers to **six relatively underdeveloped eastern districts** — *Kiphire, Longleng, Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang*.
- The aim of this devolution is to address long-standing demands for greater self-governance and focused development.
- This deal is also significant from the security perspective. Eastern Nagaland's proximity to the Myanmar border, coupled with the presence of armed groups across the porous frontier, heightened strategic concerns.
 - Prolonged unrest in the region posed risks to internal security and border stability.

Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA): Powers and Provisions

- **Semi-Autonomous Governance Structure** - The FNTA grants semi-autonomous status to six eastern Nagaland districts. A mini-Secretariat, headed by a senior officer, will function within the region to decentralise administration and reduce reliance on Kohima.
- **Financial and Administrative Devolution** - Development funds will be allocated proportionately based on population and area, with the Ministry of Home Affairs supporting initial establishment costs. This ensures direct financial empowerment of the region.
- **Legislative and Executive Authority** - The FNTA will exercise powers over 46 subjects, enabling local decision-making in areas such as land use, agriculture, rural development, and infrastructure, tailored to local needs.
- **Safeguarding Constitutional Protections** - Importantly, the arrangement does not alter Article 371(A), preserving Nagaland's special constitutional safeguards related to customary laws and social practices.

ENPO's Demand for Frontier Nagaland



◆ Historical Roots of the Demand

- ➔ The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) has sought a separate State of **Frontier Nagaland**, carved out of present-day Nagaland.
- ➔ The demand was formally submitted to the Centre in 2010, rooted in historical neglect dating back to British-era administrative arrangements that left eastern hill areas largely ungoverned.

◆ Post-Statehood Marginalisation

- ➔ After Nagaland attained statehood in 1963, eight eastern Naga tribes inhabiting the six eastern districts felt politically and economically sidelined compared to western regions.
- ➔ Perceived developmental disparities and limited administrative representation gradually intensified into a sustained movement for autonomy and eventual statehood.

IAF To Train British pilots

- In a historic first, Indian Air Force (IAF) instructors will train British fast jet pilots at Royal Air Force (RAF) Valley in the UK.
- The decision was finalised during the 19th UK–India Air Staff Talks held in New Delhi.
- This marks a new phase in expanding military training cooperation between the two countries.
- The IAF will deploy three Qualified Flight Instructors (QFIs) to RAF Valley. RAF Valley is the UK's primary training base for fast jet pilots.
- The deployment aligns with the broader **UK–India Vision 2035**, aimed at strengthening strategic and defence partnerships.

Wider Defence Engagement

- The two countries have significantly expanded joint exercises in recent years:
 - **Konkon 2025**: Largest-ever iteration of maritime exercise involving both nations' Carrier Strike Groups.

- **Ajeya Warrior 2025:** Joint army exercise held in Rajasthan.
- **Tarang Shakti 2024:** RAF participated in India's first multilateral air combat exercise.
- **Cobra Warrior 2023:** IAF's first participation in the UK's multilateral air exercise.

India Assumes Command of CTF 154

- In a first, the Indian Navy has assumed command of **Combined Task Force (CTF) 154**, a multinational training task force under the **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)**.
- The move highlights India's growing role in collaborative maritime security and capacity-building in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.

About CMF

- CMF, headquartered in Bahrain, is the world's largest multinational naval partnership, comprising 47 nations.
- It oversees around 3.2 million square miles of international waters, covering vital global shipping lanes.
- Other CMF task forces include:

CTF 150 (Maritime Security)

CTF 151 (Counter-Piracy)

CTF 152 (Arabian Gulf Security)

CTF 153 (Red Sea Security)

About CTF 154

- Established in May 2023, CTF 154 focuses exclusively on training and capacity building among CMF member nations.
- It conducts multinational training across the Middle East and surrounding waters.
- CTF 154's activities centre on five key areas:
 - ✓ Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
 - ✓ Law of the Sea
 - ✓ Maritime Interdiction Operations
 - ✓ Maritime Rescue and Assistance
 - ✓ Leadership Development
- CTF 154 organises Maritime Security Enhancement Training (MSET) events and exercises such as Compass Rose and Northern/Southern Readiness.
- It builds operational capacity against threats like illegal trafficking, piracy, and irregular migration.

Indian Army Showcases Indigenous AI Solutions

- The Indian Army unveiled a suite of indigenous Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions at the India AI Summit held at Bharat Mandapam.
- The initiative reflects the Army's transition toward becoming a data-centric and AI-enabled force, aligned with India's vision of technological self-reliance and secure digital capability.
- **Key AI Systems Unveiled**
 - **AI Examiner** - An automated assessment and feedback platform aimed at modernising training and education frameworks within the armed forces.
 - **SAM-UN** - A geospatial and AI-enabled **situational awareness** system for mission planning, disaster response, and integration with smart command centres.
 - **EKAM (AI-as-a-Service)** - A secure, air-gapped indigenous AI cloud platform ensuring data sovereignty and secure processing of sensitive information.
 - **PRAKSHEPAN** - An AI-driven climatology and disaster prediction system capable of issuing early alerts for landslides, floods, and avalanches.
- **Security and Cyber Defence Innovations**
 - **XFace:** AI-powered facial recognition system for identity verification.
 - **Deepfake Detection System:** Counters synthetic media manipulation.
 - **AI Cyber Security Systems:** Protects critical infrastructure from malware & evolving cyber threats.
- **Operational and Logistical AI Tools**
 - **Nabh Drishti:** Mobile telemetry-based real-time reporting and visualisation platform.
 - **Driver Fatigue Detection Device:** Real-time drowsiness alerts to enhance operational safety.
 - **AI-in-a-Box:** Portable AI solution for remote or disconnected environments.
 - **AI-Powered Vehicle Tracking System:** Enhances fleet monitoring and logistics optimisation.

Exercises

Vayu Shakti 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted a large-scale day–dusk–night firepower demonstration under Exercise ‘Vayu Shakti’ at Pokharan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan. • The event, held near the India–Pakistan border in the Thar Desert and was attended by the President Droupadi Murmu. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Earlier in the day, President Droupadi Murmu undertook a 25-minute sortie as co-pilot in the indigenously developed Light Combat Helicopter ‘Prachand’ from Jaisalmer Air Force Station.
MILAN 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise MILAN 2026, the Indian Navy’s premier multilateral maritime exercise, concluded with a closing ceremony aboard INS Vikrant off the coast of Visakhapatnam. • Held under the theme “Camaraderie, Cooperation, Collaboration”, the exercise marked one of the largest editions of MILAN to date. • Strategic Significance: Enhanced interoperability and collective readiness among participating navies.
International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Navy hosted the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 off the coast of Visakhapatnam, with participation from 74 countries. • This marked the third IFR hosted by India, following earlier editions in Mumbai (2001) and Visakhapatnam (2016). • The event showcased global naval cooperation, professional camaraderie, and India’s expanding maritime capability under the theme “United Through Oceans.”
Vajra Ghaat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Army conducted Exercise Vajra Ghaat at the Pokharan Field Firing Range, Jaisalmer, to evaluate the performance of the K9 Vajra self-propelled artillery system in the harsh desert conditions of the Thar Desert. • The exercise demonstrated the Army’s readiness to deploy and operate heavy artillery in extreme terrain, particularly along the western front. • About the K9 Vajra Artillery System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A tracked, self-propelled howitzer, based on South Korea’s K9 Thunder. ○ Capable of firing beyond 40 km with high accuracy. ○ Supports both Indian and NATO-standard ammunition. ○ Procured under the ‘Buy Global’ category of the Defence Procurement Procedure. ○ Manufactured in India by Larsen & Toubro in partnership with South Korea’s Hanwha (initial order in 2017). ○ Adapted for operations in deserts, plains, and high-altitude regions.
Trilateral Naval Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Navy, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and the Indonesian Navy conducted a trilateral exercise in the Andaman Sea.
IAF–RTAF In-Situ Exercise in IOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted an in-situ air combat training exercise with the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). • The exercise demonstrated the IAF’s extended operational reach over the maritime domain and highlighted interoperability with a Friendly Foreign Country (FFC) in the IOR.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

