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CURRENT AFFAIRS - October 2024

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- Criminalising Marital Rape in India
- SC Strikes Down Casteist Provisions in State Prison Manuals
- SC Upholds Section 6A of Citizenship Act
- Advocate on Record (AoR)
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SC's Verdict on Madarsa Education Act

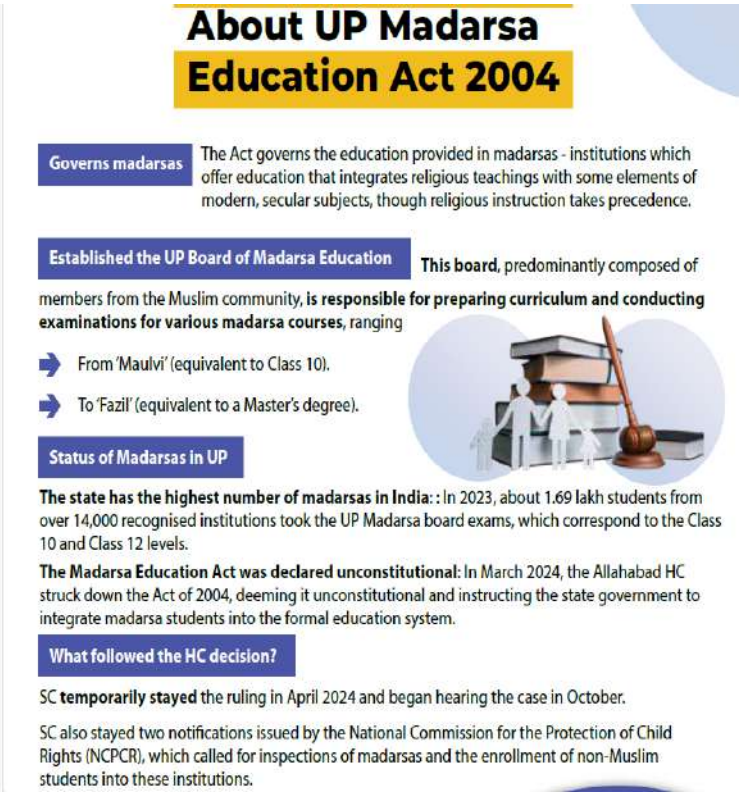
The Supreme Court (SC), in a three-judge bench led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, upheld the Constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004.

- Previously, in March, the Allahabad High Court struck down the Act, citing a violation of secularism principles. However, the Supreme Court stayed this High Court ruling in April, allowing the Act to remain effective until the Supreme Court's final decision.

Referring to ***Ms. Aruna Roy vs Union of India (2002)***, the SC highlighted that while *religious instruction (compulsory participation in worship)* is restricted in state-recognized institutions under Article 28, religious education (learning about religions) aimed at promoting communal harmony is permissible.

On What Grounds Allahabad HC Declared Madarsa Act Unconstitutional

- **Violation of secularism:**
  - The HC referred to previous SC judgments to highlight that **secularism means equal treatment of all religions by the state**.
  - The court noted that the **Madarsa curriculum made religious education on Islam compulsory** while offering modern subjects as optional, which it argued conflicted with the state's duty to provide secular education.
- **Violation of the right to education:**
  - The HC held that the Madarsa Act violated **Article 21A** of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of six and fourteen.
  - It argued that the curriculum offered in madarsas did not meet the standard of quality education (comprehensive education in modern subjects) as defined by **the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.**



- **Conflict with the UGC Act, 1956:**
  - The UGC Act grants only recognised universities or deemed universities the authority to **confer degrees.** The madarsa board's ability to grant degrees, therefore, was deemed unconstitutional, as it overstepped the boundaries set by the UGC Act.

Key Arguments on the Constitutionality of the Madarsa Education Act Before the SC

- **Religious education vs. religious instruction:**
  - A major point of contention was whether madarsas provide "religious education" or "religious instruction."
  - The distinction is crucial, as **Article 28** of the Indian Constitution prohibits religious instruction in state-funded educational institutions.
  - However, religious education, which provides knowledge about different religions, is permitted for fostering communal harmony.

- Senior Advocate, representing the Madarsa board, argued that the Allahabad HC **wrongly combined "religious education" with "religious instruction,"** leading to conclude that the Act violated secularism.

- **Striking down the entire Act:**
  - Another key debate revolved around whether the HC should have struck down the entire Act or only specific provisions that were found to be unconstitutional.
  - Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud noted that **the state government has the authority to regulate madarsa education in a way that aligns with secular principles, without completely abolishing the Act**.

Key Highlights of the SC Judgement

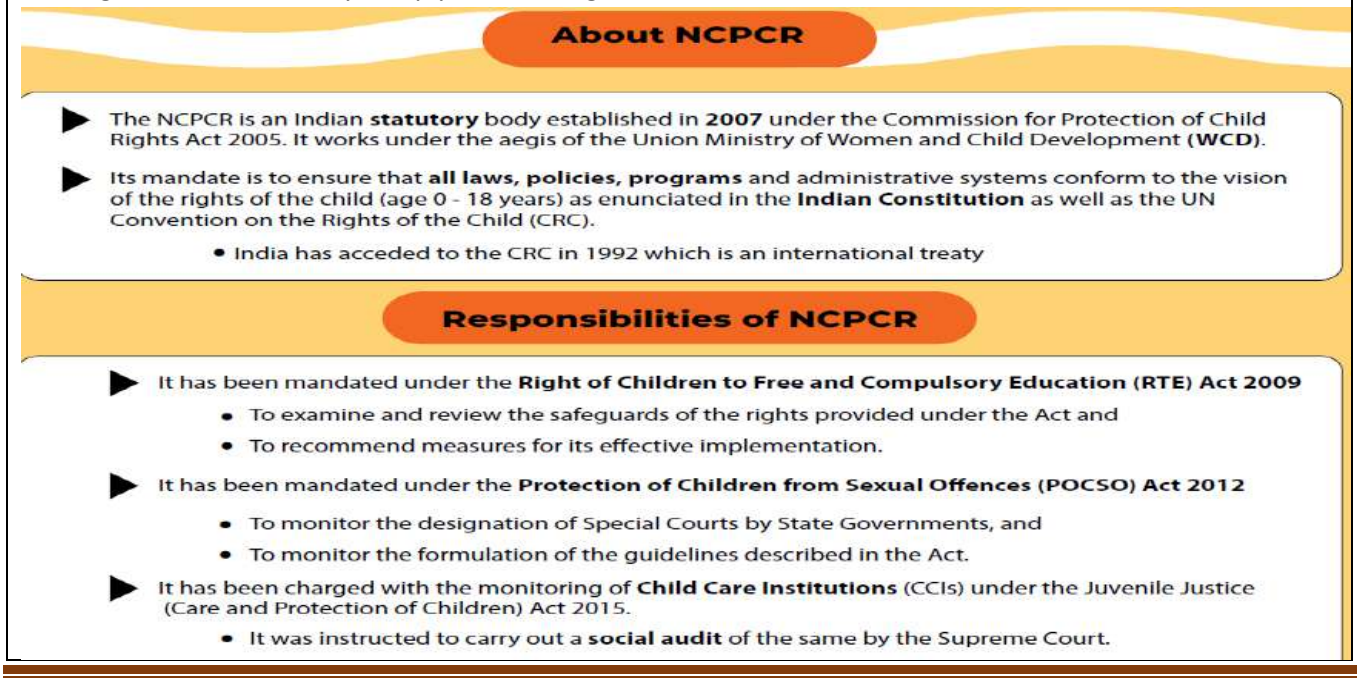
- The Madarsa Act provides a regulatory framework to ensure educational standards in madarsas recognized by the Board.
- The Act aligns with the state's obligation to enable students in recognized madarsas to acquire skills and competencies necessary for social participation and employment.
- The Act must be interpreted alongside Article 21A and the Right to Education Act, respecting religious and linguistic minorities' rights to manage their educational institutions.
- With state approval, the Board may implement regulations that ensure secular education standards without compromising the institutions' minority character.
- While the Madarsa Act falls within the State Legislature's jurisdiction under Entry 25 of List 3, provisions regulating higher degrees (e.g., fazil and kamil) are unconstitutional as they conflict with the UGC Act, which is governed by Entry 66 of List 1.

Wider Implications of the SC's Decision on the Madarsa Education Act

- It will likely have national ramifications in addition to directly affecting how madarsas function in UP.
- **The case touches on broader issues concerning** -
  - The balance between religious education and secularism,
  - As well as the role of the state in ensuring that all children, regardless of their religious background, receive a modern, secular education.
- The SC's ruling could impact not only madarsas but also other religious educational institutions, such as **gurukuls and convent schools**, which incorporate religious teachings into their curricula.

Extra Mile: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

NCPCR has raised serious concerns about the state of functioning in madrassas and called for stopping state funding to them unless they comply with the Right to Education Act.



NCPCR's Recommendations on Madarsas

- **Allegations against madrasas:**
  - **While Articles 29 and 30** of the Constitution protects minority rights, children in these (madrasas) schools were deprived of equal access to quality education under the RTE Act.
  - There are also allegations of the presence of **objectionable content in religious texts and a lack of qualified educators.**
  - Madrasas reportedly **deprive students of essential facilities** and entitlements provided in regular schools, such as uniforms and midday meals.
- **Key recommendations by NCPCR:**
  - Its recommendations follow a HC ruling deeming the UP Board of Madrasa Education Act unconstitutional, **citing violations of secularism and fundamental rights under Article 14 of the Constitution**.
  - NCPCR has written to the chief secretaries of all States and UTs recommending:
    - **Closure of madrasa boards** as they lack accountability and transparency in their functioning.
    - **Withdrawal of state funding** to madrasas unless they comply with the RTE**.**
  - NCPCR has (in its report titled 'Guardians of Faith or Oppressors of Rights?') recommended –
    - **Removing non-Muslim children from madrassas**,
    - As their inclusion violates **Article 28 of the Constitution**, which prohibits the imposition of religious instruction without parental consent.

Criminalising Marital Rape in India

The central government has opposed the criminalisation of marital rape in the Supreme Court, stating that matter relating to marital rape needs a "comprehensive socio-legal approach" rather than a "strict legal approach".

Key Points from the Government's Arguments

- **Far-Reaching Implications:** The government stated that making sexual acts between a husband and wife punishable as "rape" could severely impact conjugal relationships and disrupt the institution of marriage.
- **Parliamentary Decision:** The Centre informed the court that Parliament, after thorough deliberation, had retained Exception 2 to Section 375 of IPC
  - This decision was made during amendments to Section 375 in 2013.
- **Separate Legal Provisions for Consent within Marriage:**
  - While the government acknowledged that a husband's violation of his wife's consent is unacceptable, it argued that the consequences within marriage should differ from those outside of it.
  - The affidavit mentioned that criminal law provisions are already in place to address violations of consent within marriage.
- **Concerns over Judicial Interference:**
  - Centre urged the Supreme Court not to interfere with Parliament's decision.
  - It argued that such interference would be inappropriate, given the socio-legal context of marriage in India.
- **Disproportionate Punishment:**
  - The affidavit suggested that labelling marital sexual acts as "rape" could be considered excessively harsh and disproportionate in the context of marriage.
  - The government emphasized the importance of preserving the institution of marriage while also protecting the rights of women.

- **Supreme Court's Previous Ruling:**
  - In 2022, the Supreme Court had recognized marital rape for the purposes of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, which allowed women to seek abortions for pregnancies resulting from marital rape.
  - However, the Centre's current stance highlights a distinction between this ruling and the broader criminalisation of marital rape.

Evolution of Section 375 of the IPC

- Section 63 of Bhartiya Nyaya Sahita (BNS) deals with rape and marital rape is one of the exceptions under section 63
- Section 375 of the IPC **defines the acts that constitute rape by a man**. The provision, however, lays down **two exceptions** as well:
  - It **decriminalises marital rape**,
  - It mentions that medical procedures or interventions shall not constitute rape.
- The IPC was implemented in India during British colonial rule in 1860.
- Under the first version of the rules, the marital rape exception was applicable to women over ten years of age. In 1940, this age was raised to 15.
- However, in October 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, if the wife is under 18 years of age, shall be considered as rape.
  - The court ruled that the age of consent should be 18, not 15.

History of Martial Rape Law in India

- The **Domestic Violence Act, 2005** hints at marital rape by any form of sexual abuse in a live-in or marriage relationship.
- However, it only provides for civil remedies. There is no way for marital rape victims in India to initiate criminal proceedings against their perpetrator.
- The **need to remove this marital rape exception was rejected by the Law Commission of India's 172nd report in 2000**, while considering several proposals to reform India's laws on sexual violence.

Arguments Against Marital Rape Exception MRE

- **Violation of Fundamental Rights**:
  - **Article 14**: The MRE creates two classes of victims—married and unmarried women.
  - Unmarried women receive full legal protection against sexual assault, while married women do not, violating the principle of equality before the law.
  - **Article 21**: The MRE infringes on a woman's right to bodily autonomy and decisional privacy. The Supreme Court's rulings in **Puttaswamy vs. Union of India** and **Joseph Shine vs. Union of India** emphasized that privacy includes the right to control one's body, irrespective of marital status.
- **Gender Equality**: Critics argue that the MRE reflects **patriarchal values** and reinforces the idea that marriage gives husbands **unconditional sexual access** to their wives, which undermines women's rights.

Arguments for MRE (ie against Criminalising Marital Rape)

- **Misuse of law**:
  - Misuse of the law is a big reason why several individuals, jurists and even men's rights activists have raised alarm over the criminalisation of marital rape. The statistics cited are those of the misuse of 498A, the law that relates to dowry cases.
    - A total of 1,11,549 cases were registered under 498A in 2020. Of these, 5,520 were closed by Police citing as false and overall, 16,151 cases were closed by police either because they were false or there was a mistake of fact or law or it was a civil dispute etc.
    - 18,967 cases were tried in courts of which 14,340 led to acquittal and 3,425 led to a conviction.

- **Burden of proof**:
  - Now, if marital rape itself is criminalised, the question remains who would the burden of proof be on and what would that burden be.
- **Gender neutrality**:
  - Arguments to make the definition of 'rape' gender-neutral has been put forward on many occasions, and the same argument is put forward in the case of marital rapes too.
  - Even if the exception of IPC section 375 is removed or criminal provisions are added to the Domestic Violence act, husbands will not be able to use those.

Judicial Precedents

- **Karnataka High Court (2022)**:
  - In **Hrishikesh Sahoo vs. State of Karnataka**, the court ruled that a husband could be prosecuted for raping his wife, marking a significant shift in addressing sexual violence within marriage.
- **Delhi High Court Split Verdict (2022)**:
  - **Justice Rajiv Shakdher** declared the **Marital Rape Exception** (MRE) unconstitutional, arguing it violates women's rights to bodily autonomy.
  - **Justice C. Hari Shankar**, however, upheld the MRE, stating that within marriage, sexual relations constitute a "legitimate expectation."
- This split decision prompted the petitioners to take the case to the Supreme Court.

How is Marital Rape Treated Around the World?

- According to Amnesty International data, **77 out of 185 (42%) countries criminalise marital rape through legislation**.
- **Australia** (1981), **Canada** (1983), **South Africa** (1993), the **USA** (1993) have enacted laws that criminalise marital rape.
- In many countries, it is either not mentioned or is explicitly excluded from rape laws.
- The **United Nations has urged countries to end marital rape by closing legal loopholes, saying that "the home is one of the most dangerous places for women"**.

SC Strikes Down Casteist Provisions in State Prison Manuals

Recently, a three-judge Bench of Supreme Court (SC) headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) struck down several provisions in State prison manuals, that reinforced caste differences, for being violative of the fundamental rights of prisoners.

Background

- The case stemmed from a **PIL** filed by journalist Sukanya Shantha, which highlighted a series of rules and provisions in prison manuals across various states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Orrisa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh.
- These provisions allowed caste-based labour assignments and perpetuated caste inequalities by assigning menial tasks, such as cleaning toilets, to Scheduled Castes (SCs), while higher castes, such as Brahmins, were assigned kitchen work.

Colonial Legacy and Post-Independence Continuation of Caste Stereotyping

- These prison provisions are rooted in the colonial era, particularly the now-repealed Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. This Act stereotyped certain communities as "born criminals" and labeled them as "habitual offenders" without conviction.

- These tribes were forced to settle in designated locations, subjected to constant checks and the threat of arrest without a warrant.
- After the repeal of this Act in 1952, these groups were reclassified as “denotified tribes” yet prison manuals continued to label them as “habitual offenders” sans any conviction based on these colonial-era stereotypes, perpetuating social and economic marginalization.
  - ✓ Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes are also known as 'Vimukt Jatis. While most DNTs are spread across the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories.
  - ✓ Idate Commission (2017) recommended to immediately repeal Habitual Offenders Act by respective States as it gives scope for harassment of the members of DNTs.
- For example, according to-
  - **West Bengal Jail Code (Rule 404)**: A convict overseer can only be appointed as a **night guard** if they do not belong to any class with a **"strong natural tendency to escape,"** such as individuals from **wandering tribes**.

The SC Verdict

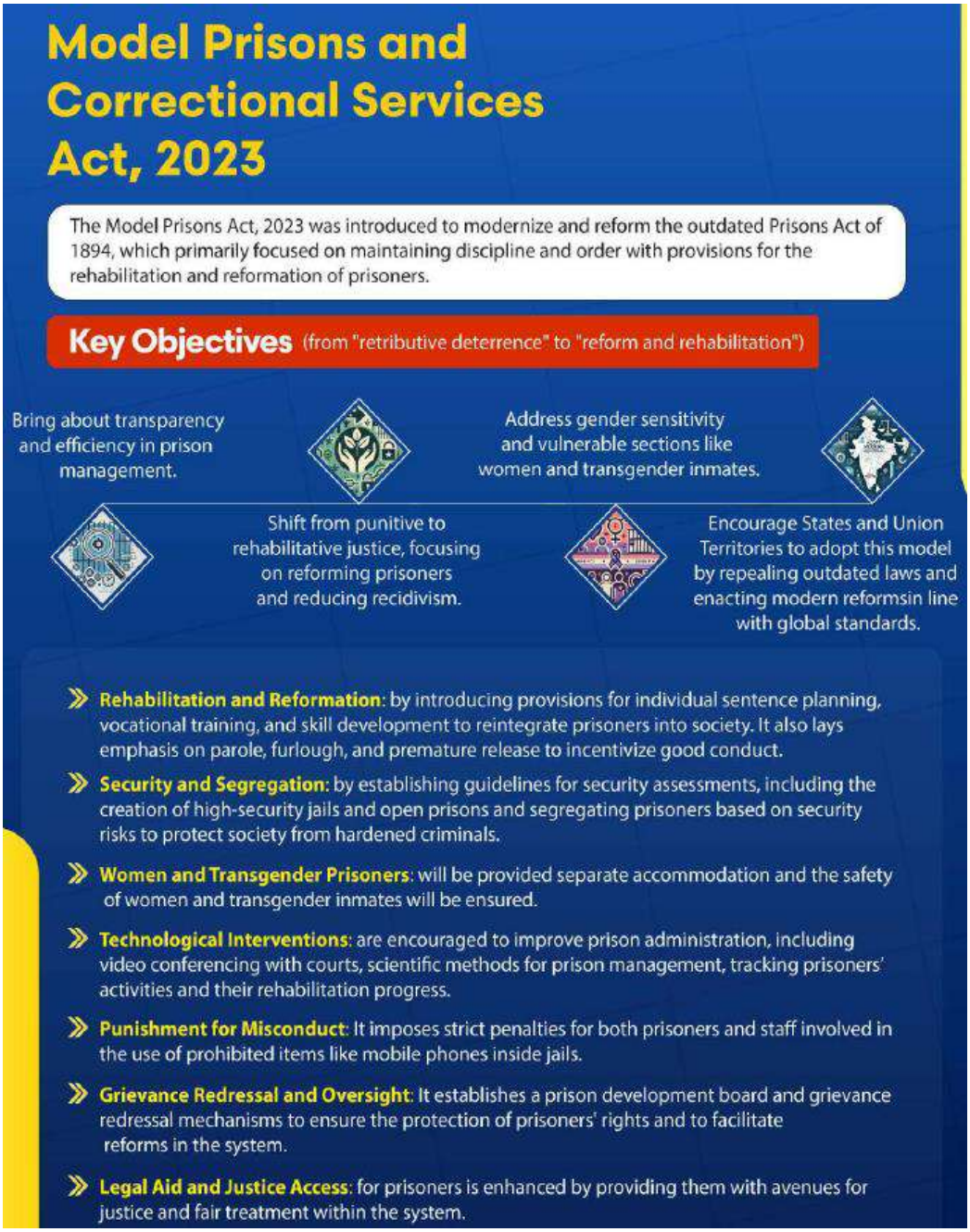
- The Supreme Court emphasized that **caste-based classification** can be used only if it benefits those who have faced caste-based discrimination. However, it found that the prison manuals in question **failed to meet this goal** and instead violated following constitutional principles:
  1. **Right to Equality (Article 14):** The Court stated that the segregation of prisoners based on caste **reinforced caste differences and animosity and** deprived marginalized prisoners of **equal opportunities** to be assessed for their correctional needs, which hindered their chances of rehabilitation and reformation.
     - ✓ The Court’s decision aligns with India's international commitments under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
  2. **Right Against Discrimination (Article 15):** The Court found that **direct and indirect discrimination** against marginalized communities by assigning certain roles based on **customary caste-based labor** perpetuated harmful stereotypes that marginalized castes were incapable of performing **skilled or intellectual work**, thus resulting in **indirect discrimination**.
  3. **Abolition of Untouchability (Article 17):** The Court ruled that provisions assigning **"degrading or menial" duties** exclusively to certain castes reflected the **caste system and untouchability**.
     - ✓ Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 was enacted to ensure the abolition of untouchability in all forms.
  4. **Right to Life with Dignity (Article 21):** The court noted that the right to life with dignity includes the **development of individual personality** and the right to **overcome caste barriers**. The caste-based labour provisions in prison manuals restrict prisoners from marginalized communities from **reforming** and deny them their **dignity**. And thus, violate their right to be treated with equality and respect.
  5. **Prohibition of Forced Labour (Article 23):** The Court held that assigning undesirable and degrading tasks to marginalized communities, while others performed honorable work, amounted to **forced labor**. Forcing marginalized communities to do tasks considered **"impure"** or **low grade** violated the constitutional prohibition on forced labor under Article 23.

Fundamental Rights of Prisoners

- **Article 21** guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.
- **Article 39A** ensures free legal aid for those in need.

- The court issued following directives-
  1. **Amendment of Prison Manuals**: SC directed all **States and Union Territories** to amend their prison manuals and rules within **three months** to abolish discriminatory practices related to caste-based labor assignments within prisons.

2. **Criticism of Model Prison Manuals:** The Court identified several shortcomings in the **Union government's Model Prison Manual (2016)** and the **Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act (2023)**. The 2016 manual was criticized for providing a **vague definition** of **"habitual offender,"** which allowed states to define the term based on **stereotypical assumptions** about denotified tribes.
3. **Implementation of Necessary Reforms**: The Court ordered that necessary reforms be made in both the **2016 manual** and the **2023 Act** to address these issues, ensuring that caste discrimination is eliminated in prison practices.



4. **Compliance and Oversight**: To ensure adherence to these directives, **district legal services authorities** and **boards of visitors** were assigned the responsibility of conducting **regular inspections**.
5. **Adherence to Guidelines**: To combat caste-based prejudices, the bench called for strict adherence to guidelines laid down in **Arnesh Kumar Vs State of Bihar (2014) and Amanatullah Khan Vs Commissioner of Police, Delhi (2024) cases** which require police officers to **ensure procedural safeguards**, particularly for vulnerable communities, reinforcing the broader fight against systemic biases.

Significance of the Judgement

1. **Protection of Fundamental Rights**: Court affirmed that all individuals, including prisoners, have the right to be treated equally and without discrimination, irrespective of their caste.
2. **Dismantling Colonial Legacies**: that have historically marginalized certain communities, especially denotified tribes by invalidating the provisions that classified individuals as "habitual offenders" based on their caste.

3. **Encouragement of Reform in Prisons**: SC directives for states and union territories to amend their prison manuals and implement changes reflect a commitment to modernizing correctional facilities and practices.
4. **Awareness and Advocacy**: The ruling raises awareness about **caste discrimination** and its implications in modern society, encouraging advocacy for marginalized communities.
5. **Strengthening Legal Precedents**: for future legal challenges against caste-based discrimination in various sectors, not just in prisons, thereby enhancing the judiciary's role in upholding human rights.
   - ✓ **The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)** emphasize non-discrimination and equitable treatment of prisoners, with a focus on rehabilitation and dignity.

The ruling underscores the importance of an equitable society, reinforcing the notion that caste should not dictate one's role or treatment, even within the confines of a prison.

SC Upholds Section 6A of Citizenship Act, 1955

In a landmark 4:1 verdict, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) recently upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which granted citizenship to immigrants who entered Assam before March 24, 1971.

About Section 6A of Citizenship Act, 1955

- **Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955** was inserted to address citizenship issues specifically related to Assam, following the **Assam Accord of 1985** which was signed between the Union government and the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU), after a six-year-long agitation against the entry of migrants from Bangladesh into Assam.
  - ✓ A key part of the **Assam Accord** is identifying who is considered a foreigner in the state. **Clause 5** establishes **January 1, 1966,** as the base cut-off date for detecting and removing "foreigners." However, it includes provisions for **regularizing** individuals who arrived between **January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971**.
  - ✓ The law is enacted in exercise of the power under Article 246 read with Entry 17 of List I (Union list. Entry 17 deals with Citizenship, naturalisation and aliens.
  - ✓ **Section 6A** aligns with the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Immigration (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 to manage immigration and prevent unauthorized settlements.
- Section 6A outlines following provisions based on when people of Indian origin entered and resided in Assam:
  1. **Citizenship for Residents before January 1, 1966**: Anyone of **Indian origin** who entered Assam **before January 1, 1966** and has been **ordinarily resident** in the state since then is considered a **citizen of India**.
  2. **People Entering Between January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971**: Individuals of **Indian origin** who entered Assam between **January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971** and were detected as **foreigners** have the opportunity to **register** themselves. Registration grants them **rights of citizens**, but they are **excluded from voting** for a period of **10 years** from the date of detection.
  3. **Illegal Immigrants Post March 24, 1971**: Those who entered Assam **after March 24, 1971** are deemed **illegal immigrants** and are not eligible for citizenship under this section.

What was the Case?

- The **Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha**, a civil society organization based in Guwahati, filed a petition in **2012**, challenging **Section 6A** of the **Citizenship Act** arguing that it **discriminates** against other Indian citizens by allowing **different cut-off dates** for regularizing illegal migrants in Assam compared to the rest of the country.
- The petition also requested the Court's intervention in **updating the National Register for Citizens (NRC)** for Assam. It proposed to update NRC based on details from the **1951 National Census**, rather than the **electoral rolls** prior to **March 24, 1971**.

- In 2014, a two-judge Bench referred this case to a Constitution Bench.

The Final Verdict

1. ***Issue*: *Constitutionality of Section 6A***

   ***Petitioner's Arguments*:** Section 6A violates **Articles 6 and 7** of the Constitution by allowing re-migration of individuals from East Pakistan and altering constitutional citizenship provisions.

   ***Verdict*:** Section 6A grants citizenship to migrants who were not covered by Articles 6 and 7, and thus does not alter these provisions. Infact, 6A aligns with Articles 6 and 7 by extending citizenship rights to those affected by Partition.

   ***Dissenting Opinion*:** Justice Pardiwala disagreed, arguing that Section 6A is inconsistent with Article 6, as it does not have a registration system or an end date for applying for citizenship.

2. ***Issue*: *Violation of Article 14 (Right to Equality)***

   ***Petitioner's Arguments*:** Section 6A is **underinclusive**, granting citizenship only to Assam's migrants and excluding other states that share borders with Bangladesh. Also, the **cut-off date** is arbitrary.

   ✓ Notably, Assam is the only Indian state to have a cut-off date for citizenship.

   ***Verdict*:** Assam's unique **magnitude of migration** and smaller population justify singling out the state. The **March 25, 1971,** cut-off is rational, differentiating "Partition migrants" from "war migrants."

   Dissenting Opinion: Justice Pardiwala argued that Section 6A fails the test of "temporal reasonableness" and lacks a temporal limit, making it constitutionally invalid over time.

   ✓The doctrine of temporal unreasonableness which has been rarely used in the Indian context, envisages that a provision that was reasonable at the time of its passage may become unreasonable with time.

3. ***Issue: External Aggression***

   Petitioner's Arguments: Section 6A allows illegal immigration, creating **internal disturbances** and threatening Assam's security, violating **Article 355**.

   ***Verdict*:** Article 355 is an **emergency power** for the Union and cannot be invoked by citizens. Section 6A regulates immigration, preventing external aggression. Section 6A addresses controlled immigration, not external aggression.

4. ***Issue: Cultural Rights (Article 29)***

   Petitioner's Arguments: Section 6A violates the **cultural rights** of Assam's indigenous people, increasing foreign migration and diluting Assamese identity and culture.

   Verdict: **Ethnic diversity** does not violate cultural rights under Article 29. Assam's culture is protected by constitutional provisions like **Article 345** (Official Language Act). Mere demographic change cannot infringe on **Article 29** protections.

5. ***Issue: Right to Vote (Article 326)***

   Petitioner's Arguments: The inclusion of Bangladeshi immigrants in electoral rolls diminishes the **political rights** of native Assamese citizens.

   Verdict: Article 326 ensures the right to vote for all citizens, irrespective of their date of citizenship. The petitioners have failed to demonstrate any **violation of voting rights**.

6. ***Issue: Right to Liberty (Article 21)***

   Petitioner's Arguments: Mass migration under Section 6A has depleted natural resources in Assam, violating the indigenous people's **right to self-governance** and sustainable development.

   Verdict: Petitioners failed to prove the **deleterious impact** of Section 6A on their communities or democratic self-governance. Sustainable development can occur alongside accommodating **immigrants**.

Implications of the Verdict

1. **Legal Validation of Section 6A:** The judgment confirms the **constitutional validity** of the **cut-off date of March 24, 1971** of granting citizenship to immigrants and could set a **precedent** for how the judiciary approaches similar laws like the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).**

2. **Demographic and Cultural Implications:** By upholding Section 6A, the judgement may help maintain the legal status of many migrants, concerns persist about the potential impact on **Assamese identity**, language, and culture.
3. **Political Implications:** It may influence **voting patterns** in Assam, as these newly recognized citizens will participate in elections. This could shift the **political landscape** in the state, especially in regions with large immigrant populations.
4. **Citizenship Rights and Statelessness:** It protects many residents (Over 40 lakh persons) who have lived in Assam for decades from being rendered **stateless**, preventing legal and humanitarian crises and provides legal clarity to migrants who qualify for citizenship under its provisions.
5. **Continued Scrutiny of Migrants**: The ruling may prompt the state to focus on identifying those who entered **after March 24, 1971**, and are considered illegal immigrants. This could lead to renewed efforts to **detect and deport** individuals deemed ineligible for citizenship under the Act.
6. **Administrative and Legal Reforms:** It could result in stricter enforcement of **immigration laws** in Assam and lead to more involvement of **Foreigners Tribunals** in determining the citizenship status of individuals in Assam.
7. **Future Debates on Citizenship:** It reinforces the **Parliament's authority** to legislate on citizenship matters, including future amendments to the **Citizenship Act** and could also influence the ongoing debates surrounding the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** and **CAA, 2019**.
   - ✓ Section 6A's relevance came under scrutiny with the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the enactment of the CAA, 2019, which provides certain exemptions to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

Extra Mile

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a register that contains the names of all Indian citizens residing in a particular state or territory.
- It was first implemented in Assam to identify illegal immigrants, particularly those from Bangladesh who arrived after the cut-off date of March 24, 1971.
- The Assam NRC is based on the conditions laid down in Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The final Assam NRC list was released on 31 August 2019. Nineteen lakh persons, including children whose parents were included in the final list, were excluded.

Advocate on Record (AoR)

The Supreme Court (SC) recently said that advocates-on-record (AoR) in a given case must mark the appearance of only those lawyers who are authorized to appear and argue that case on the particular day

Eligibility to Become an AoR

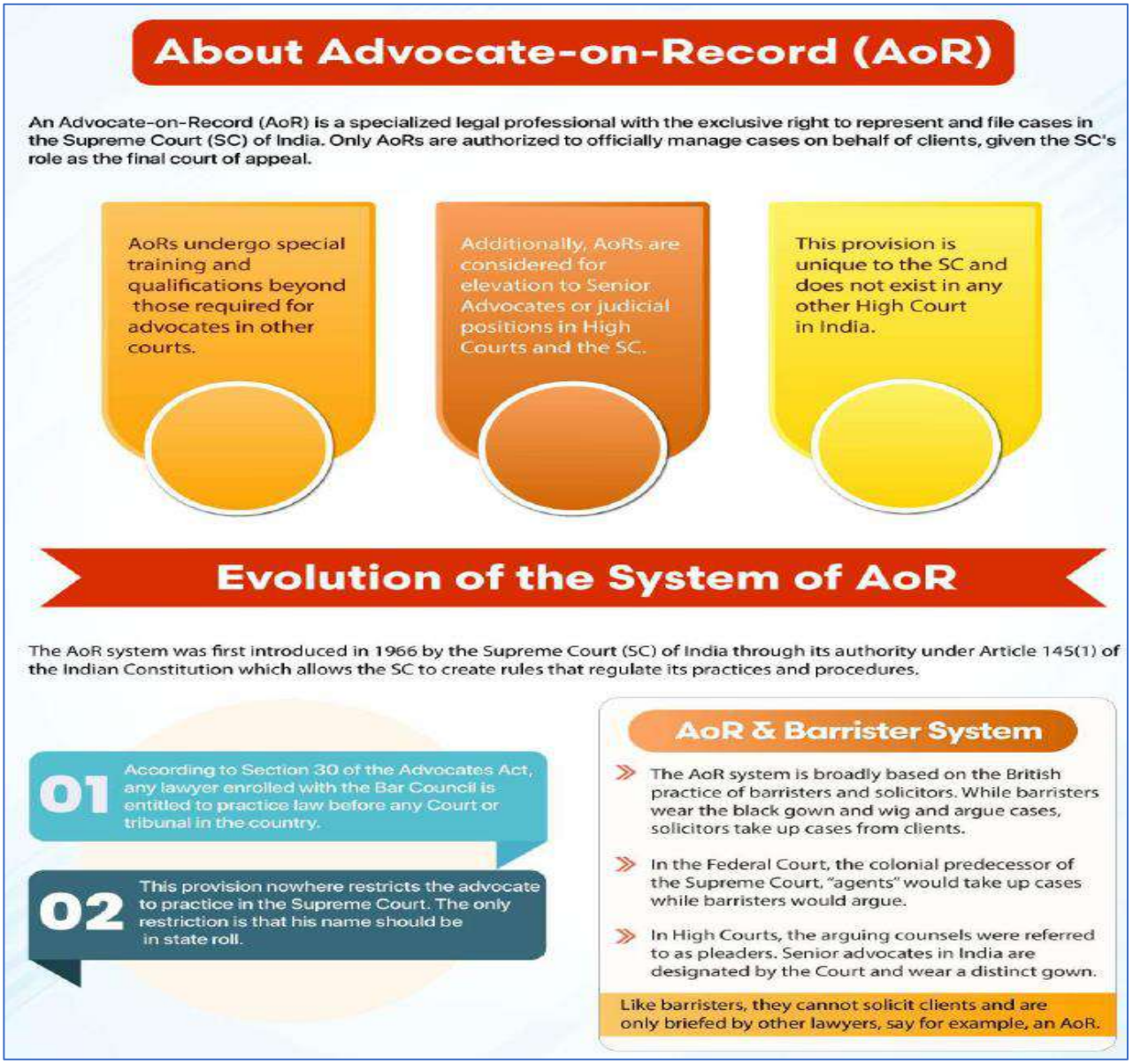
To qualify as an AoR, advocates must meet the following requirements, as outlined in Order IV Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013:

- **Bar Council Enrollment:** The advocate must be enrolled with a State Bar Council.
- **Prior Experience**: They need at least four years of prior experience as an advocate.
- **Training**: After four year's experience, One year of training under a SC-approved AoR.
- **Examination**: Passing the AoR exam conducted by the SC. This exam tests the advocate's knowledge of court practice, procedure, and the specific rules governing the Supreme Court.

- **Office Location**: AoRs must have a registered office within a 10-mile (16 km) radius of the SC, with a registered clerk.

Once an advocate is registered as an AoR, they are issued a *Unique Identification Number (UIN)*, which must be used on all documents filed in the SC. This process ensures that AoRs are thoroughly trained and well-versed in SC procedures, maintaining the integrity and efficiency of legal proceedings in the highest court.

- ✓ The designations of **Advocate on Record (AoR)** and **Senior Advocate** serve distinct roles within the legal system, particularly with respect to their privileges, responsibilities, and the courts they operate in.
- ✓ **Senior Advocate** is a prestigious title granted by courts based on merit, focused on courtroom advocacy rather than procedural aspects. They argue cases but do not file petitions or interact directly with clients regarding filings.



AoR Role & Responsibilities under Order IV Authority

1. **Authority:** Upon filing a memorandum of appearance with a vakalatnama, an AoR can act, plead, and conduct all proceedings on behalf of a client in the Supreme Court. Only AoRs are allowed to file appearances or act for parties in the SC. AoRs are accountable for document accuracy and errors in pleadings.
2. **Record Keeping:** AoRs must maintain detailed accounts, distinguishing money received and paid on behalf of each client.

3. **Fee Transparency:** AoRs must file a certificate with the Taxing Officer detailing the fees paid or agreed upon by the client.
4. **Supporting SC Functioning:** AoRs distill facts, identify key legal questions, and draft matters for SC cases, facilitating smoother court proceedings.
5. **SCAORA:** The Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association, established in 1985, upholds the integrity and professionalism of AoRs.
6. **Assisting Judges:** AoRs help newly elevated SC judges navigate SC procedures and practices.
7. **Bridging Client-Lawyer Gap:** AoRs draft key petitions and appeals, such as Special Leave Petitions under Article 136 and Election Petitions, providing expertise and bridging the gap between clients and the judiciary.
8. **Officers of the Court:** AoRs uphold the dignity of the judicial system, serving both the Bench and the Bar.

Why the AoR System Matters

The AoR system ensures that:

- **Specialization in Supreme Court Practice**: AoRs are trained to navigate the complexities of the Supreme Court, reducing the likelihood of procedural errors.
- **Accountability**: By making AoRs responsible for filings, the court ensures that its processes are followed correctly.
- **Effective Communication:** AoRs ensure that communication between the client and the court is streamlined and efficient.

Misconduct for AoRs (Outlined in Order IV, Rules 9)

- Lending their name without participating in proceedings.
- Being absent from court without valid reasons and Professional Negligence or Misconduct
- Failing to submit appearance slips properly or Inaccurate filings (errors in legal documents).
- Misuse of Trust or Breach of Fiduciary Duty or Misrepresentation or False Submission.

Consequences for Misconduct (Outlined in Order IV, Rule 10)

- The Supreme Court can suspend an AoR from practicing if found guilty of misconduct, preventing them from filing and handling cases in the SC.
- In severe cases, an AoR may be permanently removed from the AoR register, ending their ability to practice in the SC.
- The Court may impose fines or require the AoR to cover costs for any harm caused, including paying compensation for financial losses suffered by clients or the Court.
- Misconduct findings can severely damage an AoR's reputation, leading to loss of clients, diminished credibility, and difficulty finding work as an advocate.
- Additionally, the AoR may face disciplinary action from the Bar Council of India, potentially leading to suspension or cancellation of their right to practice law across any court in India.

Supreme Court Observations on AoR Conduct

- **State of Punjab v. Ashok Singh Garcha**: The Supreme Court emphasized that AoRs must ensure the accuracy of petitions and actively participate, condemning the practice of merely lending names for Special Leave Petitions (SLPs).
- **Vijay Dhanji Chaudhary v. Suhas Jayant Natawadkar**: The Court criticized AoRs for filing petitions without taking full responsibility, prompting reform suggestions from the SC Bar Association and the AoR Association.
- **Rameshwar Prasad Goyal Case (2013)**: The SC acted against an AoR for filing multiple cases without appearing in court, reiterating that AoRs are responsible for managing cases and should actively participate, not just lend their names.

Challenges and Necessary Reforms

1. **Consequences for Frivolous Petitions**: Strong penalties for AoRs who lend names or file frivolous cases.

2. **Mandatory Appearance**: AoRs or their firm must appear physically or virtually in cases they handle.
3. **Training Quality**: Senior AoRs should ensure aspiring AoRs gain practical experience in the SC before certifying their training.
4. **Increased Threshold**: Gradually raising the standards to qualify as an AoR.
5. **Records Scrutiny**: Regular review of AoRs' filings and appearances to check for irregularities.
6. **Declaration of Responsibility**: AoRs must declare responsibility for the drafting and filing of each case.
7. **Code of Conduct**: Introducing an additional code of ethics for AoRs.

Benami Act,2016

Recently, a Special Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) recalled its 2022 judgment which had declared certain amendments to the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act of 2016 unconstitutional. It has been decided to refer the case for fresh adjudication.

- ✓ In 2016, a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana had declared Sections 3(2) and 5 of the 2016 Act as unconstitutional.
- ✓ **Retrospective Effect:** Section 3(2) mandates three years of imprisonment for those who had entered into benami transactions between September 5, 1988, and October 25, 2016, that is, a person could be jailed for a benami transaction done 28 years before the Section even came into existence.
- ✓ The other provision that was struck down, Section 5 states that "any property, which is subject matter of benami transaction, shall be liable to be confiscated by the Central Government".

About the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act of 2016

- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act was enacted initially in 1988 to restrict benami transactions (where property ownership is in one name but financed by another person) and prevent the misuse of such transactions for illegal purposes such as money laundering, tax evasion, etc.
- But no rules were enacted to govern the procedural execution of the legislation. As a result, the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act 2016 was enacted.
  - ✓ The 2016 law had expanded the original law from nine sections to 72 sections.
  - ✓ Following demonetization in 2016, the government scrutinized real estate transactions for benami properties, which led to several high-profile seizures and enhanced compliance in the real estate sector.
- **Key Provisions of 2016 Act**:
  1. **Expanded the Definition of Benami Transactions:** A transaction will be qualified as "benami" if-
     - ➢ a property is purchased or held by one person, but the payment for it is made by another.
     - ➢ a transaction is conducted or registered under a fictitious name.
     - ➢ the listed owner is unaware of or denies ownership of the property.
     - ➢ the individual funding the purchase is fictitious or cannot be located.
  2. **Definition of Benamidar:** A Benamidar is an individual or fictitious person in whose name a benami property is held or registered. He cannot re-transfer the benami property to the real owner (beneficial owner).
  3. **Scope of "Property":** It expands the definition of property to include assets of any kind. This includes movable and immovable property, tangible and intangible assets, as well as corporeal (physical) and incorporeal (non-physical) property.
  4. **Powers of Authorities:** The authorities are empowered to-
     - ➢Conduct thorough examinations of properties and records.
     - ➢Summon any person, including those from banking, financial, or other reporting institutions.
     - ➢Instruct individuals or entities to produce financial records or books of accounts.

- Accept evidence through affidavits.
- To provisionally attach a property suspected of being benami. Upon confirmation that a property is benami, it may be confiscated by the central government.
  - Properties identified as benami can be confiscated by the central government without compensation. The amendment empowers authorities to take over and dispose of such assets as government owned.

5. **Penal Consequences:**
   - Engaging in or aiding a benami transaction to evade laws or debts is punishable by:
     - **Imprisonment**: 1 to 7 years.; **Fine**: Up to 25% of the property's fair market value.
   - Providing false information under this Act is punishable by **6 months to 5 years of imprisonment** and a **fine of up to 10% of the property's fair market value**.
6. **Appeal Mechanism:** A person aggrieved by the decision of the adjudicating authority can appeal to an Appellate Tribunal. Further appeals can be made to the High Court, providing a structured process for dispute resolution.

