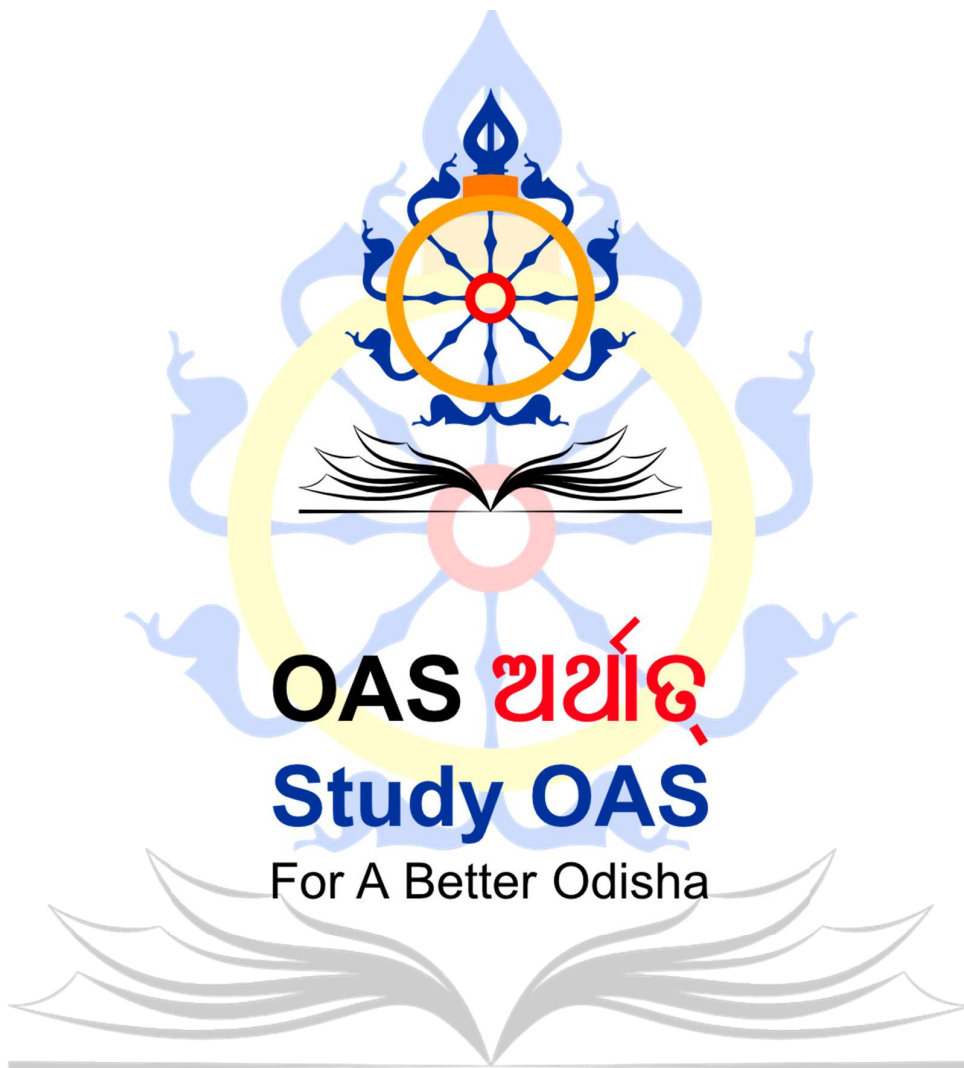


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INDEX

Governance & Policy

Social Issues

Empowerment

Culture & Arts

Environment

Health & Pharma

Education

Economy & Finance

Science & Technology

Agriculture

Important Days

State Affairs

Defence

International Relations

International Events

Miscellaneous





Governance & Policy

Cabinet Approves ₹36,441-Crore Expansion of Khelo India and Sports Federation Support

What's the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved an expanded **Khelo India Scheme** and enhanced **Assistance to National Sports Federations (ANSF) Scheme** for FY 2026–27 to FY 2030–31.

The two schemes have a combined outlay of **₹36,441 crore**, aimed at strengthening grassroots talent identification, athlete development, sports infrastructure, scientific training and India's preparation for major international competitions. The allocation is nearly eight times the outlay of the previous Khelo India Scheme.

Funding Structure

- **Khelo India Scheme:** ₹29,054 crore
- **Assistance to National Sports Federations:** ₹7,387 crore
- **Total implementation period:** Five financial years
- Around **2,800 athletes** are currently supported under the Khelo India athlete system through assistance for training and nutrition.

Revamped Khelo India Scheme

The revamped scheme establishes a continuous athlete-development pathway from school and village-level competitions to elite international events.

Components include:

- Talent identification and long-term athlete tracking.
- Scientific coaching, sports science, and high-performance training.
- Expansion of school, university, regional and sport-specific leagues.
- Support for women athletes, para-athletes, and indigenous sports.
- Assistance for conducting the National Games and hosting international sporting events.
- Partnerships with private academies, corporate organisations, and other institutions.

The structured athlete pool will be expanded nearly tenfold through a new **Emerging Khelo India Athletes (E-KIAs)** category.

School-Level Sports Initiatives

Two new institutional initiatives have been introduced:

- **Khelo India Feeder Schools**
- Identify sporting talent at an early age.
- Connect school-level athletes with professional development systems.
- **Khelo India Utkrishta Vidyalayas**
- Integrate sports training with mainstream education.

- Provide systematic coaching and academic support to talented students.

National Sports Ecosystem

The programme will integrate the following institutions:

- National Centres of Excellence
 - Khelo India Centres of Excellence
 - Sports Authority of India Training Centres
 - Khelo India Accredited Academies
 - Khelo India Centres
 - Youth Sports Companies of the Armed Forces
- A **National Coach Accreditation Board** will also be established to standardise coaching qualifications and improve the professional capacity of coaches and support staff.

Assistance to National Sports Federations

The enhanced ANSF Scheme will finance:

- National coaching and training camps
- Sports science and medical support
- Modern sporting equipment
- Foreign coaches and technical experts
- International exposure and competitions
- Participation in major multi-sport events
- International promotion of India's indigenous sports

It will also facilitate sports cooperation with countries of the **Global South**.

Digital Sports Platform

A unified digital platform will integrate:

- Athlete databases and performance records
- Sports infrastructure
- Competitions and coaching resources
- Talent assessments
- Funding information
- Fit India participation

The platform is intended to improve data-based planning, transparency, and personalised athlete development.

Additional Info

- **Nodal ministry:** Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
- **Policy alignment:**
 - Khelo Bharat Niti 2025
 - National Education Policy 2020
 - Fit India Movement
- **Elite progression pathway:**
 - Grassroots competitions
 - Khelo India athlete system
 - Target Olympic Podium Scheme
- **Strategic objectives:**
 - Preparations for the 2030 Commonwealth Games
 - Strengthening India's Olympic and Paralympic hosting ambitions
 - Developing sports as an instrument of fitness, inclusion, youth empowerment and nation-building.

Cabinet Approves ₹5,070-Crore PM Surya Sarovar Yojana

What's the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the **Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY)** with an outlay of **₹5,070 crore** to develop floating solar photovoltaic projects integrated with energy-storage systems.

The scheme targets an additional **5,000 MW of floating solar capacity** and **10,000 MWh of storage**, helping India use reservoirs and other inland water bodies for renewable-energy generation without increasing pressure on land resources.

PM Surya Sarovar Yojana

PM-SSY is a renewable-energy scheme for developing **Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV)** projects on reservoirs, industrial ponds and other suitable inland water bodies.