India's Next-Generation Tsunami Warning System (TWS)

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is working towards setting up a Regional Service Centre (RSC) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, aiming to strengthen its existing tsunami monitoring and warning system.

- ✓ **Nodal Agency:** INCOIS (Indian National Centre for Ocean Information and Services), Hyderabad.
- ✓ **International Alignment:** Complies with the **UNESCO-IOC** (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) standards.

Key Components of the Next-Gen System

- **Regional Service Centre (RSC):** A first-of-its-kind tsunami coordination centre is being established at **Vijaynagar (Swaraj Dweep)** in A&N Islands.
- **Sub-sea Cable Network:** A **270-km-long sub-sea cable** will be laid along the **Andaman-Sumatra subduction zone**. This addresses the limitations of surface buoys (which are prone to theft and vandalism) and satellite data gaps.
- **Non-Seismic Detection:** Moving beyond earthquakes, the system will now monitor:
 - ✓ **Submarine Landslides:** Underwater collapses that displace massive water volumes.
 - ✓ **Volcanic Activity:** Monitoring sites like the **Barren Island volcano** (India's only active volcano). **Acoustic Signals:** Using underwater **sound waves** which travel faster and provide earlier detection than traditional seismic sensors.

Comparative Analysis: Traditional EWS vs. Next-Gen TWS

The shift from the 2007-era Early Warning System (EWS) to the Next-Generation Tsunami Warning System (NG-TWS) marks a fundamental change in how we protect coastal regions.

Feature	Early Warning System (2007)	Next-Generation TWS
Primary Trigger	Seismic-Dependent: Relies almost exclusively on undersea earthquakes	Source-Agnostic: Detects earthquakes, submarine landslides, volcanic eruptions, and glacial collapses.
Transmission Media	Satellite & Buoy-Link: Uses Bottom Pressure Recorders (BPRs) and surface buoys.	Sub-sea Fiber Optic Cables: Hard-wired sensors connected directly to mainland/island stations.
System Resilience	Vulnerable: Buoys are prone to damage from fishing trawlers, weather, and vandalism.	High Durability: Permanent sub-sea infrastructure eliminates "blind spots" caused by buoy failure.
Lead Time	Lagged: High confirmation lag; lead times for A&N Islands are often only 10–20 minutes.	Rapid: Uses acoustic wave monitoring (faster than water waves) for near-instant detection.
Data Processing	Centralized: Data must travel to INCOIS (Hyderabad) and back to the islands.	Regionalized: Regional Service Centres (e.g., Swaraj Dweep) allow for local autonomous processing.

Extra Mile: Why Andaman & Nicobar for Next-Gen TWS?

- **Proximity to Fault Lines:** The islands sit near the highly active Andaman-Sumatra subduction zone.
- **Time Advantage:** Since the islands are closest to potential epicenters, the "lead time" warning is shortest (often less than 30 minutes). Localized monitoring is essential for the survival of islanders.
- **Barren Island:** Monitoring potential tsunamigenic eruptions from India's only active volcano.

INCOIS & it's New Apps

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) launched three innovative services—JellyAIIP, SAMUDRA 2.0 Mobile App, and SIVAS

Service	Description & Features
JellyAIIP (Jellyfish Aggregation Information Interactive Portal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function: Reporting and visualizing jellyfish aggregation, swarming, and stranding events along the Indian coast. • Geospatial Analysis: Uses AI and hotspot analysis to predict blooms, which often clog fishing nets and also impact coastal tourism. • Public Health: Provides multilingual first-aid guidance for jellyfish stings, a vital resource for tourists and fishermen.
SAMUDRA 2.0 Mobile App Upgraded multilingual (12+ languages) app	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Features: Includes map-based visualization for Potential Fishing Zones (PFZ) and Tuna advisories. • Disaster Alerts: Real-time delivery of tsunami warnings, high wave alerts, and Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) notifications. • Safety for Small Vessels: Features specialized alerts for small fishing boats to prevent overturning in rough seas.
SIVAS (Swell-Surge Inundation Vulnerability Advisory System)	<p>AI-powered early warning for coastal flooding; issues multilingual bulletins; piloted on Kerala coast with tide-gauge integration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target Phenomenon: Focuses on Swell Surges (locally known as <i>Kallakkadal</i> in Kerala), which are long-period waves that cause sudden flooding even in calm local weather. • Operational Status: Currently operational for the Kerala coast, providing inundation forecasts with a lead time of 3 days.

Extra Mile: INCOIS

- **INCOIS**, established in 1999 as an autonomous body under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**, has evolved into India's premier agency for ocean data and early warning services.
- **Headquarters:** Hyderabad, Telangana
- **Global Role:** **Regional** Tsunami Service Provider (RTSP) for the Indian Ocean.
- **Membership:** **Permanent** member of UNESCO's **Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)**.
- **Recent Partnership:** **Signed** an MoU with **ISRO's Space Applications Centre (SAC)** in Feb 2026 for advanced satellite-based ocean services.

Continental Mantle Earthquakes

A groundbreaking study led by **Stanford University** has produced the first-ever global map of **rare continental mantle earthquakes**.

What are Continental Mantle Earthquakes?

Earthquakes are typically categorized by the layer of the Earth in which they occur.

Type / Concept	Description	Depth Range / Location	Key Characteristics / Significance
Crustal Earthquakes (Common)	Earthquakes that occur in the Earth's crust , where rocks are brittle and break when stress accumulates along faults.	0 – 35 km depth within the Earth's crust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most frequent type of earthquakes. Occur due to fracturing of brittle rocks. Responsible for major surface damage because they originate close to the surface.
Deep-Focus Earthquakes (Common in Subduction Zones)	Earthquakes that occur deep inside the Earth's mantle and are usually linked to subduction processes where one tectonic plate sinks beneath another.	70 – 700 km depth in the mantle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common in subduction zones (e.g., Pacific Ring of Fire). Caused by oceanic plates sliding beneath continental plates. Less surface damage compared to shallow earthquakes but important for understanding plate tectonics.
Continental Mantle Earthquakes (Rare Phenomenon)	Earthquake occurring in the upper mantle beneath stable continental crust , rather than at plate boundaries.	Upper mantle beneath continental interiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically considered unlikely, as the mantle was believed to be too hot and ductile (plastic) to fracture. The mantle was expected to flow rather than break. Their occurrence challenges traditional views about mantle rheology and earthquake mechanics.