What was the Case?

- **Background**: After the government tried to tighten the net around Benami transactors with its 2016 amendment, the income tax department sent hundreds of notices to companies and individuals and initiated criminal prosecution against them, confiscating properties with the retrospective clause of the new law.
- **Appeal in Calcutta High Court (HC)**: This retroactive application was challenged in Calcutta HC in 2019 which ruled that the 2016 amendments could not be applied to past transactions. The Central Government then appealed this decision in the SC, seeking to overturn the HC's judgment.
  - ✓ In Union of India v. Makhan Lal Kapoor (2019), the Supreme Court upheld confiscation under the Act, stating that property held by benamis for tax evasion cannot be protected under property rights.
- **The SC Judgement**: In its 2022 ruling, the SC upheld the Calcutta HC's decision and also highlighted that seizing property outright (in-rem forfeiture) condemned the property itself, not just the individuals involved, which was disproportionately severe.
- **Review Petition**: The Union Government filed a review petition, arguing that the 2022 judgment disrupted 40 years of jurisprudence and exceeded the main issue of the 2016 amendment's prospective application by declaring Sections 3(2) and 5 unconstitutional. The current judgment responds to this review petition.

Why Did the SC in its 2022 Judgement Strike Down Some Provisions of the 2016 Amendment Act?

1. **Retrospective Application:** The 2016 amendments allowed authorities to penalize and confiscate properties from transactions conducted as far back as 1988, applying the law retrospectively.
   - ✓ Applying the 2016 provisions retrospectively would lead to legal uncertainty and confusion over which transactions were actually prohibited, as the 1988 Act was limited in scope and lacked enforcement capability.
2. **Violation of Article 20(1) of the Constitution:** which prohibits retroactive punishment, meaning laws cannot punish actions that were legal when originally performed. Applying the 2016 provisions to past transactions was seen as punitive and thus unconstitutional.
   - ✓ By retrospectively applying the law, authorities would have wide discretion to confiscate assets based on newer definitions, potentially leading to arbitrary or discriminatory enforcement.
3. **Harsh and Disproportionate Penalties**
   - **Section 3** of the Act criminalized benami transactions with harsh penalties, including imprisonment and heavy fines, without considering if such transactions were illegal at the time they were conducted.
   - **Section 5** allowed for the confiscation of properties related to benami transactions, giving authorities extensive power to seize assets without due consideration of circumstances.

- The Court found these measures overly punitive, as they imposed severe consequences on transactions that were not necessarily illegal when conducted.

4. **Lack of Adequate Safeguards:** The 2016 Act granted broad powers to authorities, enabling them to initiate criminal prosecution and confiscate properties without sufficient procedural protections for individuals. Without adequate safeguards, the powers were prone to misuse, lacking clear standards to protect individuals' rights during investigation and seizure.
5. **Right to Property under Article 300A:** Article 300A protects the right to property, stating that no person shall be deprived of property except by the authority of law. The 2016 Amendment allowed for confiscation of benami properties without compensation, which the Court found problematic.
   - ✓ The Court asserted that this retrospective confiscation amounted to forfeiture of property without due process, which was unreasonable and arbitrary.

Key Highlights of the Recent Supreme Court Judgment

1. **Constitutionality of the 1988 Act Not Initially Questioned**: SC clarified that the only question was whether the 2016 amendments should be applied prospectively.
2. **Order for Fresh Adjudication**: The Court granted the government's review petition, overturning the 2022 ruling. The case will now be reconsidered by a newly formed bench, where the constitutionality of the benami law provisions will be examined.
3. **Need for Proper Constitutional Review**: The bench highlighted the necessity of an active legal dispute for a thorough constitutional review, ensuring any challenges are properly adjudicated.

Weaponisation Of Trade

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, speaking at an event, highlighted the social and political backlash against globalisation over the past 25 years.

- He emphasised that ***trade has not only been globalised but also weaponised***, prompting countries to view economic transactions through the lens of national security.
- This has resulted in many nations, including India, adopting protectionist policies, such as anti-dumping measures, particularly targeting Chinese goods.

Steps Taken By Countries

- **Global Pushback Against Coercion**
  - Quad countries—India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S.—have issued a statement rejecting coercive economic practices and advocating for countries' right to determine their own futures.
  - The G7 nations echoed this sentiment, opposing any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.
- **Economic diversification and supply-chain resilience**
  - Creating alternative supply chains is key to countering the weaponization of trade.
  - One such initiative is the **Mineral Security Partnership (MSP)**, which includes 13 members such as India, the U.S., and the EU.
    - ✓ The MSP aims to ensure the production, processing, and recycling of critical minerals in a way that maximizes economic benefits for countries with mineral resources.
- **Friend-shoring**
  - The practice of "friend-shoring," where supply chains are limited to politically and economically allied countries, is becoming more common.

- ✓ However, experts warns that friend-shoring could harm global trade and undermine institutions like the WTO, reducing the legitimacy of multilateral trade.

- **Trade Protectionism**
  - Weaponisation of Trade has resulted in many nations, including India, adopting protectionist policies, such as anti-dumping measures, particularly targeting Chinese goods.
  - E.g., India has imposed over 30 anti-dumping duties on Chinese products in 2024 alone.
  - Concerns over job losses and the national security implications of technology have led countries to prioritize domestic industries and supply chains over economic efficiency.

India's Shift Of Approach in Trade Negotiations

India is adopting a more **cautious strategy** in its trade negotiations, halting talks for free trade agreements (FTAs) with smaller countries like Oman and Peru. This shift is due to concerns that past FTAs have disproportionately benefitted partner countries. The pause in negotiations comes not only due to the widening trade gap but also concerns over the outflow of investment from the country.

Widening Trade Deficit with ASEAN and UAE (the FTA Countries)

- **Deficit with ASEAN**
  - ASEAN remains a crucial trading partner for India, accounting for 11 percent of its global trade, with bilateral trade reaching US$ 122.67 billion during 2023-24.
  - India's trade with ASEAN experienced astounding growth after signing the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).
  - However, the trade disproportionately benefits the ASEAN region.
    - ✓ Between FY 2009 and FY 2023, imports from ASEAN to India grew by 234.4 percent while exports from India rose only by 130.4 percent.
    - ✓ As a result, India's trade deficit expanded from US$ 7.5 billion annually when the agreement was enacted in 2011 to approximately US$ 44 billion in 2023.
- **Deficit with UAE**
  - India's trade deficit with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) widened after the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in May 2022.
  - Within eight months of the CEPA coming into effect, India's trade gap with the UAE widened by more than $5 billion.
  - India's exports to the UAE grew by 11% to $20.25 billion, while imports climbed 24.4% to $36.23 billion.

Strategies Employed By India To Address The Issue

- **Development of a New Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**
  - The Commerce Ministry is drafting a fresh SOP to streamline future trade negotiations.
  - The SOP will include modern chapters on labor, environment, and trade-offs, with a clear focus on human resource mobilisation and the hierarchy of negotiating teams.
  - The draft also includes input from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), referencing consultancy private group.
- **Shift in Focus to Larger Markets and Geopolitically Important Countries**
  - India is now focusing on trade deals with larger markets such as the European Union and the UK, and countries of geopolitical importance like the Maldives.
  - Negotiations with smaller countries are paused, as India feels it has not received commensurate returns in past agreements.
    - ✓ India opens a large market for the partner country, but there is a sense that it is not receiving commensurate returns.
- **Reviewing Past FTAs and Tariff Asymmetry**
  - India is reviewing the ASEAN trade agreement, which has led to significant trade deficits post-Covid.
  - The review is expected to be completed by next year, focusing on resolving tariff asymmetry, which has disadvantaged India in these deals.

- **Stringent norms for Rule of origin and imposition of anti-dumping duties**
  - The rising influx of Chinese investments and goods into ASEAN has sparked concerns over the rerouting of Chinese products into India through the region.
  - The Economic Survey highlighted that Chinese firms are increasingly rerouting supply chains through countries like Mexico and Vietnam.
  - In response, India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched an anti-dumping investigation on various goods imported (eg steel from Vietnam).
  - India is also taking a tough stand on the issue of rule of origin while negotiating with other countries.

Challenges Faced by India in Trade Negotiation

- **Current Negotiating Capabilities**
  - One of the main challenges for India is the lack of subject matter expertise and institutional memory in trade negotiations.
  - In contrast, foreign negotiators tend to have more experience, putting India at a disadvantage.
    - ✓ Foreign negotiators are battle-hardened with years of expertise in negotiations, unlike in India where officials are rotated periodically.
- **Exit from RCEP and Concerns over Rising Imports from China**
  - India exited the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations due to concerns over rising imports from China.
  - Meanwhile, trade between China and ASEAN grew after RCEP came into effect in 2022, increasing competition for India in the region.
- **Rerouting concerns**
  - The rising influx of Chinese investments and goods into ASEAN has sparked concerns over the rerouting of Chinese products into India through the region.
- **Other challenges**
  - Global economic slowdown, the rise of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and new trade policies such as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and Deforestation Rules as major challenges.

Visit of German Chancellor to India

Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz paid an official visit to India for the 7th Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC). The IGC is a whole-of-government framework under which Ministers from both sides hold discussions in their respective areas of responsibility and report on the outcome of their deliberations to the Prime Minister and Chancellor. He had visited India twice last year, for a bilateral State Visit in February 2023 and to attend the G20 Leaders' Summit in September 2023.

Key Highlights of the Visit

- **Bilateral talks on global issues:**
  - **Russia-Ukraine conflict -** Scholz urged India to support a political solution to the Ukraine crisis, lauding India's stable role in South Asia.
  - **West Asia:** Both leaders stressed the importance of avoiding further escalation, advocating for ceasefire and a two-state solution for resolving Israeli–Palestinian conflict.
  - **Indo-Pacific security and China's influence -** Modi and Scholz emphasised the importance of a **rules-based order** in the Indo-Pacific and the need for maritime freedom.

- **Reform of global institutions:** Both leaders underscored the need for reform in multilateral organisations.
- **Expanded partnership vision:** Scholz and Modi highlighted a shift from a "whole of government" to a "whole of nation" approach, signifying a broader, deeper collaboration.

- **Key announcements and agreements:**
  - **Visa expansion for skilled Indians:** Germany to increase annual visas for skilled Indians from 20,000 to 90,000, recognising India's skilled workforce as a crucial asset for Germany's economic growth.
  - **'Focus on India' Strategy:** Germany's holistic approach to its partnership with India, marked by the 'Focus on India' document, emphasises Germany's trust and investment in India's workforce and strategic cooperation.
  - **Reducing dependency on China:** Scholz emphasised avoiding "one-sided dependencies," particularly in strategic areas such as critical raw materials.
    - Both leaders aligned on positioning India as a key partner to diversify supply chains.
  - **India as a hub for global manufacturing:** PM Modi promoted India as an emerging hub for trade and manufacturing, encouraging German businesses to "**Make in India, Make for the World.**"
- **Key areas of collaboration:**
  - **Enhanced defence and security cooperation:**
    - Modi and Scholz signed key agreements, including one on the exchange and protection of classified information, signalling a deepening mutual trust in defence and security.
    - **The Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)** in criminal matters aims to bolster cooperation on legal issues, enhancing India and Germany's ability to jointly address security challenges.
  - **Clean energy and sustainable development:**
    - **Green hydrogen roadmap:** It marks a significant step in renewable energy collaboration, contributing to both nations' climate goals.
    - **Joint Research and Development (R&D):** A Joint Declaration of Intent supports cooperation in R&D on advanced materials, underscoring a shared commitment to technological innovation.
- **Other key announcements**
  - Placing a German Liaison Officer in the IFC-IOR (*Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region)*
  - German projects and funding commitment of 20 Mn Euros under Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
  - Establishment of first *International Research Training Group* between India and Germany
  - Establishing Regional Consultations between the Foreign offices of India and Germany (Africa, West Asia and North Africa)
- **Key events**
  - Holding of the 18th Asia-Pacific Conference of German Business (APK 2024)
    - APK is a biennial event which serves as a platform to enhance trade and investment relations between Germany and the Indo-Pacific, with a particular focus on strengthening ties with India.
  - Holding of a Defence RoundTable on the sidelines of the APK 2024
  - **Indo Pacific Deployment of German Naval ships**: Joint exercises between Indian and German Navies and Port calls of German ships in Goa

India – Germany Bilateral Relation

- **Overview**
  - India and Germany have a **'Strategic Partnership'** since **2000**.
  - Recently, the two countries have intensified their cooperation in areas such as **AI, cybersecurity, circular economy, smart farming, sustainable development, etc.**

- **Bilateral Trade Relations**
  - Germany is India's largest trading partner within the European Union (EU), with bilateral trade reaching **US$26 billion in 2022-23.**
  - Indian exports to Germany rose to US$10.1 billion, while German imports to India stood at around US$15.9 billion.
  - While Germany and India lack a direct free trade agreement (FTA), **Germany is an advocate for the ongoing EU-India FTA negotiations**, which aim to enhance economic ties further.
- **Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC):**
  - The launch of IGC in **2011** at the level of Heads of Government allows for a comprehensive review of cooperation and identification of new areas of engagement.
  - India is among a select group of countries with which Germany has such a dialogue mechanism.
- **Focus on Indo-Pacific and strategic alliances:** With rising geopolitical concerns in the Indo-Pacific, German and European policymakers view **India as a vital partner for economic and strategic stability**.

Visit of President of Maldives to India

President of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, visited India. This was his first bilateral visit to India. He had earlier visited India in June 2024 to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers.

Key Outcomes Of The Bilateral Meeting

- **Vision Document released to transform the bilateral relationship**
  - Both sides agreed to transform the bilateral relationship to a **Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership**.
  - Vision Document has detailed sections on various aspects of the bilateral relations between the two countries. It is a blueprint for relations that has been charted out for the next several years and provides a framework for the ongoing visit.
  - The document also aims to bring together the objectives for India's own development as have been set out under the Viksit Bharat 2047 plan and Maldives' own action plan and objectives to become a developed country by 2040.
- **Economic and Financial Support**
  - India has extended financial support to Maldives, offering INR 30 billion and USD 400 million through a bilateral currency swap agreement.
    - ✓ This assistance aims to alleviate Maldives' financial struggles, as the country's foreign exchange reserves have dropped to dangerous levels.
  - The two sides have also initiated negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost economic cooperation and Indian investments in various sectors of Maldives.
  - The two sides also agreed to settle trade transactions in local currencies.
- **Political Exchanges**
  - Both countries agreed to intensify political exchanges, including among parliamentarians and local government representatives.
  - An MoU will institutionalize cooperation between the two Parliaments.
- **Reviving Defence and Maritime Security Cooperation**
  - India and Maldives agreed to bolster their defence and security cooperation, which had suffered after President Muizzu ordered Indian military personnel out of the country earlier this year.

- India will refit and repair a Maldivian Coast Guard vessel.
- Several initiatives have been launched to strengthen Maldives' maritime capabilities, including the provision of radar systems, defence platforms, and infrastructure support.
  - ✓ Enhance Maldives' surveillance and monitoring capabilities.
  - ✓ Support the Maldives National Defence Force (**MNDF**) with equipment and infrastructure.
  - ✓ Strengthen disaster response, risk mitigation, and information-sharing capabilities.
  - ✓ Inaugurate the Maldivian Ministry of Defence building constructed with India's assistance.

- **Key Agreements Signed**
  - Five pacts were signed during the meeting:

agreements on a bilateral currency swap	training of judicial officers	prevention of corruption	law enforcement training	youth and sports cooperation

  - Additionally, the two leaders inaugurated 700 social housing units and a new runway at the Hanimaadhoo International Airport was launched in the Maldives.
  - Launched RuPay card in Maldives, which will enhance ease of payments for Indian tourists visiting Maldives
- **Development cooperation**
  - India and Maldives will collaborate on multiple infrastructure projects, including ports, airports, roads, and housing. Key projects include:
    - ✓ The timely completion of the Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP).
    - ✓ Feasibility studies for island connections and a commercial port at Thilafushi.
    - ✓ Joint development of an Agriculture Economic Zone and fish processing facilities.
- **Digital Cooperation**
  - India will assist Maldives in developing its digital and financial infrastructure, including services like UPI and RuPay for better e-governance and payment ease for tourists.
- **Health Cooperation**
  - India will help in establishing Jan Aushadhi Kendras and enhancing emergency medical evacuation capacity.
- **Capacity Building and Training**
  - India will continue to provide customized training for civil servants and launch a program for women-led development.
  - They also plan to establish a Start-up Incubator-Accelerator in the Maldives to support youth innovation.
- **Strengthened People-to-People Ties**
  - Plans were announced to establish a consulate of Maldives in Bengaluru and a consulate of India in Addu City.
  - Both countries acknowledged the strong ties formed through tourism, education, and healthcare
  - India will support the establishment of higher education institutions and skilling centers in Maldives.
  - An Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Chair will be established at Maldives National University to foster academic exchange.

Analysis of This Visit

- **Background: Strained Relations Between India and Maldives**
  - Muizzu, who assumed office in November 2023, had campaigned on an 'India Out' platform, calling for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel from the Maldives.
  - This led to strained relations, as Muizzu was perceived to be closer to China, evident from his official visits to Turkey and China soon after taking office, bypassing India.

- ✓ Traditionally, India had been the first destination for Maldivian presidents.
- o Relations worsened when Maldivian officials made derogatory comments about Indian PM Modi, which sparked a social media conflict between Maldivians and Indians.
- o The tensions earlier this year affected tourism, with Indian tourist numbers to the Maldives dropping by 50,000, causing a loss of $150 million.

- **Muizzu's Shift in Stance**
  - o Muizzu's softened approach toward India reflects his realization of the Maldives' domestic and economic challenges.
  - o Facing a looming economic crisis, including debt repayments and downgraded credit ratings by Moody's, Muizzu's visit is seen as an attempt to seek financial assistance from India.
    - ✓ With its foreign exchange reserves down to $440 million and substantial debt repayments due in 2025 and 2026, the Maldives has received a credit rating downgrade from Moody's.
  - o India has already extended $1.4 billion in financial support to the Maldives for various infrastructure projects, and the visit is seen as an opportunity to reinforce bilateral cooperation.

Significance of Maldives for India

- **Strategic Importance**
  - o It is situated at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through Indian Ocean (particularly the 8° N and 1 ½° N channels). It has potential to allow a third nation's naval presence in the area.
- **Geo-political interest**
  - o Securing sea lanes of communication; Fighting piracy and sea-based terrorism;
  - o Making Indian Ocean a conflict free zone and restoring its status as sea of tranquil;
  - o Exploring blue economy and Enhancing trade; Security of Indian expatriates working there.
- **China Angle**: Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls"
- **Internal security angle: Radicalisation**
  - o In the past, the number of Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) had increased.
  - o Political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are further fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation.

India-China Patrolling agreement along LAC

In a major diplomatic breakthrough, India and China have agreed to resume patrolling at key friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. This agreement follows years of military standoffs since the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which had left both nations in a deadlock.

Key Highlights Of The Recent Patrolling Agreement Along the LAC

- **Restoration of Patrolling Rights in Depsang Plains and Demchok**
  - o India and China have agreed to restore patrolling rights in the Depsang Plains and Demchok regions of eastern Ladakh, addressing long-standing "legacy issues" that predate the 2020 Chinese incursions.
  - o Indian troops will now be able to patrol up to Patrolling Points (PP) 10 to 13 in Depsang and Charding Nullah in Demchok.
- **Agreement on Patrolling Protocols**
  - o Both sides will patrol up to the old points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), with Indian patrols occurring twice a month.

- The strength of each patrol will consist of 14-15 troops to avoid clashes.
- Patrol programmes will be coordinated, with any clashing dates being mutually modified to prevent misunderstandings.

- **Eastern Theatre and Other Friction Points**
  - While agreements have been reached on Depsang and Demchok, friction points like Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso remain unchanged.
  - Discussions regarding the eastern sectors, particularly sensitive areas in Arunachal Pradesh, are still ongoing.
- **Confidence-Building Measures**
  - The pact aims to restore trust between the two countries through monthly commander-level meetings and case-specific talks.
  - Both sides aim to reduce the overall deployment of troops along the LAC, a process already planned for winter.

Significance of This Agreement

- **Rekindling hope**
  - The pact has rekindled hopes of early restoration of diplomatic and bilateral political ties.
  - This agreement assumes significance since the Chinese side, until a year ago, showed reluctance to even discuss them while it agreed on disengagement at other friction points.
- **Depsang Plains is significant**
  - The Depsang Plains is 30 km southeast of the strategically important Daulat Beg Oldie post near the Karakoram Pass in the north.

- Also, in the midst of mountainous terrain, it offers a flat surface which can be used by either of the two countries to launch a military offensive, similar to the Spanggur Gap in the Chushul sub-sector.

- **Process of Disengagement, De-escalation, and Demilitarization**
  - The agreement is expected to initiate a process of disengagement, de-escalation, and demilitarization in the areas where both nations currently have 50,000 to 60,000 troops each.
    - ✓ The phased approach of the agreement will focus first on disengagement, followed by de-escalation and eventual de-induction of forces.

Article 4 of the 2005 Border Pact: Guidelines for Troop Conduct

The 2005 border agreement, particularly Article 4, provides guidelines for handling face-offs between Indian and Chinese troops:

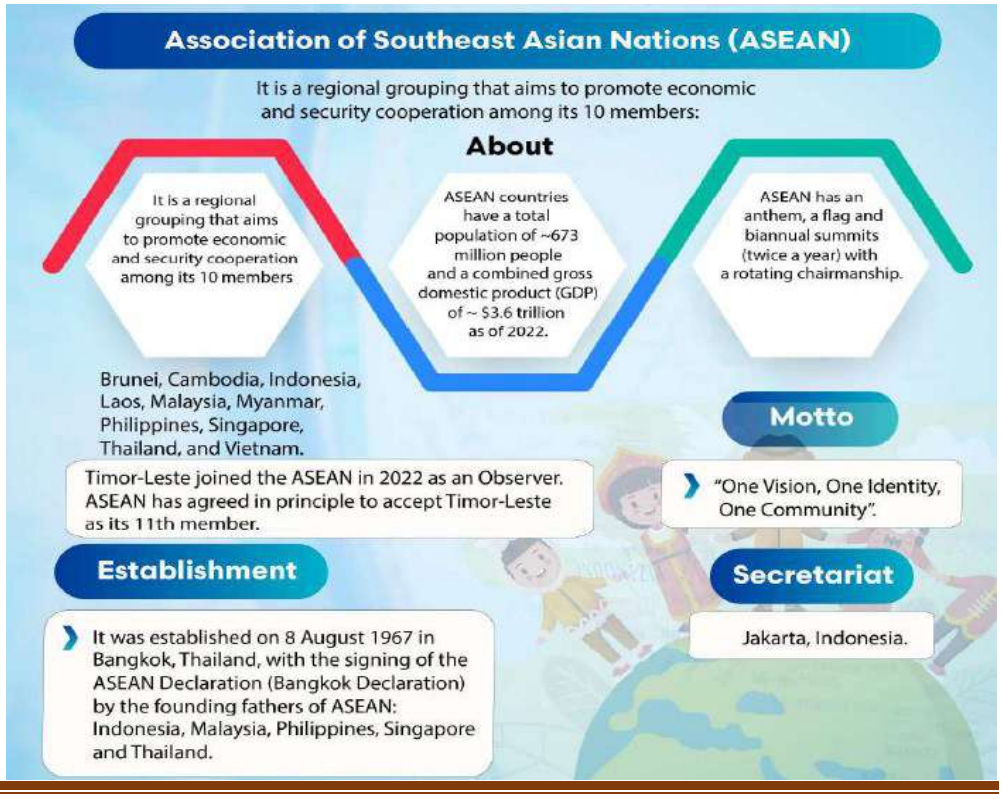
- **Self-Restraint in Face-offs**: Both sides are required to exercise restraint and take necessary measures to prevent escalation if there is a face-to-face encounter due to differing perceptions of the LAC.
- **No Use of Force**: Neither side shall use or threaten to use force during such encounters.
- **Mutual Courtesy and No Provocative Actions**: Troops must treat each other courteously and avoid any actions that could provoke tensions.
- **Prohibition on Markings**: Neither side is allowed to place marks or signs at the confrontation points.

21st ASEAN - India Summit

The 21st ASEAN-India Summit, held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, marked a decade of India's Act East Policy. PM Modi participated for the 11th time, joining ASEAN leaders to assess the **ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** and to shape future cooperation.

India's Relationship with ASEAN

- **ASEAN and Act East Policy**
  - ASEAN is central to India's Act East policy, which focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.
- **India among the dialogue partners**
  - India is part of the ASEAN Plus Six grouping, which includes China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia as well.
- **Trade and Investment**
  - In 2010, India-ASEAN FTA in goods were signed. FTA in services were signed in 2014.



- India and ASEAN are important trading partners, with ASEAN accounting for 11% of India's global trade.
- In 2023-24, bilateral trade between the two sides was around 120.88 billion.
  - ✓ India has a trade deficit with ASEAN, exporting $41.21 billion worth of merchandise in 2023-24, while importing $79.67 billion.

- **Institutional Cooperation**
  - India – ASEAN summit-level partnership in 2002;
  - Ties were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2012 and Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022.
    - ✓ The year 2022 marked 30 years of ASEAN-India relations and it was designated as **ASEAN-India Friendship Year**.
  - India and ASEAN have strengthened defence cooperation by the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+).
  - The first ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME)was held in 2023.
- **Promoting Tourism and People-to-People Ties**
  - 2025 designated as ASEAN-India Year of Tourism to boost socio-economic development.
  - Implementation of ASEAN-India Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2023-2027.

Key Highlights of the 21st ASEAN - India Summit

- **PM Modi's Address: Focus on ASEAN Unity and Economic Growth**
  - PM Modi reiterated India's unwavering support for **ASEAN Unity**, **ASEAN Centrality**, and the **ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**.
  - Calling the 21st century the "Asian century," he stressed the importance of **India-ASEAN ties** in shaping Asia's future.
  - Key achievements in the last decade include:
    - ✓ Doubling of **India-ASEAN trade** to over USD 130 billion
    - ✓ **Direct flight connectivity** with seven ASEAN nations
    - ✓ **Fin-tech collaboration** and restoration of shared **cultural heritage**
    - ✓ Scholarships for **ASEAN youth** at Nalanda University
  - PM also highlighted the need for a timely review of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** to unlock greater economic potential.
- **10-Point Plan for Enhanced Connectivity and Resilience**
  - In line with the Chair's theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," PM Modi unveiled a **10-point plan**, including:
    - ✓ Celebrating **2025 as ASEAN-India Year of Tourism** with USD 5 million for joint activities
    - ✓ Marking a decade of the Act East Policy with **people-centric activities** like *Youth Summits and Start-up Festivals*
    - ✓ Organizing the **ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave**
    - ✓ Doubling **scholarships at Nalanda University** and adding new ones at Indian agricultural universities
    - ✓ Reviewing the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** by 2025
    - ✓ Allocating **USD 5 million** to enhance **Disaster Resilience**
    - ✓ Initiating a **Health Ministers' track** to build health resilience
    - ✓ Establishing an **ASEAN-India Cyber Policy Dialogue**
    - ✓ Hosting a workshop on **Green Hydrogen**
    - ✓ Launching the **'Plant a Tree for Mother' campaign** to promote climate resilience
- **Future Plan of Action (2026-2030)**
  - Leaders agreed on the creation of a new **ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2026-2030)** to further the partnership.

- **Two joint statements were adopted**
  - **Joint Statement on Strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Indo-Pacific
  - **Joint Statement on Advancing Digital Transformation**, recognizing India's role in digital public infrastructure

Joint Statement on Advancing Digital Transformation: Key Highlights

- **Importance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**
  - India's contributions to **ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025** and Centers of Excellence in Software Development were appreciated.
- **Financial Technology (FinTech) Collaboration**
  - The partnership seeks to expand collaboration on FinTech innovations, especially through cross-border payment systems and digital financial solutions.
- **Cybersecurity Cooperation**
  - Both parties supported the establishment of the **ASEAN-India Cyber Policy Dialogue** to bolster the resilience and security of digital infrastructure.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Collaboration**
  - The Joint Statement called for collaboration in AI to develop skills, infrastructure, risk management frameworks, and responsible policies.
  - Focus areas include upskilling and reskilling the workforce and promoting trustworthy AI systems.
- **Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing**
  - These initiatives will be fostered through regular exchanges, workshops, and training programs under the **ASEAN-India Digital Ministers' Meeting** to support digital transformation efforts.
- **Sustainable Financing and Investment**
  - India and ASEAN agreed to explore innovative financing mechanisms, including public-private partnerships (PPP) and international funding to support digital initiatives.
  - The ASEAN-India Fund for Digital Future will initially fund these activities.

16th BRICS Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 16th BRICS Summit, along with Chinese President Xi Jinping and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. The summit was hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin in the city of Kazan. At the summit's conclusion, l**eaders adopted the Kazan Declaration**, which outlined critical areas for cooperation and a unified approach to various global issues.

Key Highlights of the Kazan Declaration

- **On Ukraine**
  - The BRICS nations highlighted the importance of adhering to the UN Charter and appreciated mediation efforts aimed at resolving the Ukraine conflict through peaceful dialogue and diplomacy.
- **On the Middle East Crisis**
  - Expressing grave concern over the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, BRICS condemned the escalating violence in Gaza and the West Bank and the resulting civilian casualties.
- **On Western Sanctions**
  - BRICS voiced deep concern over the negative global impact of unilateral sanctions, emphasizing that such measures disrupt the world economy, hinder international trade, and obstruct progress on SDGs.

- **Reform of the International Financial System**
  - To ensure inclusivity and fairness, aiming for economic governance that addresses current global challenges.
- **BRICS Grain Exchange**
  - BRICS welcomed Russia's proposal to create a BRICS Grain Exchange to facilitate grain and agricultural commodities trading, with potential expansion into other agricultural sectors.
- **Cross-Border Payment System**
  - The BRICS countries acknowledged the benefits of an efficient, low-cost, and inclusive cross-border payment system.
  - They advocated for using local currencies in financial transactions to promote trade between BRICS countries and partners.
- **BRICS Clear Depositary**
  - BRICS agreed to explore the establishment of an independent cross-border settlement and depositary infrastructure, known as **BRICS Clear**, to complement existing financial systems.
  - This would include a BRICS Reinsurance Company with participation on a voluntary basis.
- **Financial Innovation**
  - The group welcomed the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism's focus on fostering innovative financial practices and financing mechanisms using local currencies.
- **On the IMF**
  - BRICS reaffirmed their support for a robust **Global Financial Safety Net**, emphasizing the need for a quota-based, well-resourced IMF at the center of this safety net.
- **On the G20**
  - The BRICS countries emphasized the importance of maintaining the G20's productive functioning, stressing consensus-driven, results-oriented outcomes.
- **Pandemic Prevention**
  - The BRICS nations endorsed initiatives from the BRICS R&D Vaccine Center and supported the development of the BRICS Integrated Early Warning System to prevent mass infectious disease outbreaks.
- **Big Cat Conservation**
  - BRICS acknowledged India's initiative to create an International Big Cats Alliance, urging collaboration to protect big cats, given their high vulnerability, as part of the group's conservation efforts.

BRICS

- BRICS, in its earlier format, brought together 5 major emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
  - In 2023, during the 15th BRICS Summit, held in South Africa, **six countries were invited to join the alliance**.
  - These were - Iran, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, and Ethiopia.
- Before, expanding in 2023, BRICS as a platform represents **42% of the world population, 30% of the world's territory, 23% of global GDP, and around 18% of world trade**.
- The aim of the alliance is to challenge the economic and political monopoly of the West.
  - The group sets priorities and has discussions once every year during the BRICS summit, which members take turns hosting.

Successes/Achievements of BRICS

- **Economic Cooperation and Trade**
  - BRICS has encouraged greater trade and investment among member countries.
  - There has been a rise in intra-BRICS trade, contributing to stronger economic links.

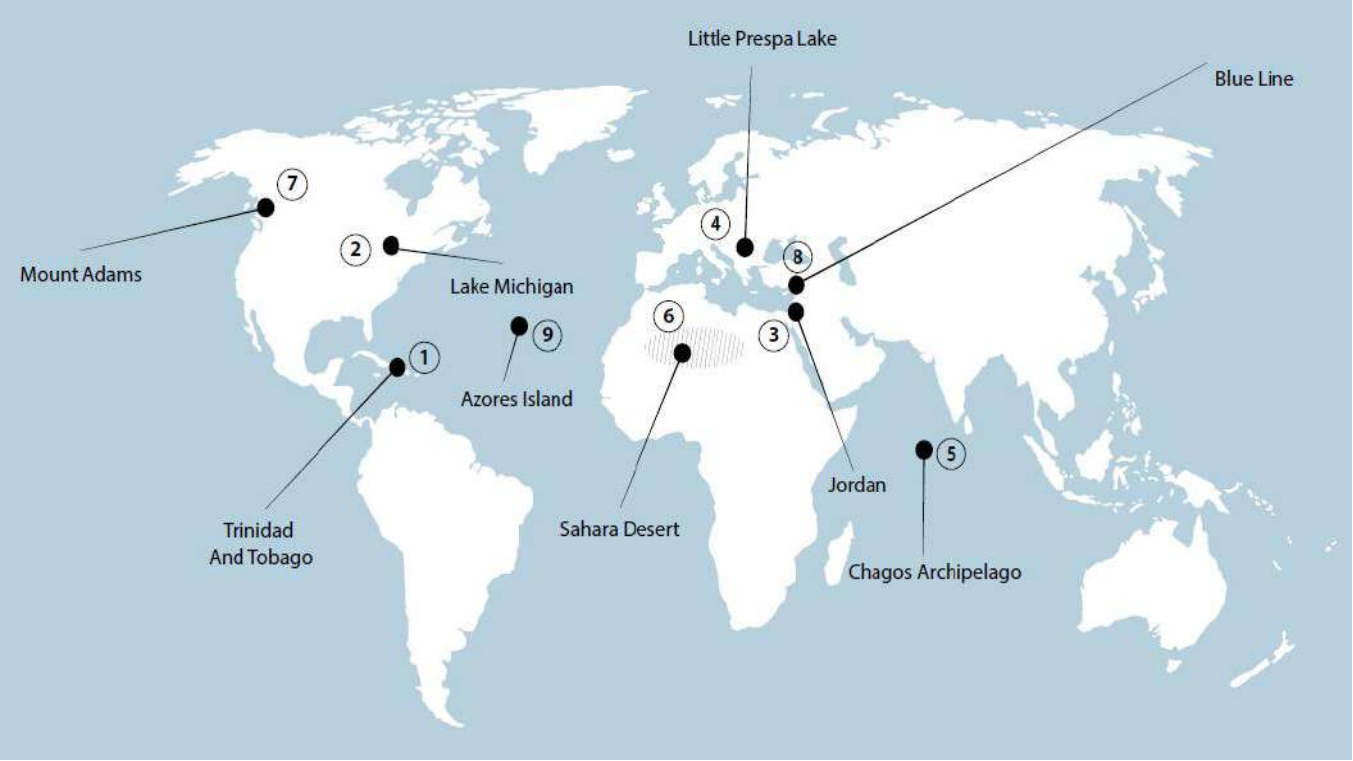
- **New Development Bank (NDB)**
  - A major milestone for BRICS is the establishment of the **New Development Bank (NDB)** in 2014, with a capital of $100 billion.
  - The bank provides funding for infrastructure and sustainable development projects within BRICS and other developing nations.
- **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)**
  - BRICS established a **CRA** with a $100 billion reserve pool to provide financial support to members facing short-term liquidity pressures.
  - The CRA aims to provide a safety net and safeguard member economies from external economic shocks.
- **Political Influence and Multilateral Engagement**
  - BRICS has become an influential political bloc, advocating for a more **multipolar world order** and greater representation of developing countries in global institutions like the United Nations, IMF, and World Bank.
- **Technical Cooperation**
  - Initiatives like the **BRICS Science, Technology, and Innovation Framework Programme** aim to enhance collaboration in research, innovation, and technical fields.
  - There have been joint efforts in health, agriculture, and disaster management, showcasing the group's commitment to addressing global challenges.

Challenges Faced by BRICS

- **Economic Disparities Among Members:** The BRICS nations are economically diverse, with varying development levels, economic structures, and political systems.
  - This disparity sometimes hinders consensus on key issues, as the priorities and interests of each member can differ significantly.
- **Geopolitical Rivalries:** Geopolitical tensions, especially between **China and India**, have sometimes strained intra-BRICS relationships, impacting the group's cohesion.
  - Territorial disputes and regional interests can influence the decision-making process.
- **Relationship with Western Powers is complex:** BRICS countries often have differing strategies regarding West.
  - Both China and Russia are now viewing the West with a lot more suspicion than before. This is due to Russia - Ukraine War and frequent roadblocks in US-China ties.
  - India, meanwhile, has been deepening its relations in spheres of economy and technology with the US.
- **Slow Progress on Institutional Reforms:** Despite advocating for a more democratic and multipolar global order, progress on reforming global institutions like the IMF and UN has been slow.
  - The group's influence is often limited by entrenched global power structures.
- **China's Economic Dominance:** China, as the largest economy within BRICS, often has a dominant influence on the group's economic agenda.
  - This can create an imbalance and generate concerns among other member states about Beijing's increasing sway in the bloc's decision-making.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

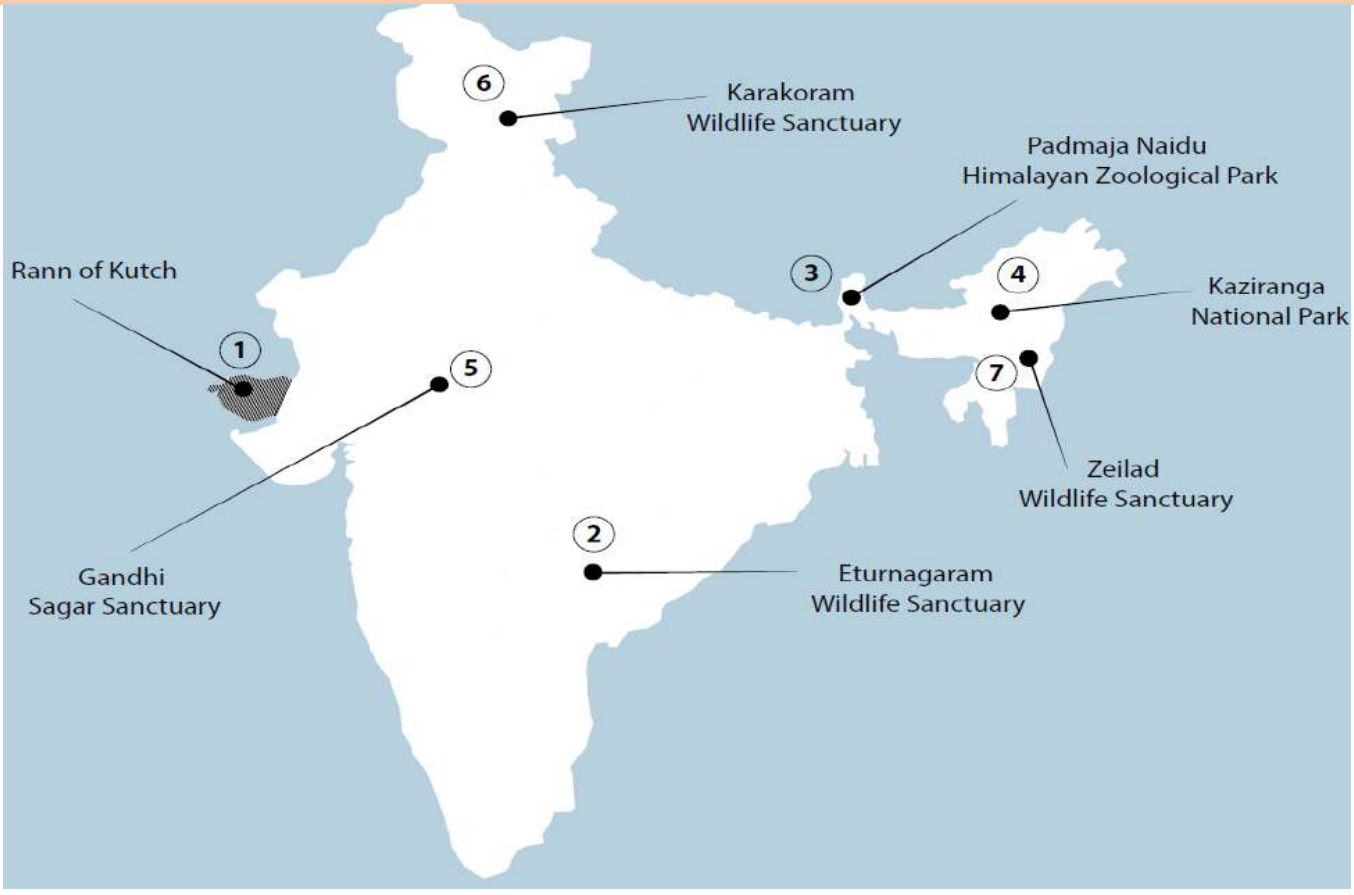
International Places in News



1	**Trinidad And Tobago**	NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) has entered into a strategic partnership with Trinidad and Tobago to develop a real-time payments platform similar to India's 'Unified Payments Interface' (UPI). Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost island country in the Caribbean. It shares maritime boundaries with Barbados to the east, Grenada to the northwest and Venezuela to the south and west.
2	**Lake Michigan**	Researchers recently surveyed the bottom of Lake Michigan after spotting strange circles on the lakebed in 2022, and new observations show the circles are craters. It is the third largest of the five Great Lakes of North America and **the only one lying wholly within the United States**. It is connected directly to Lake Huron, into which it drains, through the broad Straits of Mackinac. The lake boasts a variety of natural habitats, including tallgrass prairies, wide savannas, and the world's largest freshwater sand dunes.
3	**Jordan**	Jordan becomes the first country in the world to eliminate leprosy, receiving official verification from the WHO. It is an Arab country of Southwest Asia, in the rocky desert of the northern Arabian Peninsula. It is named on the Jordan River, which passes on its western border. It is bounded to the north by Syria, to the east by Iraq, to the southeast and south by Saudi Arabia, and to the west by Israel and the West Bank.
4	**Little Prespa Lake**	Plants and reeds have sprouted up as the water of Little Prespa Lake on the Albanian-Greek border recedes. It is situated on the border between Albania and Greece in south-eastern Europe. The majority lies in Greek territory, with a small part in Albania. It is smaller than its northern counterpart, Great Prespa Lake.
5	**Chagos Archipelago**	It's located in the central Indian Ocean, about 1,600 km south of India's southern tip. It includes key islands like Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, and Danger Island.