- **Nodal ministry:** Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
 - **Total outlay:** ₹5,070 crore
 - **FSPV capacity target:** 5,000 MW
 - **Energy-storage target:** 10,000 MWh
 - **Minimum storage duration:** Two hours
 - **Project-sanction period:** FY 2026–27 to FY 2030–31
 - **Financial-support disbursement:** Up to FY 2032–33
 - **Coverage:** All States and Union Territories
- The scheme would increase India's floating solar capacity from approximately **700 MW to 5,700 MW**.

Financial Assistance

The Union Government will provide:

- **₹1 crore per MW** as Central Financial Assistance for eligible projects after successful commissioning.
- Up to **₹50 lakh per project** for feasibility and preparatory studies, including:
 - Bathymetric assessment of water depth and underwater terrain
 - Hydrographic assessment of water-body characteristics
 - Environmental studies
 - Other activities required to reduce project-development risks

Floating Solar Potential

The **National Institute of Solar Energy** has estimated India's floating solar potential at approximately **102.18 GWp** across reservoirs and other suitable inland water bodies.

Floating solar systems consist of solar panels mounted on buoyant structures anchored to the bed or banks of a water body. They reduce competition for scarce land and allow existing reservoirs and industrial ponds to serve an additional energy-generation function.

Energy Storage Component

Each project will have a co-located Energy Storage System with a minimum storage duration of two hours.

Energy generated during periods of high solar availability can be stored and supplied when generation declines or electricity demand rises. This can:

- Improve grid reliability
- Reduce renewable-energy curtailment
- Support peak-hour electricity supply
- Address the intermittency of solar generation

Additional Info

• National Institute of Solar Energy

- An autonomous specialised institution under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- Undertakes solar-energy research and development, testing, certification, capacity building and technology development.

• Important terms

- **MW:** Megawatt; a unit of power-generating capacity.
- **MWh:** Megawatt-hour; a unit measuring the amount of energy stored or supplied.
- **GWp:** Gigawatt-peak; the maximum rated output of solar photovoltaic capacity under standard conditions.
- **Bathymetry:** Measurement and mapping of underwater depth and topography.
- **Hydrography:** Study and measurement of the physical characteristics of water bodies.

Cabinet Approves ₹84,084-Crore Samudra Manthan Scheme

What's the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved **Samudra Manthan—the National Offshore Exploration Scheme**, with a Phase-I outlay of **₹84,084 crore** for implementation up to FY 2030–31.

The Central Sector Scheme seeks to accelerate exploration of oil and natural gas in India's deepwater and ultra-deepwater regions through seismic surveys, exploratory drilling, shared offshore infrastructure and domestic manufacturing capabilities. It targets the addition of more than **600 MMTOE** to India's hydrocarbon resource base.

Samudra Manthan Scheme

- **Nodal ministry:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas
- **Type:** Central Sector Scheme
- **Phase-I outlay:** ₹84,084 crore
- **Implementation period:** Up to FY 2030–31
- **Exploration target:** 60 deepwater wells
- **Reserve-accretion target:** More than 600 Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent

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- **Focus areas:** Deepwater and ultra-deepwater offshore sedimentary basins

The government will provide financial assistance of up to **50% of the eligible cost of drilling a deepwater exploration well**, subject to a ceiling of **₹675 crore per well**. A single deepwater exploratory well can cost approximately **USD 125–150 million**.

Scheme Components

Offshore Data Acquisition – ₹28,534 crore

- **2D seismic surveys:** ₹12,000 crore
- **3D seismic surveys and other techniques:** ₹12,534 crore
- **National Data Repository reprocessing and AI tools:** ₹4,000 crore

Seismic surveys use sound waves to map geological formations beneath the seabed and identify areas that may contain hydrocarbons.

Exploration Acceleration – ₹43,200 crore

The allocation will support the drilling of **60 deepwater exploratory wells** through a risk-sharing model between the government and exploration companies.

Common Offshore Infrastructure – ₹10,000 crore

Common production and evacuation hubs will be developed to help commercialise discoveries. Shared infrastructure can reduce the cost of pipelines, processing facilities and transportation systems for individual operators.

Manufacturing and Services Zones – ₹2,000 crore

Oil and Gas Manufacturing and Services Zones will promote the domestic production and localisation of:

- Offshore drilling equipment
- Subsea production systems
- Specialised vessels and platforms
- Engineering and exploration services

Programme Support – ₹350 crore

The component covers digital programme management, monitoring and evaluation, human-resource development, stakeholder engagement and international outreach.

Expected Energy Impact

Subject to successful exploration, the scheme aims to:

- Increase annual domestic oil and gas production from approximately **62 MMTOE to 80 MMTOE**.
- Expand India's hydrocarbon resource base from **1.6 billion TOE to 2.2 billion TOE**.
- Potentially reduce the crude-oil import bill by nearly **₹1 lakh crore annually**.
- Attract private and international investment in offshore exploration.
- Develop indigenous technological capacity in deepwater exploration and production.

Why Was the Scheme Needed?

India's crude-oil import dependence increased from **78.5% in 2014–15 to 88.7% in 2025–26**.

Production from existing oil and gas fields also declines naturally by around **6–7% annually**, requiring continuous exploration and new discoveries.

More than **99% of the former offshore "No-Go" areas** have been opened, making over **one million sq. km of India's Exclusive Economic Zone** available for exploration.

Major Offshore Basins

The scheme will focus on frontier deepwater and ultra-deepwater basins, including:

- Krishna-Godavari Basin
- Cauvery Basin
- Mahanadi Basin
- Andaman region

These basins have significant hydrocarbon potential but require high-risk drilling, advanced technology and substantial capital investment.

Additional Info

• Upstream petroleum sector

- Covers the exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas.
- It is different from the downstream sector, which includes refining, transportation and marketing.

• National Data Repository

- A government-managed digital repository containing geological and hydrocarbon exploration data.
- Enables companies and researchers to assess India's sedimentary basins before undertaking exploration.

• Open Acreage Licensing Policy

- Allows companies to identify and propose exploration blocks rather than waiting for government bidding rounds.
- Operates under the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy.

• Oilfields Amendment Act, 2025

- Modernised the legal framework for petroleum operations.
- Provided greater contractual stability, improved dispute-resolution mechanisms and recognised integrated petroleum operations.

Lok Sabha Clears Bill to Raise Supreme Court Strength to 38 Judges What's the News?

The Lok Sabha passed the **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026** by voice vote without debate. Piloted by Union Law Minister **Arjun Ram Meghwal**, the Bill increases the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court from **34 to 38 judges**, including the Chief Justice of India.

The increased strength was already operationalised through a presidential Ordinance. The Bill seeks to replace that

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Ordinance with an Act of Parliament. It must still be passed by the Rajya Sabha and receive presidential assent.

What Does the Bill Change?

The Bill amends **Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956**:

- Judges excluding the Chief Justice of India: **33 → 37**
- Total sanctioned strength including the CJI: **34 → 38**

- Additional judicial posts created: **4**

It also repeals the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026 while protecting appointments and other actions already taken under the Ordinance.

Why Was the Increase Proposed?

At the beginning of 2026, the Supreme Court had **92,101 pending cases**. During 2025, it received **75,410 fresh matters** but disposed of **65,615 cases**, indicating that new filings continued to exceed final disposals.

The additional judges are expected to:

- Permit the formation of more regular Benches.
- Improve disposal of old and newly instituted cases.
- Facilitate more frequent Constitution Benches.
- Reduce docket-management pressure on the Court.