Forest Fires in North-East of India

Massive Forest fires have raged for over a week in the **Lohit Valley** (Arunachal Pradesh) and **Dzukou Valley** (Nagaland-Manipur border).

- ✓ **Scale of Incident:** Arunachal Pradesh recorded nearly **200 times more fire incidents** in early 2026 compared to the same period in 2025.
- ✓ **IAF Intervention:** Under "Operation Walong," the Indian Air Force deployed **Mi-17 V5 helicopters** using **Bambi Buckets** to drop over 1.4 lakh liters of water at altitudes exceeding 9,500 feet, a rare high-altitude aerial firefighting feat.

Forest Fire in North-East India: Multidimensional Causes

Natural & Climatic Factors	Anthropogenic Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moisture Deficit: A severe pre-monsoon rainfall deficit in 2026 turned the forest undergrowth into a "tinderbox." • Fuel Load: The accumulation of dry bamboo, pine needles (highly inflammable due to resin content), and organic litter. • Topographic Winds: High-velocity winds near peaks like Japfu Peak, rapidly spreading sparks across steep ridges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting Cultivation (Jhum): While a traditional practice, uncontrolled "slash-and-burn" fires often escape into deep forests during dry spells. • Human Negligence: Unattended campfires, discarded cigarette butts, and sparks from electric transmission lines. • Forest Friction: The friction of dry bamboo swaying in high winds can naturally ignite fires.

Initiatives Taken So Far to tackle Forest Fire

Policy Frameworks	Technological Interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Action Plan on Forest Fires (NAPFF), 2018: Focuses on informing, enabling, and empowering forest-fringe communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSI Monitoring System: The Forest Survey of India (FSI) uses MODIS and VIIRS satellite sensors to send

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme 2017 (FPM): A Centrally Sponsored Scheme with a 90:10 funding ratio for Northeast states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • near real-time SMS alerts to over 1.6 lakh registered forest officials. • Early Warning: Development of the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS).
--	--

Global "Beat the Heat" Program

30 cities in Maharashtra have joined the global "Beat the Heat" program marks a pivotal shift toward subnational climate diplomacy.

- ✓ **Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect:** In dense cities like Mumbai and Pune, urban temperatures can be **up to 10°C higher** than surrounding rural areas.
- ✓ **Humidity vs. Dry Heat:** Coastal cities like Mumbai face "felt heat" (Heat Index), where high humidity prevents sweat evaporation, increasing mortality risks.

The Core Initiative: Beat the Heat

"Beat the Heat" is a flagship implementation drive aimed at translating high-level climate pledges into local, measurable results.

- **Leadership:** Led by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** and the **Cool Coalition**.
- **Political Anchor:** It is a key initiative of the **COP30 Presidency (Brazil)**.
- **Scale in India:** Out of 44 Indian cities participating globally, **30 are from Maharashtra** (nearly 70%), showcasing the state's role as a "laboratory" for urban heat resilience.

Multidimensional Objectives

The program operates on three interconnected pillars: **Mitigation, Adaptation, and Transformation**.

Dimension	Focus Area
Mitigation	Reducing cooling-related GHG emissions by 68% by 2050 through efficient appliances and low-GWP (Global Warming Potential) refrigerants.
Adaptation	Implementing Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) like green corridors, urban forests (Miyawaki), and "cool roofs" to protect the most vulnerable.
Transformation	Integrating heat resilience into master plans, building codes, and public procurement policies rather than treating it as a seasonal emergency.

Thwaites Glacier (Doomsday Glacier)

The **Thwaites Glacier** has emerged as a focal point of glaciological concern; its **unprecedented recession** is a direct consequence of **anthropogenic climate forcing**, threatening the stability of the entire West Antarctic Ice Sheet.

- ✓ **World Day for Glaciers (March 21):** First observed in **2025** to raise global awareness about the cryosphere's collapse.

Thwaites Glacier: Geographical & Physical Context

- Located in **West Antarctica**, Thwaites is a vast ice stream (roughly the size of Great Britain or Florida).
- **The "Plug" Effect:** It acts as a natural dam, holding back the West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS). If Thwaites collapses, it could trigger a "domino effect," destabilizing surrounding glaciers.
- **Marine Ice Sheet Instability (MISI):** Unlike East Antarctica, Thwaites sits on bedrock that is **below sea level** and slopes downward toward the interior. This "retrograde bed slope" means that once the retreat starts, it can become self-sustaining and unstoppable.

Multi-Dimensional Scientific Concerns (2025-26 Updates)

Recent findings from the **International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration (ITGC)** and satellite missions (like *Copernicus Sentinel-1*) have shifted our understanding:

The "Tidal Pumping" Mechanism (New Insight)	Recent 2025-26 research revealed that high tides push warm, salty seawater kilometers deep under the glacier's "grounding line" (where ice meets rock). This " vigorous melting " from beneath is occurring much faster than surface melting.
Structural Fracturing	Satellite data in late 2025 identified a "fracture cascade" on the Thwaites Eastern Ice Shelf (TEIS) . The shelf is losing its grip on a "pinning point" (an underwater ridge), which acts like a brake. If this brake snaps, the glacier's flow into the sea could accelerate significantly.
The Sea-Level Rise (SLR) Quantified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Contribution: Already accounts for ~4% of global sea-level rise. • Direct Impact: Complete melting would raise global sea levels by approximately 65 cm. • Total Impact: If it triggers the collapse of the entire West Antarctic Ice Sheet, sea levels could rise by over 3 meters

Antarctic Melting: Implications for India

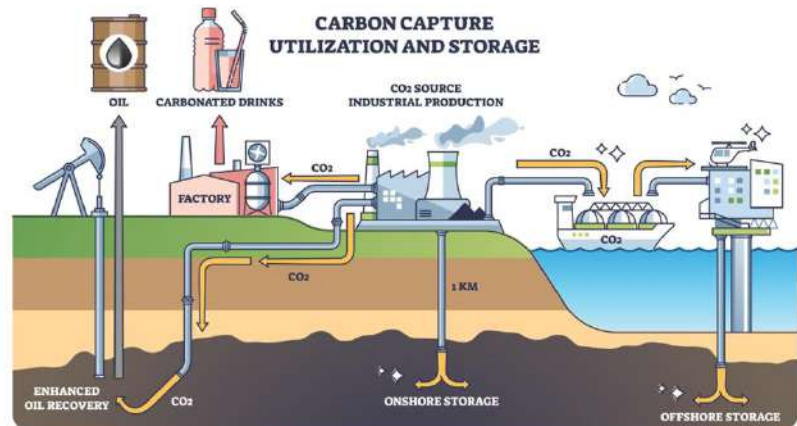
- **Coastal Vulnerability:** Cities like **Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai** are at high risk. A 0.5-meter rise could inundate low-lying areas, causing "climate refugees."
 - ✓ **Indian Antarctic Act, 2022:** India has formalized its own regulatory framework for its research stations (**Bharati and Maitri**) and activities in Antarctica, ensuring environmental protection in line with the Antarctic Treaty.
- **Monsoon Alteration:** Changes in the Southern Ocean's temperature and salinity affect global thermohaline circulation (the "Great Ocean Conveyor Belt"), which can disrupt the timing and intensity of the **Indian Summer Monsoon**.
- **Economic Cost:** Damage to blue economy sectors: ports, fisheries, and coastal infrastructure

CCUS Technologies

In the **Union Budget 2026-27**, the Government of India took a decisive step toward its "Net Zero 2070" goal by proposing an outlay of **₹20,000 crore** over the next five years for **Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS)** technologies.