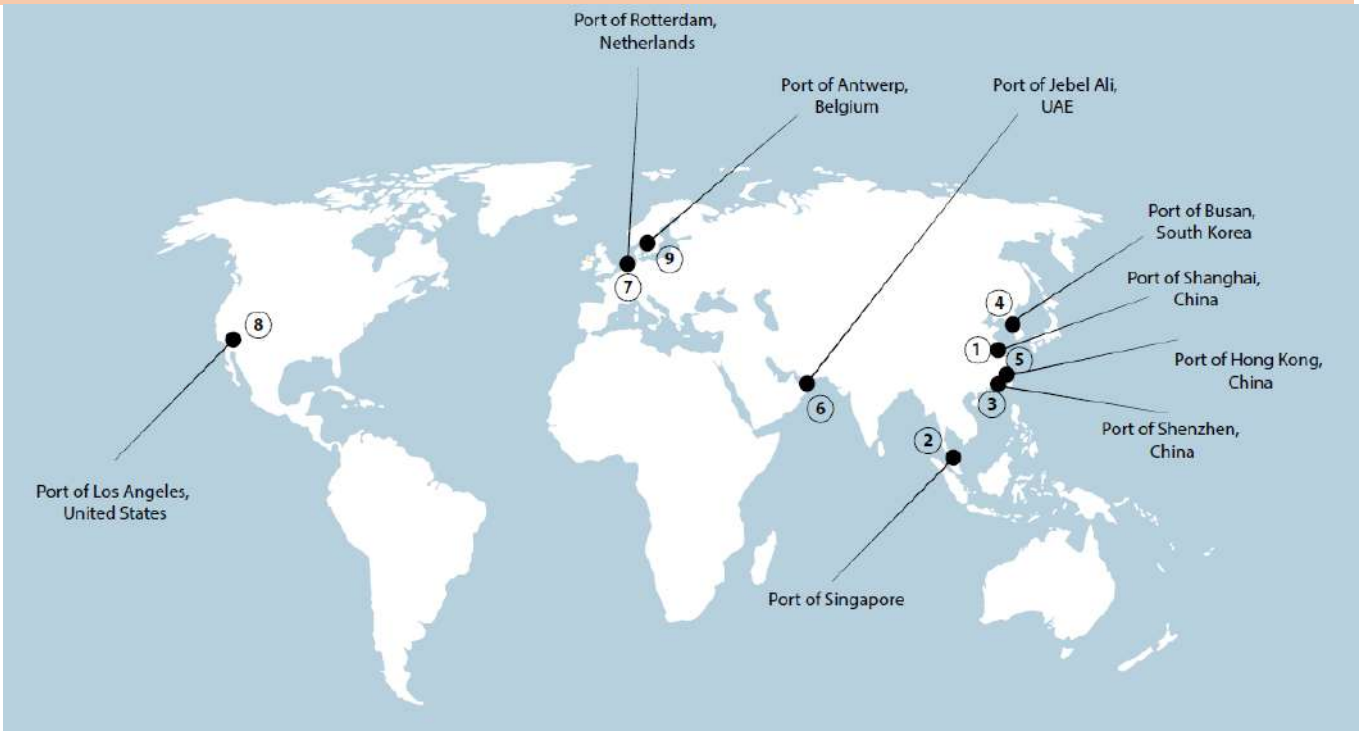
6	**Sahara Desert**	In south-eastern Morocco, it has experienced a rare deluge of rainfall, transforming it into a blue lagoon. It stretches from the Red Sea in the east and the Mediterranean in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, where the landscape gradually changes from desert to coastal plains. To the south it is bounded by the Sahel, a belt of semi-arid tropical savanna. It stretches across countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Western Sahara, Sudan, Chad, and Tunisia.
7	**Mount Adams**	It is Washington's largest volcano, and has recently shown a surge in seismic activity after remaining largely dormant for thousands of years. It is a stratovolcano located in Washington State, United States. It is the largest active volcano in Washington, surpassing Mount Rainier the state's highest peak by volume.
8	**Blue Line**	The United Nations reported that Israeli forces have fired upon its peacekeepers stationed near the Blue Line. It is a 120-km United Nations-recognized demarcation, established in 2000 to mark the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from southern Lebanon. **It separates Lebanon from Israel and the Golan Heights**, though it is not recognized as an official international border.The line is made of blue barrels and runs from the Mediterranean to the Golan Heights.
9	**Azores Island**	The regional assembly of Portugal's Azores Islands approved the creation of the largest protected marine area in the North Atlantic to reach international conservation goals. The nine-island archipelago is an autonomous region, roughly 1,500 km (932 miles) to the west of mainland Portugal. It lies in the North Atlantic Ocean and is home to unique marine biodiversity. The Azores are divided into three widely separated island groups: the eastern group, the central group, and the north-western group.

National Places in News



1	**Rann of Kutch**	The Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat faces threats from human activity and environmental issues. The Rann of Kutch is a vast salt marsh region straddling the India-Pakistan border, primarily located in Gujarat, India, with a smaller portion extending into Pakistan's Sindh province. It is divided into two parts: the Great Rann of Kutch to the north and the Little Rann of Kutch to the southeast.
2	**Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary**	A catastrophic weather event flattened an estimated 50,000 trees over 332 hectares in Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary. It is situated in Mulugu district, Telangana, near the borders of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. DayyamVagu stream divides the sanctuary, with the Godavari River also flowing through it. It is dominated by tropical dry deciduous forests with species like teak, bamboo, madhuca, and terminalia.
3	**Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park**	The Red Panda Program of Darjeeling's Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park has been selected as a finalist for the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) Conservation Award 2024. It is the **largest high-altitude** zoo in India. It focuses on breeding animals adapted to alpine conditions, with successful programs for species like snow leopards, Himalayan wolves, and red pandas.
4	**Kaziranga National Park**	More than 446 butterfly species have been recorded in Assam's Kaziranga National Park (KNP), making it a habitat with the second highest concentration in the country after the Namdapha National Park in Arunachal Pradesh. It is situated in the north-eastern part of the country in the districts of Golaghat and Nagoan in the state of Assam. It is the single largest undisturbed and representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain. In 1985, the park was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.
5	**Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary**	Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary is set to reintroduce cheetahs. It is located in Madhya Pradesh, near the Chambal River, spread across the districts of Mandsaur and Neemuch. It sits atop a flat rocky plateau, with the Chambal river cutting the sanctuary into two almost equal halves. It comprises of open grasslands interspersed with dry deciduous trees and shrubs. The sanctuary is part of the Chambal River ecosystem, which is crucial for conserving endangered species like the gharial (Indian crocodile) and gangetic dolphins.
6	**Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary**	Recently, the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has approved five significant road stretches, including four that pass through the Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is located in the union territory of Ladakh along the territory's border with Jammu and Kashmir. It is situated just to the north of Hemis National Park and to the east of Deosai National Park. Major peaks within this Wildlife Sanctuary include SaltoroKangri, SaserKangri I, and K12. Shyok and Nubra Rivers are the major water sources of this sanctuary.
7	**Zeilad Wildlife Sanctuary**	The Rongmei Naga Council Manipur (RNCM), a powerful Naga citizens' group, has strongly opposed the proposed oil exploration at Zeilad Wildlife Sanctuary in Manipur's Tamenglong district. It is located in the Tamenglong district of Manipur. It had been established in 1982 and was located specifically on the Indo-Myanmar border. It is in the basin of the Barak River and has hilly terrain.

World's Important And Busiest Ports



1	**Port of Shanghai, China**	Recently the Port of Shanghai handled more than 43 million TEUs of containers, making it the busiest port in the world. The Port of Shanghai is a crucial entry point for China's trade and commerce with the rest of the world. It is situated in the Yangtze River Delta, the center of China's economic superpower. The Shanghai Yangshan Deep Water Port, the largest automated container port in the world, is also a part of the Shanghai Port.
2	**Port of Singapore**	It is the busiest transhipment port in the world, handling about 20% of all shipping containers. Because of its strategic location, Singapore has been a significant entrepôt and trading post for at least two centuries. During the contemporary era, its ports have not become just a mere economic boon for the country, but an economic necessity because Singapore is lacking in land and natural resources.
3	**Port of Shenzhen, China**	It is the collective name of a number of ports along the coastline of Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. These ports as a whole form one of the busiest and fastest growing container ports in the world. The ports are separated by the New Territories and the Kowloon Peninsula of Hong Kong into two areas: the eastern port and the western port.
4	**Port of Busan, South Korea**	It is the largest port in South Korea. It is located at the mouth of the Naktong River.
5	**Port of Hong Kong, China**	It is located by the South China Sea. It is a deepwater seaport dominated by trade in containerised manufactured products, and to a lesser extent raw materials and passengers. The port is the key factor in the economic development of Hong Kong, the natural shelter and deep waters of Victoria Harbour which provides ideal conditions for berthing and the handling of all types of vessels. It is one of the busiest

		ports in the world, in the three categories of shipping movements, cargo handled and passengers carried.
6	**Port of Jebel Ali, UAE**	The port is not only the busiest and largest in the Middle-east region, but it is also known for being the world's biggest man-made harbour. It is located 35 km southwest of Dubai, in the Persian Gulf. The port is part of the Maritime Silk Road that runs from the Chinese coast to Mediterranean, there to the Upper Adriatic region to the northern Italian hub of Trieste with its rail connections to Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the North Sea.
7	**Port of Rotterdam, Netherlands**	It is the largest seaport in Europe, and the world's largest seaport outside of Asia. It is located in and near the city of Rotterdam, in the province of South Holland in the Netherlands. It is located in the middle of the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta.
8	**Port of Los Angeles, United States**	The Port of Los Angeles in California, also called America's port, is the first US port to appear in the Top Busiest Ports in the World list. The port is located in San Pedro Bay in Southern California and is the busiest in the United States. With its strong commitment to environmental sustainability, the Port of Los Angeles is a leader in the development of clean transportation solutions, including electric and hybrid vehicles, and is dedicated to reducing the impact of its operations on the local community and the environment.
9	**Port of Antwerp, Belgium**	It is renowned for its efficient handling of a wide range of cargo, including container ships, dry bulk carriers and oil tankers. It is Europe's second-largest seaport, after Rotterdam. Antwerp stands at the upper end of the tidal estuary of the Scheldt.

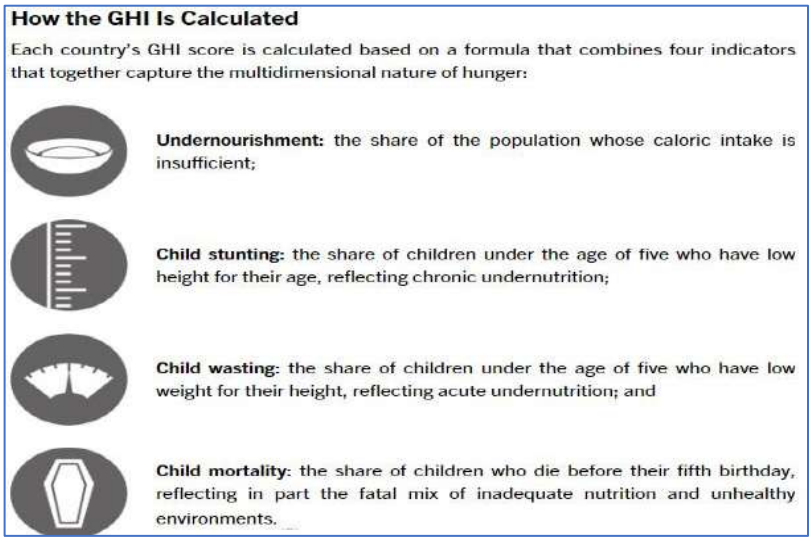
SOCIAL ISSUES

Addressing Hunger and Malnutrition in India

India's struggle with hunger and malnutrition has been underscored by its ranking in the **2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI),** where it stands **105th out of 127 countries** with a score of 27.3, categorising it in the **'serious' range**.

About GHI

- The GHI is **a peer-reviewed annual publication designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at global, regional, and national levels**, reflecting multiple dimensions of hunger over time.
- **Created in 2006**, the GHI was initially published by the US-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Germany-based Welthungerhilfe. In 2007, the Irish NGO Concern Worldwide also became a co-publisher.



- **In 2018**, IFPRI withdrew from the project and the GHI became a joint project of **Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide.**

Highlights of the 19th GHI 2024

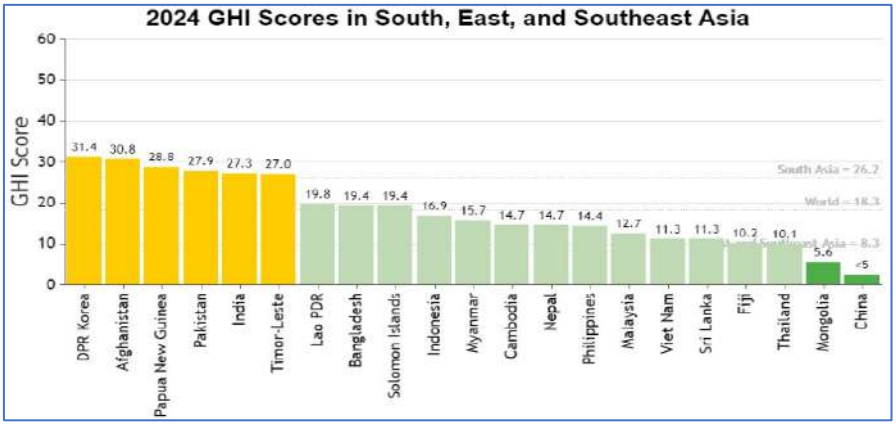
- **Theme**: "How gender justice can advance climate resilience and zero hunger".
- **Global hunger statistics:**
  - **Current GHI score:** 18.3, shows a slight improvement from 2016's score of 18.8.
  - **Vulnerable populations:** 2.8 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet.
- **Regional disparities in hunger:**
  - **Sub-Saharan Africa:** Highest rates of malnutrition and child mortality globally and ongoing conflicts in Somalia and Sudan exacerbate hunger crises.
  - **South Asia:** Countries like Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan are facing substantial hunger challenges.
- **Issues: Difficulties in achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger by 2030):** GHI 2024 reveals that 42 countries face alarming or serious hunger levels, marking a stagnation in the fight against hunger despite decades of progress.
  - **Gender disparity:** Women are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity due to discriminatory norms and violence, limiting their access to resources.
- **Underlying causes of hunger:**
  - **Climate change and environmental degradation** impacts food production and threatens the natural foundations of economies and agriculture.
  - **Armed conflicts** lead to significant displacement and disruption in food systems and affect cultivation.
  - **Lower-income countries struggle with debt**, diverting funds away from critical development needs.
- **Success stories amidst the crisis:** Countries like **Mozambique and Nepal** have achieved significant improvements in their GHI scores since 2016.
- **A call to action:**
  - GHI 2024 underscores the urgent need for coordinated efforts to address the intersecting crises of climate change, armed conflict, gender inequality and economic instability.
  - Emphasises supporting vulnerable populations, particularly women, in fight against hunger.

India Specific Findings in the GHI 2024

- **Alarming child malnutrition rates:**
  - Approximately 35.5% of children under five are stunted, indicating chronic undernutrition, while 18.7% are wasted, a sign of acute malnutrition.
  - These figures reflect **a significant lack of adequate nutrition during crucial developmental periods**, severely impacting children's physical and cognitive growth.
  - Furthermore, ~13.7% of the overall population suffers from undernourishment, which remains a persistent issue.
- **Child mortality rates:**
  - While there has been some progress in reducing child mortality, with 2.9% of children dying before their fifth birthday, the overall hunger situation remains dire.
  - *Interplay between malnutrition and child mortality underscores the need for immediate action.*

India's Performance Trends in the GHI

- **Minimal improvement over the decade:**
  - There is a stagnation in India's performance as it moved from a score of **29.3 in 2016 to 27.3 in 2024**.
  - Although there have been gains in certain areas, such as child mortality rates, the overarching issue of hunger persists.
- **India vs. neighbours:**
  - When compared to neighbouring countries like **Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh** - **each of which has fewer economic resources** - India's performance on the GHI is particularly alarming.



Addressing Hunger and Malnutrition in India

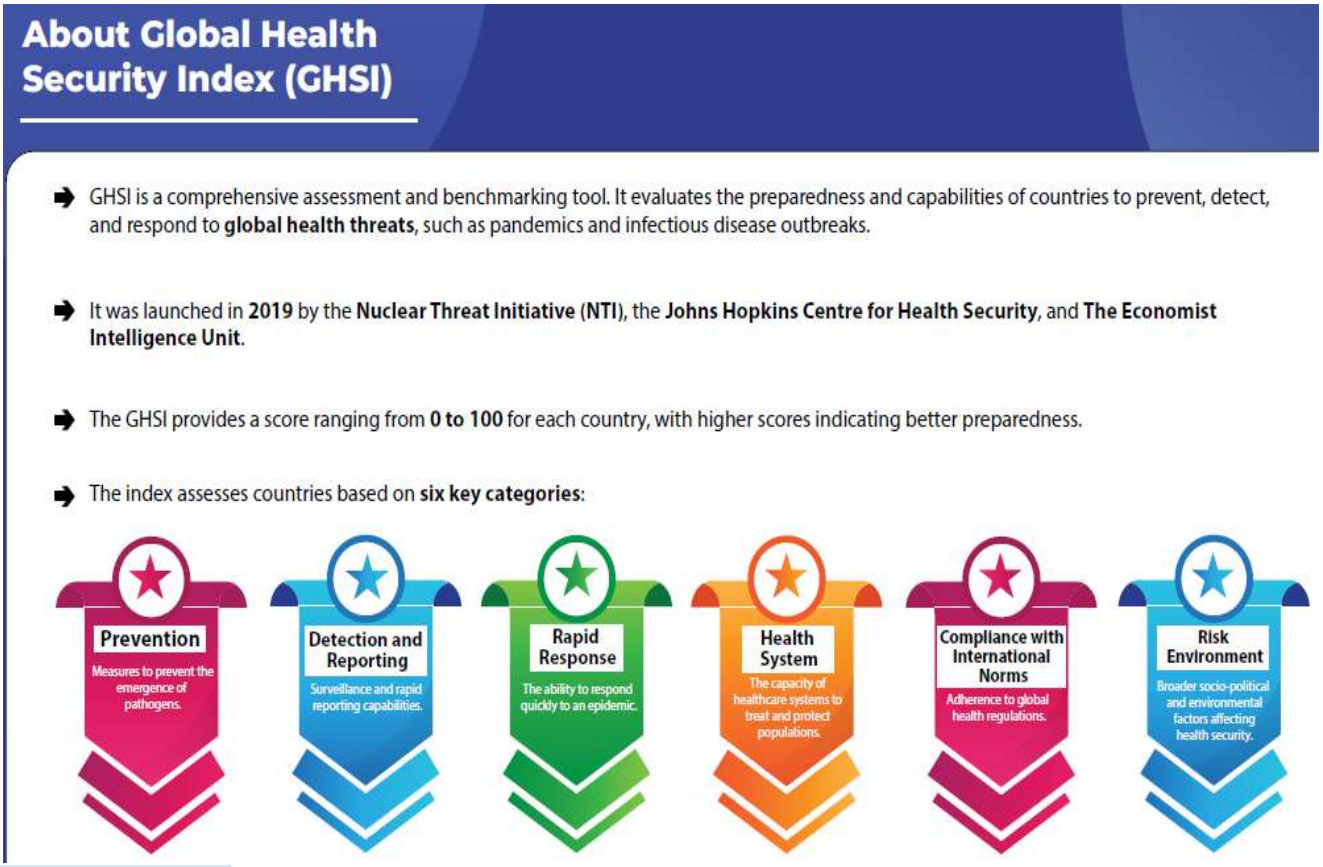
- **The need for comprehensive solutions:**
  - India's GHI score serves as a stark reminder that economic advancement is insufficient for eradicating hunger. A more holistic approach is required to tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition.
- **Effective policy interventions including key focus areas such as:**
  - **Food security:** Ensuring access to nutritious food for all segments of the population
  - **Healthcare access:** Improving healthcare infrastructure can significantly impact maternal and child health outcomes.
  - **Maternal and child nutrition programs:** Investing in targeted nutritional programs for mothers and children is vital for breaking the cycle of malnutrition.
- **Some initiatives in India:** National Food Security Act (NFSA), PM POSHAN Scheme, etc.

Pandemic Fund to curb 'Zoonotic' Diseases

The Union government has launched a **$25-million G20 Pandemic Fund** to strengthen animal health security, aiming to curb **zoonotic diseases**—diseases transmitted from animals to humans, like COVID-19.

- This initiative is a collaborative effort with organizations including the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, **World Bank**, and **FAO**, and is expected to be fully utilized by **August 2026**.
- The fund will enhance **disease surveillance**, build **laboratory infrastructure**, and promote **cross-border cooperation**.

- India, with high environmental risks and a low score (42.8) on the **Global Health Security Index (GHSI)**, is particularly vulnerable to zoonotic diseases, which are further intensified by **climate change**.
- Additionally, the project will focus on **human capacity building**, improving **data management systems**, and enhancing **disaster management frameworks** for the livestock sector.



G20 Pandemic Fund

- **Key Objectives:**
  - **Strengthen Global Health Security**
  - **Address Zoonotic Risks**
  - **Support Low and Middle-Income Countries**
- **Funding:** Initially launched with over **$1.4 billion**, the fund mobilizes grants and low-interest loans for eligible countries.

Child Betrothals Are a Ploy to Evade Punishment: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court held that child betrothals, used as a clever ploy to duck punishment under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, *violate basic rights of free choice, autonomy and childhood.*

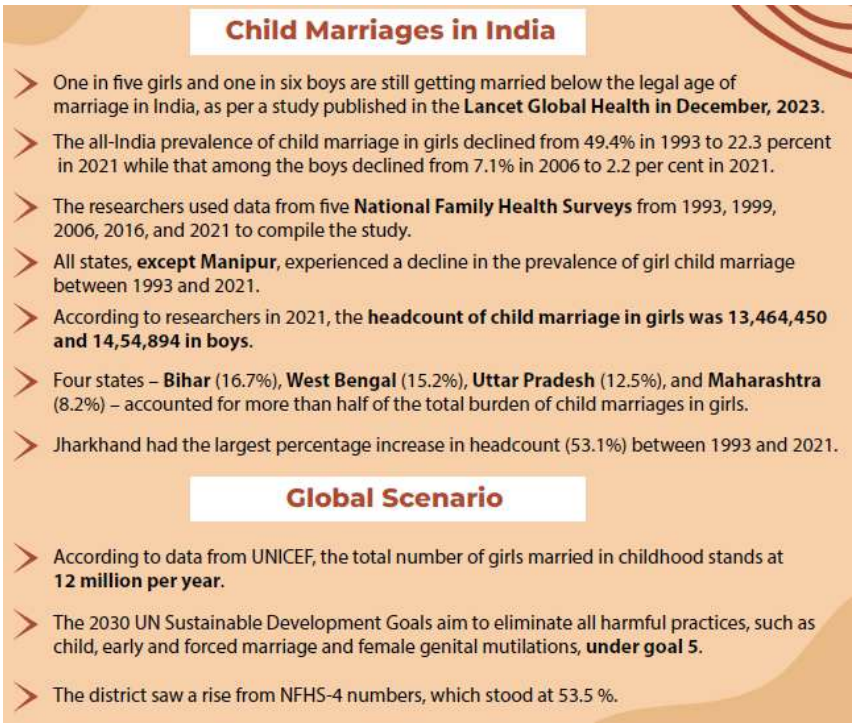
About Child Betrothal

- Child betrothal in India refers to the practice where a **marriage agreement is made between families involving children**, often before they reach the legal age of marriage.
- This arrangement may not involve an immediate marriage, but it sets the stage for a formal marriage when the children reach a certain age.
- While the actual marriage might be delayed until after the children grow older, the betrothal itself is seen as a binding commitment between families.
- **Legal Status**:
  - **Child betrothals may not have the same legal weight as child marriage in India**, but they are often viewed as a preliminary step towards a formal marriage arrangement.

- However, the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, aims to prevent child marriages and related practices by setting the legal age of marriage at **18 for girls** and **21 for boys**.
- Engaging in child marriages or betrothals is seen as violating the spirit of this law.

SC Ruling:

- A three-judge bench, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, highlighted the inadequacy of the current **anti-child marriage laws**, which are unclear on the issue of child betrothals.
- The Court urged Parliament to explicitly outlaw child betrothals and to classify children involved in such arrangements as minors in need of care under the **Juvenile Justice Act**.
- The Court also drew attention to how child marriages not only affect girls but also young boys, reinforcing patriarchal norms and denying children of both sexes their right to a childhood.



- The judgment recommended measures such as **age-appropriate sex education**, **a compensation scheme for girls opting out of child marriages**, and a campaign to create **Child Marriage Free Villages**, involving local leaders.
- This ruling emerged from a series of petitions addressing the persistence of child marriages in India despite nearly two decades of the **PCMA** and highlighted the need for stronger legislative and social efforts to combat the practice.

Impact of Climate Change on Poor Farmers in India: FAO Report

A recent report from the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** highlights how **climate change** disproportionately affects **poorer farmers in India**.

- Titled **"The Unjust Climate: Measuring the Impacts of Climate Change on Rural Poor, Women, and Youth,"** the report reveals the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized farming communities due to climate-induced stresses such as **heat stress**, **floods**, and **droughts**.

Key Highlights of the Report

- **Income Disparities**
  - The report finds that **poor households** *globally* lose **5% of their income** annually due to heat stress and **4.4%** due to floods, compared to wealthier households.
  - In India, rural poor households are particularly vulnerable because their income sources are more reliant on **climate-sensitive agriculture**.
- **Structural Inequalities**
  - The vulnerability of poor farmers is deeply rooted in **structural inequalities**.
  - Poor farmers dedicate more resources to sustaining agricultural production during adverse events, leading to reduced opportunities for **off-farm employment**.

- In India, rising temperatures increase the dependency of poor households on farming, while off-farm incomes decrease by **33%**.

- **Impact of Heat Stress and Floods**
  - Floods increase this gap by approximately **$21 billion per year**, while heat stress contributes to a gap of over **$20 billion**.
- **Policy Recommendations**
  - The FAO report suggests expanding **social security nets** for vulnerable communities.
  - **Anticipatory social protection programs**, which provide livelihood support ahead of extreme weather events, can help reduce poverty and reliance on harmful coping strategies.
  - Addressing **gendered barriers** in employment, promoting **workforce diversification**, and providing **mentorship programs** to help rural communities participate in the modern workforce.
  - Need to empower **women** and **youth** in rural areas to help combat the effects of climate change.
  - **Gender-transformative approaches** are necessary to challenge discriminatory social norms and enable *women to make economic decisions*.
  - **Mentorship programs** and initiatives to strengthen socio-emotional skills, allowing women and youth to better participate in the workforce and adapt to modern employment needs.

NITI Aayog's Response

- Responding to the report, a member of **NITI Aayog**, said that India has been actively addressing the challenges posed by climate change. Key initiatives include:
- **National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA)**:
  - NICRA offers solutions for various crops, ensuring that farmers are equipped to handle adverse climatic events.
- **Employment Guarantee Schemes and Social Safety Nets**:
  - India was the first country to implement an **employment guarantee scheme** (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) to provide economic security to its population.
  - During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government distributed **free food grains** (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) to two-thirds of the population, demonstrating its commitment to addressing both climate-related and economic challenges.
- **Increasing Women's Participation**:
  - Recent data from the **Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS)** shows a significant increase in women's participation in the workforce, indicating progress toward gender equality in employment opportunities.

India Has Eliminated Trachoma As A Public Health Problem

WHO has declared that the Government of India has eliminated Trachoma as a public health problem. With this, India has become the third country in the South-East Asia Region to achieve this milestone.

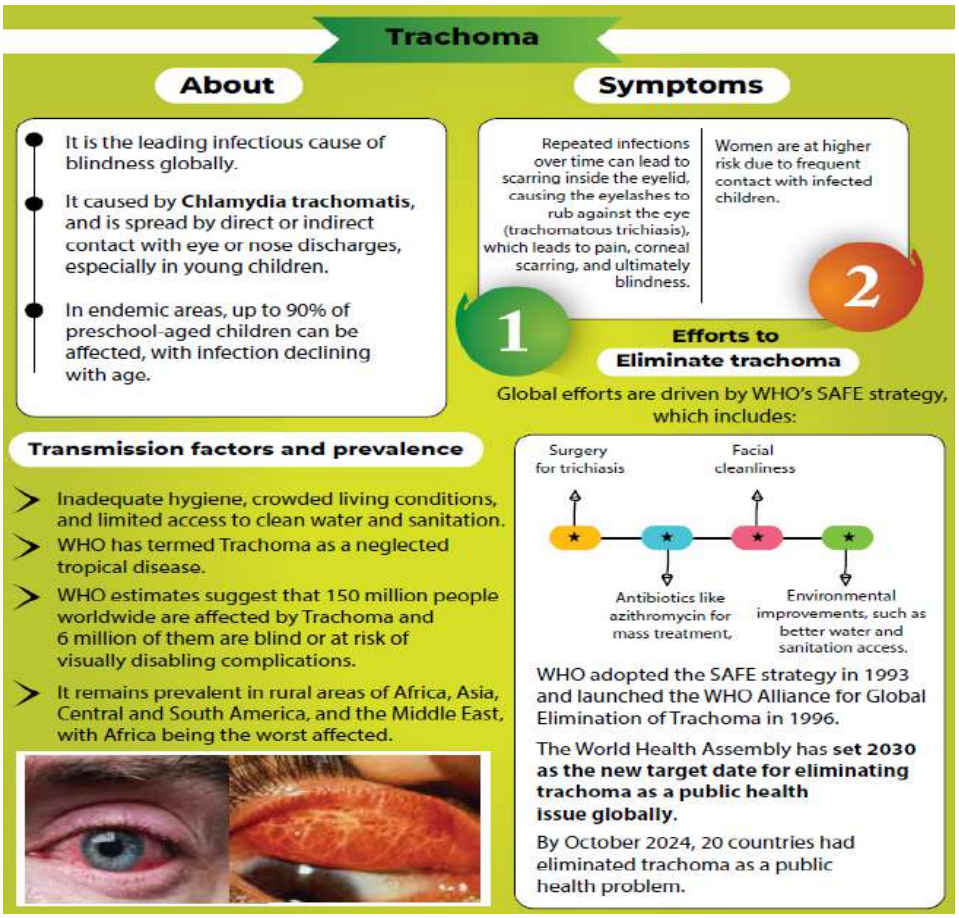
- With its elimination, India has reached "gold-tier" public health status, demonstrating significant progress in addressing these challenges and enhancing overall health conditions.

How Did Indian Govt. Address the Issue of Trachoma?

- The Government of India launched the National Trachoma Control Program in 1963 and later on Trachoma control efforts were integrated into India's **National Program for Control of Blindness (NPCB)**.
- In 1971, blindness due to Trachoma was 5% and today, owing to the various interventions under the **National Programme for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment (NPCBVI)**, it has come down to less than 1%.
- **WHO SAFE strategy** was implemented throughout the country
- As a result, in 2017, India was declared free from infective Trachoma.
- However, surveillance continued for trachoma cases in all the districts of India from 2019 onwards till 2024.

- Programs like Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission played a vital role

- **Validation and Elimination**
  - The National Trachomatous Trichiasis (TT only) Survey was conducted from 2021 to 2024 across 200 endemic districts as part of the NPCBVI, following WHO's guidelines.
  - After years of dedicated efforts, WHO officially declared that India had successfully eliminated trachoma as a public health problem.



National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM 2.0)

The Government will soon roll out the next version of the livelihood mission for urban poor and vulnerable sections - National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM 2.0). This will focus on six groups, including **construction workers, gig workers, waste management workers, care workers, domestic workers and transportation workers.**

About Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM)

- The NULM was launched by the **Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA)** in **2013** by replacing the existing Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (**SJSRY**).
  - It got its current name (DAY-NULM) in **2016**.
- It focuses on -
  - **Organising urban poor** in their strong grassroots level institutions (SHGs) to improve their livelihoods on a sustainable basis.
  - **Creating opportunities for skill development** leading to market-based employment
  - **Helping them to set up self-employment ventures** by ensuring easy access to credit.
- The Mission is aimed at
  - **Providing shelter** equipped with essential services to the urban homeless in a phased manner.
  - Addressing livelihood concerns of the **urban street vendors** by facilitating access to -
    - Suitable spaces,
    - Institutional credit,
    - Social security and skills for accessing emerging market opportunities.

Implementation and Performance of the DAY-NULM

- **Implementation**
  - **The primary target** of NULM is the urban poor, including the urban homeless.

- NULM was implemented in **all district headquarter towns** (irrespective of population) and **all other towns with population of 1 lakh or more** as per Census 2011.
- **At present 790 cities are under NULM**. However, other towns may be allowed in exceptional cases on request of the States.
- **Funding:** shared between the Centre and the States in the ratio of **75:25**.
  - For North Eastern and Special Category States, this ratio will be **90:10**.

- **Performance**
  - **Constitution of SHGs:**
    - Under the Mission, more than 89.33 lakh women had been brought under a total of 8.74 lakh SHGs in the cities.
    - Of these, 6.12 lakh SHGs are provided with a revolving fund of Rs 10,000 each to get started.
  - **Skills and employment provided by the SHGs:**
    - 15 lakh beneficiaries had undergone skill training and 8.20 lakh had been placed in employment.
    - In addition, 8.83 lakh beneficiaries had been assisted to set up their own or group businesses.
  - **For street vendors**, the Mission had conducted surveys to identify their number in 3,467 cities.
    - A total of 53.76 lakh vendors had been identified and given letters of recommendation.
    - This also led to 37.52 lakh vendors being issued certificates of vending and 30.99 lakh were issued ID cards.

What is the DAY-NULM 2.0?

- Under the scheme,
  - The government will facilitate eligible individual urban poor or a group of such persons to avail **microcredit** of up to Rs 4 lakh and Rs 20 lakh, respectively.
  - This microcredit will be provided **at a subsidised interest of 5%.**
- The microcredit will help the beneficiaries to -
  - Start enterprises;
  - Create social infrastructure like labour chowk; and
  - Provide innovation grants for purposes such as buying sanitation machineries.
- To prepare the ground for the NULM 2.0, **the Centre will carry out a first of a kind pilot exercise** (across 25 cities) **–**
  - **To identify urban poor** and
  - For right targeting of government schemes to improve their earning and living.

NITI Aayog Report on Future Pandemic Preparedness

NITI Aayog has released an Expert Group report titled 'Future Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response —A Framework for Action'.

Background – Formation Of An Expert Group

- **COVID 19 – Not the last pandemic**
  - The WHO has warned the world that 75% of future public health threats are likely to be zoonotic threats (which could be due to emerging, re-emerging and new pathogens).
- **Formation of an expert group**
  - In June 2023, NITI Aayog, recognizing the likelihood of future pandemics due to changing planetary ecology, climate, and human-animal-plant dynamics, constituted an Expert Group.
  - The expert group was created to provide a *Framework for Action* for future pandemic preparedness.
  - Its key task was to analyze how COVID-19 was managed both nationally and globally, identifying lessons learned from successes and challenges. The group aimed to pinpoint gaps in response strategies to enhance preparedness for future public health emergencies.

Key Recommendations Of The Report

A. Public Health Emergency Management Act (PHEMA)

- **Highlights the limitations of the existing legal framework**
  - The report highlights the limitations of the existing legal framework used during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the **Epidemic Diseases Act (EDA) of 1897** and the **National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) of 2005**.
  - The EDA lacks definitions for key terms like "dangerous" or "infectious" diseases and doesn't address processes for drug distribution, vaccines, quarantine, or preventive measures.
  - Similarly, the NDMA was not designed to manage health emergencies, as it primarily focuses on natural disasters.
- **Enacting a new Public Health Emergency Management Act (PHEMA)**
  - To address these gaps, the report recommends enacting a new PHEMA.
  - This law would empower central and state governments to respond effectively to pandemics and other health emergencies, including non-communicable diseases, disasters, or bioterrorism.
  - PHEMA would equip public health agencies with urgent action powers and create trained public health cadres at national and state levels to act as first responders.

B. Empowered panel of Secys (EGoS)

- The report proposes establishing EGoS, headed by the Cabinet Secretary, to oversee public health emergency preparedness and response.
- This committee will operate during non-crisis periods to strengthen governance, finance, R&D, surveillance, and partnerships, ensuring a rapid response when emergencies arise.
- EGoS will also create Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling pandemics and set up sub-committees to manage these key areas effectively, enhancing the nation's readiness for future health crises.

C. Strengthen surveillance

- The report emphasizes the need to strengthen India's disease surveillance network, particularly in light of past epidemics and pandemics.
  - It stresses the importance of constant monitoring at human-bat interfaces.
- Key recommendations include establishing a national biosecurity and biosafety network, which would connect leading research institutions, biosafety containment labs, and genome sequencing centers.
  - This system should operate in a coordinated, automated manner to respond swiftly to early warning signs of a public health threat.
- Additionally, the report proposes creating an emergency vaccine bank, which would source vaccines domestically or internationally, ensuring rapid access during health emergencies.

D. Network for early warning

- The report advocates for creating an epidemiology forecasting and modeling network to predict the transmission dynamics of infectious diseases and assess the effectiveness of countermeasures like vaccines in various scenarios.
- It also calls for a network of Centres of Excellence (CoE) focused on researching priority pathogens.
- These CoEs would work on diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines for priority pathogens identified by WHO, developing them in advance to ensure preparedness.

E. Independent drug regulator

- Need for India to establish a robust clinical trial network recognized by international regulatory authorities to ensure rapid access to innovative medical products during public health emergencies.
- It highlights the importance of making the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO) an independent body with special powers.

- Currently, the CDSCO, responsible for regulating drug import, sale, manufacture, and distribution, operates under the Ministry of Health, but greater autonomy is recommended for faster and more efficient responses in crises.

F. Other recommendations

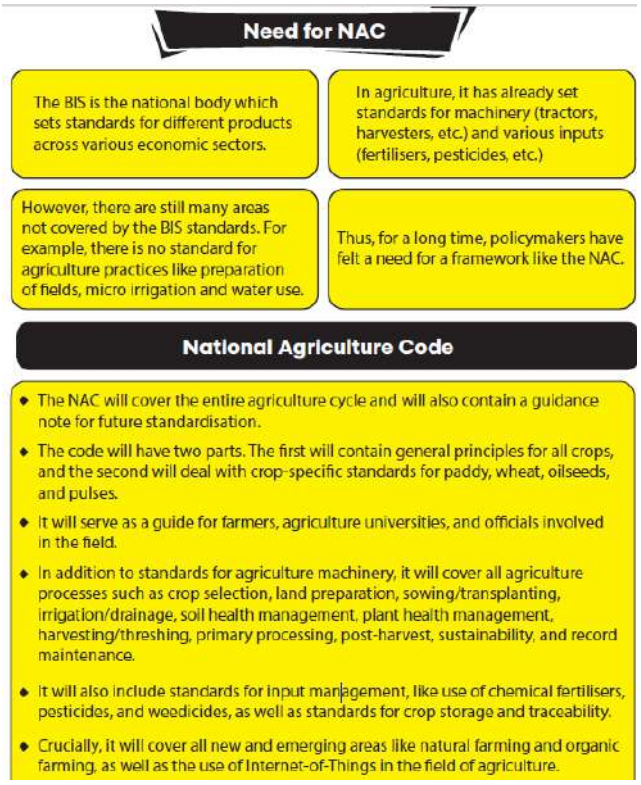
- **100-Day Preparedness Strategy**: It emphasizes a rapid response system to be fully operational within the first 100 days of an outbreak.
- **Expanding Public Health Workforce** especially in rural and underserved areas.
- **Robust Supply Chain Resilience** for essential medical supplies, vaccines, and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- **Digital Infrastructure and Data Sharing**: Leveraging technology and data-sharing frameworks to ensure transparency, coordination, and swift action.

National Agriculture Code

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has begun the process of formulating a National Agriculture Code (NAC), on the lines of existing National Building Code and National Electrical Code.
- The preparation of the draft code has a tentative deadline of October 2025.

Objectives of NAC

- To create an implementable **national code** covering recommendations for agriculture practices taking agroclimatic zones, crop type, socio economic diversity of the country and all aspects of agrifood value chain into consideration.
- To act as an enabler of quality culture in Indian agriculture by providing the required reference to policy makers, agriculture departments and regulators for incorporating the provisions of NAC in their schemes, policies, or regulations.
- To create a comprehensive guide for the farming community to ensure effective decision making in agricultural practices.
- To integrate relevant Indian Standards & to address the horizontal aspects of agriculture such as SMART farming, sustainability, traceability and documentation; and
- To aid in the capacity building program organized by agriculture extension services and civil society organisations.



Standardized Agriculture Demonstration Farms (SADF)

- Apart from drafting the NAC, the BIS has also taken an initiative for setting up of SADF in selected agriculture institutes in the country.
- These farms will serve as experimental sites for testing and implementing various agricultural practices and new technologies in accordance with Indian Standards.
- For the development of these specialised farms, BIS plans to sign MoUs with premier agricultural institutes. 10 prominent agricultural institutes have already been identified.
- BIS will provide financial assistance to these institutes for setting up the SADFs, where anyone including officials responsible for extension activities, farmers or industry people can come and learn.

Humsafar Policy

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has launched the Humsafar Policy to enhance the convenience of traveling on national highways and accelerate the development of wayside amenities.
- It intends to offer highway users a convenient, safe, and enjoyable experience while empowering entrepreneurs, generating jobs, and enhancing livelihoods for service providers.
- Despite several facilities existing along highways such as dhabas, food courts and petrol pumps, these services are not standardised, and there is limited monitoring of the quality of services.
- The policy aims to provide a comprehensive framework to ensure that the commuters have access to standardized, well-maintained, and hygienic facilities.

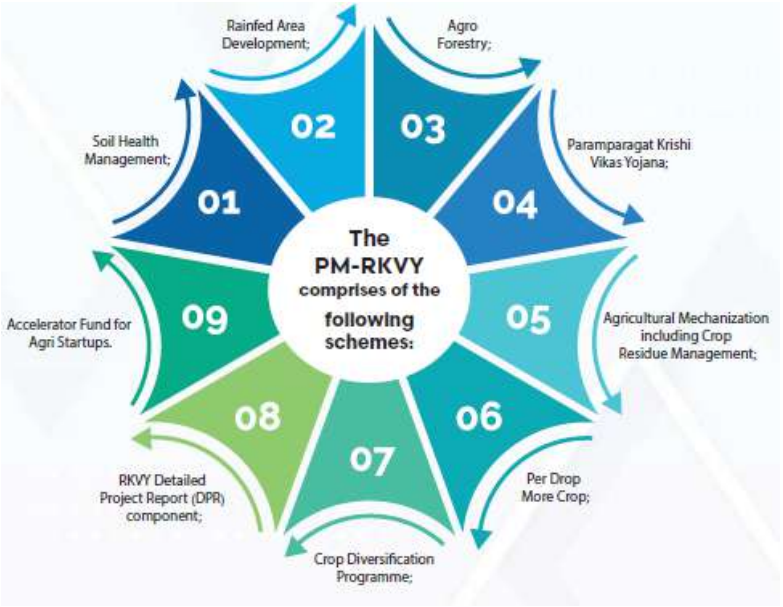
- It will provide essential facilities across the national highways network, including clean toilets, baby care rooms, wheelchair provisions, EV charging stations, parking spaces, and dormitory services at fuel stations.
- Commuters will be able to find details of relevant service providers near their location instantly on the **Rajmarg Yatra app**.
- The app will also empower commuters to **report issues and rate the service** provided and facilities.
- It has provisions for **Monitoring & Inspection** of the registered service providers. Regular inspections will be conducted by a third-party agency.
- Moreover, the policy will be **environmentally friendly** as it has been prepared with ecology and cleanliness in perspective
- Provisions for water conservation, soil conservation, waste recycling, solar energy have also been incorporated.

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and Krishonnati Yojana

- The Union Cabinet has merged all **centrally sponsored schemes** for the agriculture sector into **two umbrella schemes**:

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY)	Krishonnati Yojana (KY)

- With a projected expenditure of Rs 1,01,321.6 crore, the schemes will have a Central share of Rs 69,088.9 crore and States will have to add the remaining Rs 32,232.6 crore.
- PM-RKVY, with an allocation of Rs 57,074.72 crore, is aimed at **promoting sustainable agriculture**.
- KY will address food security and agricultural self-sufficiency, with a fund of Rs 44,246.89 crore.
- Both the schemes will be implemented through State governments.
- This exercise ensures that all the existing schemes are being continued.
- The rationalisation of various schemes has also been undertaken to provide flexibility to states. For example, under PM-RKVY, the state governments can be given flexibility to re-allocate funds from one component to other based on their state specific requirements.
- **PM-RKVY** comprises of the following schemes (*given in fig.):*



- The rationalisation of various schemes has been undertaken to:
  - Avoid duplication and ensure convergence.
  - Focus on emergent challenges of agriculture - Nutrition security, sustainability, climate resilience, value chain development & private sector participation.
  - State governments will be able to draw a comprehensive strategic plan suiting their requirements for agriculture sector.
  - Annual Action Plan (AAP) of States can be approved in one go rather than approving individual scheme-wise AAPs.