More than **96,000 cases** were reportedly pending subsequently, including **26 cases pending for over 30 years** and **558 cases pending for more than 20 years**.

Financial Implications

Creation of four additional judicial posts is estimated to involve:

- **Recurring annual expenditure:** approximately ₹10.57 crore
- **Non-recurring expenditure:** approximately ₹3.47 crore
- **Initial total expenditure:** approximately ₹14.04 crore

The expenditure covers salaries, staff, official residences, vehicles, furnishing and security arrangements.

Constitutional and Legislative Context

• Article 124(1):

- Establishes the Supreme Court.
- Authorises Parliament to prescribe the number of Supreme Court judges by law.
- Therefore, increasing judge strength requires an **ordinary law**, not a constitutional amendment.

• Article 123:

- Empowers the President to promulgate an Ordinance when Parliament is not in session and immediate action is considered necessary.
- The 2026 Ordinance was issued under this provision.

• Legislative majority:

- As an ordinary Bill, it requires a **simple majority of members present and voting** in both Houses, followed by presidential assent.

Centre Accelerates UPSC and SSC Recruitment Processes

What's the News?

The Centre has outlined administrative and technology-based reforms to make recruitment through the **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** and **Staff Selection Commission (SSC)** faster, more transparent and secure.

UPSC's recruitment cycle has been reduced from over **15 months to about 13 months**, while SSC's average recruitment cycle has fallen from **15-18 months to 6-8 months**. The reforms were detailed by Minister of State for Personnel **Dr Jitendra Singh** in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

UPSC Reforms

Major measures introduced by UPSC include:

• Modular Online Application Portal

- Simplifies registration and application submission.
- Reduces repetitive entry of candidate information.

• AI-based attempt verification

- Verifies candidates' previous Civil Services Examination attempts.
- Helps enforce prescribed attempt limits and detect data inconsistencies.

• Face authentication

- Strengthens identity verification at examination centres.
- Seeks to prevent impersonation and proxy candidates.

• Provisional answer keys

- Candidates can submit representations through a structured mechanism.
- Improves procedural transparency before finalisation.

• Candidate assistance

- Dedicated candidate helpdesk.
- Expansion of examination centres.
- Guaranteed choice of examination centre for **Persons with Disabilities**.

SSC Reforms

SSC has adopted several measures to reduce delays and improve examination integrity:

• Computer-Based Examinations

- Examination stages have been reduced and digitised.
- Recruitment time has declined to an average of 6-8 months.

• e-Dossier system

- Enables tamper-resistant digital transmission of candidate documents.

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- Reduces paperwork and delays in document communication.
- **Sliding Mechanism Framework**
 - Permits merit-based post upgradation when vacancies become available.
 - Seeks to reduce posts remaining vacant after initial allocation.
- **Transparent answer-key system**
 - Publication of tentative and final answer keys.
 - Opportunity for candidates to raise objections.
 - Reduction in the answer-key challenge fee.
 - Online publication of marks and results.

Faster Appointments

The wider recruitment reforms also permit **provisional appointment letters based on self-attested documents**. Character and caste-certificate verification must ordinarily be completed within six months. Interviews have been removed for recruitment to **Group C and Group B non-gazetted posts**, promoting objectivity and reducing procedural delays. Vacancies are also being filled in mission mode through initiatives such as the **National Rozgar Mela**.

Additional Info

- **Union Public Service Commission**
 - A constitutional body.
 - **Article 315:** Establishment of UPSC and State Public Service Commissions.
 - **Article 316:** Appointment and term of commission members.
 - **Article 320:** Functions relating to recruitment, examinations and service matters.
 - **Article 323:** Submission of annual reports.
 - Recruits mainly for All India Services, Central Civil Services and Group A and specified Group B posts.
- **Staff Selection Commission**
 - An attached office under the **Department of Personnel and Training**.
 - It is neither a constitutional body nor a statutory body.
 - Conducts recruitment mainly for Group B non-gazetted and Group C posts in Union government ministries and organisations.
- **Department of Personnel and Training**
 - Functions under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
 - Acts as the Union government's coordinating agency for personnel management, recruitment policy and administrative reforms.

- **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024**
 - Provides a separate legal framework against question-paper leaks, organised cheating, impersonation and other unfair practices in specified public examinations.
 - The technological reforms complement this broader examination-security framework.
- **Notes**
 - UPSC cycle: **Over 15 months → about 13 months**
 - SSC cycle: **15–18 months → 6–8 months**
 - Document-verification period: **Six months**
 - UPSC status: **Constitutional body**
 - SSC status: **Attached office of DoPT**

FCRA Amendment Bill Proposes Stricter Control Over Foreign-Funded Assets

What's the News?

The **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026** seeks to amend the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010**, which regulates how individuals, associations and organisations receive and use foreign donations in India. The Bill proposes a stronger framework for managing foreign contributions and assets when an organisation's FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, expires, or is not renewed. It has also triggered concerns from Opposition parties and civil society groups over possible executive overreach and impact on NGOs.

FCRA Amendment Bill

- The Bill focuses on regulation of **foreign-funded organisations**, especially NGOs, charitable trusts, societies and associations.
- It seeks to plug operational gaps in the handling of:
 - Foreign contributions
 - Assets created from foreign contributions
 - Defunct or inactive organisations
 - Organisations whose FCRA registration has ceased
- The government's stated objective is to improve:
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
 - Proper utilisation of foreign funds
 - Protection of national security and public interest

Features

- **Designated Authority**
 - A statutory **Designated Authority** will manage, supervise and dispose

of foreign contributions and assets in specific cases.

- It will act when an organisation's FCRA certificate is:
 - Cancelled
 - Surrendered
 - Expired
 - Not renewed
 - Denied renewal

• Vesting of Assets

- Foreign contributions and assets created from them may vest in the Designated Authority.
- This may include assets created **partly** from foreign contribution.
- Vesting may be:
 - **Provisional:** If restoration or renewal is still possible.
 - **Permanent:** If registration is not restored within the prescribed period.

• Use of Permanently Vested Assets

- Permanently vested assets are to be used for **public purposes**.
- They may be transferred to government ministries, departments, authorities or agencies.
- Sale proceeds and unutilised foreign contribution may be credited to the **Consolidated Fund of India**.

• Protection of Places of Worship

- If the vested asset is wholly or partly a place of worship, its **religious character** must be preserved.
- The Designated Authority cannot change its essential religious nature.

• Prior Permission Route

- Entities without FCRA registration can receive foreign contribution only through **prior permission**.
- The Bill adds that such contribution must be received and used within a prescribed time period.

• Functionaries

- The Bill expands liability to functionaries such as:
 - Directors
 - Partners
 - Trustees
 - Karta of HUF
 - Office-bearers
 - Governing body members
 - Persons controlling management
- They may be held liable for organisational offences unless they prove lack of knowledge or due diligence.

• Penalty Rationalisation

- Maximum imprisonment for violation of the Act is proposed to be reduced from **five years to one year**.

Concerns Raised

• Executive Control

- Critics argue that the Designated Authority may give the government wide control over NGO assets.

• Impact on NGOs

- Social service organisations working in education, healthcare, welfare and community development may face uncertainty if registration is not renewed.

• Property Rights

- Permanent vesting of assets raises concerns linked to **Article 300A**, which protects persons from deprivation of property except by authority of law.

• Minority and Faith-Based Institutions

- Some political and religious groups have argued that the Bill may disproportionately affect minority-run charitable and educational institutions.

• Appeal and Due Process

- Concerns have been raised over whether organisations will get adequate hearing, appeal and judicial remedies before assets are taken over.