What is CCUS?

CCUS is a three-stage process aimed at preventing CO₂ from entering the atmosphere and treating it as a resource rather than a waste product.



1. Capture

- CO₂ is separated from emissions at source (power plants, factories) or directly from the air.
- CO₂ is separated from flue gases using methods like post-combustion (commonly monoethanolamine based absorption, ~90% capture efficiency but energy-intensive), pre-combustion (gasification), or oxy-fuel combustion.
- Emerging innovations include Direct Air Capture (DAC) using solid sorbents or liquid solvents.

2. Utilisation

- The captured CO₂ is converted into high-value products like **Green Urea**, methanol, building materials (concrete), or used for **Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR)**.
- This creates economic value, potentially offsetting costs by 20-50% in utilisation pathways.

3. Storage (Sequestration)

- If not used, the CO₂ is injected into deep geological formations (depleted oil/gas fields or saline aquifers) for permanent storage, with monitoring to ensure <1% leakage over 1,000 years.

Extra Mile: CCUS: Geopolitical & Economic Dimension

- **Carbon Border Taxes:** The EU's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, entering a critical phase in 2026, is forcing exporting nations (like India and China) to adopt CCUS to protect their heavy industries (Steel/Aluminum) from high import tariffs.
- **The European Union:** The **Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA)** mandates an annual CO₂ storage capacity of at least 50 million tonnes by 2030, putting the onus on oil and gas producers to develop storage sites.
- **Northern Lights (Norway):** World's first open-source CO₂ transport and storage infrastructure.

Green Ammonia


India's energy landscape has been significantly altered by the **Green Ammonia Auction Model** led by the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).

- ✓ India's **Mode 2A of the SIGHT Scheme** (Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition) has introduced an auction framework that is now being studied by the EU and East Asian nations.

What is Green Ammonia?

- Green ammonia (NH₃) is synthesized by combining **Nitrogen** (from the air) with **Green Hydrogen** (produced via water electrolysis powered by renewable energy).
- **Environmental Impact:** Green ammonia has a near-zero carbon footprint.
- Conventional "grey" ammonia production (via natural gas) is highly carbon-intensive, emitting ~2 tons of CO₂ for every ton of ammonia.
- **Storage & Transport:** Unlike pure hydrogen, ammonia can be liquefied at a relatively modest **-33°C**, making it an ideal "hydrogen carrier" for global trade using existing shipping infrastructure.

Species in News

<p>Eurasian Otter</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IUCN Red List: Near Threatened (NT). • CITES: Appendix I • Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972: Schedule II 	<p>Once considered extinct in J&K, the Eurasian otter was recently rediscovered in the Sindh River, Ganderbal, signaling a potential recovery of the local riverine ecosystem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior: It is a shy, elusive, and primarily nocturnal carnivore. • Diet: Primarily piscivorous (fish-eater), but also consumes amphibians, crustaceans, and small mammals. • Habitat Indicator: Otters are considered bio-indicators of a healthy river ecosystem. Their presence suggests good water quality and a sufficient prey base (fish) in the Sindh River. • Distribution in India: Found in the Himalayan foothills, parts of Central India, and the Western Ghats. In J&K, historical records existed, but recent sightings were nearly non-existent until this discovery.
<p>Loggerhead turtles</p>	<p>Loggerhead turtles face four-pronged threats due to climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The "Five Species" Rule: India is home to 5 of the 7 sea turtle species: Olive Ridley, Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback, and Loggerhead.



- **Size:** It is the **world's largest hard-shelled turtle** (second only to the soft-shelled Leatherback in overall size).
- **Internal Map:** They possess a sophisticated **magnetoreception** ability, using the Earth's magnetic field to navigate across entire ocean basins during migration.
- **IUCN Red List: Vulnerable (VU); WPA, 1972: Schedule I; CITES: Appendix I;**

Bharat GenAI

Recently, the Ministry of Science & Technology informed that Bharat GenAI Large Language Model (LLM) will complete text models in all 22 scheduled languages by February.

What is Bharat GenAI?

It is the first government-supported initiative to build **sovereign foundational AI models** for Indian languages and contexts; developed under the **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)**.

Implemented through **TIH Foundation for IoT & IoE, IIT Bombay**.

Objective

To **revolutionize AI development** across India's linguistic and cultural spectrum.

Key Features:

- **Multimodal AI:** Text (LLMs), Speech (TTS & Automatic Speech Recognition), Vision–Language systems.
- **Multilingual:** Supports **15 Indian languages** (expanding to 22 Scheduled Languages).
- **Four Pillars:** Technology development, Entrepreneurship, HRD, International collaboration.
- **Bharatiya Dataset Training:** Indigenous data-driven models.
- **Open-source Orientation:** Promotes collaborative AI ecosystem.
- **Indigenous Generative AI R&D Ecosystem:** Strengthens AI sovereignty & innovation capacity.

Model Context Protocol

Recently, the National Statistics Office under Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) launched the beta version of its Model Context Protocol (MCP) server for eSankhyiki portal.

What is Model Context Protocol?

It is a **standard protocol** that enables **LLMs/AI agents to directly access datasets, tools, and workflows**. It ensures structured, real-time information access for task execution.

Key Facts about eSankhyiki Portal:

Launched by **National Statistics Office (MoSPI)**, it is a **centralized data management & dissemination platform** for official statistics.

Users: Planners, policymakers, researchers, public.

Modules:

- **Data Catalogue Module:** Centralized repository of major MoSPI datasets (National Accounts Statistics, Consumer Price Index, Index of Industrial Production, Annual Survey of Industries, Periodic Labour Force Survey, Household Consumption Expenditure Survey and Multiple Indicator Survey); enables search within tables and data download for reuse.
- **Macro Indicators Module:** Provides time-series macro data with filtering, visualization, custom downloads and API access.

Graphics Processing Units

India and the United States have announced that they will “significantly increase trade in technology products, including Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and other goods used in data centers.

What is GPU?

It is a specialized processor for **high-speed parallel computations**; initially developed for **3D graphics rendering**. It works alongside CPU (CPU directs operations).

Types

- **Discrete GPU:** Separate add-on card (desktops).
- **Integrated GPU:** Built into same chip/package as CPU (laptops, consoles).