International Energy Efficiency Hub

- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of a letter of intent enabling India to join the International Energy Efficiency Hub (IEEH).
- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), the statutory agency, has been designated as the implementing agency for IEEH on behalf of India.
- **Established in 2020** as the successor to the **International Partnership for Energy Efficiency Cooperation (IPEEC)**, IEEH is a global platform dedicated to encouraging collaboration and to promote energy efficiency worldwide.
- It brings together governments, international organizations, and private sector entities to share knowledge, best practices, and innovative solutions.
- As of July 2024, **sixteen members** (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, European Commission, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United States and United Kingdom) have joined the Hub.
- This will help India to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy and improve energy security.

Anna Darpan

- The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has launched on a comprehensive digital transformation initiative to modernize its existing supply chain management system, known as the **'Depot Online System'** with the implementation of a new, microservices-based integrated supply chain management system named **ANNA DARPAN.**
- ANNA DARPAN is being designed to streamline and enhance the entire supply chain operations and services at various levels including Mandis, Mills, Depots, as well as divisional, regional, zonal, and headquarters operations.

Objectives

- **Improved Efficiency and Productivity**: Streamlining processes to optimize performance across the supply chain.
- **Interactive and User-Friendly UI (*user interface*) Design**
- **Data-Driven Decision Making**
- **Integration with Internal and External Systems**: Facilitating smooth interoperability with other systems, both within and outside FCI.
- **Merger of Existing Internal Systems**: Merging and optimizing current applications to reduce redundancy and improve efficiency.
- **Mobile-First Approach**: Prioritizing mobile accessibility to ensure the system is accessible anytime, anywhere.

RoDTEP Scheme

The government has extended benefits under the RoDTEP scheme for exports made from domestic tariff area (DTA) units for one year till September 30, 2025.

Background of RoDTEP (*Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products*) scheme

- The US had earlier challenged India's key export subsidy schemes in WTO.
- A dispute panel in the WTO ruled against India, stating that India's export subsidy programmes violated WTO norms.
- The panel further recommended India to withdraw such **export subsidy programmes**. This led to the development of the RoDTEP Scheme, in order to ensure that India stays WTO-compliant.

Features of RoDTEP

- RoDTEP was formed to replace the Merchandise Exports from India (MEIS) Scheme. It became applicable from **January 2021**.
- RoDTEP is based on the globally accepted principle that taxes and duties should not be exported, and taxes and levies borne on the exported products should be either exempted or remitted to exporters
- Before the introduction of RoDTEP, GST taxes and import/customs duties for inputs required to manufacture exported products were either exempted or refunded.
- However, certain taxes/duties/levies are outside GST, and were not refunded for exports, such as, VAT on fuel used in transportation, Mandi tax, Duty on electricity used during manufacturing etc.
- The RoDTEP scheme now covers these taxes/duties/levies which are refunded for exported products.
- The rebate is issued as a transferable electronic scrip by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs in an end- to-end IT environment.
- Moreover, a monitoring and audit mechanism, with an Information Technology based **Risk Management System (RMS)**, is used to physically verify the records of exporters.

Benefits of RoDTEP

- It helps the country to **comply with WTO norms**, while providing benefits to exporters.
- By covering previously uncovered taxes/duties the **scheme leads to cost competitiveness of exported products** in international markets.
- Creates **better employment opportunities** in export-oriented manufacturing industries.
- The introduction of the digital platform helps clearance at a much faster rate and also increases the accuracy of transaction processing.

Hike in Minimum Wages

- The Union government has announced a hike in minimum wage rates for workers by revising the *variable dearness allowance (VDA).*
- This adjustment is aimed at helping workers cope with the rising cost of living.
- The Central Government **revises the VDA twice a year**, effective from April 1 and October 1, based on the six-month average increase in the **Consumer Price Index for industrial workers**.
- The **Labour Bureau**, an attached office of the **Ministry of Labour & Employment**, has been compiling **CPI-IW** (*Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers)* every month since 1944. The Index of the previous month is released on the last day of the ongoing month.
- Workers engaged in various sectors, including building construction, loading and unloading, watch and ward, sweeping, cleaning, housekeeping, mining, and agriculture within central sphere establishments, will benefit from the revised wage rates.
- The minimum wage rates are categorized based on **skill levels—unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled, and highly skilled**—as well as by **geographical area—A, B, and C**.

Bidkin Industrial Area

- The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the Bidkin Industrial Area (BIA) in Maharashtra.
- A transformative project spread over 7,855 acres, BIA has been developed under the **National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) as part of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor**.
- The project approved with a total cost of Rs 6,414 crore will be developed in 3 phases.
- The Maharashtra Industrial Township Limited (MITL), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) formed with a 51:49 partnership between Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) and National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICDIT), has driven this project.

- **Strategic Location:** BIA has excellent connectivity, located adjacent to NH-752E and just 35 km from the Samruddhi Mahamarg, connecting Nagpur to Mumbai.
- With Aurangabad railway station (20 km), Aurangabad Airport (30 km), and Jalna Dry Port (65 km) nearby, BIA is designed to offer seamless multi-modal connectivity, in line with the principles of PM GatiShakti.

- **Infrastructure Readiness**: BIA is now equipped with wide roads, quality water and power supply, and advanced sewage and common effluent treatment plants. These key infrastructure works are ready for the allotment of industrial and mixed-use plots.

Major Investments and Economic Impact

- Bidkin has already attracted significant investment interest, with notable companies like Ather Energy, Lubrizol, Toyota-Kirloskar, & JSW Green Mobility committing to the area.
- It is expected to have a domino effect on the socio-economic growth of the region, drawing skilled human resources, leading to rapid industrialization and giving a boost to exports.

Prime Minister's Internship Scheme

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has launched the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme in a pilot phase for the country's youth.
- It envisions to provide **internships to 1 crore young people over the next five years**, to address youth unemployment.
- The internships are spread across 24 sectors, with the greatest share available in the oil, gas & energy sector, followed by travel and hospitality, automotives, banking and financial services among others.
- The companies selected for this pilot were identified based on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) expenditure over the past three years, ensuring that participants are placed in organizations that are committed to social and ethical practices.

Eligibility	Ineligibility
• Applicants must have completed their higher secondary education or high school, as well as have a certificate from an ITI, a diploma from a Polytechnic Institute, or a degree such as a BA, BSc, BCom, BCA, BBA, BPharma etc • It offers a **12-month internship** program for youth aged **21 to 24** years. • Candidates should be Indian and should not work a full-time job or full-time	• Graduates from IITs, IIMs, National Law Universities, IISER, NIDs, and IIITs • Holders of qualifications such as CA, CMA, CS, MBBS, BDS, MBA, or any master's or higher degree. • Those undergoing skill, apprenticeships, internships, or student training under Central or State government schemes. • Individuals who have completed apprenticeships under National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) or National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS).

school. However, candidates enrolled in online or distance learning programs are eligible to apply.	• If the income of any of the family members of the candidate exceeds Rs 8 Lakh for FY 2023-24. • Family members of permanent or regular government employees.

Financial Assistance

- Interns will receive a **monthly stipend of ₹5,000** throughout the internship duration.
- From the company's CSR funding, each intern will get Rs 500 from the company, while the government will contribute Rs 4500.
- Applicants will receive a one-time financial support of Rs 6,000 in addition to the monthly stipend.
- All interns will be covered under the government's insurance schemes: **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana** and **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana**, with the premium paid by the government.

Samarth Scheme

Samarth (Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector) scheme has been extended for two years (FY 2024-25 and 2025-26) with a budget of Rs. 495 Crore to train 3 lakh persons in textile-related skills.

SAMARTH

- Samarth is a **demand driven and placement-oriented umbrella skilling programme** of Ministry of Textiles.
- The scheme was formulated under the broad skilling policy framework adopted by **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship**.
- The scheme is **implemented through** Implementing Partners (IPs) comprising of Textile Industry/ Industry Associations, State government agencies and Sectoral Organizations of Ministry of Textiles like DC/ Handloom, DC/Handicrafts and Central Silk Board.
- Samarth **aims to** incentivize and supplement the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the organized textile and related sectors, covering the entire value chain of textiles, excluding spinning and weaving.
- In addition to the entry level skilling, a special provision for upskilling/re-skilling programme has also been operationalized including traditional textile sector such as handloom, handicraft, silk and jute.
- Furthermore, a total of 184 courses aligned with National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) have been adopted under the scheme.
- **Employment linkage** is mandated in the courses under organized textile sector with **mandatory placement 70% in entry level & 90% for Upskilling programmes**.
- Under the scheme **3.27 lakh candidates have been trained, of which 2.6 lakh (79.5%) have been employed**. There is a strong emphasis on women's employment, and **2.89 lakh (88.3%) women have been trained** so far.

Decline in India's Forex Reserves

- In one of the largest decreases in recent times India's **forex reserves** dropped by $10.7 billion to $690.43.
- At the end of September, the reserves had hit an all-time high of $704.8 billion.
- The RBI said that the primary contributor to this decline was the drop in Foreign Currency Assets (FCAs), which fell by $10.5 billion to $602 billion.
- The dollar value of FCAs is influenced by the appreciation or depreciation of non-US currencies, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held within the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

- Foreign exchange reserves are the foreign currencies held by a country's central bank. The **reserves in India are managed by the Reserve Bank of India** for the Indian government and the main component is FCAs.

- RBI accumulates foreign currency reserves by purchasing from authorized dealers in open market operations.
- **RBI Act and the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999** set the legal provisions for governing the foreign exchange reserves.

Components: Foreign exchange reserves of India consist of:

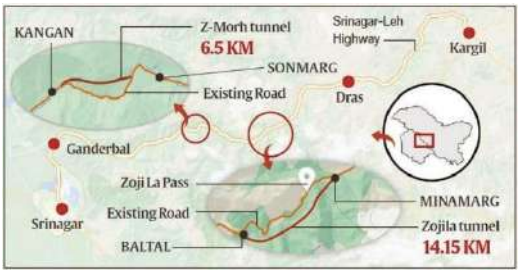
Foreign Currency Assets	Gold	Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)	Reserve Tranche Position

eShram One Stop Solution

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment has launched the eShram One Stop Solution for unorganized labour to have access to various social sector schemes.
- It aims to integrate information of beneficiaries of all social security and welfare schemes meant for unorganised workers in an effective manner through a single platform
- It thus facilitate in identification and implementation of the social security & welfare schemes for the unorganised worker and will help in saturation of the schemes in a fast and effective manner.

Z-Morh tunnel

- Militants recently killed several workers working on the Z-Morh tunnel. This is the first militant attack on a key infrastructure project in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Z-Morh tunnel is a 6.4-kilometer tunnel connecting the Sonamarg health resort with Kangan town in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district. The tunnel was originally conceived by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in 2012.
- It will provide all-weather connectivity to Sonamarg, a famous tourist destination on the Srinagar-Leh highway.
- The tunnel has acquired its name for the Z-shaped road stretch at the place where the tunnel is being constructed.



Strategic importance

- The Z-Morh tunnel is part of the Zojila tunnel project that aims to provide all weather connectivity from Srinagar to Ladakh throughout the year.
- This is important, as it would provide quick access for military personnel to the border areas of Ladakh. The construction of the tunnel will provide safe connectivity between Srinagar, Dras, Kargil and Leh regions.
    - The Indian defence forces are deployed in Siachen Glacier and in the Turtuk sub sector, which is adjoining Baltistan in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK).
    - Similarly, there is widespread Indian Army deployment against Chinese forces in Eastern Ladakh, which increased significantly after the 2020 face off with Chinese troops.
- All-weather road connectivity will lessen the dependence of air maintenance of the forward locations of the Army. The transportation of troops and supplies will be done by road and this will lead to lesser expenditure on the use of aircraft

Economic Freedom of the World Report

- The Fraser Institute recently released the Economic Freedom of the World Report which measures the degree to which people in 165 jurisdictions around the globe are allowed to make their own economic choices.
- The assessment is based on **45 variables** that are organised under **five broad areas** to construct an index of economic freedom. The five areas are:

size of government	legal system and property rights	sound money	freedom to trade internationally	regulation

- In the year with the most recent data (2022), the top five economically free jurisdictions were **Hong Kong (1st), Singapore, Switzerland, New Zealand and the United States**.
- Averaging across all countries, global economic freedom increased from 2000 to 2019, but declined in each of the three years since then, erasing more than a decade of gains

Key Findings

- Among jurisdictions in the top quartile of economic freedom, GDP per person was $52,877 in 2022, while in the least economically free places (LEFP), it was $6,968.
- In most economically free places (MEFP), the poorest 10% earned $7,610 a year, while in the LEFPs it was $952.
- In MEFPs, average person can expect to live about 16 years longer than in LEFP.
- In LEFPs, the infant mortality rate is about nine times higher than it is in the MEFPs.
- In MEFPs, one percent of the population experiences extreme poverty (living on less than US$2.15 a day), while in LEFPs, 30% of the population experiences extreme poverty.

- In LEFPs the share of children who work is nearly two and a half times greater than in MEFPs.
- In MEFPs, youth literacy is nearly universal and there is no gap between boys and girls. But in LEFPs, only 78% of girls aged 15 to 24 are literate
- Compared with those in the LEFPs, those in the MEFPs are significantly more tolerant of other genders, minorities, and immigrants.
- Compared with the LEFPs, the MEFPs score more than 50 percent better on the Environmental Performance Index.
- Compared with the governments in the LEFPs, those in the MEFPs score two-and-a-half times better on the Corruption Perceptions Index.
- Compared with the LEFPs, those in the MEFPs report that they are about 40% more satisfied with their lives.

First Dry Port in Bihar

- The Bihar industry ministry inaugurated the state's first dry port at Bihta, a town near state capital Patna.
- It is being run in a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** mode by Pristine Magadh Infrastructure Private Limited and the state industry department.

Significance

- Catering to the entire eastern India, ICD Bihta can help neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.
- It is connected by railways to gateway ports of Kolkata and Haldia in West Bengal, Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Nhava Sheva in Maharashtra, Mundra in Gujarat, among others.
- Bihar is a major producer of fruits and vegetables such as potato, tomato, banana, litchi and makhana (fox nuts).
- It also has significant export capacities of maize, sponge iron, packed food, waste paper, newsprint, rice, and meat.
- While maize production is heavily concentrated in North Bihar districts such as Khagaria, Begusarai, Saharsa and Purnia, the state government has opened several leather and garment units in North Bihar districts of Muzaffarpur, East Champaran and West Champaran. Vaishali, Nalanda, Patna, and Begusarai also have vast export potential in food processing.
- The state recorded exports worth Rs 20,000 crore in 2022-23. Now, with the availability of ICD Bihta, the state looks at boosting its export potential.

GI Tag for Products from Assam

The Geographical Indications Registry has granted the GI tag to eight products from the Assam region, including traditional food items and several unique varieties of rice beer.

GI for Rice Beer Varieties

- Bodoland has had a tradition of consuming rice beer since a long time. The Bodo people believe the drink originated from Lord Shiva, and it's taken as a medicine.

- **Bodo Jou Gwran:** It has the highest percentage of alcohol (about 16.11%) compared to other varieties of rice beer made by the Bodo community.
- **Maibra Jou Bidwi:** Known locally as 'Maibra Jwu Bidwi' or 'Maibra Zwu Bidwi', it is revered & served as a welcome drink by most Bodo tribes. It's prepared by fermenting half-cooked rice with less water, & adding little '*amao*' (a potential source of yeast) to it.
- **Bodo Jou Gishi:** It is also a traditionally fermented rice-based alcoholic beverage.

GI for Traditional Food Products

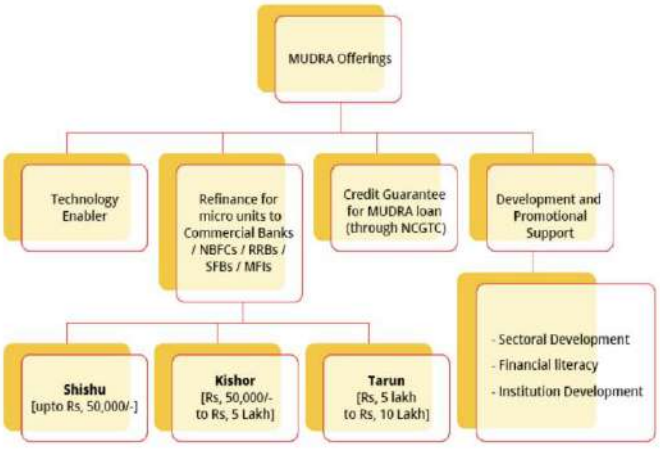
- **Bodo Napham:** A fermented fish prepared anaerobically in a tightly sealed container in a process that requires about two-three months.
    - The Bodo people preserve fish using different techniques, including smoking, drying, salting, fermentation, and marination.
    - Due to heavy rainfall and the limited availability of fish throughout the year, fermentation is favoured as a method of preserving food.
- **Bodo Ondla:** A rice powder curry flavoured with garlic, ginger, salt, and alkali.
- **Bodo Gwkha:** Locally also known as 'Gwka Gwkhi', it's prepared during the Bwisagu festival.
- **Bodo Narzi:** A semi-fermented food prepared with jute leaves that is a rich source of Omega 3 fatty acids, vitamins and essential minerals, including calcium and magnesium.
- **Bodo Aronai:** A small, beautiful cloth (1.5-2.5 meters long and 0.5 meter wide).

SATHI Portal

- Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare (DA&FW) organized a National Workshop on the SATHI (Seed Authentication, Traceability, and Holistic Inventory) portal.
- The workshop served as a platform for reviewing the progress of the SATHI Portal and discussing the roadmap for its next phases, focusing on improved seed traceability, inventory, certification, and enhancement of the seed supply chain across India.
- SATHI portal was launched by **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW)** and developed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** in 2023.
- It is a centralized online system for seed traceability, authentication and inventory designed to deal with the challenges of spurious seed production, quality seed identification and seed certification.
- SATHI portal ensures quality assurance system and identifies the source of seed in the seed production chain.
- The system consists of integrated **7 verticals of the seed chain** - Research Organisation, Seed Certification, Seed Licensing, Seed Catalogue, Dealer to Farmer Sales, Farmer Registration and Seed DBT.
- Seeds with valid certification can only be sold by valid licensed dealers to centrally registered farmers who receive subsidy through DBT directly into their pre-validated bank accounts.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

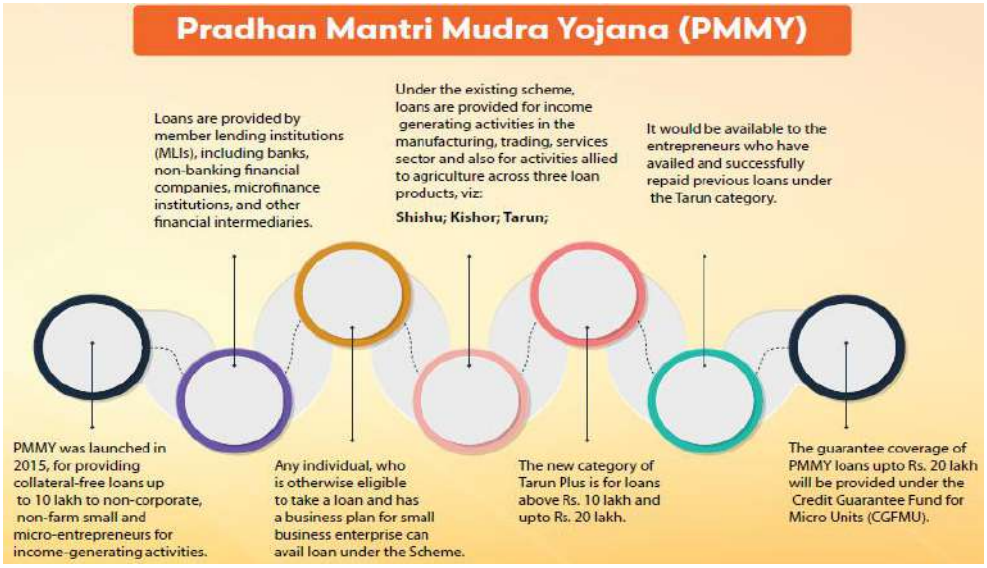
- The Union Government has doubled the limit of Mudra loan amount under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) to **Rs 20 lakh** from Rs 10 lakh under a new **'Tarun Plus'** category to promote entrepreneurship in the country.
- The increase aims to further the objective of the Mudra Scheme, which is to fund the unfunded. The move aligns with the government's



commitment to facilitate a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem.

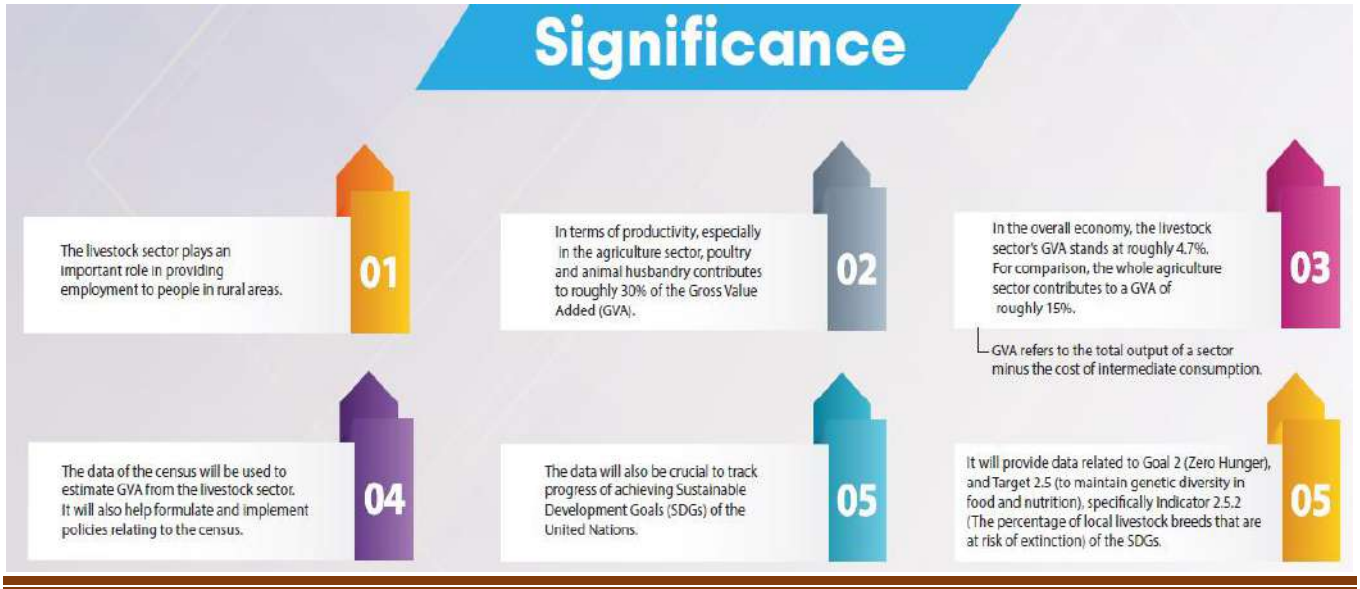
Mudra's performance

- In 2023-24, 66.8 million loans were sanctioned under PMMY, amounting to Rs 5.4 trillion. As of June 2024, more than 487.8 million loans totaling Rs 29.79 trillion have been sanctioned since the inception of the scheme.
- Non-performing assets (NPA) of public sector banks in Mudra loans have decreased to 3.4 per cent in FY24, down from a high of 4.7 per cent in 2020-21.
- In contrast, the gross NPA of scheduled commercial banks in the country is 2.8 per cent as of March 2024.



Livestock Census

- The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has launched the **21st Livestock Census**.
- Conducted **every five years**, the census carries out a headcount of the number of domesticated animals, poultry, and stray animals in the country.
- It takes into account information about the species, breed, age, sex, and ownership status of the animals in question.
- **Since 1919**, a total of 20 livestock censuses have been carried out so far, with the last being conducted in 2019.
- The enumeration process for the 21st census will take place between October 2024 to February 2025. The census is expected to cover **30 crore households** in India.
- Information on **sixteen animal species** will be collected in the 21st census. These include: cattle, buffalo, mithun, yak, sheep, goat, pig, camel, horse, ponies, mule, donkey, dog, rabbit, and elephant.
- Besides these, it will also carry out a headcount of poultry birds such as fowl, chicken, duck, turkey, geese, quail, ostrich, and emu.



Findings of 2019 Livestock Census

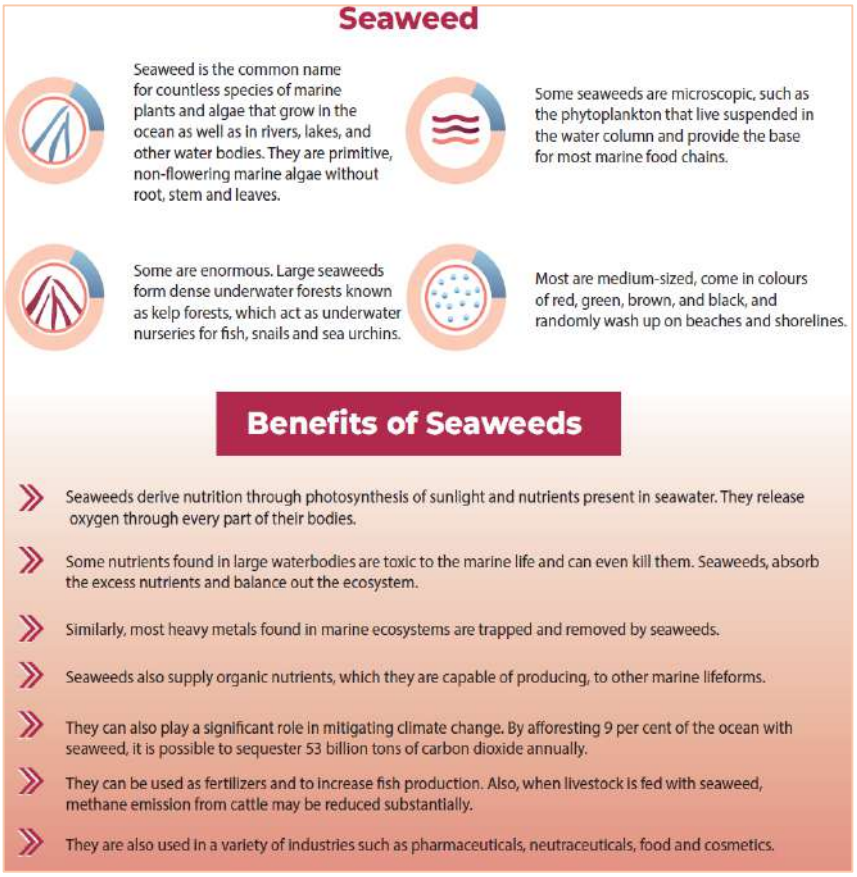
- **535.78 million** was the **total livestock population** of India. This included:

192.9 million cattle	148.88 million goats	109.85 million buffaloes	74.26 million sheep	9.06 million pigs

  - All other animals taken together contributed just 0.23% of the total livestock population.

Guidelines for Seaweeds

- The Union Government notified the 'Guidelines for Import of Live Seaweeds into India', which aimed at facilitating import of high quality seed materials or germplasm in India.
- As per the new guidelines, to import live seaweed, the importers will have to submit a detailed application to the Department of Fisheries which will be reviewed by the National Committee on Introduction of Exotic Aquatic Species into Indian Waters.
- Upon approval, the Department will issue an import permit within four weeks, facilitating the import of high-quality seaweed germplasm.
- As per the Department, the guidelines will bolster the development of seaweed enterprises as a key economic driver for coastal villages.
- It will help in the socio-economic upliftment of the fisher community while upholding environmental protection.



Seaweed Farming

- **Seaweed farming** or **kelp farming** is the practice of cultivating and harvesting seaweed. In its simplest form, it consists of the management of naturally found batches. In its most advanced form, it consists of fully controlling the life cycle of the algae.
- In contrast to other forms of aquaculture, seaweed farming has minimum capital and technological requirements and provides important economic opportunities to marginal coastal communities with limited livelihood options.
- The largest seaweed-producing countries are China, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Other notable producers include South Korea, North Korea, Japan and Malaysia.
- Currently, seaweed production in India is primarily confined to the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay in Tamil Nadu.
- The seaweed industry in India is mainly a **cottage industry** and is based only on the natural stock of agar-yielding red seaweeds and algin yielding brown seaweeds.

- Currently most of the seaweed produced in India is used for plant growth factor, which reduces the requirement of fertilisers by nearly 13%

Global Innovation Index 2024

- The Global Innovation Index (GII) 2024 was released by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).
- GII was launched in 2007 to find and determine methods that could **capture a picture of innovation in society**. WIPO started its association with the GII in 2011.

Key Findings

- India has climbed to the 39th position out of 133 economies in the GII 2024. This marks an improvement from last year's 40th rank.
- Switzerland, Sweden, the United States, Singapore and the United Kingdom are the world's most innovative economies.
- Notably, India, China, Turkiye, Vietnam, and the Philippines rank among the fastest climbers over the past decade.
- India leads the innovation rankings in Central and Southern Asia, followed by Iran and Kazakhstan.
- India excels in key areas such as ICT services exports, venture capital, and intangible asset intensity, securing the top global position in ICT services exports and the 8th rank for unicorn companies.
- India's consistent improvement in the GII ranking is due to the knowledge capital, vibrant start-up ecosystem, and the work done by the public and private research organisations.

Nobel Economics Prize

- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson have been awarded the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics. This award is officially known as the 'Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.
- The three economists have demonstrated the importance of societal institutions for a country's prosperity.
- Research by the three academics showed how the path to prosperity can vary partly because of structures established in countries colonised by Europeans.
- Johnson, is known for his stint at the IMF from March 2007 until August 2008—it coincided with the onset of the global financial crisis.
- He along with his colleague Acemoglu co-authored a book published in 2023 called Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity.
- Robinson, and Acemoglu co-authored Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty, a book first published in 2012.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SARTHIE 1.0

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE) recently launched the SARTHIE 1.0 initiative to address the needs of most vulnerable sections of society through awareness generation, legal support and easing access to Government welfare schemes.

About SARTHIE 1.0

The SARTHIE 1.0 initiative is a collaborative effort aimed at empowering vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in India. This includes Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Senior Citizens, Transgender Persons, Victims of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, persons engaged in begging, and Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs).

Key Objectives

- Bridging the Awareness Gap: SARTHIE 1.0 aims to increase awareness of legal and social welfare schemes among vulnerable populations.
- Legal Assistance: Providing legal support to ensure the proper implementation of social welfare programs.
- Empowering Vulnerable Communities: Facilitating better access to government welfare schemes for the most marginalized sections of society.

Key Features

- Alignment with UN 2030 Agenda (commitment to "leaving no one behind"): SARTHIE 1.0 aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly targeting goals focused on:
  - Eradicating poverty (SDG 1)
  - Reducing inequality (SDG 10)
  - Promoting social protection policies for greater equality (SDG 10)
- **Collaboration**: between the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE) and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
- **Awareness Campaigns**: State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) and District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) will organize awareness camps across the country through para-legal volunteers and panel lawyers.
- **Focus Areas of the Camps:** Promoting knowledge of the following key Acts implemented by the Department:
  - Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955
  - Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
  - The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
  - The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019
  - Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013
- **Outreach Strategy:** The initiative aims for comprehensive outreach, ranging from the Panchayat to the State level, ensuring targeted audiences are informed of their legal rights and the government welfare schemes available to them.

Jal Hi Amrit

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched 'Jal hi Amrit' initiative under **AMRUT 2.0 reforms** during the 100 days agenda of the Government.

✓ AMRUT 2.0 was launched for a period of five years (from 2021-22 to 2025-26) to provide **universal coverage of water supply** through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country and coverage of sewage/septage management in 500 cities covered in the first phase of the AMRUT scheme.

About Jal Hi Amrit Initiative

The Jal Hi Amrit initiative aims to promote the efficient management of sewage treatment plants (STPs), ensuring that high-quality treated water is produced for reuse, contributing to the overall augmentation of water availability.

Objective: To build competition among the cities, capacity building & incentivizing qualitative improvements in the treated discharge effluent.

Key Elements of the Scheme

1. **Incentivizing States and UTs:** States and UTs will be encouraged to efficiently manage Used Water/ Sewage Treatment Plants (UWTPs/STPs) to ensure that treated water meets environmental standards. This will create opportunities for the reuse of treated water for various purposes, helping to conserve freshwater resources.
2. **Competition and Capacity Building:** will focus on improving the quality of treated effluent discharged from these facilities. Competition among cities will help enhance the quality of treated water.
3. **Strategy and Process:**
   a. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and parastatal agencies will submit their STP details through an online module on the AMRUT 2.0 portal.
   b. Third-party verification will be conducted via desktop assessment and field visits, followed by a gap analysis and targeted training programs for field officials.
   c. STPs will be assessed and awarded Clean Water Credits with a star-rating system (3 stars to 5 stars) valid for six months, with revalidation required after the assessment period.
4. **Clean Water Credits and Incentives:**
   a. STPs that achieve at least 3-star ratings will be eligible for financial incentives based on their treatment capacity:
      - **3 stars**: Between ₹0.25 crore and ₹3 crore
      - **4 stars**: Between ₹0.5 crore and ₹5 crore
      - **5 stars**: Between ₹0.75 crore and ₹8 crore
   b. STPs revitalized to meet environmental standards will receive 70% of the incentive up front and 30% after maintaining the clean water rating for six months.
   c. STPs with 3-star and 4-star Clean Water Credits can receive additional incentives if they upgrade their standards to 4-star and 5-star ratings within the next year. The balance incentive will be awarded based on the higher Clean Water Credits achieved.
5. **Utilization of Incentives:** The incentives can be used to improve operational efficiencies of the STPs, upgrade technology, implement reuse infrastructure, and set up real-time data management systems like **OCEMS** (Online Continuous Effluent Monitoring System) and **SCADA** (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition). Funds can also be allocated for the capacity building of staff to maintain and enhance STP performance.

Significance of Jal Hi Amrit Mission	Possible Implementation Challenges
1. **Water Conservation and Sustainability:** This mission helps address the issue of water scarcity by promoting the **reuse of treated wastewater**, reducing the pressure on freshwater resources and encouraging **sustainable water management** practices by recycling treated water for purposes like irrigation, industrial use, and other non-potable needs, thereby ensuring long-term water security.	1. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Many ULBs and rural areas lack the necessary infrastructure to treat sewage water efficiently. Upgrading existing STPs or building new ones could be challenging in terms of investment in both technology and skilled manpower. For example- implementing OCEMS and SCADA in STPs across the country could be challenging

2. **Environmental Protection:** By ensuring that **STPs** adhere to high environmental standards, the mission contributes to **reducing water pollution** and improving the quality of treated water. This helps protect rivers, lakes, and groundwater from contamination, leading to healthier ecosystems and better public health outcomes.
3. **Incentivizing States and UTs:** Offering **financial incentives** to States and Union Territories based on their performance in managing sewage treatment plants will help encourage cities and regions to improve the efficiency and quality of water treatment and foster innovation and higher standards in wastewater management.
4. **Capacity Building and Infrastructure Improvement:** Emphasis on **capacity building** by providing training and resources to improve the skills of personnel managing STPs and driving **infrastructure improvements** through investments in modern technology, including real-time monitoring systems like **OCEMS** and **SCADA** will ensure that water treatment processes become more transparent, efficient, and effective.
5. **Alignment with National Initiatives:** It aligns with national missions like **AMRUT 2.0** and **Clean India Mission**, reinforcing the government's broader goals of improving **urban infrastructure** and achieving **water security**. It also contributes to meeting **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly those related to clean water and sanitation (SDG-6) and sustainable cities and communities (SDG-11).
6. **Supporting Urban and Rural Water Needs:** It helps balance the water needs of both urban and rural areas by focusing on **recycling and reuse** across the country. This can lead to enhanced water availability for agriculture, industry, and daily usage, especially in **water-scarce regions**.

due to the lack of technical expertise and high costs involved.

2. **Funding and Financial Constraints:** Despite offering incentives to states and UTs, the financial burden of upgrading and maintaining STPs could be a challenge, particularly for states with limited budgets. Additionally, the incentive-based model requires upfront improvements, which may deter regions with weaker financial standing.
3. **Regulatory and Compliance Issues:** Ensuring that states and local bodies comply with environmental standards and effectively manage their treated water systems requires robust monitoring mechanisms. Inconsistent or weak regulatory enforcement can lead to the misuse of incentives and poor implementation.
4. **Public Awareness and Participation:** Without widespread public support, especially in rural areas, there could be resistance or a lack of interest in reusing treated water for purposes like irrigation or industrial use.
5. **Geographical and Environmental Challenges:** Setting up or upgrading STPs in remote, hilly, or flood-prone areas could pose significant logistical challenges. Additionally, regions facing water stress may find it difficult to sustain operations if STPs cannot generate sufficient treated water to meet local needs.
6. **Operational and Maintenance Issues:** Poor maintenance practices or breakdowns in plant operations could lead to wastewater pollution, affecting local water sources and negating the environmental benefits intended by the mission.

The **Jal Hi Amrit Mission** is a vital initiative for improving India's water resource management by focusing on wastewater treatment, promoting sustainability, and driving innovation in water reuse, all while fostering competition and capacity building across the country.

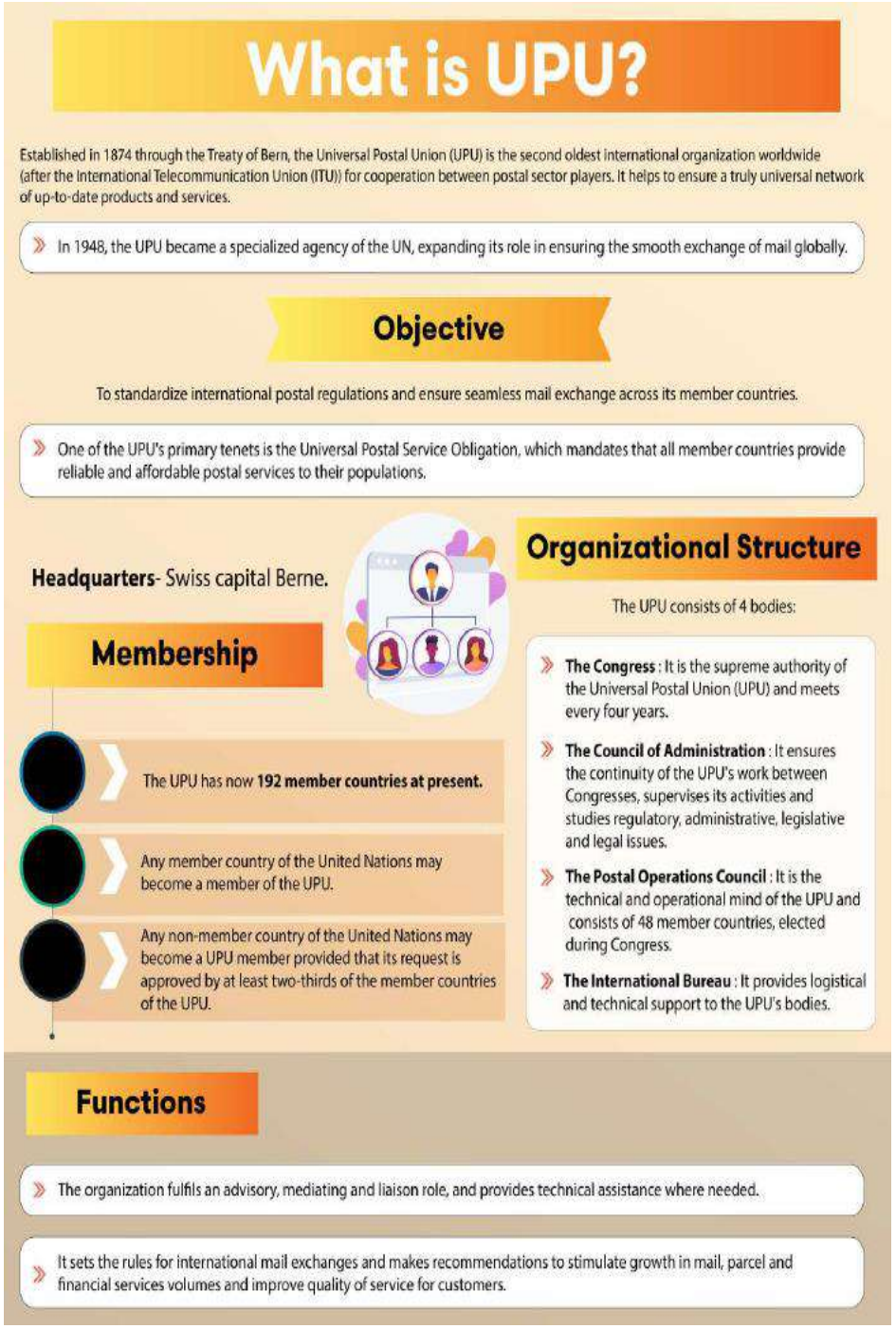
Universal Postal Union

On World Post Day (9th October), the Department of Posts unveiled a special set of commemorative postage stamps celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

Significance of UPU

1. **Global Accessibility of Postal Services**: The **Universal Postal Union (UPU)** ensures that communities across the world can easily exchange mail and packages. This has played a crucial role in **bridging distances** and facilitating communication across borders.

2. **Promoting Global Cooperation**: in postal services by helping countries standardize their postal systems and ensuring that mail can move seamlessly between nations. This cooperation has fostered stronger global connectivity.
3. **Adapting to Digital Advancements**: and with the rise of **e-commerce** by encouraging the modernization of postal services, the UPU ensures that postal systems remain relevant in the digital age and can handle the increasing volume of e-commerce shipments.
4. **Innovation and Inclusivity**: UPU ensures that postal systems are not only technologically advanced but also accessible to marginalized communities. This inclusivity aligns with broader goals of ensuring that **communication and services** reach all corners of the globe, regardless of geography or socio-economic status.



   - ✓ The UPU aligns its activities with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting economic growth, financial inclusion, innovation, and environmental sustainability through postal networks.

India's Involvement with the UPU

Year 2024 also marks 170 years of establishment of India Post which was founded in 1854 during the tenure of Lord Dalhousie.

- ✓ The year 1854 was also a landmark year for the country's postal service on various other counts as well. An all-comprehensive Indian Post Office Act was enacted in that year only.
- ✓ Again, it was in 1854 that rail mail service (RMS) began. The sea mail service from India to Britain and China also commenced in that year.

1. **One of the Oldest and Active Members**: is India playing a key role in its initiatives and contributing to the development of global postal cooperation.

2. **World's Largest Postal Network**: India Post continues to align with the UPU's mission of **modernizing postal services** and **enhancing infrastructure** worldwide.
   - ✓ With **170 years of service**, India Post has played an integral role in **connecting urban and remote areas**, providing essential postal services and ensuring communication across the country.
   - ✓ India's postal system covers even the remotest regions like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, fulfilling the UPU's Universal Postal Service Obligation.
3. **Vital Link in Global Postal Network**: By adopting the UPU's framework, India Post continues to serve as a **vital link** in the global postal network, ensuring that its services remain **relevant** and **accessible**.
   - ✓ India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) is an initiative aligned with UPU's goals of financial inclusion.
4. **Modernization and Technological Adoption**: India has been an **active participant** in adopting **new technologies** that have enhanced its position in the **global postal landscape** and strengthened its role in **fostering international communication.**

Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan

The Prime Minister launched the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan in Jharkhand with an outlay of around Rs 80,000 crore.

About Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (a Centrally Sponsored Scheme)

The **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** is a government initiative aimed at promoting **holistic development** in tribal villages across India.