Additional Info

• Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010

- Regulates acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution and foreign hospitality.
- Applies to individuals, associations and companies receiving foreign funds.
- Seeks to prevent foreign funds from being used for activities detrimental to:
 - Sovereignty and integrity of India
 - Public interest
 - Freedom or fairness of elections
 - Public order
 - Friendly relations with foreign states

• Who Cannot Receive Foreign Contribution?

- Certain categories are barred from receiving foreign contribution, including:
 - Election candidates
 - Judges
 - Government servants
 - Members of legislatures
 - Political parties
 - Organisations of political nature
 - Certain media-related persons and entities

• FCRA Registration

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- Organisations need either:
 - **FCRA registration**, generally for regular receipt of foreign funds, or
 - **Prior permission**, for specific foreign contribution linked to a specific donor, amount or purpose.
- FCRA registration must be renewed every **five years**.
- **2020 FCRA Amendment**
 - Required foreign contributions to be received through a designated **SBI, New Delhi** FCRA account.
 - Prohibited transfer of foreign contribution to another association.
 - Reduced administrative expense limit from **50% to 20%**.
 - Made identification requirements stricter for key functionaries.
- **Consolidated Fund of India**
 - Established under **Article 266** of the Constitution.
 - Includes revenues received by the Union Government, loans raised and loan recoveries.
 - Money can be withdrawn only through parliamentary authorisation.

IT Rules, 2026 Cut Unlawful Content Takedown Deadline to 3 Hours

What's the News?

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) has tightened intermediary obligations under the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**.
- Under the **2026 Amendment Rules**, an intermediary must remove or disable access to specified unlawful information within **3 hours**, against the earlier **36-hour** limit, after acquiring "actual knowledge" through a competent court order or a legally compliant government intimation.
- The amendments also introduce specific regulation of **Synthetically Generated Information (SGI)**, including AI-generated/deepfake audio, images and videos, through labelling, provenance and due-diligence requirements.
- **Current-status clarification:** these are **not merely draft proposals**. MeitY notified the amendments as **G.S.R. 120(E)** in February 2026 and they are already in force. Some recent reports describing the three-hour rule as a new draft proposal conflict with the official notified rules.

3-Hour Takedown Rule

Under **Rule 3(1)(d)**, "actual knowledge" triggering the three-hour deadline must arise through:

- An **order of a court of competent jurisdiction**; or
- A **reasoned written intimation** from the Appropriate Government or its authorised agency.
 - Normally issued through an authorised officer of at least **Joint Secretary/equivalent rank**; where such rank does not exist, a Director/equivalent may act.
 - In the police administration, authorised officers must be at least **Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG)** rank.
 - Government intimations must specify:
 - Legal/statutory basis.
 - Nature of the unlawful act.
 - Specific URL, identifier or electronic location to be blocked.
 - Such government intimations are subject to **monthly review by an officer not below Secretary rank** for necessity and proportionality.

What is Unlawful Information?

The Rule covers information prohibited under law concerning matters such as:

- Sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Security of the State.
- Friendly relations with foreign States.
- Public order.
- Decency or morality.
- Contempt of court.
- Defamation.
- Incitement to offences relating to these grounds.
- Other information prohibited under applicable law.

The **3-hour rule is not confined only to AI/deepfake content**; Rule 3(1)(d) applies to specified unlawful information generally. The 2026 amendments separately bring SGI expressly within the Rules.

Synthetically Generated Information

The Rules define **Synthetically Generated Information (SGI)** as audio, visual or audio-visual material artificially or algorithmically created or altered so that it appears real/authentic and portrays a person or real-world event in a manner likely to be indistinguishable from reality.

It excludes ordinary good-faith uses such as:

- Colour correction, noise reduction and compression.
- Routine editing or formatting that does not materially distort meaning.
- Educational, research, presentation or template-based material that does not create false records.
- Accessibility, translation, clarity or searchability improvements that do not



materially manipulate the underlying content.

AI Labelling & Metadata

For permissible SGI, intermediaries facilitating its creation or dissemination must ensure:

- **Prominent disclosure/label** identifying it as synthetically generated.
- For audio, a prominent **prefixed audio disclosure**.
- **Permanent metadata or technical provenance mechanisms**, where technically feasible.
- A **unique identifier**, where applicable, identifying the computer resource used to generate or modify it.
- Platforms must not facilitate removal or suppression of such labels or provenance metadata.

Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMIs) have additional duties, including requiring users to declare whether uploaded content is synthetic and deploying appropriate technical measures to verify such declarations.

Other Compliance Timelines

- **General grievance:** acknowledge within **24 hours** and ordinarily resolve within **7 days**.
- Certain content-removal grievances: resolve within **36 hours**.
- Complaints involving an individual's:
 - Private-area exposure,
 - Nudity,
 - Sexual acts,
 - Electronic impersonation, or
 - Artificially morphed images

must be acted upon within **2 hours**, reduced from the earlier 24-hour period.

Section 79 & Safe Harbour

- **Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000** provides conditional **safe-harbour protection** to intermediaries for third-party information hosted on their platforms.
- Protection depends on compliance with prescribed **due diligence** and lawful takedown requirements.
- The IT Rules, 2021 are framed under the rule-making powers of the Central Government under **Section 87 of the IT Act, 2000**.

Additional Info

- **Intermediary:** broadly covers entities that receive, store, transmit or provide services relating to electronic records; social-media platforms constitute an important category.
- **Deepfake:** AI-generated or AI-manipulated media capable of realistically depicting persons saying or doing things that did not occur.
- **MeitY**

- Ministry: **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**.
- Responsible for the intermediary-rule framework under the IT Act.

India Restricts New Renewable Energy Projects Near International Borders

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has issued national-security guidelines restricting the establishment of **new solar, wind and hybrid renewable-energy projects** near India's **International Border (IB), Line of Control (LoC) and Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- **No new project activity is permitted within 1 km** of these border lines.
- Areas extending up to **50 km** have been classified as **sensitive areas**, bringing renewable-energy projects within a structured security-clearance framework.
- The objective is to balance **renewable-energy expansion and ease of doing business** with **national-security requirements** in strategically sensitive border regions.

Border Security Zones

- **0–1 km:** New solar, wind and hybrid projects are **prohibited**.
- **1–50 km:** Projects require **security clearance from the MHA**, assessed on a **case-by-case basis**.
- **1–20 km from the International Border:** A separate **No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Ministry of Defence (MoD)** is also required.
- Projects that had already received the required **MHA security clearance or MoD NOC** before the new guidelines do **not need to reapply** for those clearances.

Security Conditions

- Applications must be routed through the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** along with the concerned State government's in-principle land-allotment approval and project coordinates.
- Personnel from land-border countries, particularly **Pakistan, China and Bangladesh**, cannot be engaged without prior Central Government permission.
- Project land cannot be transferred to a **foreign company** without prior Central Government approval and MHA security clearance.
- Projects involving **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** require a separate application to the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under India's FDI policy.
- Security requirements include:
 - **Anti-drone systems**, with their cost borne by the project developer.

- Security equipment operated by the **CISF/State Police**.
- A **dedicated police post** for monitoring construction.
- Pre-verification of project personnel.
- Roads sufficiently wide for use by **Border Security/Armed Forces during emergencies**.

Infrastructure Restrictions

Civil infrastructure used for project operation and maintenance is subject to height limits within sensitive areas:

- **1–8 km: Maximum 3 metres**
- **8–20 km: Maximum 5 metres**
- **20–50 km: Maximum 15 metres**
- Hotels/accommodation associated with such projects must generally be located at **least 5 km from the border**.