Key Features:

- **Parallel processing architecture** (many cores).
- Dedicated **Virtual Random Access Memory (VRAM)** for high-volume data handling.
- Optimized for intensive computational tasks.

Uses: AI/ML & Deep Learning, High-Performance Computing (HPC), weather/climate modelling, cryptocurrency mining, data centres.

Mons Mouton

Scientists from ISRO's Space Applications Centre (SAC) have identified a landing zone in the rugged south polar region of the Moon called Mons Mouton for India's first lunar sample return mission, Chandrayaan-4.

What is Mons Mouton?

It is a mountain (~6 km high) near the **Moon's South Pole** (South Circumpolar Region), located on the rim of the **South Pole-Aitken Basin** (largest & oldest lunar impact basin). Its named after NASA mathematician **Melba Roy Mouton**.

Key Features:	Significance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively flat summit → suitable landing site.• Receives extended sunlight → favourable for solar-powered missions.• Maintains line-of-sight communication with Earth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Near permanently shadowed craters with potential water-ice deposits.• Crucial for studying lunar geology, evolution & in-situ resource utilization (ISRU).• Strategic site for future south pole exploration missions.

Biopharma SHAKTI

Recently, the Union Minister for Finance announced the launch of Biopharma Shakti initiative in budget 2026-27.

What is the Bio-Pharma SHAKTI Scheme?

Bio-Pharma SHAKTI is a **₹10,000 crore; five-year national initiative** aimed at strengthening India's **end-to-end ecosystem for biologics and biosimilars** production. It marks a strategic shift from India's traditional strength in **generic medicines** to becoming a **global hub for high-value biopharmaceuticals**, targeting **5% share in the global biopharma market**.

- **Biologics** are complex medicines made from living cells or organisms, whose difficult manufacturing has limited their access mainly to high-income countries.
- **Biosimilars** are highly similar versions of biologic medicines that match them in safety and effectiveness, offering affordable alternatives and increasing competition.

Objectives

- Reduce **import dependence** in high-value biologics
- Build domestic capabilities in **R&D, manufacturing and regulation**
- Enhance India's role in **global biologics supply chains**
- Improve access to **advanced and affordable biologic therapies**
- Position India as a **preferred global clinical research destination**

Key Features

- **Manufacturing Strengthening:** Support domestic development of high-value biologics & biosimilars.

- **Human Resource Development:** Establishment of **3 new** National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (**NIPERs**), Upgradation of **7 existing NIPERs**, Focus on specialized skills in biopharma research, manufacturing & regulation.
- **Clinical Research Ecosystem:** Creation of **1,000+ accredited clinical trial sites** and expansion of ethical, high-quality clinical trial capacity nationwide.
- **Regulatory Capacity Building:** Strengthening of Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (**CDSCO**), faster evaluation of complex biologics and alignment with global regulatory standards.

Significance	Challenges in Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Healthcare Security: Reduces reliance on imports for biologics used in cancer, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, etc. • Move Up the Value Chain: Transitions India from “Pharmacy of Generics” to innovation-driven biopharma hub. • Economic & Export Potential: Strengthens India’s claim in the \$1+ trillion global pharma market. • Innovation Boost: Complements National Biopharma Mission, Bio-E3 Policy and PRIP (<i>Promotion of Research & Innovation in Pharma-MedTech sector</i>) scheme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Capital Intensity • Regulatory Complexity: Ensuring global-standard approvals while maintaining safety and ethics. • Skill Gaps: Shortage of highly trained bioprocess engineers, regulatory scientists and clinical researchers. • Coordination Issues: Multi-ministerial convergence (Health, Pharmaceuticals, DBT, Science & Technology). • Clinical Trial Ethics & Trust Deficit • Global Competition

Moltbook Platform

A new tech phenomenon called Moltbook has erupted across social media as the first social network designed exclusively for artificial intelligence agents.

It is an online machine-to-machine social platform where Artificial Intelligence (AI) agents interact autonomously without direct human intervention in each exchange.

Founded by: Developer Matt Schlicht.

Key Features

- **Autonomous Interaction:** AI agents post, reply, and upvote in threaded discussions. Interaction occurs via APIs once connected by human owners.
- **Machine-Centric Discussions:** Topics range from technical issues to abstract themes (e.g., identity, consciousness). Text is generated from training data + ongoing interactions.
- **Emergent Behaviour:** Agents adapt responses based on interactions, remix ideas and create debate-like evolving threads.

Significance: Illustrates evolving **AI-to-AI communication ecosystems** and raises governance, autonomy, and digital ethics questions.

Myoglobin

Researchers have developed a flexible, low-cost biosensor capable of detecting myoglobin which is associated with the early stages of a heart attack.

What is Myoglobin?

It is a **small oxygen-binding protein** found in **skeletal and cardiac muscle** (~2% of muscle protein). It has **one polypeptide chain with one heme (iron) group** → binds one oxygen (O₂) molecule.

Functions

- **Stores and releases oxygen** in muscles during high demand.
- Helps regulate **mitochondrial respiration**.
- Marker of **muscle injury** when detected in blood/urine.

** Unlike hemoglobin (4 O₂ sites), myoglobin has **only one O₂ binding site**.

India AI Stack

It is the **integrated national AI ecosystem** designed to enable **AI deployment at population scale**, aligned with the vision of **democratization of AI**. It integrates infrastructure, models, compute, data, and applications to turn **data + compute into real-world impact**. It consists of five layers which include

- **Application Layer:** AI solutions in agriculture, healthcare, education, justice, disaster management.
- **AI Model Layer:** Indigenous & sovereign AI models (IndiaAI Mission, BharatGen, Bhashini).
- **Compute Layer:** Subsidised Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) / Tensor Processing Unit (TPU) access via IndiaAI Compute Portal.
- **Data & Network Infrastructure Layer:** Data centres, optical fibre, 5G infrastructure.
- **Energy Layer:** Reliable & increasing clean energy to power AI infrastructure.

Need	Significance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To democratize AI access beyond large corporations.• To reduce dependence on foreign AI ecosystems.• To lower entry barriers (compute + infrastructure costs).• To enable AI integration in public service delivery.• To support India-specific, multilingual use cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes AI for Humanity approach.• Strengthens technological self-reliance (AI sovereignty).• Boosts startups, innovation & semiconductor ecosystem.• Aligns AI growth with clean energy & sustainability goals.

SPHEREx Mission

NASA's SPHEREx mission turned its infrared gaze on interstellar comet 3I/ATLAS recently, adding to the deep pool of information the agency has gathered on what is only the third such object to be discovered passing through our solar system.

What is SPHEREx Mission?

SPHEREx (Spectro-Photometer for the History of the Universe, Epoch of Reionization, and Ices Explorer) is a NASA space telescope mission launched in March 2025 to conduct the first **all-sky spectral survey** in optical to near-infrared wavelengths.

Objective: To create a 3D map of the universe to study cosmic inflation, galaxy evolution, and the distribution of water and organic molecules in space.

Key Features

- 2-year prime mission.
- Will survey **~450 million galaxies** and **~100 million stars in Milky Way**.