- ✓ "Dharti Aaba" is a title used in Jharkhand to honour Birsa Munda, who led resistance against British rule in the late 19th century.
- ✓ As per 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute approximately 8.6% of population of India numbering around 10.4 crores.
- ✓ There are over 730 Scheduled Tribes notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India.

Objective: To bring **transformative changes** to the socio-economic conditions of tribal villages focusing on **infrastructure**, **healthcare**, **education**, and **livelihood improvements**.

Key Features of the Abhiyan:

1. **Coverage**: The initiative targets around **63000 tribal villages**, benefiting over **5 crore tribal people** across **549 districts** and **2,911 blocks** in **30 states/UTs**.
   - ✓ The tribal villages covered under the mission would be mapped on PM Gati Shakti Portal.
2. **Saturation Approach**: It aims to address **critical gaps** in social infrastructure by implementing **25 targeted interventions**.
3. **Convergence of Ministries**: The program involves **17-line ministries** of the Government of India, ensuring a **converged approach** to development, utilising funds from the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST) over the next five years.
   - ✓ The DAPST scheme ensures that all central ministries implement schemes for tribal welfare, with 41 ministries working in coordination.
   - ✓ The plan focuses on filling critical gaps in education, healthcare, and infrastructure in tribal regions, backed by significant budget allocations.
4. **Budget**: The scheme has a total budget of **₹79,156 crores**, with **₹56,333 crores** from the central government and **₹22,823 crores** from the states.
5. **Inspired by PM JANMAN**: It builds on the learnings and successes of the **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN)**, launched ~~in~~ on 15th November 2023 (Janjatiya Gaurav Divas- Birsa Munda's birth anniversary), which focuses on **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)**.

The program aims to ensure **sustainable and inclusive development** of tribal areas, enhancing the quality of life for tribal communities.

Story of Lady Justice

The Supreme Court (SC) recently unveiled a **new statue of "Lady Justice"**- typically a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales in one hand and a sword in the other that is synonymous with legal practice around the world.

About the New Statue of Lady Justice

- **Design and Features**:
  - The new **six-foot-tall statue** is installed in the **judges' library** and depicts a woman clad in a **saree**.
  - Unlike traditional depictions, this version of Lady Justice has **no blindfold** and holds the **Constitution of India** instead of the usual sword.
- **Symbolism of the Blindfold**: In the classic rendition, the **blindfold** signifies **impartiality** in justice. However, the absence of a blindfold in this statue represents that **"Law is not blind; it sees everyone equally."**
- **Artist and Purpose**:
  - The statue was designed by **Vinod Goswami**, a muralist and teacher at the **College of Art in Delhi**.
  - The new interpretation aligns with recent **legal reforms**, such as the new **criminal codes**, and reflects the broader aim of **"decolonizing"** India's legal framework.

Background to the Lady Justice

Origins of Lady Justice

Greek Mythology	Roman Mythology
The ancient Greek conceptualization of justice was intrinsically linked to morality, wisdom, and a higher divine order. • **Themis:** According to works of the Greek poet Hesiod (700 BCE), **Themis** is a figure from **Greek mythology**, one of the **12 Titans**, born to **Gaea** (Earth) and **Uranus** (Sky), and depicted as the **goddess of justice**, wisdom, and good counsel. ✓ Themis is often portrayed holding **scales** in one hand and a **sword** in the other, symbolizing **justice and fairness**.	The Romans institutionalized justice, making it a civic virtue under the Roman Empire's legal framework. This institutionalized form of justice later influenced legal systems around the world, including India, via British colonization. • **Justitia**: The first Roman emperor **Augustus** (27 BCE-14 CE) introduced the worship of **Justice** through the goddess **Justitia** (Iustitia). Like Themis, **Justitia** is depicted **without a blindfold**.

Iconography

- **Blindfold**: Added during the **Renaissance** (14th century) as a critique of legal corruption, it was later reinterpreted during the **Enlightenment** (17th-18th century) to represent **impartiality** in justice, indicating that justice should be administered without bias regardless of wealth, power and social status.
  - ✓ The blindfold symbolizes a key principle of justice in modern democracies, including India—equality before the law. It signifies the principle of non-discrimination, enshrined in the Indian Constitution under Article 14 (Right to Equality).
- **Scales**: Symbolize **balance**, emphasizing that courts must **weigh both sides** of an argument before making a judgment.

- ✓ The scales represent the **procedural fairness (audi alteram partem)**, a key component of the rule of law in India's judicial system. The Supreme Court and High Courts rely on this principle when adjudicating disputes.
- **Sword**: Represents the **power and authority** of the law, signifying its ability to both **protect** and **punish**.
  - ✓ In India, this is seen in how courts can impose penalties, including **capital punishment** in rarest cases.

Lady Justice in India

- Under the **British Raj**, India adopted both the **common law legal system** and the **iconography** of Lady Justice. **Lady Justice** can still be found in courthouses across India, such as the **Calcutta High Court** (constructed in 1872), where she is depicted both **blindfolded** and with her **eyes open**.
- A statue of **Lady Justice without a blindfold** is located at the top of one of the Bombay High Court buildings.
- The new statue at the Supreme Court is very similar to a mural close to the judges' entrance which shows Mahatma Gandhi and Lady Justice on either side of a chakra; Lady Justice in this depiction is wearing a saree and holding scales and a book instead of a sword.
  - ✓ Statues and depictions of Lady Justice in Indian courts show how justice is a universal concept but can be adapted to fit local cultures and values. The adaptation of Lady Justice in India signifies the localization of global ideals of justice within the Indian legal framework.

Why the Change in India?

The new statue reflects a move towards **decolonization** by replacing colonial symbols: This decolonization aligns with Article 51A of the Constitution (Fundamental Duties), which emphasizes the duty of citizens to value and preserve the rich heritage of India's composite culture.

i. **Saree** replaces western attire, reflecting **Indian tradition**.
ii. **Open eyes** signify that law in India is **not blind but** sees and considers the diversity and challenges of its people. The discrimination faced by underprivileged sections, constitutional provisions and laws made for their upliftment require a nuanced approach of 'viewing' every case appropriately and delivering justice.
iii. **Constitution instead of sword** emphasizes the **supremacy of the Indian Constitution** in delivering justice, while the scales remain to show continued **impartiality** in weighing evidence.
   - ✓ This is a shift from colonial legal systems, where justice was often administered through brute force (symbolized by the sword).

These changes are necessary to ensure that the **new symbol** of Lady Justice represents not only symbolism but also a commitment to **fair and timely justice**.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) reached a remarkable milestone by achieving sales worth Rs. 1000 Crores in October 2024, a significant advancement from the previous year when this target was met in December 2023.

About Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

PMBJP is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in association with Central Pharma Public Sector Undertakings (CPSU), to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through dedicated outlets called 'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendra'. These provide generic medicines at much lesser price.

Historical Background

- It was initially launched in 2008 as the Jan Aushadhi Campaign by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India.
- In 2015, the Jan Aushadhi Scheme was revamped as Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Yojana (PMJAY) and was renamed as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) in 2016.

✓ **Janaushadhi Week** is celebrated across the country from 1st to 7th March 2020, to inform and educate the general public about the price benefits and quality of Generic medicines.

Objective

- To make available quality medicines, consumables and surgical items at affordable prices for all and reduce out of pocket expenditure of consumers/patients.
- To popularize generic medicines among the masses and eliminate the notion that low priced generic medicines are of inferior quality or are less effective.
  - ✓Generic drugs are marketed under a non-proprietary or approved name rather than a proprietary or brand name and are equally effective and inexpensive compared to their branded counterparts
- Generate employment by engaging individual entrepreneurs in the opening of Janaushadhi Kendras.

Implementing Agency: Pharmaceuticals & Medical Devices Bureau of India (PMBI).

- ✓ PMBI was established in 2008 under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India.
- ✓ It helps in co-coordinating procurement, supply and marketing of generic drugs through the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras.
- ✓ Government grants of up to Rs. 2.5 lakhs are provided for setting up of PMBJKs, which can be set up by doctors, pharmacists, entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs), NGOs, charitable societies, etc. at any suitable place or outside the hospital premises.
- ✓ **Janaushadhi Sugam Mobile App** provides citizens the assistance to locate nearby Janaushadhi kendra, direction guided through Google Map for location of the Janaushadhi kendra, search Janaushadhi generic medicines, analyze product comparison of Generic and Branded medicine in form of MRP & overall Savings, etc.

Who is Eligible to Open a Jan Aushadhi Kendra?

- State Governments or any organization / reputed NGOs / Trusts / Private hospitals / charitable institutions / Doctors / Unemployed pharmacists/ individual entrepreneurs are eligible to apply for the new Jan Aushadhi Kendra.
- One must have a B. Pharma or D. Pharma degree or must employ someone with a B. Pharma or D. Pharma degree.

Achievements

1. **Extensive Coverage**: The **Janaushadhi Kendras** across the country, offering a wide range of **1965 medicines** and **293 surgical items** that cover major therapeutic areas such as **anti-infectives, cardiovascular drugs, anti-cancers, anti-diabetics, and gastro-intestinal medicines**.
   - ✓ Affordable anti-diabetic drugs like **Metformin** and anti-cancer drugs like **Tamoxifen** have become accessible to millions under this scheme.
2. **Product Expansion**: In **2023**, **206 new medicines** and **13 new surgical devices** were added to the product list. The inclusion of new life-saving drugs, such as antivirals and blood thinners, addresses growing health concerns like cardiovascular diseases and pandemics.
3. **Sales Milestone**: The scheme achieved sales of **₹1,000 crores** by **October 2024**, demonstrating its increasing reach and popularity.
4. **Growth Over the Years**: The number of **Janaushadhi Kendras** has grown **170 times** in the last decade, from **80 in 2014** to **14,000 in 2024**, with plans to expand further to **25,000 outlets** by 2026.
5. **Daily Visits**: Almost **1 million people** visit these outlets daily, indicating their rising reliance on affordable healthcare options.

Impact

1. The program ensures that **quality healthcare** is accessible to every citizen and plays a crucial role in reducing healthcare costs.

2. It promotes the use of **generic medicines**, making essential drugs more affordable while maintaining quality standards.
3. By offering **affordable, quality medicines**, PMBJP contributes significantly to **health equity** in India, empowering people from all sections of society.

** The quality, safety and efficacy of medicines are ensured by getting each batch of medicines procured from CPSUs as well as private suppliers tested from NABL (National Accreditation Board Laboratories) approved laboratories and conforming to the required standards before the same are supplied to Super stockists /Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras from the warehouse of PMBI.

Application of Bone Ossification Test in Law

An accused in the murder of former Maharashtra MLA Baba Siddique claimed to be 17 years old, seeking trial under the **Juvenile Justice Act**. However, the Mumbai Police Crime Branch, citing his **Aadhaar card**, stated his age as 19. To resolve the dispute, the magistrate ordered a **bone ossification test** which confirmed the accused, **Dharmaraj Kashyap**, was not a minor.

What is a Bone Ossification Test?

- Ossification is the natural process of bone formation. This starts from the early developmental stage of the fetus and continues until late adolescence but differs slightly from individual to individual.
- It involves the transformation of soft tissues, like cartilage, into harder bone structures. Based on the stage of development of the bones, experts can determine the approximate biological age of the person.
- Bone ossification is influenced by **factors like nutrition, genetics, and geography**, leading to individual differences in bone development. This natural variation means that the ossification test can only provide an approximate age range rather than a precise age.
  - ✓ The test can be used to identify conditions related to delayed growth or early maturation in children. It is useful in diagnosing disorders like growth hormone deficiency or precocious puberty.

Process

- In a **bone ossification test**, X-rays of certain bones, typically the hands and wrists, are taken to assess skeletal and biological development. These images are then compared to X-rays representing standard bone growth at different ages, helping determine the individual's approximate age.
- The Greulich & Pyle Atlas is one such standard used globally to compare ossification stages with age.
- The analysis may also use a **scoring system (In the Tanner-Whitehouse method)**, where the growth of individual bones is measured & matched against the typical bone maturation standards of a particular population. This process aids in determining the biological age of the person being examined.

Importance of Age Determination in the Criminal Justice System

- **Adult versus Minors**: In India, anyone **below 18 years of age** is legally considered a M**inor**. Minors are governed by the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**. Under this Act, a child in conflict with the law cannot be sent to an adult prison but is placed in an **observation home**.
  - ✓ Accurate age determination ensures the protection of juvenile rights under both Indian & international law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasizes need for fair treatment of juveniles, making age determination a crucial part of justice delivery.
- **Juvenile Justice Board (JJB)**: Instead of facing a regular court, minors are brought before a JJB which consists of a **magistrate** and two **social workers** with experience in child welfare. After investigation, the JJB can decide on various outcomes, such as:
  - **Admonition**
  - **Community service**
  - Placement in a **special home** for a maximum of three years.

- **2021 Amendment**: to the Juvenile Justice Act allowed a child **above the age of 16** who commits a **heinous offence,** a minimum punishment of seven years subject to a **preliminary assessment (Mental and physical capacity)**. Based on which the JJB decides whether the child should be **tried as an adult**.
- The test is used in **immigration cases**. A refugee claiming to be under 18 to gain protection as a minor may undergo this test if there is suspicion regarding their actual age.

Court's View on the Bone Ossification Test

- **Section 94 of JJ Act:** In cases where age is unclear, the Board must conduct age determination using various documents like **school certificates** or **municipal birth certificates**. If such documents are unavailable, an **ossification test** is used as a last resort.
- **SC's Ruling:** The test should only be used when other methods, like birth certificates, are not available. Courts have ruled that the ossification test cannot override documentary evidence of age.
  - ✓ **Jarnail Singh v. State of Haryana (2013) & Arnit Das v. State of Bihar (2000):** The court emphasized that the determination of age based on ossification test results should be cautiously approached and that other evidence, such as school records, should carry more weight.

Reliability of Bone Ossification Tests

- **Variability and Margin of Error:** The test gives an age range (e.g., 17-19 years), and individual differences in bone development can introduce errors. Courts may choose the **upper end of the range** in age-sensitive cases, like under the **POCSO Act**.
  - ✓ The variability in bone development across different ethnic groups and environmental conditions can introduce further errors in ossification tests.
- **Delhi High Court's View:** A margin of error (up to **two years**) should be considered in cases involving age determination through ossification, especially for sensitive cases like sexual offenses under the **POCSO Act**.

Doctrine of Lis Pendens

The Supreme Court (SC) while hearing an appeal against a High Court judgment, reiterated that once a transaction is found to be hit by the doctrine of Lis Pendens, then the defences of being a bona fide purchaser and lack of notice regarding the sale agreement are not available.

✓ **In simple terms,** The Supreme Court's statement means that if a property deal falls under the doctrine of Lis Pendens, then a person who bought that property cannot claim to be an innocent buyer ("bona fide purchaser") or say that they didn't know about any prior disputes over it.

About the Doctrine of Lis Pendens

Meaning and Concept

- Lis Pendens refers to a "pending legal action" and is derived from the common law principle "**ut lite pendente nihil innovetur**," meaning "during litigation, no new interest should be created in the property."
- In property law, it deals with the impact of transferring immovable property while a legal dispute concerning the same property is ongoing.
  - ✓ Lis Pendens prevents any party from using third-party transactions to evade the judgment's effects, ensuring the original plaintiff's (party who initiates a lawsuit) rights remain intact regardless of any transfers made.
- The doctrine is codified under Section 52 of the Transfer of Property Act, 1882 (TOPA), which regulates the transfer of immovable property during litigation.

Key Provisions of Section 52 of TOPA

1. **Effect of Transfer During Litigation:** If immovable property is transferred while a legal dispute is ongoing, the rights of the parties in the dispute remain unaffected by the transfer. Also, the outcome of the litigation,

decided by a court of competent jurisdiction, will bind the purchaser who bought the property during the litigation.

2. **Transfer Not Declared Void:** Section 52 does not declare such transfers as void or illegal. Instead, it ensures that the transferee (purchaser) is subject to the court's final decision on the matter.

Underlying Principle

- **Protect the rights of the parties** involved in litigation over immovable property.
- **No party to the suit can transfer the property** in a way that would undermine the rights of the other party under the court's eventual decision.

Emergence and Basis of Lis Pendens

The doctrine of **Lis Pendens** is the control or jurisdiction that a court acquires over a property during litigation until a final judgment is made. This was affirmed in **Rajendra Singh and Ors. vs. Santa Singh and Ors.** and reinforced in **Jayaram Mudaliar vs. Ayyaswami and Ors.**

✓ The court effectively "freezes" any legal changes to the ownership or interest in the property, ensuring that the judgment will not be affected by unauthorized transfers during the litigation period.

Essential Conditions for Application of the Doctrine: To apply the doctrine of Lis Pendens, certain conditions must be met. These were laid out in **Dev Raj Dogra and Ors. vs. Gyan Chand Jain and Ors.**:

1. **Suit Pending:** A suit or proceeding directly involving rights to immovable property must be pending.
2. **Non-Collusive Suit:** The suit must not be collusive or fraudulent.
3. **Restriction on Transfer:** Property cannot be transferred or dealt with during the suit unless authorized by the court. Any such unauthorized transfer will be subject to the outcome of the case.

✓ **Additional Conditions from Section 52 (TOPA):** Competent Court, Involvement of Immovable Property and Transfer Effect.

Controversies and Clarifications

1. **Competency of Court:** It was debated whether arbitration proceedings fall under this doctrine. In **Sardara Singh vs. Mohan Lal Major**, it was clarified that the doctrine applies to arbitration as well.
2. **Type of Transfer:** It was questioned whether involuntary transfers, like court sales, are included. The **Privy Council** ruled that Lis Pendens applies to court and execution sales.

Exceptions to the Doctrine

- **Court-Permitted Transfers:** The court may grant permission for property transfers during litigation, but under strict conditions to protect the rights of the other party.
  - ✓ For instance, in **Vinod Seth v. Devinder Bajaj and Ors.**, the doctrine was exempted with the condition of providing security.

Legal Authority to Recruit Civic Volunteers in Police

The Supreme Court (SC) recently directed the West Bengal government to come clean on the "source of authority" by which civic volunteers are employed, especially in sensitive areas such as schools and hospitals.

✓ West Bengal has one of the most structured Civic Police systems. Civic Police in the state are involved in local patrolling, assisting in law-and-order duties, and reporting minor offences.

About Civic Police Volunteers

- Civic Police Volunteers (CPVs), also known as village police volunteers in rural areas, are contractual workers engaged by the police to assist in duties that do not require formal police personnel.
- Their primary responsibilities include traffic management, festivals and minor administrative tasks. Volunteers are trained in **conflict resolution, communication, and public interaction** skills to help them deal with community members effectively.

- They are not regular police personnel but work under police stations and assist in routine, non-critical operations. (CPVs are a bridge between local communities and law enforcement agencies)

CPVs in West Bengal: The recruitment of Civic Police Volunteers began in **2011**, soon after Mamata Banerjee became the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

Eligibility Criteria

1. **Local Residency**: The applicant must reside in the area where the police station they will serve is located.
2. **Age Requirement**: The applicant must be over **20 years of age**.
3. **Educational Qualification**: Initially, applicants were required to have passed the **Class X examination**, but this was later lowered to **Class VIII pass**.
4. **No Criminal Record**: Applicants must not have any criminal background.

Terms of Employment

- Civic police volunteers are **contractual** workers, not permanent employees of the police department.
- Their daily honorarium is **₹310**, amounting to approximately **₹9,300 per month**.
- They also receive an **ad-hoc bonus**, which was raised from **₹5,300** to **₹6,000** for the year 2023-2024.

Recruitment Scale: In Kolkata, there are **7,200 civic volunteers**, while the total police force is **37,400**. Across West Bengal, over **1.24 lakh civic police volunteers** assist a police force of **79,024** personnel.

Legal and Judicial Perspective (CPVs are largely governed by state policies and guidelines)

- **Legal Veracity and Recruitment Concerns**: The **Calcutta High Court** has raised questions about the recruitment process, stating that the appointment system preys on the **unemployed** without proper transparency.
  - In cases like **Chandra Kanta Ganguli vs The State of West Bengal**, Justice Sanjib Banerjee pointed out flaws, such as the impracticality of interviewing over a thousand candidates in a single day.
- **Temporary Nature**: A **2020 High Court ruling** emphasized the temporary nature of the civic police volunteers' engagement, stating that it does not qualify as **permanent employment** or probationary hiring.
- **Law and Order Misuse**: Despite court rulings, civic police volunteers are frequently deployed in **law-and-order situations**, leading to concerns about overreach and untrained handling of serious duties.

Criticism and Controversies

- **Excesses and Misconduct**: There have been several reported cases of misconduct by civic police volunteers, the most notorious being the **unnatural death of student leader Anish Khan** in February 2022, where a civic police volunteer was arrested.
  - More recent cases, such as the **R.G. Kar incident**, highlight the risk of misconduct, as volunteers are sometimes found threatening or harassing the public.
- **Political Allegiances**: Critics, including opposition leaders, allege that the recruitment of civic police volunteers serves as an extension of the **Trinamool Congress's political machinery**.
  - According to **Prof. Biswanath Chakraborty**, the recruitment process lacks proper transparency, allowing local party leaders to hire individuals loyal to the **ruling party**.

Comparative Examples from Other Countries

- **UK's Special Constabulary:** The United Kingdom has a structured model called the Special Constabulary, which is a part-time volunteer police force that assists in routine policing.
- **Japan's Koban System:** Japan uses a community policing system known as Koban, which stations local officers in neighborhoods to help address minor issues and engage with the community.

Right to Unionize

The 37-day-long strike led by Samsung India Workers' Union (SIWU), at one of South Korean electronics giant Samsung's flagship factories in Chennai was called off recently.

Demand of Workers

The workers went on strike primarily to assert their right to unionize and secure fair employment terms, such as wage hikes, improved work conditions, an eight-hour workday, and official recognition of their newly formed SIWU.

- ✓ Samsung has historically maintained a strict "no union" policy for over 80 years, though this stance began shifting in 2021 when Samsung Display and Samsung Electronics workers secured wage revisions and collective bargaining rights, including compensation for union activities and National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU) was formed in South Korea with over 30,000 members.

Reasons SIWU is Not Being Recognized

1. **Trademark Objections**: by Samsung's management on the SIWU's registration citing the use of "Samsung" in the union's name as a violation under the Trademarks Act. Such cases reflect a broader conflict **between trademark protection and workers' rights to organize**.
   - ✓ The concern centers on potential brand dilution or misrepresentation of a company's brand name. This issue highlights the tension between **intellectual property rights (IPRs) and Labor Rights**.
2. **State Process Underway**: Under the 1926 Trade Unions Act, the Registrar of Trade Unions or the Labour Commissioner of the State, in this case Tamil Nadu, must consider an application for registration, while also examining objections, if any. The objections in this case are yet to be considered.
   - ✓ The 1926 Trade Unions Act governs the registration of workers' unions, laying down the procedure to be followed.
3. **Legal Precedents**: point out that a trademark violation is applicable only when a union indulges in any commercial activity, which SIWU is not.
   - ✓ The Madras High Court in TI Cycles Employees Union v. TI Cycles of India ruled that trademark laws do not typically apply to non-commercial unions, as they do not affect the trademark's market value.
   - ✓ This precedent supports SIWU's stance that their use of "Samsung" is purely for identification and not commercial gain.
4. **Significance of Registration**: under the Trade Unions Act would legally empower SIWU with immunity from civil or criminal liabilities during strikes and permit them to represent members in collective bargaining.
   - ✓ Without registration, SIWU is unable to represent Samsung employees effectively, reducing its ability to address grievances, negotiate wages, or participate in dispute resolution processes.

About the Right to Unionize

The right to unionize is the right of employees to form a labor union and collectively bargain with their employer. The union can negotiate with the employer over wages, working hours, safety standards, and other terms and conditions of employment.

- **Constitutional and Legal Backing**:
  - This right is constitutionally recognized under Article 19(1)(c) of the Indian Constitution, allowing citizens to form associations or unions. This right is also reiterated in the **1989 B.R. Singh vs Union of India** case.
  - The Trade Unions Act, 1926 regulates union formation, requiring registration for unions to legally operate and engage in collective bargaining.
- **Role of Collective Bargaining**: International Labour Organization (ILO) defines Collective Bargaining as negotiations between employees and employers or their organizations to determine working conditions and terms of employment. The product of successful collective bargaining is a collective agreement. It plays the following role:
  - **Facilitates Negotiation of Working Conditions**: including wages, work hours, job safety, and benefits, ensuring fair conditions for employees.
  - **Legal Framework and Recognition**: Industrial Disputes Act gives it a statutory backing, providing for workers and employers to settle disputes amicably. In case of failure, the matter is referred to a conciliation officer

and further referred to a labour court or an industrial tribunal if the conciliation officer fails. This IDA Act empowers employees and management to settle disputes through legal channels rather than informal, often disruptive methods.
    - **Balance of Power**: by creating a level playing field where both parties negotiate as equals, promoting fair labor practices and reducing exploitation.
    - **Historical Importance**: It has always protected workers' rights, especially during economic hardships, establishing it as a cornerstone of labor rights and democratic governance.
    - **Encouragement of Union Representation**: It reinforces the right of workers to organize and select representatives, fostering a democratic approach to workplace governance.
    - **Social Justice**: The judiciary recognizes collective bargaining as crucial for achieving social justice in industrial relations, reducing the power imbalance between employers and employees.
- **Right to Strike:** The right to strike is legally recognized but subject to restrictions under the Industrial Disputes Act (IDA-1947).
    - ✓ The Supreme Court (SC) describes strikes as a form of workers' demonstration, including various methods like 'go-slow,' 'sit-in-work,' 'work-to-rule,' and absenteeism.
    - The right to strike is upheld by democratic nations and the ILO views it as part of the right to organize.
    - India's IDA 1947 Act restricts the right to strike without giving employer notice within six weeks before striking or within 14 days of giving such notice; or before the expiry of the date of strike specified in the notice and during conciliation proceedings.
    - In the All-India Bank Employees case, the Supreme Court upheld the right to association but emphasized that union actions must comply with industrial laws.
- **Workmen Committee:** Section 3 of the IDA 1947 Act allows the government to require employers to form a 'works committee' with equal employer and worker representation, with workers chosen in consultation with a registered trade union.
    - This requirement is also included in the in the yet-to-be implemented Industrial Relations Code of 2020, emphasizing trade union registration before committee formation.
    - Tata Motors in Maharashtra established a works committee to address worker grievances, demonstrating effective collaboration and proactive dispute resolution.
- **Trademark Use by Trade Unions:** Section 29(5) of the 1999 Trademarks Act restricts using a registered trademark in a business name, but trade unions, defined by the 1926 Trade Unions Act as non-commercial entities, are exempted from this restriction.
    - U.S. courts support "nominative fair use," allowing unions limited use of brand logos to identify association with a company.

In essence, the right to unionize is a fundamental workers' right to collectively bargain for better terms, protected by law but subject to legal and procedural constraints to maintain industrial peace and order.

States have the Power to Make Laws on Industrial Alcohol

A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) recently held in an 8:1 ruling that states have the power to tax not just alcoholic beverages, but also 'industrial' alcohol.

About Industrial Alcohol

- **Meaning**: Industrial alcohol is impure alcohol used as an industrial solvent.
- **Production Process**: Chemicals like benzene, pyridine, and gasoline are mixed into ethanol (produced by fermenting grains, fruits, molasses, etc.) through a process called denaturation, making it unfit for consumption and reducing its cost.
- **Industrial Uses**: In manufacturing pharmaceuticals, perfumes, cosmetics, and cleaning liquids.

- **Illicit Use and Risks**: It is sometimes misused to produce illicit liquor, posing severe health risks, including blindness and death.

Background

- The dispute centers on overlapping entries in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution:
  - Entry 8 of List II grants states the power to regulate intoxicating liquors, while Entry 52 of List I allows the Centre to regulate industries in public interest.
- The Centre claims authority over industrial alcohol under the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1961, while states argue for their right to legislate due to potential misuse of industrial alcohol for illegal consumption.

The Final Verdict and its Significance

1. **Revenue Generation for States**: The SC upheld states' authority to regulate industrial alcohol, securing a significant source of revenue for states.
   - As states heavily rely on taxes from alcohol, this decision safeguards their right to levy excise duties on alcohol sales. For example, Karnataka increased the Additional Excise Duty (AED) on Indian Made Liquor (IML) by 20% in 2023.
2. **Centre-State Relations**: This ruling reinforces states' legislative powers on items in the State List, asserting that state laws on "intoxicating liquors" can't be overridden by Centre's powers under 'Industries' in the Union List.
   - This balance is vital in maintaining federal autonomy within India's legislative framework.
3. **Redefining "Intoxicating Liquor"**: The SC expanded the definition of "intoxicating liquor" under Entry 8 of List II, which now includes industrial or denatured alcohol by clarifying that any substance causing intoxication, whether for consumption or having a potential health impact, falls under the scope of "intoxicating liquor."
   - This overturned the SC's 1990 *Synthetics & Chemicals Ltd. v State of Uttar Pradesh* decision, which restricted "intoxicating liquor" only to potable alcohol.
4. **Federal Balance**: The SC emphasized that, in cases of overlapping jurisdiction, interpretations should favor federal balance. Therefore, "intoxicating liquor," including its raw materials, is under state control, while the Centre cannot claim regulatory authority under Entry 52 of List I, as doing so would make Entry 8 redundant.
5. **Dissenting Opinion**: Justice Nagarathna dissented, arguing that "intoxicating liquor" should not include industrial alcohol, as its misuse potential alone does not justify its regulation under Entry 8. She maintained that under the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1961, the Centre retains regulatory power over industrial alcohol.

This judgment reinforces federalism by affirming state legislative rights over industrial alcohol, crucially impacting states' revenue. By redefining "intoxicating liquor" to include industrial alcohol, the ruling broadens state powers in regulating alcohol-related health and safety issues. It also establishes a precedent to favor federal balance when resolving overlapping jurisdiction issues in the Seventh Schedule.

Lawrence Bishnoi Interrogation

Mumbai police are investigating the murder of Maharashtra MLA Baba Siddique, alleging that the accused shooters have ties to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. Bishnoi is currently incarcerated in Gujarat's Sabarmati jail for cross-border drug smuggling and has been linked to previous criminal incidents.

Legal Framework for Custody and Interrogation: Under section 267 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), a person facing trial must be brought to court for proceedings to ensure a fair trial. A criminal court is empowered to issue an order for the same during an inquiry, trial or other proceedings.

Why Can't Bishnoi Be Taken Out of Jail for Questioning?

- In 2023, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued an order under section 268 of the CrPC restricting Bishnoi from being taken out of jail for any purpose. It was later extended in 2024 under section 303 of the new Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

- As a result, Bishnoi cannot be directed to be produced in court and any agency seeking access to him will have to get an order from a court to question him only within the jail premises.
- Any court order requiring Bishnoi to be produced for legal proceedings would be rendered inoperative until the restrictive order remains operational.

Criteria for Imposing Restrictive Orders

- **Section 268 of the CrPC:** allows State Governments to exclude certain prisoners from the provisions of section 267 (Power to Require Attendance of Prisoners in Court)
- **Section 303 of the BNSS:** permits both the Central (in cases instituted by central agencies like the NIA) and State Governments to issue orders preventing specific individuals or groups from being removed from prison while a restrictive order is in effect.
- **Section 303(2) of the BNSS:** outlines three criteria for such orders: 1) the nature of the offense; 2) potential public disorder if released; and 3) overall public interest.
  - ✓ Investigating agencies find jail interrogations limiting, as they are constrained in time and personnel.
  - ✓ **Ajmal Kasab (2008) –** The 26/11 Mumbai attacks perpetrator was interrogated and tried under extraordinary security due to the high-risk nature of his offenses, with all interactions taking place within the confines of secure facilities.

When can Such Orders be Imposed?

- **For Security Reasons**: Governments have historically imposed such orders for security reasons, fearing that releasing certain prisoners could lead to absconding or threats to their lives.
  - Past cases, like that of Zabiuddin Ansari (involved in the Mumbai terror attacks) where the Maharashtra government in 2013 passed a Government Resolution (GR) invoking section 268 of the CrPC to restrict the production of Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal before the court.
  - Ansari then approached the Bombay High Court seeking the GR be quashed. The court rejected his plea and allowed Ansari to attend the trial through a video link from jail.
  - Such instances illustrate the court's support for these restrictions when public safety is a concern, allowing for alternatives like video link appearances.
    - ✓ Similar digital measures are adopted internationally, such as the U.K. and U.S., to minimize risks when dealing with high-profile criminals. This trend aligns with digital transformation in judicial processes, showing India's adaptability in law enforcement.
- **To Deny Parole and Furlough:** in serious cases.
  - Courts have occasionally intervened when orders seem excessively prolonged or unjust, as seen in a Gujarat High Court case regarding a prisoner's long-term denial of furlough.

Are there any Guidelines Established for Restricting Prisoner's Movement?

- Yes, the Gujarat government has established guidelines for restricting prisoner movement, which require a police assessment of the prisoner's conduct and the case's severity.
- These guidelines also emphasize the need for expedited trials for those affected by such orders, preventing prolonged imprisonment without trial.
- **Balancing Rights with Public Interest:** These guidelines embody the **principle of proportionality**, ensuring restrictive orders are used only when public safety or national security is genuinely at risk.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

ICCR recently held a conference of Buddhist monks and scholars in Colombo on bequeathing Pali the status of a classical language by the Indian government.

About ICCR

- It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of External Affairs established in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (India's first Education Minister) for promoting India's external cultural relations through cultural exchanges with other countries and their people.
- The ICCR, as India's only soft power institution, aims to shift its focus towards previously "neglected" areas such as Indian literature, artisanship, and Ayurveda.
- ICCR has established Indian Cultural Centres across several countries to serve as hubs for disseminating Indian culture. Some of the major centres are in **New York, Berlin, London, Kathmandu, Beijing, and Tokyo.**
  - ✓ ICCR instituted an award, **Gisela Bonn Award**, in 1996, to honour her services to bolster Indo-German friendship.
- Its flagship journal "Indian Horizons" reflects on India's cultural evolution and global cultural initiatives.

✓ Until 1958, the ICCR was under the administrative jurisdiction of the Education Ministry.

✓ ICCR is instrumental in the promotion of yoga, particularly through the celebration of International Yoga Day on June 21 each year.

Objectives of ICCR

1. **Policy Formulation**: Actively participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs related to India's external cultural relations.
2. **Cultural Relations**: Foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other nations.
3. **Cultural Exchanges**: Promote cultural exchanges with other countries and their people.

Scholarship Programs

ICCR administers various scholarship programs annually, awarding over 3,000 scholarships under 21 different schemes to foreign students from approximately 180 countries. Among these schemes:

- Six are funded directly by ICCR from its grants.
- The others are administered on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Ayush.

These scholarships cover a wide range of courses from undergraduate to postdoctoral levels, allowing students to study at leading universities and educational institutions across India.

Abetment of Suicide

The Supreme Court (SC) recently held that police and the courts should avoid "unnecessary prosecutions" in cases of abetment of suicide stemming from the workplace.

What is Meant by Abetment?

- Section 45 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 (earlier Section 107 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC)) defines abetment.
- A person abets (encourages) the doing of a thing, if he-
  - instigates any person to do that thing; or
  - engages with one or more others in a conspiracy for the doing of that thing; or
  - intentionally aids, by any act or illegal omission, the doing of that thing.

What is the Punishment for Abetment of Suicide?

Abetment of suicide is a serious offence that is tried in a Sessions court and is cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable. Section 108 BNS (Section 306 IPC) prescribes imprisonment of upto 10 years along with a fine for abetment of suicide.

✓ As per National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB's) annual Crime in India report, the conviction rate in abetment of suicide (Section 306 IPC) cases was 17.5% in 2022.

- ✓ **Under Mental Healthcare Act 2017**, an individual who attempts suicide is presumed to be under severe stress and is not liable for prosecution under IPC Section 309 (which criminalized attempted suicide). The state is now obligated to provide rehabilitation and treatment.
- ✓ The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) does not include a similar clause of IPC Section 309. This means that attempted suicide is now decriminalized in India.

What was the Case?

- **Background**: The FIR stated that senior officers pressured salesman Rajeev Jain to accept the company's Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) in 2006, threatening him and his colleagues of demotion when they refused. This stressed-out Jain and resulted in him committing suicide, prompting his brother Rajnish to accuse the officers of abetting the act.
- **Allahabad High Court (HC) Judgement**: It rejected the officers' plea to dismiss the case, noting a "direct link" between the meeting's humiliation and Jain's suicide.

Supreme Court's Ruling: The court held that-

1. **Direct Incitement:** must be there for abetment of suicide from the accused.
2. **Two Categories of Cases**: are there based on the relationship of the deceased person with the accused i.e.-
   a. **Sentimental Ties**: In cases involving personal relationships, the court stated that the threshold for proving abetment may be lower. Normal disputes or heated exchanges could create psychological imbalances, leading individuals to contemplate suicide.
   b. **Official Capacity**: Relationships in an official capacity, such as between employer and employee, are governed by laws, rules, policies, and regulations. In these cases, courts must be cautious and look for clear evidence indicating that the accused intended to cause suicide to prevent unnecessary prosecutions.
3. **Trial Proceedings**: cannot be held to determine the accused's intent is unnecessary, as the facts of the case typically clarify the situation. Therefore, it concluded that pursuing further trial in Jain's case would be an abuse of the legal process, leading to the quashing of the case.

Previous Court Rulings

- **M Mohan v The State (2011)**: It established a high bar for proving abetment of suicide; requires a direct act intended to push the deceased towards suicide.
  - ✓ **Domestic Violence:** The Supreme Court has often upheld convictions under Section 306 in cases where a husband or in-laws harassed a woman, resulting in her suicide.
- **Karnataka HC (July 2023)**: It refused to quash proceedings against individuals accused of harassing an LGBT employee, affirming that belittling or destroying a person's self-esteem could constitute abetment.
  - ✓ From an ethical perspective, the abetment of suicide involves questions of moral responsibility, especially in cases of bullying, harassment, or mental torture.
- **Ude Singh v State of Haryana (2019)**: It was held that proving abetment depends on case-specific facts, focusing on acts that create situations leading the deceased to perceive suicide as the only option.
- **M. Arjunan v. State (2019):** The Supreme Court ruled that for a conviction under Section 306, there must be a **clear mens rea (intention)** to instigate the deceased into committing suicide. Mere quarrels or disagreements in daily life would not automatically lead to abetment charges.

Third-Party Litigation Funding

The idea of Third-Party Litigation Funding (TPLF) has quickly emerged as a game-changer, potentially opening courtroom doors for many who felt they had been shut out.

What is TPLF?

- Often referred to as litigation finance, it is a financial arrangement in which a third party—unconnected to the legal dispute—provides financial support to a plaintiff to pursue a legal claim.

- This funding typically covers legal fees and other costs associated with the litigation. In exchange, the funder receives a **pre-agreed share** percentage of the proceeds from the case if it is successful. If the case fails, the plaintiff is not required to repay the funding.
  - ✓ The third party can be a bank, hedge fund, insurance company, or even an individual.

Global Precedents and Relevance in India

- In countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, TPLF is a well-established practice that has supported access to justice in expensive commercial and civil litigation.
- It is gaining traction in India, particularly in arbitration cases and high-value commercial disputes.
- Countries like Hong Kong have implemented detailed codes, such as the Code of Practice for Third Party Funding in Arbitration 2019, which mandates disclosure of funding arrangements, cost liabilities, and funder control.

Common Disputes Involving TPLF

Commercial contracts	International Commercial Arbitration	Class action lawsuits	Anti-trust proceedings
Tortious claims (e.g., medical malpractice, personal injury)		Insolvency proceedings	Other claims with significant monetary award potential

Regulatory Landscape in India: TPLF is not expressly prohibited in India. Several court judgments highlight the benefits of TPLF and indicate a need for its regulation.

- ✓ **Ram Coomar Coondoo vs Chunder Canto Mookerjee (1876):** The Privy Council allowed a third party to fund litigation as long as it was not against public policy.
- ✓ **The Supreme Court of India's 2018 judgment in Bar Council of India v. A.K. Balaji** stated that third-party litigation funding (TPLF) is permissible in India, as long as lawyers are not involved in funding litigation.

Need for TPLF

1. **Escalating Legal Costs**: associated with legal proceedings which make it increasingly difficult for plaintiffs, especially individuals or small businesses, to afford access to justice.
2. **Complexity of Modern Litigation**: which requires extensive resources for research (Specialized legal fields like medical malpractice and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), expert testimony, and prolonged legal representation. TPLF provides the necessary capital to manage these complexities.
3. **Access to Justice**: Many individuals and entities may not have the financial means to pursue legitimate claims. TPLF helps level the playing field, allowing those with fewer resources to pursue their legal rights.
4. **Risk Mitigation**: Litigants can pursue lawsuits without the fear of incurring substantial debt if the case does not succeed. This can encourage more individuals to come forward with valid claims.

Benefits of TPLF

1. **Financial Relief**: as plaintiffs receive the financial backing necessary to cover legal costs, enabling them to focus on their case without worrying about upfront expenses.
2. **Increased Access to Justice**: TPLF empowers individuals and entities who might otherwise be unable to afford legal representation, thus promoting a fairer legal system.
3. **Encouragement of Merit-Based Claims**: With funding available, more plaintiffs may pursue legitimate claims, contributing to a system that prioritizes justice over financial power.
4. **Flexibility**: TPLF can be structured in various ways, allowing for tailored solutions that meet the specific needs of the case and the parties involved.
5. **No Financial Risk for Plaintiffs**: If the case is unsuccessful, plaintiffs do not owe anything to the funder, making it a low-risk option for pursuing justice.

6. **Support for Complex Cases**: TPLF can support the pursuit of complex and high-stakes legal disputes that require significant resources, which might deter many plaintiffs from proceeding otherwise.

Challenges and Concerns

1. **Influence on Legal Strategy:** There is a risk that funders may interfere in case strategy, pressuring litigants to settle prematurely or pursue litigation in ways that maximize the funder's profit but harm the litigant's interests.
2. **Exploitation of Litigants:** Since litigants may have fewer alternatives, third-party funders could demand an exorbitant share of any settlement or award.
3. **Picking Profitable Cases:** Funders may prioritize cases that promise high financial returns, neglecting those that are socially important but less lucrative.
4. **Legal Uncertainty:** Since India has no formal regulatory framework for TPLF, there is a lack of clarity on disclosure norms, fees, and the funder's role in decision-making during litigation. This legal ambiguity poses challenges to both litigants and funders, potentially deterring the growth of TPLF.

TPLF serves as a vital tool in the legal landscape, providing the necessary financial support to individuals and entities seeking justice while minimizing their financial risks.

MLA-LAD Funds

The Delhi Government recently increased the Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development (MLA LAD) fund from the current ₹10 crore to Rs 15 crore per year. The allocation is the highest in the country.

About MLA-LAD Funds

The MLA-LAD fund, modeled on the MPLAD (Member of Parliament Local Area Development) scheme, allocates government funding to MLAs for developmental projects within their constituencies.

Objective: To enable MLAs to support local development in their constituencies by recommending specific projects directly funded by the government.

Funding: Funds are **issued every year to MLAs** for local development work and are released as grants-in-aid, enabling districts to utilize the funds for the recommended projects.

Working: Under the scheme, each MLA has the choice to **suggest to the Deputy Commissioner** of his/her district, to the extent of allocations given from year to year, to be taken up by his/her constituency.

- ✓ MLAs have discretion over how and where to spend the fund within guidelines, making it responsive to the specific needs of their constituency.

Types of Projects

1. The projects funded are usually restricted to "durable infrastructure work" focusing on local development and reflecting the needs of the community, such as roads, parks, sewer lines, and streetlight repairs.
   - ✓ During emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, MLALAD funds were repurposed for medical supplies and natural disaster relief.
   - ✓ For instance, in Maharashtra, MLA-LAD funds have been directed toward constructing parks in high-density areas, promoting urban beautification and environmental sustainability.
   - ✓ States prone to **natural disasters**, like West Bengal and Assam, frequently use MLA-LAD funds for disaster relief. **After Cyclone Amphan** in 2020, MLAs in West Bengal used these funds to rebuild local infrastructure and provide emergency shelters.
2. Projects must be designed to be completed within one financial year. This encourages accountability and reduces the likelihood of long-term incomplete projects.