Additional Info

- **LoC (Line of Control):**
 - Military control line separating Indian- and Pakistan-controlled areas in the Jammu & Kashmir region.
 - It is **not an internationally recognised political boundary**.

• LAC (Line of Actual Control):

- De facto line separating Indian- and Chinese-controlled territories.
- India and China do not have a **commonly delineated LAC across the entire boundary**, making border infrastructure particularly security-sensitive.

• India's Renewable-Energy Context:

- India is working towards **500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030**.
- Non-fossil installed capacity: **283.46 GW** as of the end of FY 2025-26.
 - Renewable energy: **274.68 GW**
 - Solar: **150.26 GW**
 - Wind: **56.09 GW**
 - Nuclear: **8.78 GW**.
- The new framework therefore illustrates the policy interface between **energy security, renewable-energy expansion and border/national security**.

Lok Sabha Passes Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026

What's the News?

- The Lok Sabha has passed the **Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026**, which seeks to repeal the **Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021** and introduce a new framework for appointments, tenure, service conditions and administration of major tribunals.
- Its central feature is the establishment of a **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)** to provide institutional oversight over **16 tribunals**.
- The legislation follows the Supreme Court's ruling in **Madras Bar Association v. Union of India**, which struck down key provisions of the 2021 Act for violating principles of **judicial independence and separation of powers** and reiterated the need for an independent tribunals commission.
- **Current status:** The Bill has cleared the Lok Sabha but has **not yet been passed by the Rajya Sabha**; hence, it is not yet an Act.

National Tribunals Commission

- **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- **Composition:** 5 members – a Chairperson, **2 Judicial Members** and **2 Technical Members**.
- **Chairperson:** A person who has been a Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court.
- **Judicial Members:** Former Chief Justices/Judges of High Courts.
- **Technical Members:** Minimum **25 years' experience** in areas such as public administration, finance, law, accountancy, banking, management or technology.
- The Central Government appoints Commission members; the **Chief Justice of India must be consulted** for appointment of the Chairperson and Judicial Members.
- Commission members have a **5-year tenure or until 70 years of age**, whichever is earlier.

Major functions of the NTC include:

- conducting selection processes for tribunal vacancies;
- reviewing tribunal performance;
- overseeing inquiries into complaints against tribunal Chairpersons/Members; and
- developing and maintaining a **National Tribunals Data Grid**, containing tribunal case-related information.

The Commission will have a Secretariat headed by an officer of the rank of **Secretary to the Government of India**. Its accounts will be audited by the **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)**, while its annual report and audited accounts are to be placed before Parliament.

What Changes from the 2021 Act?

Provision	2021 Act	2026 Bill
Institutional oversight	No NTC	National Tribunals Commission
Tribunal tenure	4 years	5 years
Upper age	70 years—Chairperson; 67 years—Member	Same
Minimum appointment age	50 years	Minimum-age restriction removed
Names recommended per vacancy	Panel of 2	1 candidate + 1 name on waiting list
Government appointment timeline	Preferably within 3 months	Mandatory within 3 months
Accountability	Existing removal grounds	Adds incompetence/inefficiency and paid assignment as removal grounds

The Search-cum-Selection Committees will now operate under the NTC framework and involve Commission members, retired High Court judges, a government secretary and subject experts. The Bill **does not revive tribunals/appellate bodies abolished under the 2021 rationalisation exercise.**

Tribunals Covered

The First Schedule covers **16 tribunals/authorities**, including:

- Central and State Administrative Tribunals;
- National Green Tribunal;
- Armed Forces Tribunal;
- Securities Appellate Tribunal;
- Debts Recovery Tribunal and Debts Recovery Appellate Tribunal;
- Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal;
- Appellate Tribunal for Electricity;
- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal;
- National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission;
- Income-tax Appellate Tribunal;
- Railway Claims Tribunal; and
- Customs, Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal, among others.

Financial Outlay

The proposed NTC and its Secretariat involve an estimated expenditure of **₹27.14 crore**, comprising:

- **₹24.79 crore** recurring expenditure; and
- **₹2.35 crore** non-recurring expenditure.

The expenditure will be met from the **Consolidated Fund of India**. The Secretariat also envisages two additional **Level-14 (Joint Secretary-level)** posts.

Additional Info

- **Constitutional basis of tribunals**
 - Tribunals are specialised **quasi-judicial bodies** dealing with subject-specific disputes.
 - **Part XIV-A** of the Constitution deals with tribunals and was inserted through the **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976**.
 - **Article 323A:** Administrative tribunals, particularly for public-service matters.
 - **Article 323B:** Tribunals for specified matters such as taxation and other areas authorised by the Constitution.
- **L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997)**
 - The Supreme Court held that judicial review by the High Courts under **Articles 226 and 227** and by the Supreme Court under **Article 32** forms part of the Constitution's **basic structure**.
 - Decisions of tribunals under Articles 323A and 323B remain subject to scrutiny by the jurisdictional High Court.
- **Madras Bar Association case**
 - The Supreme Court invalidated important parts of the 2021 tribunal regime relating to appointment, eligibility, tenure and related service conditions.



- It regarded an independent National Tribunals Commission as a structural safeguard for **independence, transparency and uniformity** in tribunal administration and directed the Union to establish such a body.

E-Samudra Launched to Digitise India's Maritime Governance

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)** has launched the full-scale **E-Samudra** platform to digitise maritime administration and provide integrated services to **seafarers, shipowners, shipping companies, ports and other maritime stakeholders**.
- The platform was inaugurated by Union Minister **Sarbananda Sonowal** during a national stakeholder interaction in Mumbai.
- E-Samudra seeks to shift maritime administration from a physical office-based system to **"Digital First and Faceless Governance"**, improving **Ease of Living for seafarers** and **Ease of Doing Business** for the maritime sector.

What is E-Samudra?

- **Type:** Unified digital maritime services platform.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
- **Implementing authority:** **Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)**.
- **Technology partner:** CMS Computers India Ltd.
- It integrates **72+ maritime services** on a common platform and is designed for paperless and digitally tracked processing.
- Stakeholders include:
 - Seafarers and seamen
 - Shipowners
 - Charterers
 - Multi-Modal Transport Operators (MTOs)
 - Shipping and other maritime entities.

Features

- **Single digital window:** Multiple regulatory and administrative services available through one portal.
- **End-to-end workflows:** Applications can move digitally through the entire approval process.
- **Online payments:** Digital payment of applicable fees.
- **Real-time tracking:** Applicants can monitor status and receive notifications.
- **Digital certificates:** Certificates can be issued electronically.
- **Paperless processing:** Digital document uploads reduce dependence on physical submissions.

- **Cybersecurity:** Designed to comply with Government of India cybersecurity policies.
- **Anywhere access:** Allows seafarers aboard vessels to access government services without physically visiting government offices.

Services under E-Samudra

The platform was initially rolled out with specific maritime modules before being expanded into its full-scale form. Important services/modules include:

- **Ship Registration Module** – simplifies registration and flagging of vessels.
- **Chartering Permissions and Licences** – digitises approvals relating to vessel chartering.
- **Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Scheme (SBFAS) Module** – supports digital processing of financial assistance applications.
- **Multi-Modal Transport Operator Module** – enables digital registration and regulatory compliance of MTOs.
- **Visitor Access Management System** – automates access management at maritime administration offices.