Copernicus Sentinel-2 Mission

The European Space Agency (ESA)'s Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission recently released a stunning high-resolution image of the 2026 Winter Olympic venues across northern Italy.

About Copernicus Sentinel-2 Mission: An ESA-developed Earth observation mission under the EU's Copernicus Programme for monitoring land surface changes.

Configuration: It consists of twin satellites **Sentinel-2A and Sentinel-2B** in sun-synchronous polar orbit, providing ~5-day global revisit with a 290 km swath.

Technical Features: It delivers high-resolution multispectral imagery in **13 bands** (Visible, Near Infrared, Short Wave Infrared).

Applications: Used for agriculture, food security, ecosystem and land-use monitoring, disaster management, water quality and methane emission tracking.

The **Copernicus Programme** is the European Union's Earth Observation component under its Space Programme, led by the European Commission in partnership with ESA. It integrates data from Sentinel satellites and in-situ sources (ground, airborne and sea-based sensors) to provide free, open and near-real-time information for environmental and security monitoring.

Sarvam AI

At the India AI Impact Summit 2026, **Union Minister of Home Affairs** stated that Sarvam AI exemplifies why the future belongs to India.

What is Sarvam AI

It is a **Made-in-India full-stack AI company** developing **sovereign, multilingual foundational models** aligned with India's public service and governance needs.

Institutional Support: Selected under the **Innovation Centre pillar** of the **IndiaAI Mission** to develop indigenous foundational models, with **financial and compute support amounting to ₹246.72 crore**.

Core Focus	Key Products
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indigenous Large Language & Speech Models (LLMs).• Trained on Indian languages & local datasets.• Reduces dependence on foreign AI ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bulbul: Text-to-Speech (11 languages).• Saaras: Speech-to-Text (22 Scheduled Languages).

Zeigarnik Effect

Zeigarnik Effect is a psychological phenomenon where unfinished or interrupted tasks are remembered better than completed ones. It was proposed by Bluma Zeigarnik, based on observations by Kurt Lewin.

Why it happens? Starting a task creates **mental tension**. If incomplete, it remains an **"open loop"** in short-term memory. This causes cognitive tension, making it harder to forget.

Use & Limitation: It is useful in **learning/productivity**, can cause stress if too many tasks remain unfinished.

National Biobank For Lysosomal Storage Disorders (Lsds)

Researchers have compiled the first government-supported national biobank of rare diseases called Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSDs).

What are LSDs?

It is a group of **70+ rare, inherited metabolic disorders** caused by **deficiency of lysosomal enzymes** → accumulation of toxic fats/sugars in cells. It is life-threatening and mostly affects children. It faces severe diagnostic & therapeutic challenges in India.

✓ India has over 12,000 estimated LSD patients. In a cohort of 530 cases (2008–2025), 60% have died and only eight receive treatment. Therapies exist for just ~7% of rare diseases and cost over ₹1 crore per patient annually, limiting access.

About LSD Biobank

- India's first government-supported LSD biobank, led by Foundation for Research in Genetics and Endocrinology and funded by Department of Biotechnology, was published in Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases.
- It compiles clinical, biochemical and genetic data, along with DNA, plasma and urine samples of 530 patients from 15 states, covering 8 LSD subgroups and 27 disorders- most commonly Gaucher, Tay-Sachs, Mucopolysaccharidosis II/III and Morquio-A.
- **Institutional Collaboration:** Biobank already in active research use:
 - **Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine:** Working on general therapeutic approaches.
 - **Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics:** Developing screening technologies using spectrometry.
 - Collaboration with **Tata Institute for Genetics and Society:** Developing stem cell-based disease models.

- **Significance:** First **centralized clinical-genomic registry** for LSDs in India. Enables early diagnosis, screening technologies, affordable indigenous therapies and stem-cell disease modelling. It reduces dependence on costly imported therapies and strengthens India's rare disease research ecosystem.

CHaracterising ExOPlanet Satellite (CHEOPS)

European Space Agency's (ESA) CHaracterising ExOPlanet Satellite (CHEOPS) recently revealed a four-planet system whose outermost world is a small and rocky planet- not a gas giant.

What is CHEOPS?

It's the first space mission dedicated to **precise study of known exoplanets** orbiting bright, nearby stars.

Launch & Orbit: 2019 in Sun-synchronous, dusk–dawn orbit (~700 km altitude)

Objective

To measure **planetary radii with high precision** by observing **transits** (planet passing in front of host star).

Focus: Super-Earth to Neptune-sized exoplanets

Instrument: Single payload- **High-precision photometer (specialized camera).**

Significance:

- Measures planet diameters to ~10% accuracy.
- When combined with ground-based **mass data**, it enables calculation of **planetary density**.
- Density helps determine composition- rocky, gaseous, and water-rich/ocean worlds.

Quorum Sensing

The phenomenon of bacterial communication, or “quorum sensing” could indeed be a game changer for medicine, by opening new avenues to develop anti-quorum sensing therapies instead of antibiotics.

What is Quorum Sensing (QS)?

It is a mechanism by which bacteria regulate gene expression in accordance with population density through the use of signal molecules (autoinducers).

Mechanism: Autoinducers accumulate → threshold reached → activation of specific genes.

Functions

Virulence	Biofilm formation	DNA uptake (competence)	Horizontal gene transfer	Symbiosis
-----------	-------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	-----------

Examples: *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (pathogenic regulation) and *Rhizobium leguminosarum* (nitrogen fixation).

Bio-Based Chemicals

Bio-based chemicals are industrial chemicals made from renewable biomass (e.g., sugarcane, corn) through biological processes like fermentation. They are used in plastics, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. Enzymes are biological catalysts used across industries and reduce energy use by working at lower temperatures and pressures.

Why India needs bio-based chemicals & enzymes?

- **Leverage strengths:** large agri base, pharma-grade fermentation expertise, strong manufacturing ecosystem.
- **Reduce import dependence** on petrochemicals (e.g., ~\$480 million acetic acid imports in 2023).
- **Create value-added markets** for agricultural produce.
- **Position India as a global supplier** of sustainable industrial inputs.

Where does India Stand?

- India has prioritized bio-based chemicals and enzymes under the Department of Biotechnology's BioE3 policy.
- The enzymes market is consolidated, with few top players accounting for over 75% of market share.

Risks in bio-based chemicals sector:

- **Cost Disadvantage:** Bio-based products are often costlier than petrochemical alternatives in early stages, deterring private investment.

- **Feedstock & Infrastructure Gaps:** Uncertain biomass supply and limited large-scale biomanufacturing facilities constrain scalability.
- **Market Adoption Risk:** Substitutability in existing manufacturing chains and willingness of downstream firms to switch remain uncertain.

Mitigation: Scaling shared infrastructure (biofoundries, pilot & demo plants under BioE3) and establishing clear standards, certification, and procurement support can reduce capital risk and build investor confidence.

SAHI and BODH Initiative

The Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare recently launched two key national initiatives- the *Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India (SAHI)* and the *Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI (BODH)* at the India AI Summit.