Allocation per State: Each state determines its own annual MLALAD allocation. For example, while the central MPLAD provides Rs. 5 crore per MP, state MLALAD allocations vary widely with Uttar Pradesh distributing Rs. 5 crore per MLA, while other states like Tripura (35 lakhs) and Arunachal Pradesh (55 lakhs) allocate much smaller total amounts.

- ✓ Only two Union Territories, Delhi and Puducherry, have MLALAD schemes due to their legislative assemblies. In Delhi, MLA-LAD funds have been used to upgrade schools, establish public libraries, and fund public transportation projects.
- ✓ Sates such as Haryana, Punjab, and Sikkim do not have such scheme.

Challenges in Utilization

1. **Underutilization of Funds:** Many states struggle to fully utilize their MLALAD allocations. Studies have shown significant unused funds; for instance, only 32% of Karnataka's funds were utilized in 2019-20, and Gujarat saw about 25% of its LAD funds go unused over five years.
2. **Misallocation of Funds:** There have been allegations that MLAs sometimes recommend projects that cater to vote-bank politics or benefit select groups, instead of addressing broader community needs.
3. **Bureaucratic Delays:** Multiple levels of approval, including district authorities and, in some cases, state-level permissions often slow down the initiation of projects. Detailed procedures and documentation requirements can also delay the execution process, leading to lapsing funds when projects do not start or complete on time.
4. **Lack of Awareness:** among MLAs about the scope of projects allowed under the MLA-LAD scheme, resulting in selection of ineligible or poorly conceived projects that struggle for approval.
5. **Poor Planning and Execution**: of projects without clear timelines or execution strategies, lead to delays or ineffective project outcomes. In some areas, finding reliable contractors or service providers for project execution can also be challenging, slowing down or compromising project quality.
6. **Coordination Gaps Between Stakeholders:** Effective utilization requires coordination between MLAs, district authorities, and implementing agencies. Miscommunication or lack of collaboration can cause project delays.
7. **Lack of Tracking Systems**: States often lack effective systems to track fund utilization in real-time, making it difficult to reallocate or adjust resources quickly when projects face obstacles.
8. **Durable Assets Requirement**: Creating durable assets within a single financial year, can be challenging for large-scale, sustainable development projects that need more time and resources.

Recent Trends and Adjustments

- In response to rising developmental demands, at least eight states have increased MLALAD allocations, and two states have introduced new schemes.
  - ✓ Odisha has introduced a real-time tracking system for MLA-LAD funds, allowing citizens to view ongoing projects and ensure greater accountability.
- High-debt states like Punjab have debated MLALAD fund introduction; for instance, a Rs. 10-crore fund was proposed but remains unimplemented due to financial constraints.
- Karnataka has launched the **KL-LAD** (Karnataka Legislators Local Area Development) scheme, giving additional funding discretion to MLAs for region-specific projects, particularly in underserved rural areas.

Overseas Citizens of India (OCI)

Recently, the Consulate General of India in New York clarified that rumours circulating on social media regarding Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) becoming reclassified as "foreigners" are false.

About Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) Scheme

The OCI scheme was introduced in August 2005 (under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003) to provide a form of long-term residency for Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) who were previously Indian citizens or were eligible for Indian citizenship as of January 26, 1950.

- ✓ As of 2023, over 45 lakh OCI card holders were registered globally, with significant numbers from the US, UK, Australia, and Canada.

OCI and PIO Merger

- In 2015, the Government of India decided to merge the OCI and PIO schemes into one single scheme under the name of OCI.
- This was done to streamline the process and simplify the rights and privileges granted to Indian-origin foreign nationals.
- All existing PIO cardholders were given the opportunity to convert their PIO cards to OCI cards.

Objective- To offer a limited form of dual citizenship (facilitate easier travel, residency, and access to certain rights), allowing the Indian diaspora to maintain a connection with India, while not extending full citizenship.

Key Privilege:

- Multiple-entry, multi-purpose lifelong visa to visit India.
- Exemption from the need to register with the local police or the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) regardless of the duration of stay.
- **Employment and Occupation:** OCIs can pursue professions like doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, advocates, engineers, chartered accountants, and architects in India. However, they cannot hold government jobs or work in the armed forces.
- Parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in financial, economic and educational fields except in the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
  - ✓ NRIs are Indian citizens who are permanent residents of a foreign state.
  - ✓ **Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas** is also known as Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Day, is celebrated on January 9 to mark the contribution and achievements of the overseas Indian community to the development of India. It is the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs.

Eligibility: A foreign national is eligible for registration as an OCI cardholder if they:	**Ineligibility:** Following are not entitled for grant of OCI.
1. Were an Indian citizen on or after January 26, 1950; 2. Were eligible for Indian citizenship on January 26, 1950; 3. Belonged to a territory that joined India after August 15, 1947; 4. Are a child, grandchild, or great-grandchild of an Indian Citizen person; 5. Are a minor child of the above or have at least one Indian citizen parent; 6. Are a foreign spouse of an Indian citizen or OCI holder, with a registered marriage lasting at least two years.	1. Foreign military personnel either in service or retired. 2. Anyone with a parent or grandparent who was a citizen of Pakistan, Bangladesh, or any country specified by the Indian government. 3. OCI applications are not permitted in India on Tourist, Missionary, or Mountaineering Visas, and the applicant must be an ordinary resident of India.

Restrictions on OCI Card Holders

- **Political and Government Positions:** OCI holders are not allowed to vote, contest in elections, or hold Indian Constitutional posts such as President, Vice President, Supreme Court or High Court Judge.
- **Employment Limitations:** Generally, OCI card holders cannot be employed in the government sector in India.
- **Passport Restrictions:** OCIs cannot hold an Indian passport. They are provided with an OCI card and a lifelong visa sticker, which must be carried along with their foreign passport when traveling to India.
- **No Protection Abroad:** OCI cardholders do not receive Indian diplomatic protection when residing abroad. They remain nationals of the country of their foreign citizenship.

Latest Rules for OCI Card Holders (As per 2021 Gazette Notification by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA))

- **Restricted Area Permits**: OCI holders need special permission to visit "protected" or "restricted" areas, similar to restrictions for foreign nationals in Jammu & Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh.

- **Special Permit for Specific Activities**: OCIs must obtain permits for research, missionary work, Tablighi activities, journalism, and visiting restricted areas.
- **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA)**: OCIs were reclassified as foreign nationals concerning economic, financial, and educational activities under FEMA, reversing their previous NRI-equivalent status.

History of Changes to OCI Rules

- **Initial Notification in 2005:** Provided OCI holders with multiple-entry lifelong visas and exemption from Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) registration, with parity to NRIs in economic, financial, and educational fields (except for agricultural properties).
- **2007 Amendments:** Introduced parity with NRIs in inter-country adoption, domestic airfare, and entry fees to wildlife sanctuaries and parks.
- **2009 Amendments:** Further extended parity in entry fees for monuments and museums, allowed OCI card holders to work as doctors, lawyers, architects, etc., and enabled participation in all-India entrance exams for medical and other fields.

The OCI card serves as an important link for the Indian diaspora, providing many of the rights and privileges of NRIs, though it has specific restrictions that distinguish it from full citizenship.

Bombay HC Scraps IT Rules on Government Fact-Check Unit (FCU)

The Bombay High Court (HC) recently **struck down** crucial provisions of the 2023 Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, which empowered the government to set up fact-check units (FCUs) to identify and flag false or fake news against the government on social media and other online platforms.

✓ A two-judge Bench delivered a split verdict in the case in January 2024.

Background

IT Amendment Rules: MEiTY introduced the IT Amendment Rules in 2023, updating the Information Technology Rules, 2021 proposing following amendments:

1. **Expansion of "Fake News" Definition:** The amendment to Rule 3(1)(b)(v) broadened the term “fake news” to include content related to “government business.”
   - ✓ This change aligns with the global push for fact-checking and curbing misinformation, especially where government credibility is at stake.
2. **Role of Fact-Checking Units (FCU):** It allowed the FCU to flag posts as “fake,” “false,” or “misleading” if they pertain to government business and inform social media platforms. This introduces a mechanism for centralized monitoring of government-related information, similar to global trends where government bodies collaborate with digital platforms to manage public misinformation.
3. **Implications for Social Media Intermediaries (SMIs):** It required the **p**latforms to remove flagged content to maintain their “safe harbour” status, which provides them legal immunity for third-party content.

✓ This aspect strengthens the government’s ability to hold platforms accountable, following global examples like the European Union’s Digital Services Act which mandates content moderation.

✓ **Under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act**, social media platforms are granted safe harbor but are not legally required to remove content unless it violates federal law.

Concerns Raised Regarding the Amendments

1. **Impact on Free Speech:** The rules sparked concerns about the potential restriction of free speech and the government’s reach in regulating online discourse.
2. **Government’s Role as “Arbiter of Truth”:** The FCUs allowed the government to be the “only arbiter” of truth in respect of business concerning itself.

3. **Lack of Independent Oversight of FCUs:** The amendment lacks provisions for independent oversight of FCUs, which could compromise the objectivity of fact-checking. Critics argue for an independent regulatory mechanism to ensure that fact-checking decisions are fair and unbiased.
4. **Safe Harbor Status and Platform Liability:** Linking safe harbor status to compliance could make platforms over-cautious, leading them to take down content hastily to avoid legal risks.
5. **Ambiguity and Scope of "Fake News" Definition:** The broad scope of "fake news" as applied to government business could create ambiguity in enforcement. Without a clear, narrow definition, even legitimate critique or fact-based discussion might be misinterpreted as "fake news."

- **Challenge to Amendments**: These amendments were challenged in the Bombay HC on the grounds that these provisions violated the constitutional right to free speech under Article 19(1)(a) and amounted to unchecked censorship, undermining the principle of independent journalism and public discourse.
- **Split Verdict:** A two-judge bench delivered a split verdict in the case. Owing to this divide, the matter was referred to a third judge, whose opinion became the tiebreaker in this case and gave the final judgement.
  - ✓ The third judge (Justice Chandurkar) refused to grant a stay on the notification to set up the FCU in March 2024 until he gave his final opinion. Thus, the Centre notified the FCU under the Press Information Bureau (PIB). However, a day later, the Supreme Court (SC) stayed the operation of the notification until the Bombay HC took a final decision.

The Final Verdict: While quashing the impugned rule by 2-1 majority, the court ruled that the amended IT Rules resulted in-

1. **Violation of Free Speech:** The state does not have a duty to ensure citizens access only "truthful" information and that fact-checking requirements were not imposed on traditional media, making the rules discriminatory toward digital media.
   - ✓ The amended IT Rules were deemed discriminatory, as similar fact-checking requirements were not mandated for traditional media, singling out digital media for stricter scrutiny.
2. **Government Overreach:** The rules allowed "unilateral determination by the executive" on content related to government matters, making the FCU the "arbiter in its own cause." The undefined terms "fake," "false," and "misleading" are vague, increasing the potential for misuse and creating a chilling effect on free speech.
3. **Impact on Intermediaries:** Intermediaries could lose their "safe harbour" status if they host content deemed "fake" by the government, further deterring free expression online.
   - ✓ Section 79 of the IT Act, which protects platforms from legal liability for user-generated content. This places platforms in a difficult position, where they may over-comply and take down content hastily to avoid penalties.
4. **Lack of Proportionality:** The rule fails the proportionality test, lacking safeguards against abuse and improperly infringing on fundamental rights.
   - ✓ The verdict implies that regulation of digital content must align with constitutional freedoms, emphasizing the protection of digital rights and promoting transparency and accountability in governance.
   - ✓ Proportionality test requires that the government measures taken to restrict a fundamental right-
     a. has a legitimate goal;
     b. is a suitable means of reaching that goal;
     c. creates the least amount of restriction possible on the fundamental right; and
     d. does not have "a disproportionate impact on the right holder".

The judgement is a setback for the government's digital regulation efforts and a key moment in the debate over digital freedoms and online dissent. While it's a win for free speech advocates, the legal battle may continue, as the government is expected to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Visit of Spanish PM to India

- Spainish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez visited India. During this visit, he held bilateral talks with PM Modi. This visit marked the first visit by a Spanish PM in 18 years.
  - PM Modi had visited Spain in 2017.
- He also visited Vadodara, Gujarat to inaugurate the **Final Assembly Line (FAL) plant of the C295** medium-lift tactical transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force.
  - It is India's first private military transport aircraft production facility, developed by Tata Advanced System Limited (TASL) in partnership with Airbus Defence and Space.
  - Under the $2.5 billion contract, 56 C295 aircraft will be supplied, with the first 16 delivered from Spain and the remaining 40 assembled in Vadodara.
- This plant is expected to produce its first "Made-in-India" C295 in 2026, with all deliveries by 2031.
- The project aims to build a complete industrial ecosystem in aerospace manufacturing in India, with contributions from **Bharat Electronics Ltd, Bharat Dynamics Ltd, and private MSMEs**.
- Several MoUs were signed, furthering cooperation in trade, IT, infrastructure, renewable energy, defence, pharma, and tourism.
- During this visit, Year 2026 has been declared as India-Spain Year of Culture, Tourism and AI.

India – Spain Bilateral Relation

- India and Spain established diplomatic relations in **1956**.
- High-level visits, including by heads of state, have helped solidify this relationship over the years.

Bilateral Trade:

- Spain is India's **6th largest trade partner** in the European Union.
- **Total Trade (2023)**: **US$ 8.25 billion**, a 4.2% increase from the previous year.
  - **India's Exports to Spain**: US$ **6.33 billion** (growth of 5.2%).
  - **India's Imports from Spain**: US$ **1.92 billion** (growth of 1.05%).
  - **Top Indian Exports**: Mineral fuels, chemical products, iron and steel, electrical machinery, apparel, nuclear reactors, marine products, and articles of iron and steel.
- **Foreign Direct Investment:**
  - **Spanish FDI in India**:
    - ✓ US$ 3.94 billion (April 2000 - December 2023), with Spain as India's 16th largest investor.
    - ✓ Over 280 Spanish companies in India, focusing on metallurgical industries, renewable energy, automotive, ceramics, and infrastructure.
    - ✓ Major destinations: Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka.
  - **Indian FDI in Spain**:
    - ✓ ~US$ 900 million; 80 Indian companies in Spain, primarily in software & IT services, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and logistics.
    - ✓ India is among Spain's top 30 investors globally and top 5 from Asia.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation Framework:**
  - **India-Spain Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation** (JCEC): Established in 1972; has met 12 times, with the latest meeting in April 2023 in New Delhi.
  - **India-Spain CEOs Forum**: Established in 2015; first formal meeting held in May 2017 in Madrid.

Strategic Significance and Cooperation:

- The strategic relationship between India and Spain is steadily expanding, encompassing areas like **defense, counter-terrorism, and cybersecurity**:
- **Defense**:
  - Spain is a key partner in India's defense modernization, providing expertise in **aerospace and naval technology**.
  - Spanish companies are involved in defense projects, including submarine technology transfer and collaborations for military aircraft.
- **Counter-Terrorism**:
  - India and Spain actively cooperate in counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing, recognizing mutual concerns regarding global terrorism.
- **Sustainable Development and Climate Action**:
  - Both nations are committed to the **Paris Agreement** and actively collaborate on climate change and SDGs.
  - Spain's expertise in renewable energy aligns with India's goal of increasing clean energy sources.

Indian Diaspora in Spain:

- The **Indian community in Spain** is relatively small but has been growing in recent years.
- **Population**: As of 2023, approximately **55,000 Indians** reside in Spain, contributing actively to sectors like **hospitality, retail, IT, and healthcare**.

UK Hands over Chagos Islands to Mauritius

Britain has agreed to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, to Mauritius.

Key Highlights

- **About the treaty**
  - UK and Mauritius reached an agreement where the UK ceded its claims over the Chagos Archipelago.
  - The agreement allows the UK to retain sovereign rights over Diego Garcia, where a joint UK-US military base will remain operational for an initial period of 99 years.
  - Mauritius is now allowed to implement a resettlement program on the islands, except for Diego Garcia.
  - Additionally, the UK has pledged to create a trust fund to benefit the displaced Chagossians.
- **Role of India**
  - India has maintained steadfast support to Mauritius' claims over the Chagos Islands.
    - ✓ It voted in favour of the island country at the UNGA in 2019.
  - In recent years, India has attempted to deepen its ties with Mauritius amidst China's ever-increasing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean.
  - Earlier this year, an India-built airstrip and a jetty was inaugurated at Agaléga, a two-island dependency of Mauritius in the Western Indian Ocean.

Chagos Islands

- The Chagos archipelago comprises of 58 islands, with Diego Garcia being the largest and most significant.
- **Colonial history of Chagos**
  - Chagos Islands were discovered by Portuguese navigators in the 16th century, who mapped and named some of them.
  - The Dutch explored the islands next but did not settle there.
  - The islands later came under French control, along with Mauritius and Réunion, and the French gave additional names to the islands.

- They brought enslaved workers from Madagascar and Mozambique, followed by laborers from southern India, to work on coconut plantations.
- After Napoleon's defeat, Britain took control of both Chagos and Mauritius.
  - ✓ In 1814, France ceded the islands to the British.

- **Significance of Chagos**
  - **Geostrategic Location**: The archipelago's location in the central Indian Ocean makes it strategically valuable for monitoring major shipping lanes, ensuring security in the region, and projecting military power across a wide area.
  - **UK-US Military Base**: Diego Garcia, serves as a logistics, surveillance, and intelligence hub for both the UK and the US, playing a key role in military operations in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.
  - **Environmental and Biodiversity Significance**: It is home to one of the largest coral atolls and is rich in marine biodiversity.
    - ✓ Its pristine environment has made it important for scientific research and conservation efforts.

Chagos Islands Dispute

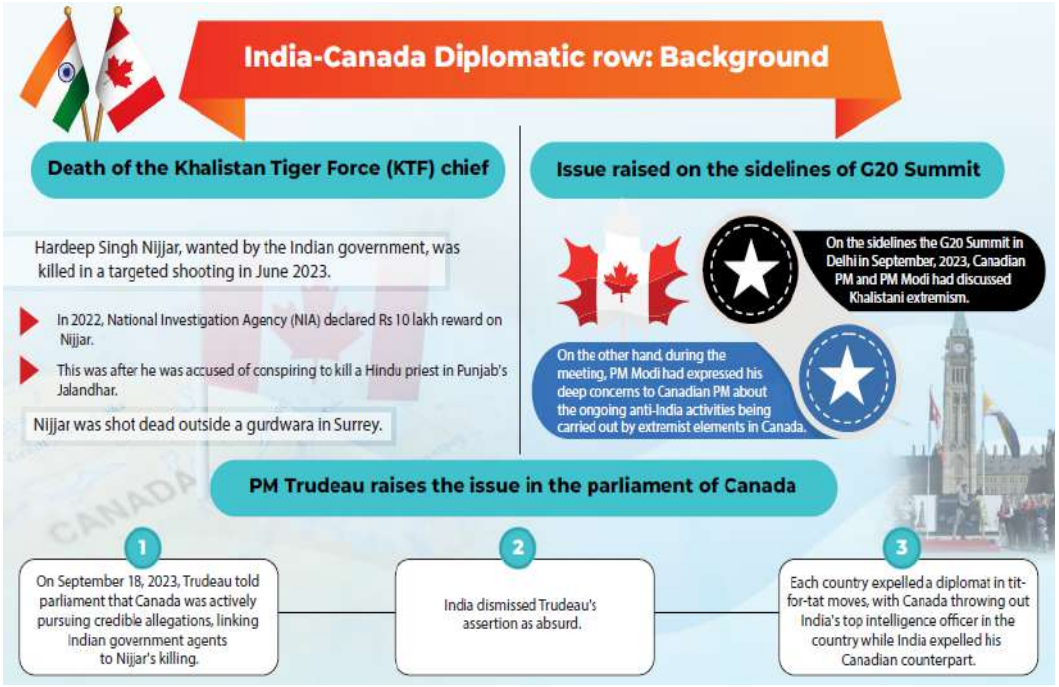
- **UK Declares Chagos Islands as Overseas Territory**
  - In November 1965, the UK declared the Chagos Islands as an overseas territory.
    - ✓ In 1965, the UK constituted the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), of which the Chagos Islands were a central part.
    - ✓ Chagos was attached to Mauritius, another British colony in the Indian Ocean, for administrative purposes.
    - ✓ *When Mauritius gained independence in 1968, Chagos remained with Britain.*
    - ✓ The UK government gave the newly-independent country a grant of 3 million pounds over the "detachment" of the Chagos archipelago.
- **Strategic Military Use of Diego Garcia**
  - Diego Garcia became the site of a major UK-US military base, which played a crucial role in US-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s.
  - Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the base also served as a CIA interrogation site.
- **Mauritius' Proposal and UK's Rejection**
  - After gaining independence, Mauritius proposed allowing the UK to lease the islands to the US for defense purposes in exchange for an increased US quota for sugar imports, which would boost Mauritius' economy.
  - The UK rejected the proposal, claiming the US could not be involved in any treaty, despite benefiting from the islands.
- **Forced Depopulation of Chagossians**
  - Between 1968 and 1973, the UK and US forcibly removed the native Chagossians to make way for the military base.
  - The UK denied the inhabitants' connection to the islands, dismissing claims of human rights violations.
- **Legal Action by Mauritius**
  - In 2015, Mauritius initiated legal proceedings against the UK at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, challenging the UK's sovereignty claims and addressing the forced removal of the Chagossians.
  - The UK resisted, insisting that the issue should remain a bilateral matter.
- **Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2015 Ruling Against the UK**
  - In 2015, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that the UK had violated Mauritius' rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

- The court found that the UK had ulterior motives when it created a **Marine Protected Area (MPA)** around the Chagos Islands in 2010, intentionally preventing the return of the Chagossians.
- The ruling highlighted that British and American defense interests were prioritized over Mauritius' rights, and the UK's actions were deemed a violation of good faith.

- **UN General Assembly Vote in 2017**
  - In June 2017, the UNGA voted on Mauritius' resolution to seek an advisory opinion on the Chagos Islands from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
  - The result reflected global opposition to colonial legacies and suggested that the UN was unlikely to endorse continued colonial control.
- **International Court of Justice (ICJ) Ruling in 2019**
  - In February 2019, ICJ ordered the UK to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius as rapidly as possible.
  - Mauritius argued that it had been coerced into giving up the islands during colonial rule, in violation of **UN resolution 1514**, which prohibited the breakup of colonies before independence.
  - The UK claimed that the ICJ had no jurisdiction over the matter.

India-Canada Diplomatic Escalation Over Nijjar Killing Case

- India has ordered the expulsion of six Canadian diplomats, including Acting High Commissioner Stewart Wheeler. It also announced the withdrawal of its own High Commissioner and other diplomats from Canada, citing security concerns.
- This comes after Canada identified these Indian diplomats as "persons of interest" in an ongoing investigation into the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023.
- Also, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) accused Indian government agents of collaborating with the Lawrence Bishnoi gang to spread terror in Canada.



  - Bishnoi's criminal network is reportedly active in Canada, and Canadian authorities allege that the Indian government has used this network for targeting dissidents.

India-Canada Relation

- **Background**
  - Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1947.
  - Bilateral relation was elevated to a strategic partnership during PM Modi's visit to Canada in 2015.
- **Commercial relations**
  - **Bilateral Trade Relation -**India was Canada's 10th largest trading partner.

- ✓ **India's total exports to Canada:** US$ 4.11 billion in 2022-23
- ✓ **India's imports from Canada:** US$ 4.05 billion in 2022-23

- **CEPA/EPTA negotiations**
  - In March 2022, the two countries had agreed to re-launch the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations.
  - Both the countries also decided to have an interim agreement or Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) that could bring commercial gains to both.
  - Trade talks were paused in September 2023 following the diplomatic row over the killing of Nijjar.
- **Nuclear Cooperation**
  - Canadian aid to India in the nuclear field begun in 1956. However, this relationship deteriorated in 1974 after India conducted **Smiling Buddha nuclear test**.
    - ✓ Canada was among the first countries to participate in India's nuclear power program.
    - ✓ CIRUS, the first research reactor to be built in India, was built with the help of Canada.
  - Later, in June 2010, the nuclear cooperation was restored when a Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) with Canada was signed.
- **People-to-People**
  - Canada hosts one of the largest Indian diasporas in the world, numbering 1.6 million (PIOs and NRIs) which account for more than 4% of its total population.
    - ✓ In the field of politics, in particular, the present House of Commons (total strength of 338) has 22 Members of Parliament of Indian-origin.

Challenges in India-Canada relations

- **Separatist Khalistani groups**
  - Canada has been providing a safe haven for separatist Khalistani groups, which New Delhi sees as the Liberal Party's pandering to these groups for votes.
    - ✓ Diaspora Sikhs are well represented in the Trudeau government. Some of them are politically supported by pro-Khalistan groups.
    - ✓ Jagmeet 'Jimmy' Dhaliwal, whose New Democratic Party supports Trudeau's minority government in Parliament, is viewed with suspicion by the Indian establishment.
  - Last year, New Delhi objected to Canada permitting a Khalistani secessionist referendum in the Sikh diaspora.
- **Canada is slow to act against anti-India elements on its soil**
  - A massive controversy had erupted, in June 2023, over a social media video of a parade float depicting late PM Indira Gandhi's assassination in Canada.
    - ✓ A female figure was shown in a blood-stained white saree, with the hands up, as turbaned men pointed guns at her.
  - The parade was allegedly organised by pro-Khalistani supporters days before the 39th anniversary of 'Operation Bluestar' (celebrated on June 6).
- **Other irritants include**
  - Attacks on Indian-origin people;
  - Canadian comments over India's farmer protests and India's cancellation of diplomatic talks in response.

Israel Launches Retaliatory Strikes On Military Targets In Iran

Israel launched what it described as precise and targeted airstrikes on Iran in retaliation to an Iranian attack on Israel earlier in October 2024.

West Asian Crisis and Impact on India

- **Fears of Protracted Red Sea Disruption**
  - A direct conflict between Israel and Iran would cause a prolonged disruption of the Red Sea shipping route.
  - India is especially vulnerable to these disruptions, as its trade with Europe, the US, Africa, and West Asia—valued at over $400 billion in FY23—relies heavily on the Suez Canal and Red Sea routes.
  - The involvement of Hezbollah's allies, such as the Houthi rebels in Yemen, heightens the risk of attacks on ships using this critical trade passage.

- **Impact on Indian Petroleum Exports**
  - In August 2024, India's exports fell by ~9%, primarily due to a sharp 38% drop in petroleum product exports, which fell to $5.95 billion from $9.54 billion in August 2023.
  - Rising shipping costs and the crisis in the Red Sea have led importers to seek alternative sources, impacting Indian exporters' profitability, particularly standalone refiners.
- **Silver lining - Trade Opportunities in West Asia**
  - Despite the conflict, India's trade with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has grown by 17.8% between January and July 2024, according to a Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) report.
  - India's exports to Iran also increased by 15.2% during this period, benefiting from the neutrality of regional players such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar, who have stayed out of the conflict.
- **Risk to India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**
  - The ongoing conflict in West Asia could hinder the development of the IMEC, a strategic project announced during the G20 in 2023.
    - ✓ The IMEC plan comprises an Eastern Corridor connecting India to the Gulf region and a Northern Corridor connecting the Gulf region to Europe.
    - ✓ It will include a railway and ship-rail transit network, as well as road transport routes.
  - The IMEC aims to reduce reliance on the Suez Canal by creating faster trade routes through a rail and ship network connecting India to the Gulf and Europe.

Israel's Ban on the UN Chief

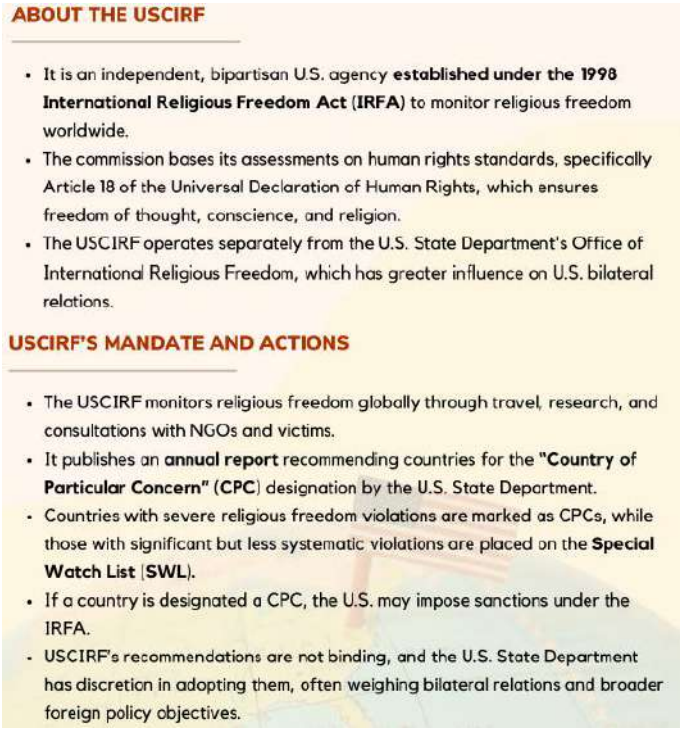
- Israel had banned United Nations Secretary- General (UNSG) António Guterres from entering the country. Israel accused him of "backing" Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran.
  - This decision was taken due to the UNSG's failure to "unequivocally condemn" Iran's missile strikes on Israel.
  - Israel also criticized Guterres for not condemning a previous attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,200 Israelis and the taking of 250 hostages.

Unprecedented Nature of Israel's Ban of UNSG

- Analysts say that similar action occurred was in 1950 when the USSR accused UNSG Trygve Lie of bias during the Korean crisis and threatened to veto his re-election.
- U.S. had banned former UNSG Kurt Waldheim in 1987 due to his complicity in Nazi war crimes during World War II. But this happened after his term as UNSG and during his presidency of Austria.
- Citing Article 100, paragraph 2 of the UN Charter, they emphasized the importance of the UNSG for both substantive and logistical reasons.
  - This paragraph requires member states to respect the Secretary-General's independence.

USCIRF Labels India a "Country of Particular Concern"

- **The report**
  - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recently recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate India as a "Country of Particular Concern" due to alleged *systematic violations of religious freedom*.
  - The report accuses the Indian government of enabling hate speech and misinformation that incite violence against religious minorities and places of worship.
  - It claims that throughout 2024, there have been killings, lynchings, arrests of religious leaders, and demolitions of homes and places of worship, highlighting severe violations of religious freedom.
  - India has rejected the report, calling USCIRF a "biased organisation with a political agenda."



Prabowo Subianto Sworn In As Indonesia's Eighth President

- Prabowo Subianto was inaugurated as Indonesia's eighth President, marking a significant rise from his past as an ex-General accused of human rights abuses.
- Despite his long-standing rivalry with outgoing President Joko Widodo, Subianto was endorsed by Widodo after serving as Defense Minister.

Dragon Drones

- In the Russia-Ukraine war, "dragon drones" have emerged as a lethal new weapon, capable of spewing molten metal that burns at 2,427°C.
- These drones release thermite, a mixture of aluminum and iron oxide, which ignites in a self-sustaining reaction that can burn through almost any material, including military vehicles and even underwater. It causes severe, often fatal, burns on human targets.
- First deployed around September, Ukrainian forces initially used dragon drones to burn vegetation used by Russian troops as cover, exposing them to attack.
- Russian forces soon followed suit, deploying their own dragon drones.
- The combination of high-precision drones with thermite has made these weapons both highly effective and dangerous, according to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV).

US is Sending THAAD to Israel

- The U.S. has announced it will deploy its advanced **THAAD (Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system** to Israel, reinforcing its commitment to Israel's security.
- THAAD is designed to intercept and destroy ballistic missiles during their terminal phase of flight, offering protection against short, medium, and limited intermediate-range missile threats up to 5,000 km.
- A THAAD battery includes 95 personnel, six launchers, 48 interceptors, radar, and fire control systems.
- Using "hit-to-kill" technology, THAAD provides broader protection than the Patriot system.
- THAAD was developed by Lockheed Martin.

Kartarpur Corridor Pact Renewed

- India and Pakistan have renewed their agreement on the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for another five years, ensuring **visa-free access** for Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.
- Originally signed in October 2019, the pact was due to expire on October 24, 2024, but has now been extended to maintain the corridor's uninterrupted operation.
- The corridor connects the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan to the Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak in India. It includes a 4.1-kilometer highway in India, a passenger terminal building at the border, and the gurdwara in Pakistan.

India Inks Deal with US for 31 Predators

- India and the U.S. signed a $3.5-billion deal to acquire 31 MQ-9B Predator drones to enhance India's armed forces' intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), and strike capabilities.
- The deal includes 15 Sea Guardians for the Navy and 8 Sky Guardians each for the Air Force and Army.
- The drones, equipped with Hellfire missiles, laser-guided bombs, and advanced sensors, will support long-endurance, high-altitude missions.
- Additionally, a performance-based logistics contract with General Atomics Global India Pvt Ltd will establish a Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility in India, aiming to boost domestic defence capabilities by sourcing some components locally.

India and US Sign Agreement To Strengthen Supply Chain For Critical Minerals

- In response to China's dominance in critical minerals and recent export restrictions on gallium, germanium, and rare earth technology, India and the U.S. have signed an agreement to strengthen critical mineral supply chains.

- The MoU aims to enhance resilience in critical mineral sectors through shared resources in exploration, extraction, refining, and recycling.
- Amid efforts to boost clean energy manufacturing, India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, worth over $4.5 billion, aim to promote solar photovoltaic (PV) module production and reduce reliance on low-cost Chinese imports.
- The Economic Survey 2023-24 noted China's expanding manufacturing surplus due to increased industrial capacity, with Chinese companies seeking markets overseas, often leveraging low-cost products.

India Eases Investor Dispute Arbitration norms for UAE

- The new **India-UAE Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)**, which came into effect on **August 31, 2024**, reflects changes aimed at making the treaty more **investor-friendly**.
- According to the **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI)**, two key changes stand out:
  - **Reduction in Local Remedies Period**:
    - ✓ The period that investors must attempt to resolve disputes through India's legal system has been reduced from five years to three years.
    - ✓ This change provides investors with quicker access to **Investor-State Dispute Settlement** mechanisms.
    - ✓ While it attracts investors by speeding up dispute resolution, it also **weakens India's ability** to handle disputes domestically, increasing the chances of costly international arbitration.
  - **Inclusion of Portfolio Investments**:
    - ✓ Unlike India's **Model BIT**, which excludes **portfolio investments** (such as stocks and bonds), the India-UAE BIT includes them as protected investments.
    - ✓ This broadens the treaty's scope and increases India's exposure to disputes over financial instruments, moving away from the Model BIT's focus on long-term, direct investments.
- Overall, the treaty signals a shift towards a more open investment environment, but at the cost of some **regulatory sovereignty**.
- While it may encourage more investment from the UAE, it also raises the risk of higher arbitration claims.
- **UAE is currently the 7th -largest investor in India**, with ~ **$19 billion** in **FDI** from April 2000 to June 2024.

Nepal-India-Bangladesh Sign Tripartite Agreement

- Nepal, India, and Bangladesh have signed a tripartite agreement to enable **cross-border electricity trade.**
- This agreement will allow Nepal to export surplus hydroelectricity to Bangladesh via Indian territory from June 15 to November 15 each year.
- In the first phase, Nepal will supply 40 MW of power to Bangladesh at a rate of 6.4 cents per unit, generating an annual income of approximately USD 9.2 million.

SCO Summit 2024

- The **23rd Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Government (CHG)** was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. The summit concentrated on the bloc's trade and economic agenda.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar led the Indian delegation at the summit.
    - His visit marks the first by an Indian foreign minister to Pakistan in nine years, highlighting the significance of India's participation in the SCO despite ongoing bilateral tensions.

India-Pakistan Foreign Ministers Hold First Talks in 9 Years

- **Jaishankar and Dar Engage in Talks at SCO Meeting**
    - For the first time since 2015, EAM S. Jaishankar and his Pakistanis counterpart Muhammad Ishaq Dar engaged in direct talks.
- **Preliminary Discussions on Resuming Cricket Ties**
    - The discussions explored the possibility of resuming cricketing ties between India and Pakistan, with a focus on India potentially participating in the Champions Trophy hosted by Pakistan in February 2025.

- While these talks were still in their early stages, the conversations opened a potential pathway for improving bilateral relations through sports diplomacy.
  - ✓ India's participation in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan would mark the Indian cricket team's first visit across the border in 17 years.

19th East Asia Summit

- PM Modi attended the **19th East Asia Summit (EAS)** in Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- In his address, PM stressed on ASEAN's central role in the Indo-Pacific regional architecture, in India's Indo-Pacific Vision and in Quad cooperation
- He also mentioned India's humanitarian efforts, including Operation Sadbhav, in response to Typhoon Yagi.

East Asia Summit (EAS)

- **About**
  - It is a forum for leaders of countries in the Indo-Pacific region to discuss political, security, and economic challenges.
  - EAS was established in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) by ASEAN and is held annually.
- **Members**
  - The EAS was originally attended by 16 countries from East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania.
  - In 2011, membership expanded to 18 countries, including Russia and the United States.
  - Currently, EAS is a forum of 18 countries that represent 54% of the world's population and 58% of global GDP. The 18 countries are:
    - ✓ **Ten member states of the ASEAN** – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam;
    - ✓ along with Australia, China, Japan, **India**, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and United States.
  - EAS is the **only leaders-led forum that brings together** US, China, Russia, India, RoK, and Australia.
- **To become a member of the EAS, countries must:**
  - Sign the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)
  - Be a formal dialogue partner of ASEAN
  - Have substantive cooperative relations with ASEAN
- **Six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS**

Environment and Energy	Education	Finance	Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases	Natural Disaster Management	ASEAN Connectivity

- **India and EAS**
  - India is member of EAS since 2005.
  - At the 4th EAS in Thailand in 2009, leaders endorsed the proposal to revive **Nalanda University**.
    - ✓ The idea was first proposed by former President APJ Abdul Kalam in 2006.

Reforming Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)

- The G20 Independent Expert Group has issued a report card assessing the progress made by Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in expanding lending capacity and mobilising private capital.
  - MDBs are financial institutions providing loans, grants, and technical assistance to foster economic and social development in low- and middle-income countries.
  - These include the World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, etc.

- This assessment highlights **the gap between current achievements and the ambitious "triple agenda"** needed to meet global development and sustainability goals.
- The expert group had been set up under the G20 Indian Presidency and had Fifteenth Finance Commission Chairman NK Singh and former US Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers as co-convenors.

Key Recommendations for MDB Reforms

- **Triple mandate for MDBs:**
  - **Eliminating extreme poverty.**
  - **Promoting inclusive growth.**
  - **Financing global public goods** with an emphasis on sustainable development and climate goals.
- **How to meet this triple mandate?** MDBs were advised to triple their financial commitments, establish a "Global Challenges Funding" mechanism, and significantly boost private sector engagement.
- **Expanding lending capacity:**
  - MDBs have made strides in expanding their lending capacities:
    - **A 33% increase in lending capacity.**
    - Improved use of balance sheets and guarantee platforms.
    - Reforms to the capital adequacy framework to optimise resources.
  - Despite this progress, MDBs are still short of the targeted tripling in capacity required to fulfil their expanded mandate.
- **Innovations in capital mobilisation:**
  - **MDBs introduced innovative funding mechanisms**, including hybrid capital options to attract additional financing.
  - Although some member states showed interest, uptake has been limited.
- **Private sector involvement:**
  - There is the need to change the MDB cultures **to lower perceived risks for private capital**.
  - Involving private investors, working with rating agencies, and creating an atmosphere that is conducive to investment is the need of the hour.

Way Ahead to Strengthen MDBs

- **Enhancing performance and relevance:**
  - Current approaches do not maximise MDBs' potential to mobilise resources, foster policy alignment, and support innovation.
  - **Tailored, flexible solutions and diversified instruments** are crucial for the dynamic needs of different countries and sectors.
- **Improving governance:**
  - MDBs' governance structures are often seen as **unrepresentative of developing countries**.
  - **Increased transparency, accountability, and responsiveness** are essential to MDBs' credibility and effectiveness.
- **Concessional financing:** For the world's poorest countries.
- **Climate-related financing:** MDBs have substantially increased climate financing, with commitments reaching $75 billion in 2023 - up from $42 billion in 2019. This includes $50 billion for mitigation and $25 billion for adaptation activities.
- **Coordination among MDBs:** MDBs are working to harmonise procurement practices and have introduced a digital **co-financing portal** to facilitate large-scale project coordination.

Conclusion:

- The G20 report card underscores both achievements and gaps in MDB reforms.
- While MDBs have enhanced lending capacity and introduced measures for better private sector engagement, significant efforts are still required to meet the ambitious goals of the "triple agenda."

- With a strong role to play, **India's leadership and commitment to MDB reforms** could help shape a more inclusive, responsive, and effective MDB system for the Global South.

Attack on UN Peacekeepers in Lebanon

- India had expressed concern over the worsening security situation in West Asia after two UN peacekeepers were injured near Lebanon's border with Israel.
- The incident occurred when an Israeli tank fired on a UN observation tower. This marks the most serious escalation since Israel asked the UN peacekeeping force, UNIFIL, to relocate from positions near Hezbollah rocket launch sites in Lebanon. The request was declined by the UN.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

- The UNIFIL is an international peacekeeping mission with over 10,000 civilian and military personnel from 50 countries, tasked with preventing violations along the 121-km "Blue Line" border between Lebanon and Israel.
- **Established under a 2006 UN resolution**, the force is responsible for ensuring the area is free of hostile activities, including the presence of weapons or fighters.
- However, the U.S. and Israel have criticized UNIFIL for being ineffective in preventing Hezbollah from stockpiling and firing rockets.
- Though armed, the peacekeepers can only use force when their safety or civilians are in immediate danger, and they report violations to the UN Security Council.

India Pledges $250 million for Traditional Medicine Centre

- India has committed over $300 million to the WHO for its core programme of work from 2025 to 2028, **making it the sixth largest global contributor to WHO's core funding**.
    - WHO has received pledges exceeding $2.2 billion towards a $7.1 billion funding gap, aiming to save at least 40 million lives through various initiatives, including increasing vaccine delivery and supporting health worker education.
- Of this amount, $250 million will be allocated to establishing a Centre of Excellence for Traditional Medicine.
    - The WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) is a knowledge center in Jamnagar, Gujarat.
    - It aims to improve global health and sustainable development through traditional medicine.
- In addition to the traditional medicine centre, India's funding includes $38 million for a new regional office, $10 million for digital health, and $4.6 million for thematic funding.

149th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly

- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla led a Parliamentary Delegation (IPD) to the 149th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Geneva.
    - Leading the Indian Parliamentary Delegation, he discussed the theme of "Harnessing science, technology and innovation for a more peaceful and sustainable future."
- He emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation among Parliaments in science, technology, and innovation for the greater common good.
- The IPU, founded in 1889 as the first multilateral political organisation, is a global forum of national Parliaments.