Related Digital Initiatives

- **e-NAVIK**
 - A **24x7 grievance-redressal system** for Indian seafarers.
 - Grievances can be raised through multiple channels, including the portal, helplines, WhatsApp and email.
 - Intended to improve welfare and protection of seafarers, including those working overseas.
- **Digital Seafarers Employment Agreement (d-SEA)**
 - Digitises seafarer employment agreements.
 - Intended to improve verifiability and transparency of employment conditions and contractual rights.
- **Seafarer Tracking Dashboard**
 - An upcoming digital system for improved tracking and support of Indian seafarers.

India's Seafarer Workforce

- India's active seafarer workforce increased from approximately **1.03 lakh in 2013 to more than 3.23 lakh in 2025**.
- India has emerged as the **world's second-largest supplier of seafarers**.
- The expanding workforce has increased the need for faster digital regulation,

certification, grievance redressal and welfare services.

Additional Info

- **Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)**
 - Apex maritime authority of the Government of India.
 - Functions as an **attached office of MoPSW**.
 - The earlier Directorate General of Shipping framework is evolving into DGMA under the modern maritime governance framework, reflecting an expanded regulatory mandate.
 - Major responsibilities include:
 - vessel registration, survey and certification;
 - seafarer employment and welfare;
 - maritime education and training;
 - prevention of marine pollution;
 - coastal shipping;
 - implementation of international maritime conventions; and
 - representation of India in the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**.
- **Merchant Shipping Act, 2025**
 - Forms a major legislative pillar of the new maritime governance framework.
 - Recognises **seafarers** as **"Key Workers"**.
 - Works alongside Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 and the principle of **"Minimum Government, Maximum Governance"** in shaping maritime administration.
- **Seafarer Welfare Measures**
 - **Sagar Mein Yog**: Promotes physical and mental well-being of seafarers.
 - **Sagar Mein Samman**: Promotes opportunities and support for **women seafarers**.
 - **Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS)**: Provides welfare support to seafarers.

India Expands E-Visa Entry Network to 88 International Ports

What's the News?

- The **Government of India** has notified **11 additional international entry points** for foreign nationals holding valid **e-Visas**.
- The additions comprise **9 land ports** and **2 airports**, taking the total number of designated e-Visa entry points in India to **88**.

- The expanded network now consists of **37 airports, 38 seaports and 13 land ports**.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said the expansion is intended to simplify legitimate international travel while strengthening technology-based immigration and internal-security infrastructure.

11 New E-Visa Entry Points

Airports

- **Bhopal**
- **Tirupati**

Land Ports

- **Agartala**
- **Darranga**
- **Gede**
- **Ghojadanga**
- **Haridaspur**
- **Jaigaon**
- **Dawki**
- **Moreh**
- **Attari (Road)**

E-Visa Entry Network

Entry Point	Number
Airports	37
Seaports	38
Land Ports	13
Total	88

- Around **95% of e-Visa applications** are processed within **72 hours**.
- Electronic visas now account for roughly **78% of visas issued by India**.

Indian E-Visa?

- **E-Visa** is an electronic visa facility intended to simplify entry into India for eligible foreign nationals.
- It operates along with **Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)**.
- The facility was introduced in **2014**, initially covering nationals of **43 countries**.
- It is now available to nationals of **172 countries**.
- Entry on an e-Visa is permitted only through **designated immigration entry points** notified by the government.

E-Visa Categories

India currently provides e-Visas under **17 sub-categories**, covering areas such as:

- **Tourist**
- **Mountaineering**
- **Business** – 6 sub-categories
- **Medical** – 4 sub-categories
- **Student** – 2 sub-categories
- **Transit**
- **X-1 Miscellaneous**
- **Group Visitor Visa (Cruise)**

Why is the Expansion Important?

- **Tourism**: More entry options improve accessibility for foreign tourists.



- **Border Connectivity:** Addition of land ports facilitates legitimate cross-border passenger movement.
- **Regional Access:** Entry points such as **Moreh, Dawki and Attari** are strategically significant border gateways.
- **Ease of Travel:** Expands options beyond major metropolitan airports and seaports.
- **Digital Governance:** Supports a more technology-driven visa and immigration system.
- **Security:** Expansion is being accompanied by technological infrastructure intended to strengthen immigration monitoring and internal security.

Additional Info

- **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**
 - The **Foreigners Division of MHA** deals with matters relating to foreigners, visas and immigration.
 - India's official e-Visa service is provided through the **Indian Visa Online** platform.
- **Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)**
 - An approved e-Visa application results in an **ETA**, which enables eligible foreign travellers to seek entry through authorised immigration checkpoints.
 - E-Visa services are **completely online**; the government advises applicants not to use unauthorised intermediaries.
- **Pointers**
 - **New e-Visa entry points:** 11
 - **Land ports added:** 9
 - **Airports added:** Bhopal and Tirupati
 - **Total designated entry points:** 88
 - **Break-up:** 37 airports + 38 seaports + 13 land ports
 - **E-Visa introduced:** 2014
 - **Initially covered:** 43 countries
 - **Currently available to:** 172 countries
 - **E-Visa sub-categories:** 17
 - **Share of visas issued electronically:** about 78%
 - **Around 95% of applications:** processed within 72 hours
 - **Responsible Ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs

Note: The official PIB release states a total of **13 land ports**, while its accompanying table appears to list **Darranga twice**. For examination purposes, retain the officially announced aggregate – **88 entry points: 37 airports, 38 seaports and 13 land ports**.

Sports Ministry Suspends Recognition of Table Tennis Federation of India

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports** has suspended the recognition of the **Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI)** as the National Sports Federation for table tennis with **immediate effect**.
- The action was taken over persistent **governance deficiencies, institutional failures and non-compliance with government directions**.
- The Ministry has asked the **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)**, in consultation with the **International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)**, to establish an interim regulatory mechanism, including an **ad-hoc committee**, to administer the sport until a compliant governance structure is restored.
- During the suspension, TTFI will not be entitled to **government financial assistance, official patronage or other benefits** linked to recognition as a National Sports Federation.

Why was TTFI Recognition Suspended?

The Sports Ministry highlighted several governance and administrative concerns:

- **Failure to conduct elections within the stipulated timeframe.**
- **An unsatisfactory response to a show-cause notice** issued by the Ministry.
- Repeated non-compliance with Ministry directions and shortcomings in **transparency, accountability and democratic functioning**.
- Appointment of **Mahinder Pal Singh** as CEO at an Annual General Meeting despite Ministry directions.
- Concerns over the procedure used to constitute TTFI's **grievance/dispute-redressal committee**.
- Continuing differences between **TTFI President Meghna Ahlawat** and **Secretary General Kamlesh Mehta**, which affected decision-making and institutional functioning.

Selection Policy Concerns

- The Ministry also found deficiencies in TTFI's player-selection policy and stated that it was inconsistent with its **2025 selection guidelines**.
- The policy gave:
 - **50% weightage** to national rankings.
 - **40% weightage** to world rankings.
 - **10% weightage** to the selection committee's discretion.
- The Ministry said the system could disadvantage highly ranked players who regularly compete internationally.
- It also noted the absence of sufficiently clear criteria for major competitions such



as the **Olympic Games and Asian Games**, whose qualification pathways differ.

- Another concern was the lack of an adequate mechanism for athletes to seek **redressal of selection-related grievances**.

Manika Batra Controversy

- The federation faced renewed scrutiny after leading Indian paddler **Manika Batra** was left out of India's main **Asian Games squad** and named as a reserve because of insufficient participation in domestic competitions.
- Batra criticised the process as **ambiguous and unfair** and sought government intervention.
- The episode intensified scrutiny of TTFI's selection and governance mechanisms.