<p>SAHI is a national framework to ensure safe, ethical, evidence-based and inclusive use of AI in India's healthcare system. <u>It serves as a policy compass to guide on responsible AI integration</u>, helping States adopt AI in line with public health priorities.</p>	<p>BODH, developed by IIT Kanpur with the National Health Authority, is a <u>privacy-preserving benchmarking</u> platform that evaluates AI models on real-world health data without sharing datasets. It provides a structured mechanism for <u>testing and validating AI solutions before deployment at scale</u>. As a digital public good under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, it enhances trust and quality in Health AI.</p>
--	---

Significance: Together they strengthen responsible and globally competitive Health AI adoption in India.

VoicERA

The **Digital India BHASHINI Division (MeitY)** recently launched **VoicERA**, an open-source end-to-end Voice AI stack, at the India AI Impact Summit 2026- marking a key milestone in India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) journey.

✓ **BHASHINI (Bhasha Interface for India)** is India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for languages**, launched by MeitY.

Objective: To create a **national multilingual voice execution layer on BHASHINI**; reduces vendor lock-in; enables scalable voice services.

Key Features: Modular, interoperable, cloud/on-premises deployable; supports real-time speech, conversational AI & multilingual telephony.

Significance:

- Expands BHASHINI from translation to full **Voice AI ecosystem**.
- Enables voice-based citizen services (agriculture, education, grievances).
- Strengthens **sovereign & inclusive AI infrastructure**.

Tetrodotoxin (TTX)

Food safety authorities and doctors suspect that the severe illness in people who consumed seafood at a restaurant in Vizhinjam, Kerala, was caused by contamination with a highly potent marine neurotoxin, likely tetrodotoxin (TTX).

What is TTX?

It is an extremely potent **marine neurotoxin**; **Chemical formula: C₁₁H₁₇N₃O₈**

Source: Found in some fish in the order Tetraodontidae such as **puffer fish**, porcupine fish, ocean sunfish. It is present in skin, liver & intestines of certain fishes.

Mode of Action: Blocks nerve signal transmission → **muscle paralysis**.

Toxicity: 1000 times more toxic than sodium cyanide, can be **fatal and there is no antidote** (supportive treatment only).

Yuva AI for All Initiative

Recently, MeitY launched Kaushal Rath under the National AI Literacy programme “Yuva AI for All.”

- Kaushal Rath is a fully equipped **mobile computer lab** with internet-enabled systems, audio-visual tools, and structured training modules. It will travel to schools, colleges, ITIs, and community spaces to deliver hands-on exposure to AI and Generative AI tools, supported by trained facilitators and contextualised Indian use-cases.

About Yuva AI for ALL

- **Launched by:** MeitY under the IndiaAI Mission
- **Objective:** AI literacy for **1 crore citizens**
- **Course Features:**
 - Free, self-paced foundational AI course
 - India-centric practical examples
 - Available on **FutureSkills Prime & iGOT Karmayogi**
 - Govt. of India certificate on completion

Wet Dress Rehearsal

Recently, NASA found a hydrogen leak during a wet dress rehearsal of its Artemis II mission.

What is meant by Wet Dress Rehearsal?

It is the final full-scale practice before a rocket launch involving **actual loading of cryogenic fuel** (liquid oxygen/hydrogen).

Process: Fuel line cooling → propellant loading → pressurization → leak checks → full countdown (stops before ignition) → draining.

Significance:

- Tests rocket + ground system integration
- Reveals leaks or faults under cryogenic conditions
- Ensures launch-day readiness

A **Dry Dress Rehearsal (DDR)** is a launch countdown simulation conducted without loading cryogenic propellants. The team powers up vehicle and ground systems, tests communications, and simulates critical events using mock sensor inputs to validate coordination and decision-making. It helps identify procedural or logical errors while avoiding the risks associated with fuel loading.

Exposome

Scientists are launching an ambitious global effort to map the “human exposome”- the lifelong mix of environmental, social and chemical exposures that drive most diseases.

What is Exposome? It is the total lifetime exposure of an individual (from conception onward) and its impact on health. It is defined by International Human Exposome Network (IHEN) as the integrated set of **physical, chemical, biological, and psychosocial factors** and their interactions.

Components

- **Internal:** metabolism, microbiome, hormones, inflammation
- **External:** pollution, chemicals, diet, lifestyle, social factors

Significance: Explains environmental contribution to diseases; supports preventive & precision medicine.

Panama Disease

Recently, scientists discovered a gene that could save bananas from deadly Panama disease.

About Panama Disease (*Fusarium Wilt*)

- **Cause:** *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* (soil-borne fungus).
- **Nature:** Highly destructive banana disease; fungus survives in soil for years.

- **Affected variety:** Mainly **Cavendish (G9)** cultivar.
- **Spread:** Enters through roots → blocks vascular tissue → cuts water/nutrient supply.
- **Symptoms:** Yellowing of older leaves → browning & wilting → dark stem discoloration → plant death.
- Called “**banana cancer**” due to its severity.

Lenacapavir

Recently, Zimbabwe has begun rolling out lenacapavir, a long-acting injectable HIV prevention medicine.

About Lenacapavir

- **Type:** Long-acting injectable **HIV PrEP** (pre-exposure prophylaxis).
- **Dose:** **Once every 6 months** (first twice-yearly PrEP).
- **Mechanism:** **Capsid inhibitor** → blocks HIV protein shell → prevents viral replication.
- **Efficacy:** Clinical trials show **~99% risk reduction** in high-risk groups.
- **Significance:** Improves adherence vs daily oral PrEP. Major advance in global HIV prevention strategy.

A **capsid** is the **protein shell of a virus** that encloses and protects its genetic material. It is made of repeating protein units called **capsomeres**, lies beneath the viral envelope (if present), and helps in **protecting and delivering viral DNA/RNA into the host cell**.

✓ A new study recently found that to escape the drug Lenacapavir, HIV must damage its own capsid, reaffirming that the viral capsid is an effective target for antiviral therapy.

Vikko Sat-1

13 students from the Class XI batch of Ariyakudi Government Higher Secondary School in Tamil Nadu’s Sivagangai district have successfully launched a mini satellite named Vikko Sat-1.

About Vikko Sat-1

- **Type:** 600-gram mini satellite (high-altitude balloon payload, not an orbital satellite).
- **Objective:** To detect **fungal spores in the stratosphere**.
- **Method:** Launched via **helium balloon** to ~22 km altitude (stratosphere).
- **Technology:** Equipped with **five specialized sensors** and adhesive collection surfaces to capture biological particles.
- **Significance:**
 - Fungal spores influence **agricultural health and ecological cycles**.
 - Provides **real-time high-altitude atmospheric data**, difficult through ground-based monitoring.

CULTURE

Thaipusam

- The Prime Minister greeted everyone recently on the occasion of Thaipusam.
- Also known as Thai poosam, it is a Hindu festival celebrated to **honour Lord Murugan (also known as Lord Kartikeya)**, the Hindu god of war, victory, and wisdom.
- Name “Thaipusam” is a combination of **Thai (the Tamil month)** and **Poosam**, which is the name of a **star that is at its highest point** during this festival. It is **celebrated on the full moon in the month of Thai**.
- The festival marks the day when Goddess Parvati presented Lord Murugan (Lord Kartikeya) with a divine spear, known as the Vel, to help him defeat the demon Soorapadam. The event symbolises the victory of good over evil.
- It is widely celebrated by the **Tamil community** in Tamil Nadu and across the world, especially in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, and more.