8th Edition of the India Mobile Congress

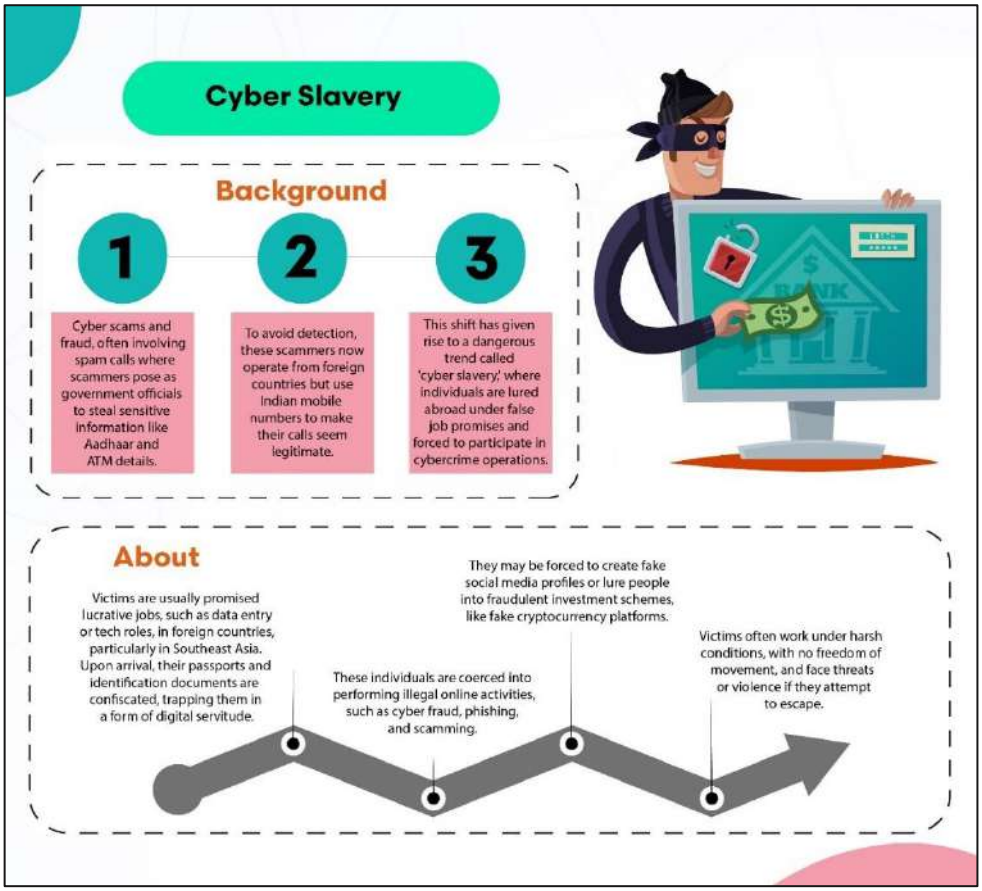
- PM Modi inaugurated the International Telecommunication Union's **World Telecommunication Standardisation Assembly** 2024 (ITU-WTSA 2024) and the 8th edition of India Mobile Congress.

- The event aimed at setting global telecommunication standards and discussing the future of telecommunications as a global good.
- The Prime Minister emphasized India's significant role in the telecom sector, with 120 crore mobile users, 95 crore internet users, and 40% of global digital transactions being from India.

2.17 Crore Mobile Connections Disconnected Amid 'Cyber Slavery' Concerns

The Union Ministry of Telecommunications has informed a high-level inter-ministerial panel that it will disconnect 2.17 crore mobile connections obtained through forged documents or used in cybercrime, and block 2.26 lakh mobile handsets.

- **Cause of worry:** Cyber slavery is part of a broader pattern of **human trafficking** and is increasingly prevalent due to the rise of **digital crimes**.
  - It highlights the intersection of human rights violations and online criminal networks, requiring international cooperation to combat.
- **Indians trapped as cyber slaves**
  - A report revealed that over 5,000 Indians were believed to be trapped in Cambodia,
  - Government estimates suggest that Indians had been defrauded of at least Rs 500 crore in the six months leading up to March 2024.
  - Analysis of data by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has observed an increase in the number of cybercrime incidents targeting India.
  - About 45% of them originate from the Southeast Asia region, mainly Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos PDR.
- **Inter-ministerial panel formed to address the issue**
  - The panel identified deficiencies in the **banking, immigration, and telecom sectors**.
  - It identified three loopholes that enable cyber scams originating from Southeast Asian countries. These are:
    - ✓ Involvement of the senior bank managers of two nationalised banks to open mule accounts. It was found that maximum accounts were allegedly opened with the connivance of senior bank managers/ staffers in several branches of State Bank of India and Punjab National Bank.
    - ✓ around 30,000 unreturned passengers travelling on visitor visa to Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam from January 2022-May 2024; and
    - ✓ **misuse of bulk SIM cards**.
- **Steps Taken by Indian government**
  - The Union Ministry of Telecommunications has announced to:
    - ✓ disconnect approximately



2.17 crore mobile connections obtained through forged documents or used in cybercrime and block 2.26 lakh mobile handsets.

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has also directed telecom companies to block all incoming international spoofed calls that display Indian mobile numbers.
  - ✓ This has resulted in a 35% drop in such calls, with full implementation expected by December 31, 2024.
- Additionally, DoT is working to identify roaming phone numbers involved in scams in Southeast Asia.
  - ✓ The DoT reported that over 6 lakh Indian SIM cards were roaming in Southeast Asia between April and June 2023.
  - ✓ Over 1.4 lakh point of sale (PoS) agents across India were identified as being involved in selling SIM cards used in scam operations in countries like Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos.
- Telecom service providers (TSPs) are required to submit weekly data on Indian mobile numbers utilizing roaming services in countries like Hong Kong, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, and Myanmar.

Indians lost Rs 120.3 crore in digital arrest frauds in January-April 2024

- Digital arrest scams involve fraudsters posing as law enforcement, falsely accusing victims of crimes involving illegal goods and demanding payment to "resolve" cases.
  - Scammers often exploit video calls to create a sense of official urgency, even dressing in uniforms and calling from staged offices.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), through I4C, reported that 46% of the total Rs 1,776 crore lost to cyber frauds in this period originated from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.
- I4C identified four main scam types: ***digital arrest, trading scams, investment scams, and romance scams***.

Cyberfraud losses could amount to 0.7% of GDP

- I4C forecasts that Indians may lose over ₹1.2 lakh crore to cyber frauds over the next year, with mule bank accounts playing a key role in these scams, potentially costing 0.7% of India's GDP.
- Much of the siphoned money is laundered overseas, with scams primarily originating in China, Cambodia, and Myanmar.
- I4C identifies about 4,000 mule accounts daily, and nearly half of cyber complaints link back to China and parts of Southeast Asia.

Quad Partners Take Part in back-to-back Naval War Games

- The Quad group of countries—India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S.—recently conducted back-to-back naval exercises aimed at enhancing interoperability.
- **Exercise Malabar 2024**, held off the coast of Visakhapatnam, is described as the most comprehensive edition to date, featuring complex operational scenarios.
  - The exercise included a Harbour Phase in Visakhapatnam and a Sea Phase in the Bay of Bengal.
- Prior to Exercise Malabar, the Quad countries participated in **Exercise Kakadu**, hosted by the Royal Australian Navy in September 2024.
  - This flagship maritime exercise brought together nearly 3,000 personnel from 30 nations, emphasizing regional maritime security and international partnerships.

India's 4th Nuclear Submarine Launched

- India launched its **fourth nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), *S4****, at the Ship Building Centre in Visakhapatnam.
  - India currently operates two SSBNs: ***INS Arihant***, commissioned in 2016, and ***INS Arighaat***, commissioned recently.

- Third SSBN, ***Aridhaman***, is undergoing sea trials, with commissioning expected next year.
- Larger and more advanced than the 1st SSBN, INS Arihant, the S4* features significant indigenous input.
- The S4* and its predecessor, S4, both have improved reactors and can carry the advanced 3,500 km-range K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), strengthening India's undersea nuclear deterrence.

Terrorist Attack on Z-Morh Project in Kashmir

- Suspected militants had attacked workers of APCO Infratech, an infrastructure company constructing the Z-Morh tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Seven workers were killed in this attack, marking the first militant assault on a key infrastructure project in the region.
  - Previously, militants had not targeted such projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Analysis of This Attack

- **Terror attack on infra project in J&K and the exposing of vulnerabilities**
  - The terror attack on workers constructing the Z-Morh tunnel, reflects the revival of terrorism and points towards a broader strategy aimed at exposing vulnerabilities in the region.
  - The incident suggests a deliberate effort by Pakistan's deep state to derail peace and stability, especially after the peaceful elections and installation of a democratic government in Srinagar.
    - ✓ Deep state is an alleged secret network of especially nonelected government officials and sometimes private entities (as in the financial services and defense industries) operating extralegally to influence and enact government policy
- **Pakistan's Deep State and its Role**
  - The Pakistani deep state appears determined to re-establish its relevance in J&K by instigating violent events. Their goal is to obstruct India's process of stabilizing J&K, particularly after the abrogation of Article 370.
  - A strategic terror event like this attack is seen as a way to prevent peace dividends from taking root and ensure continued instability.
- **Targeting Peripheral Areas and Infrastructure Projects**
  - While traditional urban areas like Srinagar, Anantnag, and Baramulla remain heavily secured, the attackers have shifted focus to peripheral regions with low security.
  - The Z-Morh tunnel, a flagship infrastructure project, requires a large workforce and specialized expertise.
  - The attack may indicate a larger threat to infrastructure projects in J&K's peripheral regions, such as the Kishanganga project and railway projects in Banihal and Qazigund.
- **Broader Pattern of Unusual Activities**
  - The attack could be part of a wider scheme targeting India's emerging strategic confidence.
  - Recent events such as bomb hoaxes, strange blast in New Delhi, and diplomatic pressure over transnational issues appear connected, signaling a broader attempt to put India on the defensive.

{For more about Z-Morh tunnel refer Economy section}

Army Strengthens Self-Reliance through Tech Integration

- The Indian Army has been strengthening its self-reliance through technology integration in several ways, including:
  - **Swavlamban Shakti**
    - ✓ This exercise is a collaboration between the Army and the defense industry to develop cutting-edge solutions for warfare.

- ✓ The exercise showcases indigenous innovations from industry partners, such as drones, robotic mules, and laser-based communication systems.

- **Akashteer air defense systems**
  - ✓ The Army acquired 100 Akashteer air defense systems to enhance its air defense capabilities.
  - ✓ These systems were developed by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and are a critical asset in safeguarding the country from aerial threats.
- **Atma Nirbhar Bharat program**
  - ✓ To make India self-sufficient in defense electronics by 2025.
- **Innovation for Defence Excellence and Technology Development Funds**
  - ✓ These programs are focused on indigenization.
- **Naval Unified Domain (NUD)**
  - ✓ This is the Indian Navy's encrypted cyber communication network. It is a highly regulated network that allows for easy segregation and analysis of data.

Commemorative Events to Mark 62 Years of Battle of Walong

- To mark the ***62nd anniversary of the Battle of Walong*** during the 1962 India-China war, the Indian Army has organized month-long commemorative events.
  - In 1962, the Indian Army's 11 Infantry Brigade, though heavily outnumbered, held back the Chinese Army for 27 days in the rugged Walong region of Arunachal Pradesh, demonstrating extraordinary courage under extreme conditions.
- The observance includes the inauguration of the renovated Walong War Memorial, "Shaurya Sthal" at Lama Spur, and new border infrastructure.
  - The events will culminate on Walong Day, November 14, with the inauguration of the war memorial.

Paramesh Sivamani takes over as Coast Guard Chief

- Paramesh Sivamani took over as the 26th Director General of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG).
- ICG is a maritime armed force that operates under the Ministry of Defence.

75 Border Infra Projects Launched

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated 75 border infrastructure projects across 11 states and Union Territories, focusing primarily on regions near Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, and the Northeast.
- Managed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), the projects include 22 roads, 51 bridges, and two other developments.
- Key highlights include the Kupup-Sherathang Road in Sikkim, linking Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg and Zuluk.
- With these additions, BRO has completed 111 projects in 2024, totaling ₹3,751 crore.

Indian Air Force Day 2024

- India observed its 92nd Air Force Day 2024 on October 8, 2024. This day has a deep history that goes back to 1932 when the Indian Air Force (IAF) was established.
- Theme: '**Bhartiya Vayu Sena - Saksham, Sashakt, Atmanirbhar" (Potent, Powerful, and Self-Reliant)**.\

Development Trials of Man-portable Air Defence System Completed

- DRDO announced the completion of development trials for the ***4th Generation miniaturised Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORAD)***.

- VSHORAD, developed as a replacement for the Army's aging Igla systems, demonstrated effective performance against high-speed targets, confirming its hit-to-kill capability in various engagement modes (approaching, receding, and crossing).
- This man-portable air defence system, created by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat with other labs and production partners, is now ready for early user trials and production.

KAZIND-2024

- The 8th edition of **India-Kazakhstan** Joint Military Exercise KAZIND-2024 was held at Surya Foreign Training Node, Auli, Uttarakhand.
- Joint Exercise KAZIND-2024 has been held annually since 2016.

Remaining S-400 Missile Systems will Reach India by 2025

- India will receive the final **two squadrons** of the ***S-400 air defence missile system from Russia*** by 2025, according to IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh.
- Delivery delays were attributed to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, payment issues, supply chain disruptions, and Russian focus on meeting conflict demands.
- With three squadrons already operational along India's borders with China and Pakistan, the advanced system targets threats up to 400 km, capable of tracking targets at 600 km and engaging a variety of air threats at different altitudes.
- The $5.5 billion contract for five units was signed in 2018, with the first squadron operationalized in 2021.

Crackdown on Civil Society and NGOs in India

- Following the searches, the Income Tax (I-T) department recently concluded that some of the NGOs had allegedly violated provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) 2010, cancelling their FCRA licences.
- This relates to the "**mismatch**" in annual returns and statements of foreign currency bank accounts and "**misutilisation**" of funds in foreign currency.

Reasons behind the Crackdown

- **For hurting economic interests:**
  - A number of notable organisations working on environmental and social issues have faced scrutiny by India's investigative agencies for hurting the country's "economic interests" or "stalling" development projects.
  - **For example**, the FCRA licence of one of India's oldest think tanks, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), was cancelled recently following a year of suspension and raids from the I-T Department.
- **As a result of shrinking public participation:**
  - Public consultations are a **necessary component of the environmental clearance process** for large infrastructure development projects.
  - Projects perceived as being of national importance or for national security – such as roads – have been made exempt from certain compliance regulations.
  - The crackdown on civil society organisations comes as **public participation in environmental clearance norms is facing a setback**.

First Woman to Take Over as DG, Armed Forces Medical Services

- Surgeon Vice Admiral Arti Sarin became the first woman officer to take over as the Director General, Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS).
- The DGAFMS is directly responsible to the Ministry of Defence for overall medical policy matters which relate to the Armed Forces.

Operation Chakra-III

- CBI arrested 26 individuals in Pune, Hyderabad, and Visakhapatnam, following a coordinated crackdown on a cybercrime network targeting both Indian and international victims.
- Operation Chakra-III led to raids at 32 locations, revealing the involvement of four call centers. These centers impersonated tech support and manipulated victims, mainly in the U.S., into transferring funds by claiming their bank accounts were compromised.

Parliamentary Committee to Review Armed Forces' Readiness for 'Non-Kinetic Warfare'

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has prioritized 17 subjects for deliberation, with a key focus on India's preparedness to counter hybrid warfare.
- Hybrid warfare describes a conflict in which non-kinetic (non-military) tactics are employed to complement military action.

Non-Kinetic Warfare

- **About**
  - Non-kinetic warfare refers to conflict methods that do not rely on traditional military force or physical destruction.
  - Instead, it employs cyberattacks, electronic warfare, psychological operations, information manipulation, economic sanctions, and other strategies to disrupt an enemy's infrastructure, economy, or morale.
  - It can involve non-military actors and often targets critical infrastructure like power grids, communication networks, and financial systems.

Government Issues Advisory To Curb Hoax Bomb Threats On Social Media

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued an advisory urging social media platforms to take responsibility in controlling threats against flights operating from India.
- The Ministry highlighted the unrestricted spread of hoax bomb threats due to features like forwarding, resharing, and reposting, which are readily available on social media platforms.
  - The **Information Technology Act, 2000**, along with the **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, require intermediaries to promptly remove harmful misinformation.
  - Previously, the Ministry applied similar provisions to tackle the spread of deepfake videos, citing Rule **3(1)(b) of the IT Rules**.
    - ✓ Rule 3(1)(b)(v) prohibits misinformation and patently false information.
- The advisory warned that non-compliant platforms risk losing intermediary liability protections, exposing them to potential legal action as publishers of harmful posts.

Hoax Bomb Threats - Aviation Security Architecture and Protocols

Aviation Security Architecture

- **ICAO's Aviation Security Guidelines and Directives**
  - Most aviation security guidelines are derived from the **International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Annex 17** on Aviation Security.
  - These guidelines and **Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs)** are part of the **Chicago Convention**.
    - ✓ These guidelines mandate global measures against unlawful interference in civil aviation.
  - The **ICAO Aviation Security Manual (Doc 8973)** provides member states with detailed security procedures.
  - Annex 17 and Doc 8973 are continually updated to address new threats and advancements in technology, though detailed discussions and specific guidance are restricted.
- **Security Agencies and Measures in India**
  - In India, the **Bureau of Civil Aviation Security** is responsible for establishing security standards for civilian flights, while the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** oversees flight safety.
  - Other involved agencies include the Airports Authority of India, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), National Security Guard (NSG), Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), Ministry of Home Affairs, and the judiciary.
- **Proposed Amendments to Strengthen Aviation Security Laws**
  - In response to recent security threats, amendments are being considered for the **Aircraft Act 1934, Aircraft Rules 1937**, and other relevant laws.
  - Planned updates include stricter penalties, no-fly list provisions, and expanding legal recourse to address security violations even on the ground.

- Updates to the **Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982** would further empower authorities to handle in-flight and on-ground security threats.
  - ✓ Currently, this Act applies to in-flight incidents, but the government seeks to broaden its scope to cover bomb threats even when the aircraft is grounded, making such offences cognizable under the law.

Weather Forecasting at the Gram Panchayat Level

The Government of India has taken a significant step in **localising weather forecasting** by introducing hourly five-day weather forecasts at the Gram Panchayat level.

This initiative **aims to equip rural communities** with crucial weather data to enhance agricultural activities and disaster preparedness.

- Currently, weather forecasting is available at district and block levels, but IMD aims to provide hyper-local forecasts down to 1 km x 1 km grids, with 3 km x 3 km grids already being tested.

Launch of the Weather Forecasting at the Gram Panchayat Level

- **About the initiative:**
  - The initiative, formally launched by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**, is **a collaborative effort** between -

Ministry of Panchayati Raj | IMD | Ministry of Earth Sciences

- **What will be forecasted?** The localised weather forecasts will provide real-time **hourly updates** on:

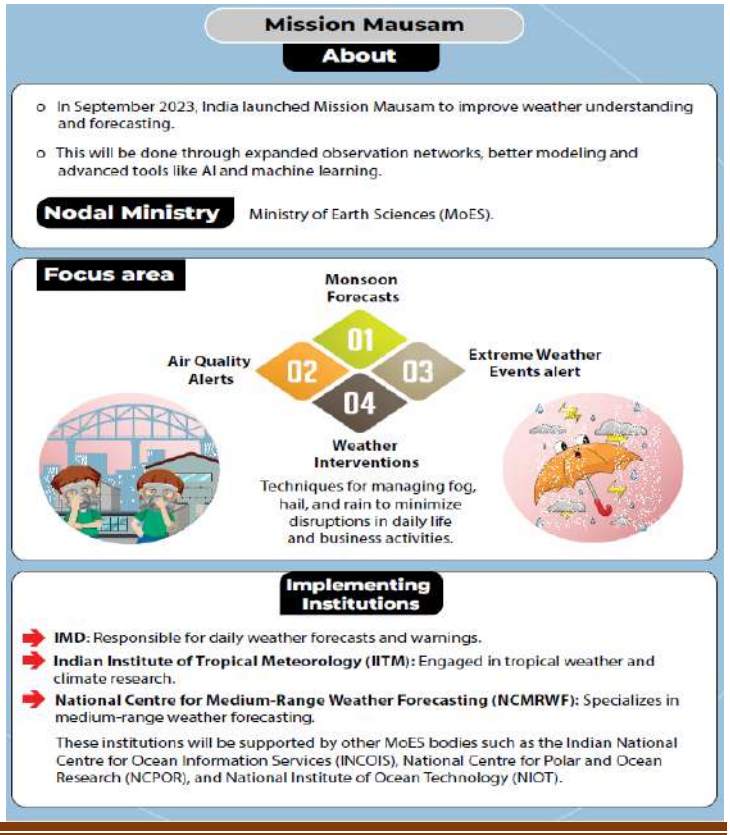
Temperature | Wind speed and direction | Cloud cover | Rainfall | Relative humidity

  - In addition, five-day forecasts will give minimum and maximum temperatures, rainfall, cloud cover, and wind data.
- **Platforms:** The forecasts will be accessible via the **e-GramSwaraj and Gram Manchitra portals**, as well as the **Meri Panchayat app**.
- **Training:** The Panchayati Raj Ministry is organising a workshop for more than 200 representatives from Panchayati Raj institutions.

India Is Building A Cloud Chamber As Part Of Mission Mausam

Mission Mausam, launched by the Indian government, aims to enhance weather forecasting and actively manage weather events, including modifying rainfall, hail, fog, and potentially lightning strikes.

A key focus of the mission is **cloud physics research**, crucial for effective weather modification. To support this effort, India is setting up its first cloud chamber at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, to advance research in this field.



Cloud Chamber under Mission Mausam

- India's upcoming **cloud chamber** at IITM Pune will be a unique facility designed to study **Indian monsoon clouds**.
- Resembling a closed cylindrical drum, it will simulate conditions for cloud formation by injecting water vapor, aerosols, and maintaining specific humidity and temperature.

- Unlike basic cloud chambers in other countries, India's facility will include **convection properties**, crucial for monsoon research.
- This advanced setup will allow scientists to study seed particles forming cloud droplets or ice particles. Globally, only a few such convective cloud chambers exist.
    - Establishing a **convective cloud chamber** aims to enhance understanding of the processes specific to Indian weather.
- This knowledge will support strategic planning for **weather modification** efforts.

India's Cloud Seeding Experience

The **Cloud Aerosol Interaction and Precipitation Enhancement Experiment (CAIPEEX)** was a decade-long program conducted in four phases, focusing on cloud seeding to enhance rainfall.
In the final phase (2016-2018), experiments were conducted in the **rain-shadow regions of Solapur, Maharashtra**.
Results showed that, under suitable conditions, cloud seeding could increase rainfall by up to **46% in certain locations** and by about **18% in a 100 sq. km area** downwind of the seeding site.

Permafrost

Glaciologists based at Himadri research station in Norway are digging deep to identify the probability of disasters due to permafrost collapse.

About Permafrost

- Permafrost is a layer of soil, rock, or sediment that remains frozen for at least two consecutive years and as many as hundreds of thousands of years.
- It is found in high-latitude and high-altitude regions, such as the Arctic, Antarctic, and parts of the Tibetan Plateau. Permafrost often contains ice, which can be in the form of ice wedges, lenses, or continuous layers.

Permafrost and Climate Change

Permafrost is highly sensitive to climate change. As temperatures rise, permafrost can thaw, leading to a variety of environmental and ecological impacts which are as follows:

- Almost a quarter of the land area in the Northern Hemisphere has permafrost underneath.
- **Release of Greenhouse Gases:** Permafrost contains large amounts of carbon, primarily in the form of frozen organic matter. When permafrost thaws, this organic material decomposes, releasing CO2 and methane (CH4) into the atmosphere, which contributes to global warming. This is known as the permafrost-carbon feedback loop.
- **Erosion and Infrastructure Damage:** Thawing permafrost leads to ground instability, resulting in the collapse of roads, buildings, pipelines, and other infrastructure in Arctic communities.
- **Changing local Ecosystems:** The release of fresh water from melting ice can create new lakes and wetlands, while changing soil conditions can lead to shifts in plant and animal species in these regions.
- **Human Health risk:** Thawing soil can release ancient bacteria and viruses trapped in the ice for millennia, some of which may be pathogenic to humans and animals.

Casuarina Tree

Six years after Cyclone Gaja's destruction, casuarina plantations in Tamil Nadu are experiencing a revival as farmers prepare for their first harvest in five years.

About Casuarina Tree (or Australian pine or kattadi and savukku in India)

- **Geographical Distribution:** Tropics, subtropics, and Mediterranean countries. In India they are concentrated in the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu.
  - ✓ India has 6.73 million hectares of salt affected land and is also the largest producer of Casuarina in the world.
- It is an Evergreen tree with a straight stem and a conical crown of permanent, horizontal branches containing deciduous needle-like branchlets. It is especially known for its ability to thrive in coastal environments and its resistance to saline soils.
- **Climate:** The trees are suited to a wide range of temperature from 10°C-33°C, from sea level upto 1500m and mean annual rainfall between 700 and 2000 mm.
- It is native to Australia and was introduced into mainland India in 1868
- **Roots:** The tree has a deep and extensive root system, which helps in soil stabilization. They fix atmospheric nitrogen through a symbiotic association with the bacteria Frankia.

Greenhushing

The practice of Greenhushing is on the rise across globe by companies.

About Greenhushing

- It is a term used to describe the practice of companies downplaying or concealing their environmental efforts to avoid negative publicity or criticism.
- It's essentially the opposite of greenwashing, where companies exaggerate or misrepresent their environmental credentials.
- Occurs in following ways:
  - ✓ Omitting information: Companies may fail to disclose their environmental practices or achievements.
  - ✓ Downplaying negative impacts: Companies may minimize or justify their negative environmental impacts.
  - ✓ Avoiding public scrutiny: Companies may avoid participating in environmental initiatives or reporting on their sustainability performance.

Rise in Mt. Everest

Study suggests that Mount Everest's height may be increasing due to the erosion and isostatic rebound of the Arun River, located near the base of the Himalayas.

About Isostatic Rebound (or glacial isostatic adjustment or post-glacial rebound)

- It is a Geological process (Viscoelastic Behavior) that pushes the Earth's crust upward as material (glacier or an ice sheet) is removed, allowing Mount Everest and its neighboring peaks to grow.
- When a heavy load, such as ice or eroded rock, is removed from the Earth's crust, the land beneath slowly rises in response, much like a boat rising in water when cargo is unloaded.
  - ✓ The crust, Earth's outermost layer floats atop a mantle layer of hot, semi-liquid rock. (Earth's lithosphere = crust + upper mantle)

Mount Everest Rise

- Mount Everest, currently 8,849 metres tall, has over the past 89,000 years, grown about 15 to 50 m higher because a nearby river is eroding rock & soil at its base, helping push it upwards
  - ✓ Mount Everest and the Himalayas have been rising due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates for 50 million years, but scientists believe **a change in nearby rivers** is also causing Everest's unusual growth.

- ✓ The loss of landmass in the Arun River basin, which is 75 km away from Everest, is causing the world's tallest peak to rise by up to 2 mm a year.

Consequences of Isostatic Rebound

- **Changes in Sea Level**: As the land rebounds, local sea levels drop, which can lead to changes in coastlines, creating new land areas while submerging others in nearby regions (sometimes referred to as relative sea level changes).
- **Seismic Activity:** In some regions, the ongoing adjustment can induce earthquakes as the Earth's crust adjusts and faults are reactivated.
- **Effect on Water Bodies:** The rebound can alter water drainage patterns, resulting in the formation or modification of lakes and rivers.

Examples of isostatic rebound

1. Scandinavia: After the last ice age, Scandinavia experienced significant isostatic rebound due to the melting of the Scandinavian ice sheet. This process is still ongoing, and the land continues to rise. Rising Baltic Sea coastlines are a direct result of this rebound.
2. Hudson Bay: The Hudson Bay region in Canada is another example of isostatic rebound. The land has been rising since the retreat of the Laurentide ice sheet.

About Arun River (one of the few rivers which follows north-south flow)

- It is a transboundary river in the Himalayas, flowing through Tibet, Nepal, and India.
- It originates from the Tibet Autonomous Region of China (close to Mount Kailash), where it is known as the Phung Chu or Bum-chu River.
- After flowing through Nepal, it joins the Koshi River (sorrow of Bihar), which eventually merges into the Ganges in India.
- The cooperation between Nepal and India on **the Arun III Hydropower Project** is an example of bilateral collaboration in the energy sector.
- Changes in precipitation patterns due to global warming could impact the river's flow and increase the risk of **glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)**.

EnviStats India 2024: Environment Accounts

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the 7th consecutive issue of the publication "***EnviStats India 2024: Environment Accounts".***

About EnviStats India 2024

- The current publication covers four core thematic areas including: Energy Accounts, Ocean Accounts (for the first time), Soil Nutrient Index and Biodiversity.
  - ✓ First EnviStats were released in 2018 on recommendations of Sir Partha Dasgupta Committee, detailing the physical asset accounts of land cover, minerals, water and forests, at the state and national levels.
  - ✓ MoSPI released the 'Strategy for Environmental Economic Accounts in India: 2022-26'.
- It also includes several aspects like a country's natural resources, environmental degradation, and government efforts to manage these issues.
- It takes into consideration the SEEA (System of Environmental- Economic Accounting) Framework which is an agreed international framework for the compilation of the Environment Economic accounts.

Key Findings

- India emerged as world leader in energy transition.
- Mangroves coverage: has increased around 8% over the years 2013 to 2021.
- Protected area: There has been around 72% increase in the number and around 16% increase in area during 2000 to 2023.

- It also provides updated values of the Soil Nutrient Index, compiled using data from the Soil Health Card initiative for 2023-24.

International Energy Efficiency Hub

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister of India has approved India's membership to the Energy Efficiency Hub.

About International Energy Efficiency Hub

- Global platform dedicated to fostering collaboration and promoting energy efficiency worldwide with its secretariat at the International Energy Agency (IEA) secretariat in Paris, France.
- Established in 2020 as successor to the International Partnership for Energy Efficiency Cooperation (IPEEC), in which India was a member.
  - ✓ Germany in 2017, then President of the G20, proposed to establish the Energy Efficiency Hub as part of the G20's actions.
- Membership: 16 countries have joined the Hub, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.
- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (**BEE**), the statutory agency under the Ministry of Power, has been designated as the **implementing agency** for the Hub on behalf of India.
  - ✓ BEE was established in 2002 under the provisions of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001. Its primary objective is to reduce energy intensity in the Indian economy.

Modified Ecomark Scheme

In alignment with the Mission 'LiFE' (Lifestyle for Environment) Mission in 2021, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the New Ecomark Rules.

About Ecomark Scheme (replaces the Ecomark scheme of 1991).

- The scheme will encourage the demand for environment-friendly products aligning with the principles of 'LIFE', promote lower energy consumption, resource efficiency & circular economy
  - ✓ Ecomark is a voluntary and non-binding scheme which promotes labelling of household and consumer products based on the environmental and quality parameters.
- The scheme seeks to ensure accurate labelling and prevent misleading information about products with Strict Environmental Standards.
- As part of the Ecomark Rules, the notification has also spelt out a detailed criteria for 17 categories of products ranging from paints, cosmetics, batteries, edible oils, tea, coffee, toilet soaps to coir and paper.
- The scheme will be implemented by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)

WAZA recently suspended the membership of the Delhi Zoo over concerns about the treatment of its lone African elephant.

About WAZA (founded in 1935, Headquartered at Barcelona, Spain)

- It is a global non-profit organization representing zoos, aquariums, and wildlife parks worldwide.
- Mission: To promote the conservation of wildlife , To support the ethical and sustainable management of zoos and aquariums, To encourage education and public awareness about wildlife conservation, To foster cooperation among zoos and aquariums worldwide.

- In May 2024, Darjeeling Zoo also known as The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZP), West Bengal has achieved international recognition from **WAZA** for its successful conservation breeding programme (CBC) for snow leopards.
- In India, **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)** is established in 1992 to complement and strengthen the national effort in conservation of rich biodiversity of the country. Other objectives of this Authority include enforcing minimum standards and norms for upkeep and healthcare of animals in Indian zoos and to control mushrooming of unplanned and ill-conceived.

Living Planet Report 2024

WWF's 2024 Living Planet Report details an average 73% decline in wildlife populations since 1970.

✓ The Living Planet Report is a comprehensive biennial publication by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) that assesses the state of the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems, and the impact of human activity on the natural world.

Key Findings of Report

- Regionally, the steepest declines in monitored wildlife populations were recorded in Latin America and the Caribbean (-95%), Africa (-76%) and Asia–Pacific (-60%)
- Habitat degradation and loss, driven primarily by our food system, is the most reported threat in each region, followed by overexploitation, invasive species and disease.
  - ✓ The dual crises of nature loss and climate change are pushing the planet closer to dangerous and irreversible tipping points.
  - ✓ Food production is one of the main drivers of nature's decline: it uses 40% of all habitable land, is the leading cause of habitat loss, accounts for 70% of water use and is responsible for over a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions.
  - ✓ The Andhra Pradesh Community-Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) initiative is a strong example of how nature-positive food production can bring significant socio-economic benefits.
  - ✓ India's millet mission has been widely praised for its positive contributions.
- Global tipping points such as the dieback of the Amazon rainforest and the mass die-off of coral reefs, including the Great Barrier Reef, would create shockwaves far beyond the immediate area impacting food security and livelihoods.
- In India, the decline of three vulture species – white-rumped vulture, Indian vulture, and slender-billed vulture, has been alarming,
- Ecosystem-wise declines: Freshwater ecosystems: 85% decline >> Terrestrial ecosystems: 69% decline >> Marine ecosystems: 56% decline
- **Global Goals:** Despite international agreements like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Paris Agreement, current national commitments are insufficient to meet 2030 targets. Over half of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are off track.

Slag and Sedimentary rock formation

Geographers and Geologists have observed the creation of new geological formations, such as sedimentary rocks formed from slag, a by-product of the steelmaking industry.

Slag

- Slag, a byproduct of metallurgical processes, can be transformed into sedimentary rock through geological processes. Slag can be used as aggregate in concrete.

Slag to Sedimentary rock formation

- Slag generation: Slag is produced during metal smelting and refining processes.
- Deposition: Slag is deposited in a specific area, often near industrial sites or mining regions.
- Weathering: Slag undergoes chemical weathering, breaking down into smaller particles.
- Erosion: Weathered slag particles are transported away by natural agents (wind, water, or ice).
- Sedimentation: Slag particles settle and accumulate in a new location, such as a river delta or ocean floor.
- Compaction: Over time, sediment layers are compressed, forming a more solid mass.
- Cementation: Minerals precipitate out of solution, binding the sediment grains together.
- Lithification: The compacted and cemented sediment becomes sedimentary rock.

Types of Sedimentary Rocks Formed

- Claystone: Fine-grained, clay-rich rocks.
- Siltstone: Medium-grained, silt-rich rocks.
- Conglomerate: Coarse-grained, gravel-rich rocks.

Water Chestnut (goer)

An environmental change has led to declining production of Water chestnut in Kashmir.

About Water Chestnut (Goer)

- It is a vital income source for families around Wular Lake, one of Asia's largest freshwater lakes. It is known as "Singhara" in other parts of India.
  - ✓ In some regions, especially in the United States and Europe, Water chestnut is considered an **invasive species.** It disrupts the local ecosystem by blocking sunlight, reducing oxygen levels, and displacing native aquatic plants and animals.
- It is harvested during autumn, typically starting in late September. The edible kernel is peeled, dried, and ground into flour. It's widely consumed during festivals like Navaratri.
  - ✓ Dried outer shells are used as fuel in traditional Kashmiri fire pots (kangri) during winter.
- **Method of harvesting:** using boats, with protective footwear to avoid injuries from sharp barbed spines on the plants.
- **Appearance:** The plant has long, slender leaves that grow from a central stem. The tubers, which are the edible part, are round or oval-shaped and have a light brown or tan color.
- **Nutrition:** Water chestnuts are low in calories and fat, and a good source of vitamins and minerals, including vitamin C, potassium, and iron.

Northeast Monsoon

The northeast monsoon set in over Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, also impacting rest of the country.

About Northeast Monsoon (also known as the Retreating Monsoon)

- The Northeast Monsoon is a seasonal wind pattern that occurs in South Asia, primarily affecting the Indian subcontinent.

Key features

- Timing: The Northeast Monsoon typically begins in October and continues until December.
- Wind Direction: The winds shift from a southwest direction during the Southwest Monsoon to a northeast direction during the Northeast Monsoon.
- Rainfall: The Northeast Monsoon brings relatively less rainfall compared to the Southwest Monsoon, but it can still cause occasional showers or thunderstorms in certain regions and also prone to cyclones.

- ✓ One of the most devastating impacts of the Northeast Monsoon in recent years was the 2015 Chennai floods, where unusually high rainfall (Due to both the Northeast Monsoon and cyclonic depressions) led to widespread urban flooding, affecting millions.
- Temperature: The Northeast Monsoon is often associated with a decrease in temperature, particularly in northern India.
- Agricultural Importance: While the Northeast Monsoon brings less rainfall than the Southwest Monsoon, it is still important for agriculture in some parts of India. It can help to replenish groundwater levels and support winter/Rabi crops.

Regional Variations:

- Tamil Nadu: Receives the most rainfall during this period.
- Kerala: Experiences moderate rainfall, with some areas receiving over 200 mm.
- Andhra Pradesh: Receives significant rainfall, especially in the coastal regions.

Bushveld Igneous Complex

There is recently discovery of living microbes in a 2-billion-year-old rock from South Africa's Bushveld Igneous Complex.

About Bushveld Igneous Complex (BIC)

- It is one of the largest known layered mafic intrusions in the world located in South Africa, covering an area of approximately 66,000 square kilometers.
- The BIC formed over millions of years as magma slowly cooled and crystallized beneath the Earth's surface. The different layers of rock represent different stages of this cooling process.
- **Complex Composition:** It is composed of four distinct layers or "lobes," each featuring a variety of rocks like norite, anorthosite, and gabbro, formed from the slow cooling of magma.
  - ✓ These layers vary in thickness and composition, ranging from ultramafic rocks at the base to felsic rocks at the top.
- **Platinum Group Metals (PGMs):** The BIC is home to a variety of valuable mineral deposits, including platinum, chromium, vanadium, and iron. These deposits are economically significant and have contributed to the development of the South African mining industry.
  - ✓ The BIC contains approximately 75% of the world's platinum reserves. Platinum and its associated metals, such as palladium, rhodium, and iridium, are found in the Merensky Reef and the UG2 Layer.

Mining Dust and Carbon Capture

Alt Carbon, a Darjeeling based company is using crushed basaltic rock from mining to enhance carbon sequestration through a process called enhanced rock weathering (a geo-chemical process)

Concept & Working

- Mining dust often contains silicate minerals/Iron Ore Tailings/ Limestone and Dolostone (e.g., basalt or olivine) that chemically react with CO_2 when exposed to water and air. The CO_2 reacts with these minerals, forming stable carbonate minerals, which effectively sequester the carbon over long timescales.
  - ✓ **Carbon Dioxide Absorption**: The modified mining dust can then be used to capture CO2 directly from the atmosphere. This process, known as direct air capture (DAC), involves filtering air through the dust, which absorbs the CO2 molecules.
  - ✓ **Carbon Storage:** The captured CO2 can be stored underground or used for other purposes, such as producing synthetic fuels.
- **Spread on Land or Water:** Mining dust can be spread on agricultural land, forests, or even coastal waters, where natural CO_2 uptake occurs. The minerals react with CO_2 in the soil, enhancing carbon storage while

also releasing essential nutrients like magnesium and calcium into the soil, which can improve fertility and promote plant growth.

- **Carbon Capture Benefits:** Enhanced weathering could sequester a significant amount of CO_2 if scaled, with some studies estimating that spreading silicate rock dust across 2-3% of the world's croplands could sequester around 2-4 billion tons of CO_2 annually.

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)

Climatologists have issued a warning about the potential collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC).

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)

- It is a crucial system of ocean currents that plays a significant role in regulating Earth's climate. It is the Atlantic branch of the global ocean conveyor belt or Thermohaline circulation (THC-water temperature and salinity (density) differences).
- **Downwelling:** It acts like a giant conveyor belt, transporting warm water from the tropics to the North Atlantic, where it cools and sinks (a process called **deep water formation**). This sinking water then flows back towards the equator in deeper layers.

Importance of AMOC

- Climate Regulation: AMOC helps to redistribute heat around the globe, influencing regional and global climate patterns. It helps to moderate temperatures in Europe and North America.
- Nutrient Transport **(process called Upwelling)**: The circulation helps to transport nutrients from the deep ocean to the surface, supporting marine ecosystems.
- The collapse of the AMOC could have "devastating and irreversible" impacts, particularly on Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden).

Spraying Diamond Dust: A Geoengineering Method

A new finding proposes spraying diamond dust in the upper atmosphere as a geoengineering method to cool the Earth and combat global warming.

About Spraying Diamond Dust (Nanodiamond particles)

- This method is based on reflecting solar radiation back into space, an approach known as Solar Radiation Management (SRM).
  - ✓ SRM involves scattering reflective materials in the atmosphere to reflect sunlight and reduce the amount of heat that reaches the Earth's surface.
  - ✓ Besides diamonds, other proposed materials include sulfur dioxide, calcium carbonate, and sodium chloride. Each has varying degrees of reflectivity and risks.

Working

- Diamond Dust Preparation: Nanoscale diamond particles are created through various methods, such as chemical vapor deposition or detonation synthesis.
  - ✓ **Diamond** dust is composed of tiny carbon-based particles with unique reflective and thermal properties. Nanodiamonds, in particular, can scatter sunlight more effectively than other particles traditionally considered for SRM, like sulfate aerosols.
- Stratospheric Injection: Diamond dust is sprayed into the upper atmosphere (15-30 km altitude) using aircraft, balloons, or rockets.
  - ✓ **Nanodiamonds** are more chemically inert than traditional aerosols, meaning they could potentially remain in the stratosphere longer without breaking down.

- Solar Radiation Reflection: Diamond particles scatter and reflect sunlight, reducing the amount of solar radiation that reaches the Earth's surface.

Potential Benefits	Challenges and Concerns
• Global Temperature Reduction: Estimated 1-2°C decrease • Regional Climate Regulation: Helps stabilize regional climate patterns	• High costs and logistical challenges for large-scale deployment. • Lack of international agreements and regulatory frameworks

World's 1st Global Ecosystem Atlas

World's 1st global ecosystem atlas is launched at the 16th Conference of Parties (COP16-Colombia) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN-CBD).

About Global Ecosystem Atlas

- It was developed by the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), this atlas is a groundbreaking tool designed to map and monitor ecosystems worldwide.
- Monitoring these ecosystems is crucial for implementing **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, an international agreement designed to halt & reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.
- The Atlas uses advanced techniques, such as Earth observation, artificial intelligence and field data collections to fill the gaps in existing national ecosystem maps
  - ✓ Experts believe that over 55 per cent of the world's ecosystems have not been fully understood because of disorganised data sources and inconsistencies between countries.
- It is open-source, it would be freely accessible to all. This atlas compiles various **"spatial data products"** designed to represent ecosystems, sourced from reputable national, regional, and global databases.
- An example of the Atlas's impact is already visible in countries like **South Africa and Mozambique**. These neighbouring countries share ecosystems like savannas and coral reefs, and have long been involved in mapping efforts.

Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is an intergovernmental partnership that aims to improve the availability, access, and use of Earth observations for the benefit of society. It was founded in 2003 and is hosted by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Species In News

Swallowtail butterflies 	• A new study has revealed that the over exploitation of 25 medicinally valuable host plant species is endangering the swallowtail butterflies in the forest habitats of a region in Assam. • They are named for the characteristic tail-like extensions of the hindwings, although many species are tailless. • The swallowtail butterflies (Papilio) are found worldwide except in the Arctic. • **IUCN Status:** Some species are globally endangered. • The IUCN has designated India's Northeast as a **"Swallowtail- rich zone"** focusing on conservation efforts in this region to protect 69 species through habitat preservation and sustainable plant use.
Honey badger	• Recently, for the first time a honey badger has been captured on camera in the Terai East Forest Division (TEFD) of Uttarakhand.