Interim Administration

- The **Indian Olympic Association** has been asked to work with the **ITTF** to create an interim mechanism.
- An **ad-hoc committee** is expected to manage Indian table tennis until a duly constituted and compliant TTFI governance structure is restored.
- The suspension is not expected to directly prevent India's participation in the forthcoming Asian Games because the team-selection process has already been completed and the interim administration can oversee the contingent.

Additional Info

- **Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI)**
 - National governing body for table tennis in India.
 - Established in **1926**.
 - Affiliated with the **International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)**.
 - Currently headed by **Meghna Ahlawat**, its first woman president.
- **National Sports Development Code of India, 2011**
 - Provides governance norms for recognised National Sports Federations.
 - Covers areas such as **elections, tenure of office-bearers, transparency, accountability, athlete representation and government recognition**.
 - The Ministry invoked powers under the **2011 Sports Code and other applicable regulations** while suspending TTFI's recognition.
- **Previous Intervention**
 - TTFI had also faced judicial intervention in **2022**, when the Delhi High Court suspended its executive committee following concerns regarding its functioning and selection processes.
 - Fresh elections subsequently restored an elected administration.

Revamped India Code Portal: AI-Powered Access to Indian Laws

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Law and Justice** has launched a revamped **India Code Portal** to make Indian laws simpler, faster and more citizen-centric to access.
- It was launched by **Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice**.
- The upgraded portal introduces **AI-assisted search, semantic search, speech-based search and multilingual access**.
- It aims to transform India Code from a repository of legislative documents into an **interconnected digital gateway to law**, improving access for citizens, lawyers, researchers, the judiciary and government departments.

India Code Portal

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Law and Justice.
- **Administrative Department:** Legislative Department.
- It serves as a **unified digital repository of Indian legislation**.
- It provides access to:
 - Central Acts and subordinate legislation.
 - State Acts and subordinate legislation.
 - Union Territory legislation and regulations.
 - Constitution and other legislative information.
- The portal is developed through coordinated efforts of the **Legislative Department and National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.

Features of Revamped Portal

- **AI-assisted Search & Interaction:** Enables more intelligent discovery of relevant legal information.
- **Semantic Search:** Searches according to the *meaning and context* of a query rather than depending only on exact keywords.
- **Speech-based Search:** Allows users to search legislative information through voice input.
- **Multilingual Access:** Seeks to provide AI-assisted access to laws in **all 22 languages of the Eighth Schedule** of the Constitution.
- **Legislative History:** Provides easier access to amendments and evolution of legislation.
- **Interlinking:** Connects principal Acts with their relevant **Rules and other subordinate legislation**.



- **e-Gazette Integration:** Links legislative information with the government's electronic Gazette ecosystem.
- Other features include:
 - Improved document viewing.
 - **QR-enabled access.**
 - Structured **citizen-feedback mechanism.**

Why is it Important?

- **Access to Justice:** Easier access to laws helps citizens understand their legal rights, duties and remedies.
- **Transparency:** Makes authentic legislative information more readily accessible.
- **Digital Governance:** Uses AI and digital technologies to improve delivery of legal and public services.
- **Legal Research:** Reduces the difficulty of locating Acts, amendments, Rules and related instruments scattered across different legal documents.
- **Linguistic Inclusion:** Access in Eighth Schedule languages can reduce language barriers in understanding legislation.
- The initiative seeks to make legislative information more **searchable, interconnected, interoperable and citizen-centric.**

Eighth Schedule

- The **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution** deals with recognised languages.
- Constitutional provisions connected with it include:
 - **Article 344(1):** Constitution of a Commission and Committee of Parliament concerning progressive use of Hindi for official purposes.
 - **Article 351:** Directive for development of the Hindi language.
- The Eighth Schedule originally contained **14 languages**; it presently contains **22 languages**.
- The revamped India Code Portal seeks AI-assisted multilingual access across all these **22 languages**.

Subordinate Legislation

- **Primary legislation:** Laws enacted by Parliament or State Legislatures, such as Acts.
- **Subordinate/Delegated legislation:** Detailed legal instruments made by the Executive or another authorised authority under powers granted by a parent Act.
- It can include:
 - Rules.
 - Regulations.
 - Notifications.
 - Orders.
 - Circulars.
 - Statutory instruments.
- Linking an Act with its subordinate legislation enables users to understand

both the **statutory framework and its operational rules** through one platform.

e-Gazette

- **Gazette of India** is the Government of India's authorised publication for official statutory orders, notifications, rules and other government instruments.
- **e-Gazette** provides such material electronically.
- Integration of India Code with the e-Gazette ecosystem improves connectivity between **laws and officially published legal instruments.**

Additional Info

- **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**
 - Functions under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).**
 - Provides digital and ICT infrastructure and technology support to government institutions.
 - Provided technical expertise and development support for the revamped India Code Portal.

Supreme Court Revises Definition of 'Industry' Under Labour Law

What's the News?

A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, delivered a **5:4 majority verdict** revising the definition of "industry" under labour law. The Court held that the expansive **1978 Bangalore Water Supply interpretation** will not govern future disputes under the **Industrial Relations Code (IRC), 2020**, while pending cases under the erstwhile Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 will continue under the old framework. The ruling marks a structural shift in India's labour jurisprudence, balancing worker protections with regulatory clarity for employers.

1978 Bangalore Water Supply Judgment?

- **The Ruling:** In *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa* (1978), a seven-judge Bench laid down the **"triple test"** to determine whether an establishment qualifies as an "industry" under **Section 2(j)** of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.
- **Triple Test:** An activity is an industry if it involves:
 - **Systematic activity**
 - **Organised cooperation between employer and employee**
 - **Production or distribution of goods or services** calculated to satisfy human wants and wishes
- **Features:** Profit motive was held **not essential**; the Court also evolved the **"Dominant Nature Test"** for organisations with multiple activities. This broad



definition brought hospitals, educational institutions, municipalities, clubs, and welfare schemes under labour-law protection, leading to what later benches termed a **"docket explosion."**

- **Legislative Attempt:** The **Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, 1982** sought to narrow the definition but was **never brought into force.**

Supreme Court's New Ruling?

- **Majority View (5:4):** The 1978 triple test requires **refinement** and should not burden the interpretation of **Section 2(p)** of the IRC, 2020. The IRC must be interpreted on a **"clean slate."**
- **Prospective Operation:** The reformulated definition will apply **prospectively** – only to future disputes under the IRC, 2020. All **pending proceedings** under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 will continue to be decided under the original 1978 framework to avoid artificial discrimination.
- **Reference Validity:** By a **6:3 majority**, the Court held that the reference seeking reconsideration of the 1978 judgment (in *State of Uttar Pradesh v. Jai Bir Singh*) was **validly made and maintainable.**
- **Dissent:** Justices **B.V. Nagarathna, Dipankar Datta, Ujjal Bhuyan, and Joymalya Bagchi** opposed modifying the 1978 precedent. Justice Nagarathna argued that the broad definition remains necessary amid privatisation and liberalisation, and that the **nature of the activity** – not who performs it – should determine coverage.

Additional Info

- **Industrial Relations Code, 2020:**
 - Came into force in **November 2025**, replacing the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.
 - One of **four Labour Codes** enacted to consolidate 29 central labour laws:
 - *Code on Wages, 2019*
 - *Industrial Relations Code, 2020*
 - *Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020*
 - *Code on Social Security, 2020*
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 145(3):** Requires a Bench of at least five judges for substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution.
- **Key Questions Before the Court:**
 - Whether the 1978 triple test remains the correct interpretation of "industry."
 - Whether welfare schemes and social service activities run by government departments constitute industrial activity.