Devnimori Relics

- The Holy Devnimori Relics of Lord Buddha arrived in Sri Lanka for an exposition.
- It marks a moment of profound spiritual, cultural, and civilisational significance, strengthening the bond between India and Sri Lanka rooted in their shared Buddhist heritage.
- The Devnimori Relics are named after the **Devnimori archaeological site** near the Hindu pilgrimage centre of Shamlaji in **Gujarat’s Aravalli district**.
- The site was **first explored in 1957 by archaeologist S. N. Chowdhry**. Excavations revealed significant Buddhist structures and relics, underscoring the spread of Buddhism in western India during the early centuries of the Common Era.
- The relic casket discovered within the Devnimori Stupa bears an inscription in **Brahmi script and Sanskrit reading “dashabala sharira nilay”**—meaning the abode of the Buddha’s bodily relic.
- It contains a copper box holding organic material with holy ashes, along with silk cloth and beads.

Bastar Pandum Festival

- The Bastar Pandum festival was recently celebrated in Chhattisgarh.
- Bastar Pandum is a **state organised tribal cultural festival** held in Bastar region.
- It has emerged as a major cultural platform highlighting Bastar’s tribal identity through art, music, dance, handicrafts and indigenous cuisine.
- As part of the festival, divisional-level competitions were held, with more than 700 artists participating across twelve cultural disciplines.
- These performances offer visitors a comprehensive experience of Bastar’s vibrant cultural landscape.
- The festival reflects deep-rooted cultural ethos of Bastar’s tribal communities and serves as a tool for:
 - Preservation of indigenous traditions;
 - Empowerment of local artists and communities;
 - Transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations;
 - Promotion of cultural tourism and local livelihoods.

C Rajagopalachari

- President Droupadi Murmu unveiled a statue of C Rajagopalachari in the central courtyard of the Rashtrapati Bhavan replacing the bust of British architect Edwin Lutyens.
- Born in 1878 in Thorapalli village in Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu (then part of the Madras Presidency), he was an Indian statesman, writer, lawyer, and Indian independence activist. He was also known as CR and Rajaji.

- In 1911, he was elected to the Salem Municipal Council. Later, in 1916, he joined Annie Besant's Home Rule League. He was also elected, in 1917 as the Chairman of the Salem Municipal Council.
- He supported the **Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919**. The **Non-Cooperation Movement (NCM)** gathered momentum in Tamil Nadu under his leadership.
- He gave up his legal practice and committed himself fully to NCM — boycotting elections, educational institutions, government posts, and official titles.
- In April 1930, he **led the Salt Satyagraha** in South, marching from **Trichy to Vedaranyam** on Tanjore coast.

Rajaji formula 1944

- CR developed a **proposal for a Congress– Muslim League agreement** known as the **Rajaji formula**.
- The plan required All-India Muslim League to cooperate with Indian National Congress in forming a provisional national government, provided INC agreed to abide by a plebiscite on the question of Pakistan.
- The plebiscite was to be held after the transfer of power from Britain, in contiguous Muslim-majority districts in the North-West and East of India.

Social Reform

- CR was also a leading **supporter of temple entry** for marginalised castes.
- He **advocated Dalit upliftment** and in 1938, as a **Premier of Madras**, he supported a legislation that made discrimination in employment, access to wells, schools, and colleges a punishable offence.

Post Independence

- In 1948, he succeeded Lord Mountbatten as **Governor-General**, becoming the **only Indian to hold the office** before India became a republic. He served as **India's Home Minister** (1950–51).
- He later served as **Chief Minister of Madras** from 1952 to 1954.
- Respected by both Gandhi, who called him his conscience keeper, and Nehru, Rajaji was awarded the **Bharat Ratna in 1954**.

Swatantra Party

- By mid 1950s Rajaji grew critical of Congress dominance and was concerned about excessive statism and centralisation.
- In 1959, he **launched the Swatantra Party**. The party grew out of the Forum for Free Enterprise (1956) and the All India Agriculturalists' Federation (1958).
- It **promoted free enterprise** while rejecting 19th century laissez-faire capitalism.

Literary contribution

- His most popular works include **retellings of the Ramayana and Mahabharata**.
- In 1958, he received **Sahitya Akademi Award** for Tamil retelling of Ramayana – Chakravarti Thirumagan.

Ol Chiki Script

The Ministry of Culture has organised the **centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script**. On the occasion, the government has released a commemorative coin & commemorative postage stamp.

- The **Ol Chiki is the official script of the Santhali language**, one of India's prominent tribal languages spoken widely across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar.
- Prior to the 20th century, Santhali, belonging to the **Austroasiatic language family**, was transcribed using various borrowed scripts, including Roman, Bengali, Odia, and Devanagari.
- These scripts facilitated limited written expression and were not specifically designed to accurately represent the distinctive phonetic features of Santhali.
- Ol Chiki script was **developed in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu** specifically for the Santhali language. In 1936, he also authored **High Serena**, the **first book in Ol Chiki**.
- A defining moment in the journey of the Ol Chiki script came in 2003, when the Santhali language was formally included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

AWARDS/PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Global Teacher Prize 2026

- Indian teacher Rouble Nagi has won the Global Teacher Prize 2026, receiving the one million dollar award at the **World Government Summit** in Dubai.
- Over the past two decades, her work has helped integrate more than one million children into formal education using art as a learning tool. She was chosen from over 5,000 nominations from 139 countries.
- Through her Rouble Nagi Art Foundation, she has set up more than 800 educational centres across India, in over 100 low-income communities and villages.
- These centres help out-of-school children start structured learning and return to formal education, while offering remedial support, psychosocial assistance, and creative activities to enrolled students.
- Central to her approach are 'living walls of learning,' where abandoned walls are turned into open classrooms.

World Governments Summit (WGS)

- WGS is an annual global platform held in **Dubai**, UAE, dedicated to shaping the future of governance, innovation, and sustainable development.
- Established in 2013, it convenes world leaders, ministers, policymakers, and experts to address pressing global challenges.
- Theme 2026: "Shaping Future Governments"

Global Teacher Prize

- **Established in 2014**, the Global Teacher Prize is an annual award presented by **GEMS Education**.
- Often referred to as the "Nobel Prize" for teaching, it was established by the **Varkey Foundation** in collaboration with **UNESCO** to raise the status of teachers.
- Selection is based on criteria such as innovation in teaching, impact on students and community, leadership, and contribution to the profession.

BAFTA Awards

- **Manipuri film Boong** won the prestigious British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award for Best Children's & Family Film in London.
- It is prestigious annual awards presented by the BAFTA to honour excellence in film, television, and related creative arts.
- It is regarded as the British equivalent of the Oscars and plays a significant role in shaping global cinema and television standards.