	• It is also known as the Ratel, and is related to skunks, otters, ferrets, and other badgers. • Honey badgers are omnivorous and nocturnal mammals that belong to the weasel family. • They are found in parts of Africa and Asia. • **IUCN status:** Least Concern. • **Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972:** Schedule I
Halari donkeys 	• The endangered Halari donkeys, native to the Halar region of Gujarat, are considered to be intelligent animals which work closely with human beings. • They are considered endangered with a population fewer than 500. • They are white, larger, and more resilient compared to other donkey breeds. • Bharwad and Rabari pastoralists used them as pack animals during migration.
Nilgiri tahr 	• A newly colonised habitat of Nilgiri Tahr has been discovered in Pasumalai. • The Nilgiri tahr is a unique species of mountain ungulate endemic to the Nilgiri Hills and the southern portion of the Western and Eastern Ghats in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in southern India. • Nilgiri tahrs are stocky goats with short, coarse fur and a bristly mane. Males are larger and darker than females, with both sexes having curved horns. • They develop a light grey area on their backs, earning them the nickname “saddlebacks”. • **IUCN Status:** Endangered
Red Panda 	• The Red Panda Program of Darjeeling’s Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park has been selected as a finalist for the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) Conservation Award 2024. • It is primarily herbivorous, consuming bamboo, berries, acorns, and occasionally small mammals. • Lives in the mountainous forests of Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, and Nepal, with nearly 50% of its habitat in the Eastern Himalayas. • **IUCN Status:** Endangered, • **CITES:** Appendix I • **Wildlife Protection Act 1972**: Schedule I

Union Cabinet Approves Rs 1,000-Crore Fund to Boost Indian Space Start-Ups

The Union Cabinet has approved a Rs 1,000-crore venture capital (VC) fund aimed at supporting about 40 **space start-ups** over the next **five years.** This fund, **launched under the aegis of IN-SPACe**, is expected to attract private investment and drive innovation in India's growing space sector.

Supporting India's Emerging Space Entrepreneurs

- **Key initiatives**
  - **Pre-Incubation Entrepreneurship (PIE) Development Program:** The Indian government, through IN-SPACe, launched the PIE Development Program, for guiding startups from ideation to prototype development.
  - **Financial and regulatory support:**
    - ✓ The government has introduced tax incentives such as GST exemptions for satellite launches and income tax breaks for R&D.
    - ✓ Initiatives like the **Startup India Seed Fund, DRDO's Technology Development Fund, and Atal Innovation Mission** are providing critical financial support to space startups.
  - **World-class infrastructure:** The GIFT City in Gujarat is emerging as a global hub for space technology, offering regulatory benefits and world-class infrastructure.
  - **Collaborations:** Amazon Web Services (AWS) has launched its space accelerator programme in India, in collaboration with ISRO and IN-SPACe, selecting 24 startups to receive mentorship and up to $100,000 in credits.
  - **Incubation and mentorship:** The Space Technology Incubation Centre (STIC) offers startups access to advanced labs, funding opportunities, and mentorship.

What is IN-SPACe and its Proposal to Set-up a VC Fund for Start-ups?

- As part of the 4th 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' stimulus, the Union Finance Minister announced the creation of the **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe)** in **2020**.
- **IN-SPACe was set up as a single-window**, independent, nodal agency to authorise, promote and supervise space activities of private non-governmental entities (NGEs).
- Since its establishment, IN-SPACe has signed 45 MoUs with NGEs to support them in space activities.
- IN-SPACe has proposed a Rs.1000 crore VC fund **to support the growth of India's space economy, currently valued at S8.4 billion**, with a target **to reach $44 billion by 2033.**

Financial Implications of Establishing a VC Fund for Start-ups

- **The average deployment amount** could be Rs.150 - 250 crore per year, depending on the investment opportunities and fund requirements.
- **The indicative range of investment** is proposed to be Rs.10 - 60 Crore, contingent upon the stage of the company, its growth trajectory, and its potential impact on national space capabilities.

- **Indicative equity investment range could be:**
    - Growth stage: Rs.10 Crore - 30 Crore
    - Late growth stage: Rs.30 Crore - 60 Crore
    - Based on the above investment range, the fund is **expected to support approximately 40 startups.**
- It will serve as **an Alternative investment Fund under SEBI regulations**.

India AI Mission

Under its ambitious AI Mission, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has **relaxed s**ome provisions in its norms to procure **computing capacity** for AI solutions.

7 Key Features of India AI Mission:

- **India AI Compute Capacity:** This pillar will build a high-end scalable AI computing ecosystem *with over 10,000 GPU* to cater to the increasing demands from India's rapidly expanding AI start-ups and research ecosystem.
- **India AI Innovation Centre:** The Centre will undertake the development and deployment of indigenous Large Multimodal Models (LMMs) and **domain-specific** foundational models in critical sectors.
- **India AI Datasets Platform:** This will streamline access to quality non-personal datasets for AI Innovation.
- **India AI Application Development Initiative:** This will promote AI applications in critical sectors for the problem statements sourced from Central Ministries, State Departments, etc.
- **India AI Future Skills:** It is conceptualised to mitigate barriers to entry into AI programmes and will increase AI courses in undergraduate, Masters level, and Ph.D. programmes.
- **India AI Startup Financing:** To support and accelerate deep-tech AI startups and provide them with streamlined access to funding to enable futuristic AI projects.
- **Safe & Trusted AI:** To enable the implementation of responsible AI projects including the development of indigenous tools and frameworks.

Changes Introduced by the MeitY under its AI Mission

- **Key changes include:**
    - **Lowered annual turnover requirements:**
        - ✓ For primary bidders, it has been reduced from Rs 100 crore to Rs 50 crore,
        - ✓ For non-primary members, it has been halved to Rs 25 crore.
        - ✓ **This adjustment aims to include more start-ups in the bidding process.**
    - **Reduced computing capacity requirements:** For instance, the requirement for FP16 (half precision) performance has been cut from 300 TFLOPS to 150 TFLOPS, and AI compute memory has been reduced from 40 GB to 24 GB.
    - **Experience criteria:** Companies must now demonstrate prior experience in providing AI services, including the number of clients served and minimum billing of Rs 10 lakh over the past three financial years.
    - **Local sourcing mandate:** Bidders are required to source components for cloud services from Class I or Class II local suppliers, **promoting the 'Make in India' initiative**.

- **Data sovereignty:** All AI services must be delivered from data centers within India, ensuring that user data remains within the country's borders.

- **Significance of these changes:** These changes are expected to facilitate greater participation from smaller firms, enhancing the AI landscape in India.

Neutrino Fog

Recently, the LUX-ZEPLIN (LZ) experiment emphasized that as the search for dark matter progresses, the challenge posed by neutrino fog is becoming increasingly significant.

About Neutrino Fog

- The concept of Neutrino Fog refers to the **hypothetical effect** that vast amounts of neutrinos in the universe could obscure/ limit our ability to detect or interact with certain aspects of the cosmos.
  - ✓ Neutrinos are nearly massless, electrically neutral particles that interact extremely weakly with matter, which makes them difficult to detect.
  - ✓ Despite their weak interactions, they are one of the most abundant particles in the universe, produced in large quantities by stars, supernovae, and other astrophysical processes.

Key Points about Neutrino Fog:

- **Weak Interactions:** Neutrinos only interact through the weak nuclear force & gravity, making them capable of passing through matter almost unhindered.
  - ✓ This "fog" refers to the idea that they could obscure other signals or phenomena, similar to how light fog on Earth might obscure vision.
- **Cosmic Neutrino Background:** Just like the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) is the remnant radiation from the Big Bang, there is a theorized Cosmic Neutrino Background (CvB).

✓ These relic neutrinos from the early universe may form a "fog" of sorts, preventing us from gaining direct insights into certain cosmic phenomena.

LUX-ZEPLIN (LZ) experiment

- Physics experiment designed to search for dark matter particles. It's located deep underground at the Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) in Lead, South Dakota, USA.

Dark Matter

- It is a hypothetical form of matter that makes up about 27% of the universe's mass-energy content but remains invisible and does not emit, absorb, or reflect light.
- Despite its invisibility, its existence is inferred through its gravitational effects on visible matter, such as stars and galaxies.

Thermobaric Weapons

Russia's use of thermobaric weapons in Ukraine has drawn significant attention due to their devastating effects.

About Thermobaric Weapons (also known as "vacuum bombs" or "enhanced blast weapons,")

- Thermobaric weapons, also known as fuel-air explosives (FAEs) are a type of explosive device that uses oxygen from the surrounding air to generate a high-temperature explosion.
- Unlike conventional explosives that contain both fuel and oxidizer, thermobaric bombs release a fuel cloud, which, when ignited, causes a high-temperature explosion.
- This explosion generates a blast wave of immense pressure, followed by a rapid vacuum effect as the oxygen in the vicinity is consumed.
  - ✓ This blast overpressure can cause severe destruction, especially in confined spaces like tunnels or buildings.

- ✓ **Russian "Father of All Bombs" (FOAB)**: Claimed to be the most powerful thermobaric bomb, with a blast yield reportedly four times stronger than the U.S. MOAB.
- ✓ **U.S. GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB):** Often referred to as the "Mother of All Bombs," this is one of the largest non-nuclear bombs in the U.S. arsenal and operates on a similar fuel-air explosive principle.

- There are no international laws specifically banning their use, but if a country uses them to target civilian populations in built-up areas, schools or hospitals, then it could be convicted of a war crime under the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.

Fluorescent Nanodiamonds (FNDs)

Recent study demonstrated *spinning FNDs* at ultra-high speeds, to test their limits in physics, highlighting potential applications in both theoretical and practical fields.

About FNDs

- FNDs are tiny diamonds that emit light when exposed to certain wavelengths of light. This phenomenon is known as fluorescence.

Key features

- Fluorescence: FNDs emit light of a different wavelength than the light they absorb, making them visible under certain conditions.
- Photostability: They are highly resistant to photobleaching, meaning they do not lose their fluorescence over time even when exposed to intense light.
- Biocompatibility: FNDs are generally biocompatible, making them suitable for use in biological and medical applications.
- Small size: Their nanoscale size allows them to penetrate cells and tissues, making them useful for imaging and sensing.

Applications

- Bioimaging: FNDs can be used as fluorescent probes to visualize cells, tissues, and biological processes.
- Drug delivery: FNDs can be used to deliver drugs to specific cells or tissues.
- Quantum computing: FNDs are being explored as potential quantum bits (qubits) for quantum computing.
- Photonics: FNDs can be used in various photonic applications, such as lasers and optical sensors.

Charon

The gases carbon dioxide and hydrogen peroxide were detected on Pluto's largest moon, 'Charon'.

About Charon (Pluto's largest moon)

- Size: Some astronomers consider them a "double planet" system rather than a planet-moon system. Charon is about half the size of Pluto.
- Charon orbits Pluto in a synchronous rotation, meaning that it always keeps the same face towards Pluto. (a phenomenon called mutual tidal locking)
- Charon has a diverse surface with mountains, plains, craters, and possibly even cryovolcanoes (volcanoes that erupt icy materials). While Pluto has a thin atmosphere, Charon lacks a significant atmosphere.
- **New Horizons Mission:** NASA's New Horizons spacecraft conducted a flyby of the Pluto-Charon system in 2015, providing detailed images and data about Charon for the first time.

Pluto

- Pluto, previously the ninth planet, was reclassified as a dwarf planet in 2006 after the discovery of similar objects beyond Neptune in the Kuiper Belt.

Kuiper Belt

- The Kuiper Belt is a region of space located beyond the planet Neptune, extending from approximately 30 to 55 astronomical units (AU) from the Sun.
- It is home to a vast collection of icy bodies and dwarf planets, including Pluto, and is considered part of the outer Solar System.

Nobel Prize in Chemistry

2024 Nobel Prize for chemistry shared by (American scientist) **David Baker** "**for computational protein design**" along with (British scientist) **Demis Hassabis and** (American scientist) **John Jumper "for protein structure prediction."**

Why is Work on Protein Important?

- **The role played by proteins:**
  - Proteins are **vital for life** and participate in nearly all biological processes. **For example:** Haemoglobin transports oxygen and Insulin aids in glucose absorption.
- **Significance of protein structure:**
  - Made of long chains of 20 different amino acids, **their unique sequences determine their structure and function.** Understanding its shape is key to knowing how it works.
- **Challenges in determining protein structure:** Historically, determining protein structures has been slow, often taking months or years using x-ray crystallography.

What the 2024 Chemistry Nobel was Awarded For?

- **For creating innovative tool - AlphaFold:**
  - **AlphaFold** is an **AI tool** created by Hassabis and Jumper that accurately predicts protein structures in a fraction of the time.
  - It utilises known amino acid sequences to make fast and reliable predictions.
- **For designing new proteins:**
  - Baker created **Rosetta software** to predict protein structures.
  - He used Rosetta to reverse-engineer protein design, allowing the creation of new proteins by entering desired structures.
  - David Baker developed **synthetic proteins** that do not exist in nature.

MicroRNAs

The 2024 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to **Victor Ambros & Gary Ruvkun** for the discovery of microRNA and its role in post-transcriptional gene regulation.

About microRNAs (miRNAs)

- miRNAs are small, non-coding RNA molecules (do not code for proteins) that play a crucial role in regulating gene expression in organisms.
  - ✓ CRISPR/Cas9: Genome-editing technologies that can be used to manipulate miRNA genes to study their functions in detail.
- They are single-stranded RNA molecules, and their small size distinguishes them from other types of RNAs like messenger RNA (mRNA) and ribosomal RNA (rRNA).
- miRNAs are conserved across a wide range of species, from plants to animals. Their conserved nature highlights their fundamental role in regulating gene expression throughout evolution.

Functions & Applications of miRNAs

1. **Development:** miRNAs play a critical role in various developmental processes, such as cell differentiation, organogenesis, and growth.

- ✓ Cell Differentiation: miRNAs help to determine the fate of a cell by regulating the expression of genes involved in cell differentiation.

2. **Metabolism:** miRNAs regulate metabolic pathways, including those involved in energy production, nutrient uptake, and waste removal.
3. **Biomarkers:** miRNAs are promising biomarkers for the early detection and diagnosis of diseases. They can be detected in body fluids, including blood and urine.
4. **Disease:** Dysregulation of miRNAs has been implicated in a variety of human diseases, including cancer, heart disease, and neurodegenerative disorders.
   - ✓ let-7 family: One of the first discovered miRNAs, important in regulating cell differentiation and linked to cancer suppression.

Working of miRNAs

1. Transcription: miRNAs are transcribed from DNA as precursor molecules called primary miRNAs (pri-miRNAs).
2. Processing: Pri-miRNAs are processed into smaller precursor molecules called pre-miRNAs.
3. Maturation: Pre-miRNAs are further processed into mature miRNAs, which are typically 18-25 nucleotides long.
4. Target Recognition: Mature miRNAs bind to specific target messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules, often through complementary base pairing.
5. Gene Silencing: When a miRNA binds to its target mRNA, it can lead to gene silencing by either inhibiting translation or promoting mRNA degradation.

Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs)

John Hopfield and **Geoffrey Hinton** won the 2024 Nobel Prize for physics for "foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks."

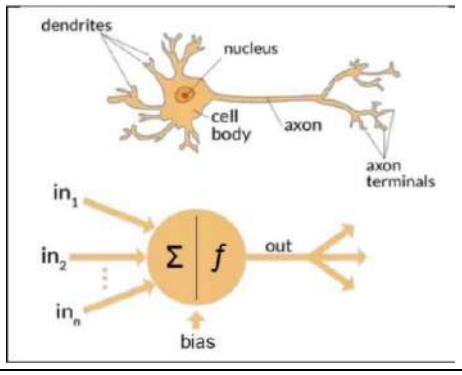
About Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs)

- ANNs are **a subset of machine learning** and an **essential component of artificial intelligence (AI)**, designed to mimic the way the human brain processes information.
- These are computational models inspired by the structure and function of the human brain.
- They are composed of interconnected nodes, called neurons, that process information. ANNs are capable of learning from data and making predictions or decisions.
- ANNs excel at learning patterns and relationships from large datasets, making them ideal for complex tasks. Once trained, neural networks can adapt to new tasks without being explicitly programmed.

Components of an ANN

- Neurons: The basic units of an ANN, similar to biological neurons. They receive inputs, process them, and produce an output.
- Synapses: The connections between neurons, representing the strength of the relationship between them.
- Layers: ANNs are typically organized into layers:
  1. Input Layer: Receives the input data.
  2. Hidden Layers: Process the input data and extract features.
  3. Output Layer: Produces the final output or prediction.

Biological Neuron	Artificial Neuron
Cell Nucleus (Soma)	Node
Dendrites	Input
Synapse	interconnections
Axon	Output



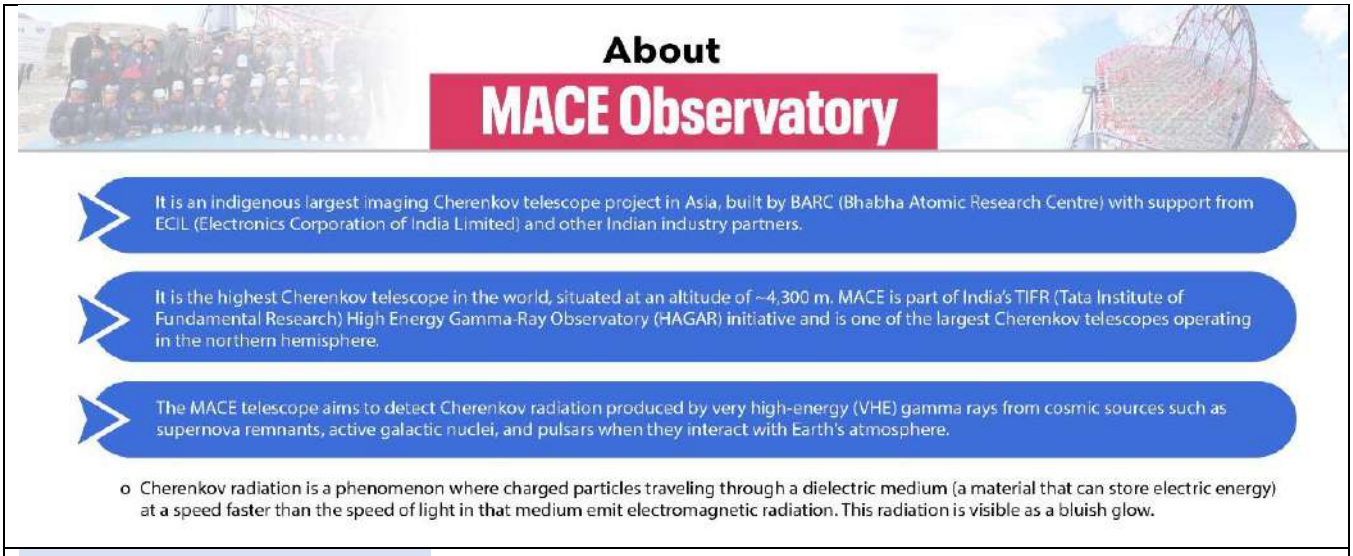
Applications of ANNs:

1. Image Recognition: Identifying objects, faces (In Facial Recognition Technology), and scenes in images.
2. Natural Language Processing: Machine translation, sentiment analysis, and text generation.
3. Recommendation Systems: Suggesting products or content based on user preferences.
4. Medical Diagnosis: Analyzing medical images, predicting diseases and personalized medicine.
5. Financial Forecasting: Predicting stock prices and market trends.
6. Autonomous Vehicles: Enabling self-driving cars to perceive and navigate the environment.

Major Atmospheric Cherenkov Experiment (MACE) Observatory

The Major Atmospheric Cherenkov Experiment (MACE) Observatory has been inaugurated at Hanle, Ladakh.

✓ Hanle is an ideal location for such observatories due to its clear skies, minimal light pollution, and dry air, which is critical for Cherenkov radiation detection.



Significance of MACE Observatory

- It will advance India's role in cosmic-ray research and study high-energy gamma rays to better understand the universe's energetic events like supernovae, black holes, and gamma-ray bursts.
- The data collected by MACE will be shared with the international scientific community, fostering collaborations with other Cherenkov experiments like H.E.S.S. (High Energy Stereoscopic System in Namibia), MAGIC (Major Atmospheric Gamma Imaging Cherenkov Telescopes in Spain), and VERITAS (Very Energetic Radiation Imaging Telescope Array System in USA).

Applications of Cherenkov Radiation

- Nuclear Physics: Used to detect and study high-energy particles, such as those produced in nuclear reactors or particle accelerators.
- Astronomy: Used to detect neutrinos, which are elusive particles that rarely interact with matter.
- Medicine: Used in Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans to detect the decay of radioactive isotopes.
- Security: Used in radiation detectors to identify nuclear materials.

X-band Radar

The Union Ministry of Earth Sciences approved the installation of an X-band radar in Wayanad to improve monitoring and prediction of weather conditions.

About X-band Radar

- A type of radar that operates in the X-band of the electromagnetic spectrum. This band covers frequencies between 8 and 12 gigahertz (GHz).

- ✓ Radar stands for 'Radio Detection and Ranging'. The device uses radio waves to determine the distance, velocity, and physical characteristics of objects around the device.

Characteristics

- High Resolution: It has a relatively high resolution, meaning it can detect and track small objects with greater accuracy than lower frequency radars.
- Short Range: Due to its high frequency, X-band radar has a shorter range compared to lower frequency radars. This makes it suitable for applications that require shorter detection ranges, such as air traffic control and weather radar.
- Less Affected by Rain: It is less affected by rain than lower frequency radars, making it more reliable in inclement weather conditions.

Applications of X-band Radars

- Air Traffic Control: widely used to track aircraft & ensure safe and efficient air traffic operations.
- Weather Radar: used to detect and track precipitation, such as rain, snow, and hail.
  - ✓ For instance, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) uses X-band radars for detailed weather monitoring in metro cities.
- Military Applications: used for target acquisition, missile guidance, and electronic warfare.
  - ✓ India's Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system and USA's THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) systems use X-band radar for early warning and tracking.
- Security: used to detect intruders and monitor borders.
- **Space (Earth Observation Satellites):** used in Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) systems for Earth observation
  - ✓ India's RISAT (Radar Imaging Satellite) series uses X-band radars for high-resolution imaging and disaster monitoring.

Biopolymers

India's first demonstration facility for Biopolymers inaugurated near Pune.

About Biopolymers

- These are natural polymers with large molecules composed of repeating structural units derived from biological sources. They form the fundamental building blocks of living organisms.
- Biopolymers have more complex structures than synthetic polymers therefore they are more active in vivo. Biopolymers are eco-friendly alternatives to synthetic polymers (plastics), as they are often biodegradable and derived from renewable resources.
- They are decomposed by the processes named oxidation (mainly reaction with oxygen), hydrolysis (decomposition by water) or by some enzymes.
  - ✓ Many biopolymers are biodegradable, meaning they can break down into non-toxic byproducts (such as water, carbon dioxide, and biomass). They help reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with conventional plastic production.

Major Types of Biopolymers

- Proteins: Composed of amino acids, proteins are essential for various biological functions, including enzymes, hormones, and structural components.
  - ✓ Example: **Collagen** is found in connective tissues of animals, used in medical applications like wound dressings and tissue engineering.
- Nucleic Acids: DNA and RNA are nucleic acids composed of nucleotides. They store and transmit genetic information.
- Polysaccharides: Made of monosaccharides (simple sugars), polysaccharides serve as energy storage molecules and structural components. Examples include starch, cellulose, and glycogen.

- ✓ Starch is derived from plants like corn, potatoes, and wheat. It is often used in packaging materials, adhesives, and biodegradable films.

Applications of Biopolymers

- Biodegradable Plastics: To create biodegradable plastics, reducing environmental pollution. Used to strengthen soil, rehabilitate drylands, and fight against desertification.
- Medical Materials: Biopolymers like collagen and gelatin are used in various medical applications, such as drug delivery, tissue engineering, and sutures.
- Food Industry: Biopolymers (like chitosan and alginate) are used as thickeners, emulsifiers, and gelling agents in the food industry to increase the shelf life of food products.
- Industrial Applications like in textiles, cosmetics, packaging, and adhesives.

Copper Zinc Tin Sulfide (CZTS) Nanoparticles

Scientists have developed an efficient photocatalyst that can degrade **sulfamethoxazole,** a broad-spectrum antibiotic to less hazardous chemicals and reduce health and environmental concerns associated with antibiotic contamination.

About Copper zinc tin sulfide nanoparticles (CZTS)

- The team synthesized copper zinc tin sulfide nanoparticles and CZTS-tungsten disulfide composite.
  - ✓ The composite is made from earth-abundant, inexpensive, and non-toxic components using a hydrothermal reaction involving zinc chloride, copper chloride, tin chloride, and tungsten disulfide.
- CZTS nanoparticles are a class of semiconductor materials with promising applications in solar cells, photodetectors, and other optoelectronic devices.

How it can be used

- Photocatalytic Degradation: CZTS nanoparticles can act as photocatalysts under sunlight irradiation. This means they can degrade organic pollutants, including antibiotics, into simpler, less harmful substances.
- Antimicrobial Properties: Certain CZTS nanoparticles have intrinsic antimicrobial properties, which can help to kill or inhibit the growth of bacteria. This could be useful in water treatment (80% radical scavenging efficiency) or medical applications.
- Sensor Development: CZTS-based sensors can be developed to detect and monitor antibiotic contamination in water or soil. These sensors could provide early warning of pollution and help in remediation efforts.

Mechazilla

SpaceX successfully landed its Starship rocket using a new structure called “Mechazilla.”

About Mechazilla

- It is a term used to describe SpaceX's tower-based rocket-catching system designed to catch the company's reusable rocket stages, particularly the Super Heavy booster and potentially the Starship, during landing.
- Mechazilla aims to catch the rocket mid-air, eliminating the need for complex landing systems like legs. The term "Mechazilla" was coined by SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, likening the tower's structure and mechanism to a robotic Godzilla.
- It is custom-built to catch the heaviest flying object ever made, weighing about 250 tons.
- It is a 400-ft rocket-catching structure at SpaceX’s Starbase in South Texas.
- It is equipped with two mechanical arms, nicknamed “chopsticks,” designed to catch the Super Heavy booster midair.
- By enabling quick refurbishment and reuse, Mechazilla significantly lowers launch costs and enhances the sustainability of space missions.

Future Prospects of Mechazilla Technology

- Mechazilla could allow for **multiple rockets launches in a single day**, pushing the boundaries of how quickly rockets can be reused.
- This would be crucial for commercial space operations as well as for ambitious missions like the **colonization of Mars**.
- Mechazilla will revolutionize how spaceports function, making **low-Earth orbit and deep-space exploration** more accessible.
- Mechazilla can spur further development in the **commercial space industry**, encouraging more private companies to participate in space ventures like satellite deployment, space tourism, and asteroid mining.

Smart Insulin: NNC2215

Scientists have developed real time responding smart insulin, named NNC2215.

About NNC2215

- It is the insulin that auto-adjusts its activity based on blood sugar levels, reducing the risk of hypoglycemia. The newly developed insulin named NNC2215 comprises two parts: a ring-shaped structure, and a molecule with a similar shape to glucose called a glucoside.
- It increases activity by up to 3.2 times at higher glucose concentrations and reduces activity at low blood glucose concentrations.
- In animal models, NNC2215 demonstrated a protective effect against hypoglycemia, maintaining average blood sugar levels.
- Its glucose-sensitive insulin response resulted in less severe drops in blood sugar compared to traditional insulin degludec.

Working

- When blood sugar levels are low, It is engineered with macrocycles that bind to glucose, allowing it to sense changes in blood glucose levels to prevent further lowering of blood sugar.
- This glucose-binding ability enables it to adjust its insulin activity accordingly, providing more effective glycemic control. Thus, helping bring blood sugar levels down to safer ranges.

Moonlight Programme

The European Space Agency (ESA) launched its Moonlight Lunar Communications and Navigation Services (LCNS) programme at the International Astronautical Congress.

About Moonlight Programme

- It will consist of a constellation of five lunar satellites. Four of these satellites will be dedicated to communication, while one will handle navigation. These satellites will reportedly enable data transfer over 4,00,000 kilometres between the Earth and the Moon.
- This system would function similarly to GPS on Earth but would serve the lunar environment, enabling better coordination of robotic and manned missions, including moon bases and resource exploration.
- The satellites will be strategically positioned to prioritise coverage of the lunar south pole, an area of particular interest for future missions
  - ✓ **ISRO** has expressed interest in future lunar missions following the success of Chandrayaan-3. India could potentially collaborate with ESA's Moonlight Programme for communication and navigation services in its upcoming lunar missions.

Key Objectives

- **Communication**: Establishing a reliable and high-speed communication network between the Moon and Earth, as well as between lunar rovers and landers.
- **Navigation**: Providing precise navigation services for lunar missions, enabling accurate landing and exploration of the lunar surface.
- **Scientific Data**: Supporting scientific research on the Moon by facilitating the transmission of data back to Earth.
- **Commercial Applications**: Enabling commercial activities on the Moon, such as mining and tourism. Countries and private companies are exploring the potential for extracting resources like water ice and helium-3 from the Moon. Moonlight will provide the necessary support for these activities, enabling precise operation.

Space Docking Experiment (SPADEX)

Hyderabad-based company handed over two 400 kg class satellites to ISRO, as a part of the Space Docking Experiment planned by the space agency later this year.

About Space Docking Experiment (SPADEX)

- ✓ It's a mission designed to test and demonstrate the technology required for autonomous rendezvous and docking of two spacecraft ("Chaser" and "Target") in orbit.
- ✓ Rendezvous: The "Chaser" satellite autonomously approaches the "Target" satellite.
- ✓ **Docking** refers to the process of joining two space vehicles together while they are in orbit around the Earth or another celestial body. This is a complex maneuver that requires precision, advanced guidance systems, and autonomous control technologies.
- ✓ The history of docking systems dates back to the Cold War when the Soviet Union achieved the first successful docking in space.

Objectives

- ✓ Technological Demonstration (TD): To showcase India's capabilities in autonomous docking technology. SPADEX aims to develop technologies for future missions such as refueling satellites, repairing satellites in orbit, and even creating a space station (Bhartiya Antriksh Station or Indian Space Station by 2035).
- ✓ Future Missions: To pave the way for future missions like the Gaganyaan human spaceflight program and the proposed Indian Space Station.
- ✓ In-Orbit Servicing: To explore the potential for in-orbit servicing of satellites, which could extend their lifespan and reduce space debris.
- ✓ Docking capabilities will also allow India to participate in international space missions that require spacecraft from different countries to dock in space, such as potential collaborations with NASA, ESA, or Russia.
- ✓ **International Space Station (ISS)** regularly uses docking technology to allow different spacecraft, such as NASA's Dragon or Russia's Soyuz, to dock for crew transfer and resupply missions.
- ✓ **NASA's Artemis missions** to the Moon will involve docking spacecraft, including the **Orion crew module and the Lunar Gateway space station.**
- ✓ China has developed docking technology for its **Tiangong Space Station**, allowing different modules and spacecraft to dock.

E. coli

E. coli outbreak in the U.S. has caused the death of one individual and hospitalization of several others.

- ✓ More than 500 outbreaks of diarrhoeal diseases due to E. coli were reported across India in 2023, according to the National Centre for Disease Control.

About E. coli

- It is a Gram-negative, rod-shaped bacterium commonly found in the lower intestine of warm-blooded organisms (healthy people and animals).

✓ Most strains of E. coli are harmless, but some can cause serious foodborne illness.

✓ E. coli is used to produce insulin, growth hormones, and vaccines in the pharmaceutical industry. The bacterium's simple genetics and rapid growth make it ideal for laboratory use.

✓ **Ganga Action Plan** and other river cleaning projects in India often measure E. coli levels as a key indicator of pollution levels and the effectiveness of water treatment efforts.

✓ The most familiar strains of E. coli that make you sick do so by producing a toxin called **Shiga**.

Beneficial strains	Pathogenic (Harmful) strains
✓ Help maintain gut health ✓ Produce vitamins (K and B12) ✓ Support immune system	✓ E. coli O157:H7 (food poisoning) ✓ Uropathogenic E. coli (UTIs) ✓ Enterotoxigenic E. coli (traveler's diarrhea)

✓ **Common Symptoms:** Infections can result in diarrhea (often bloody), urinary tract infections (UTIs), stomach cramps, fever, and nausea.

✓ Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS): In severe cases, particularly with the O157 strain, HUS can occur, leading to kidney failure and death.

✓ **Transmission:** Spread through contaminated food (Uncooked or undercooked meat (especially beef)), water, and contact with fecal matter from infected humans or animals.

✓ **Treatment:** Most E. coli infections are self-limiting and resolve on their own without treatment. However, The cornerstone of treatment for E. coli-related diarrhea is fluid replacement to prevent dehydration.

✓ The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is working on creating a network of 34 microbiology labs across the country that will test food products for 10 pathogens, including **E.coli, salmonella, and listeria**.

CULTURE

200 Years of Kittur Vijayotsava

The Department of Post released a commemorative stamp at Kittur Fort to mark the 200th anniversary of Kittur Vijayotsava.

Rani Chennamma

- Born in 1778, in Kakati, a small village near Belagavi district of Karnataka, Rani Chennamma was the Queen of Kittur, formerly a princely state in present-day Karnataka.
- Chennamma's father was Dhulappa Desai and her mother's name was Padmavati. She belonged to the Lingayat community. She married Raja Mallasarja of the Desai family at the age of 15.
- Chennamma's husband died in 1816, leaving her with a son. This was followed by her son's death in 1824.
- Following the death of her husband and son, Rani Chennamma adopted Shivalingappa in the year 1824 and made him heir to the throne.
- The British did not recognise the new heir and notified Kittur to accept British control.
- In the first round of war, during October 1824, British forces lost heavily and St John Thackeray, collector and political agent, was killed in the war.
- However, the British attacked once again and captured Chennamma and imprisoned her at **Bailhongal Fort**, where she died in 1829.

Raja Ravi Varma

- Raja Ravi Varma was commemorated on his death anniversary on October 2.
- Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) was a great Indian painter and artist. He was born in an aristocratic family in **Kilimanoor palace**, in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore.
- Often referred to as the **father of modern Indian art,** Varma fused two styles together: European art's technical and aesthetic knowledge, and the emotional sensibilities and storytelling from Indian art.
- He was famous for his oil portrait paintings and narrative paintings of Indian history, mythology, and paintings of Gods, which he recreated from historical sources, like Hindu epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Puranas.
- In 1894, he established the **Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press**. He was notable for making affordable lithographs of his paintings available to the public.
- His lithographs increased the involvement of common people with fine arts and defined artistic tastes among the common people.
- **Lithography** is a printing process that uses a flat stone or metal plate on which the image areas are worked using a greasy substance so that the ink will stick to them, while the non-image areas are made ink-repellent
- His 1873 painting, **Nair Lady Adorning Her Hair**, won Varma prestigious awards including Governor's Gold Medal when it was presented in the Madras Presidency, and Certificate of Merit at an exhibition in Vienna.
- In 1904, the British colonial government awarded Varma with the **Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal**. In 2013, a crater on the planet Mercury was named in his honour.
- His **most famous works** include Damayanti Talking to a Swan, Shakuntala Looking for Dushyanta and Shantanu & Matsyagandha.

Sohrai Painting

- The Indian Prime Minister recently presented a Sohrai painting to the Russian President during the BRICS summit.

- Sohrai Painting is a folk/tribal painting tradition that is mostly practised by women of different indigenous communities native to the villages of Hazaribagh region of Jharkhand.
- These practitioners belong to Kurmi, Santal, Munda, Oraon, Agaria, Ghatwal ethnic groups among others.
- The traditional term '**Soh' or 'Soro' means to drive away and 'Rai' means a stick**.
- Sohrai art is believed to have its origin in ancient rock art form practised by the native people of this region during the **Meso-chalcolithic period** or even the **late Stone Age**.
- The paintings include motifs such as animals, flowers, plants, geometric figures, and representations of Shiva depicted in the form of Pashupati (lord of the animals).
- The paintings depict a **matriarchal tradition** in which the art form is passed down as a legacy to daughters by their mothers; likewise, one of the key topics of these paintings is the mother-child bond.
- The festival is **celebrated twice a year**. **Once it coincides with Diwali** and is celebrated on Amavasya (new moon) in the Hindu month of Karthik (October-November) for three days after the heavy Indian monsoons, when the paddy fields are ready to be harvested.
- It is also celebrated during **Poush Sankranti** in January, coinciding with the harvest of Rabi crops in the winter season.
- Natural earth ochres are used in the paintings. Red ochre or Geruamitti, Yellow ochre or Pila mitti, manganese or powdered coal or Kali Mitti, and White Clay or Dudhi/Charak mitti are the four major colours used.
- The women who paint Sohrai art also paint another form of wall mural called **Khovar**. While Sohrai is linked to harvest Khovar relates to marriages. The word Kho means cave and Var means a bridal couple.

Bharatiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh

- The President of India recently attended an event on the completion of 75 years of Bharatiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh (BAJSS).
- BAJSS was established in 1948 by Amritlal Vithaldas Thakkar, popularly known as Thakkar Bapa.
- **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** was designated as the **Founder-President of BAJSS**.
- BAJSS works on issues like poverty, illiteracy and poor health prevalent in the tribal society. It also works for the welfare and empowerment of girls and women.

Amritlal Vithaldas Thakkar

- He was born in 1869 in the Bhavnagar district of Gujarat.
- He spent his entire life working towards the upliftment of the marginalized. He founded a school for the children of sweepers and implemented a scheme for making them debt-free.
- In 1909, he became a member of the **Depressed Classes Mission**, and four years later, in 1914, he became a member of the **Hind Sevak Samaj (Servants of India Society)**.
- Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, he joined the Indian Independence Movement in 1915. He played a crucial role during the negotiations of the **Poona Pact**.
- In 1918, he also played an important role in presenting the Compulsory Primary Education Bill to the Bombay Legislative Council.
- He was one of the **General Secretaries of the Harijan Sevak Sang**, an organization founded by Gandhiji in 1932 that focused on the rights of the marginalized sections of society.
- He also authored the book, **Tribes of India**, published in 1950.

National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)

- The Union Ministry of Culture is planning to revive and re-launch the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) and is considering the formation of an autonomous body to help preserve ancient texts in India.

- NMM was established in 2003 by the **Ministry of Culture**.
- India possesses an estimate of ten million manuscripts. These cover a variety of themes, textures and aesthetics, scripts, languages, calligraphies, illuminations and illustrations.
- The Mission has the mandate of identifying, documenting, conserving and making accessible the manuscript heritage of India.
- Presently, NMM is a part of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts. The new body, likely to be named the National Manuscripts Authority, will be an autonomous entity under the Ministry of Culture.
- The National Manuscripts Mission (NMM) has prepared metadata for 5.2 million manuscripts and digitized over 300,000 titles, but only one-third have been uploaded.
- There are issues with mismatches between the digitized metadata and the actual manuscripts, which are currently being corrected.
- Of the nearly 130,000 manuscripts uploaded, only 70,000 are accessible for viewing due to the lack of an access policy, discouraging private owners who hold about 80% of India's manuscripts from sharing them.

Classical Language Status For Five Languages

The Union Cabinet recently accorded classical language status to **Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Pali, and Prakrit**.

Classification of Classical Languages

- The guidelines for declaring a language as Classical are:
    - High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.
    - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
    - A literary tradition that is original and not borrowed from another speech community.
    - The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Benefits Provided to a Classical Language

- Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages.
- A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages is set up.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) is requested, to start with at least, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages in the Central Universities.
- The UGC also awards research projects for promoting these languages.
- For instance, **three central universities** were established in 2020 through an Act of Parliament for promotion of **Sanskrit language**.
- The **Central Institute of Classical Tamil** was set up to facilitate the translation of ancient Tamil texts, and offer courses in Tamil.
- To enhance the study and preservation of classical languages, the **Centres for Excellence** for studies in **Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia** were also set up.

Impact

- The inclusion of languages as classical language will create significant employment opportunities, particularly in academic and research fields.
- Additionally, the preservation, documentation, and digitization of ancient texts of these languages will generate jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media.

Bharatiya Kala Mahotsav

- The President of India inaugurated the first edition of Bharatiya Kala Mahotsav at Rashtrapati Nilayam, Secunderabad.

- The eight-day-long festival was organised by Rashtrapati Nilayam in collaboration with the Ministry of Development of the North-East Region and the Ministry of Culture.
- The festival aims to present the rich and diverse cultural heritage of North-Eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura before the visitors.
- It is also an opportunity to promote cultural exchange, as it can act as a bridge between the North-East and Southern parts of the country.

Rashtrapati Nilayam

- **Rashtrapati Nilayam** (literally the "President's House") is the official winter retreat of the President of India located in **Secunderabad**.
- It is one of the three Presidential retreats in India. The other two are in **Delhi and Shimla**.
- Originally called the **Residency House**, it was constructed in **1860** by **Nizam Nazir-ud-Dowla**.
- After the Hyderabad state's integration into Indian Union (after Operation Polo) in 1948, it became the President's retreat.

PERSONS IN NEWS/ AWARDS

NAFED

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed Deepak Agarwal, as the Managing Director of National Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED).

About NAFED

- NAFED is an apex organization of marketing cooperatives for agricultural produce in India. It is registered under Multi State Co-operative Societies Act 2002.
- It was launched in 1958 to promote the trade of agricultural produce and forest resources across the nation.
- It is now one of the largest procurement as well as marketing agencies for agricultural products in India.

Nobel Prize in Literature

- The Nobel Prize in Literature 2024 was awarded to South Korean author Han Kang. She is the first South Korean to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- The prize is worth 10 million Swedish krona ($915,000) and is regarded widely as the world's most prestigious literary award.
- Han Kang's breakthrough novel was The Vegetarian, first published in Korean in 2007, and translated into English in 2015. The book won the Man Booker International Prize in 2016.
- Other notable books of Han Kang are Human Acts, The White Book, We Do Not Part and Greek Lessons.

Nine Sports Dropped from CWG

- Nine sports have been dropped from the 2026 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Glasgow, Scotland.
- The Australian state of Victoria was originally scheduled to host the 2026 CWG but it pulled out due to a significant increase in the projected costs. Glasgow later agreed to host a scaled down Games.
- The organizers made the decision to reduce the number of sports to balance the need for a multi-sport feel with the need to manage financial and operational risk. The 2026 edition will take place from July 23 to August 2.
- The nine sports dropped are **Badminton, Cricket, Hockey, Squash, Table tennis, Wrestling, Shooting, Triathlon, and Archery**.
- The last edition of the games held in Birmingham (2022) featured 19 sports.
- The 2026 CWG will **feature only 10 sports**: athletics and para-athletics, boxing, bowls and para-bowls, swimming and para-swimming, artistic gymnastics, track cycling and para-track cycling, netball, weightlifting and para-powerlifting, judo, 3×3 basketball and 3×3 wheelchair basketball.

About Commonwealth Games

- They are quadrennial international multi-sport event among athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations, which consists mostly, but not exclusively, of territories of the former British Empire.
- The event was first held in 1930 as the **British Empire Games** and, with the exception of 1942 and 1946 (which were cancelled due to World War II), has successively run every four years since.
- The event is overseen by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), which controls the sporting programme and selects host cities.

Dadasaheb Phalke Award

- Actor Mithun Chakraborty has been awarded the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award
- It is India's **highest award in the field of cinema**.

- It is presented annually at the **National Film Awards ceremony** by the **Directorate of Film Festivals**, an organization set up by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The recipient is honoured for their outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian cinema.
- The award comprises a Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus) medallion, a shawl, and a cash prize.
- Presented first in **1969**, the award was introduced by the Union Government to commemorate Dadasaheb Phalke's contribution to Indian cinema. The **first recipient** of the award was actress **Devika Rani**.

About Dadasaheb Phalke

- Dhundiraj Govind Phalke was an Indian producer-director-screenwriter, known as the **Father of Indian cinema**.
- His debut film, **Raja Harishchandra**, was the first Indian movie released in **1913**, and is now known as **India's first full-length feature film**.