- What constitutes a **"sovereign function"** of the State and whether such functions fall outside labour law.

- **Implications:** The ruling aims to reduce litigation and provide clarity for enterprises under the new labour regime, while preserving existing workers' rights in pending disputes.

DoT Mandates Photo Verification to Enforce Nine-SIM Limit

What's the News?

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) issued a circular directing telecom service providers to use subscriber photographs available through the **Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)** to enforce the existing cap on mobile connections. The mechanism is designed to prevent individuals from obtaining SIM cards beyond the permissible limit, thereby curbing the misuse of multiple mobile numbers in cybercrimes and financial frauds such as **"digital arrest" scams.**

Nine-SIM Limit & Photo Verification?

- **Existing Cap:** An individual can hold a maximum of **nine mobile connections** across all telecom operators and service areas. The limit is lower at **six connections** in **Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, and the North-Eastern States.**
- **Photo-Based Screening:** From **23 August 2026**, the DIP will make a **representative photograph** of every subscriber who has reached the maximum limit available to operators. From **24 August 2026**, operators must use these images to identify applicants seeking additional connections and deny issuance if the cap is reached.
- **Implementation Phases:**
 - **Initial Phase (Post-Facto):** Operators will carry out next-day verification. Any SIM activated beyond the permitted limit must be **suspended immediately.**
 - **Final Phase (Real-Time):** By **30 November 2026**, operators must integrate the photo-check into their **real-time enrolment and activation systems.**

- **Excess Connections:** Operators are required to take steps to bring existing connections held beyond the prescribed limit within the permissible threshold.

Digital Intelligence Platform?

- The **DIP** is a government platform that collates subscriber records uploaded by telecom operators to **identify and group** all mobile connections registered in the name of a single individual across multiple operators and service areas.



- It functions as a centralised tool for **telecom fraud detection** and subscriber verification.
- Operators must **download the representative photographs daily** and use technical systems to flag applicants who have exhausted their SIM quota.

Additional Info

- **Parent Ministry:** DoT functions under the **Ministry of Communications**.
- **Legal Basis:** The nine-connection limit was originally prescribed under the **2012 subscriber verification guidelines**.
- **Upcoming Framework:** The government is expected to notify the **Telecommunications (User Identification) Rules, 2025**, which propose a **biometric-based system** with a **unique user ID** linked to a person's telecom connections across operators. The draft rules mandate live photographs or other biometric attributes for verification, re-verification for SIM replacement and number porting, and allow government audit of user-identification records.
- **Objective:** The tightened enforcement is specifically aimed at addressing **cybercrime and financial fraud**, including impersonation-based scams that exploit multiple unverified mobile connections.

Ministry of Jal Shakti Releases Data Sharing Policy Under Sujalam Bharat DPI

What's the News?

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, has issued the Policy on Data Sharing, Interoperability and Stakeholder Access under the Sujalam Bharat Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). The policy establishes a secure, federated, and interoperable framework for governing rural drinking water data across the Centre, States, Union Territories, Gram Panchayats, and authorised stakeholders. It marks a strategic shift from infrastructure creation to service-oriented, accountable, and evidence-based water delivery in rural India.

Sujalam Bharat DPI Policy?

- **Overview:** The policy creates a federated data-sharing architecture that enables multiple administrative levels to share data through common rules while retaining institutional control over their records. It is anchored in the Sujalam Bharat DPI, positioned as a long-term public digital infrastructure for rural water utility governance.
- **Features:**
 - **Standardisation:** Mandates use of common identifiers, standardised metadata, interoperable registries,

and secure digital services for seamless, machine-readable data exchange.

- **Governance Principles:** Lays down provisions for privacy, personal data protection, cybersecurity, data classification, access governance, and public-interest safeguards.
- **Tiered Access:** Adopts a purpose-based, tiered data-access framework ensuring secure, responsible, and limited use of information while protecting sensitive infrastructure and personal data.
- **Panchayat-Centric Role:** Expands the role of Gram Panchayats in participatory asset monitoring, grievance redressal, and service accountability.
- **Innovation Enablement:** Authorised stakeholders can leverage approved access mechanisms to develop solutions for operation and maintenance, water-quality monitoring, predictive maintenance, geospatial planning, Digital Twins, and AI-enabled analytics.

Jal Jeevan Mission Context?

- The policy is part of the common digital infrastructure under Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0, which builds upon the original mission launched in 2019 to provide Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) in rural India.
- It supports the mission's evolution toward infrastructure lifecycle management, source sustainability, service assurance, and citizen-centric accountability.
- The framework is designed to improve planning and management of rural water supply systems through data-driven decision-making and real-time monitoring capabilities.

Additional Info

- **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS):**
 - A department under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India.
 - Responsible for policy formulation and implementation of programmes related to rural drinking water and sanitation.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM):**
 - Launched in 2019; aims to provide Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household.
 - Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 focuses on sustainability, water quality, and service delivery beyond infrastructure creation.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**
 - Refers to shared digital systems (such as registries, payment

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systems, and data exchanges) that enable public service delivery at scale.

- Indian examples: Aadhaar, UPI, CoWIN, and Sujalam Bharat.

- **Gram Panchayat:**

- The lowest tier of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), established under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.
- **Article 243G** of the Constitution empowers Panchayats with powers and authority to function as institutions of self-government, including water management.

- **Technologies Mentioned:**

- **Digital Twins:** Virtual replicas of physical water infrastructure used for simulation, monitoring, and predictive maintenance.
- **Geospatial Planning:** Use of GIS and remote sensing data for planning water supply networks and source sustainability.
- **AI-Enabled Analytics:** Machine learning models for predictive maintenance, demand forecasting, and anomaly detection in water supply systems.

- **Constitutional & Legal Context:**

- **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:** Institutionalised Panchayati Raj as the third tier of governance.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** Provides the overarching legal framework for processing personal data in India, relevant to the policy's privacy provisions.

Supreme Court Refines 1978 'Industry' Test Under Industrial Disputes Act in 5:4 Split Verdict

What's the News?

A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, by a 5:4 majority, refined the "triple test" for defining "industry" under Section 2(j) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, in *State of Uttar Pradesh v. Jai Bir Singh*. The Bench held that the 1978 *Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa* framework remains valid but requires reformulation with greater emphasis on the **commercial character** of an establishment. Crucially, the refined test will apply **prospectively**, and all pending disputes under the repealed 1947 Act will continue to be decided under the 1978 triple test. The Court also unanimously refrained from interpreting the definition of "industry" under the new Industrial Relations Code, 2020.

The 1978 Triple Test?

The 1978 seven-judge Bench judgment in *Bangalore Water Supply* laid down a three-part test to determine whether an establishment qualifies as an "industry" under Section 2(j):

- **Systematic activity** – organised and methodical functioning
- **Cooperation between employer and employee** – employer-employee relationship
- **Production or distribution of goods and services** – intended to satisfy human wants and wishes

This expansive interpretation brought educational institutions, charitable organisations, research bodies, and even certain government departments within the ambit of labour adjudication, regardless of profit motive.

The 2026 Refinement?

The nine-judge Bench, headed by CJI Surya Kant, held by a 5:4 majority that while the basic framework of the 1978 judgment is sound, the test needed clearer articulation to better reflect the scope of Section 2(j). Aspects of the majority view:

- The **commercial character** of the activity requires closer scrutiny
- The reformulated test applies **prospectively only** – it does not disturb concluded judgments, settlements, or determinations
- All **pending disputes** under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, must be adjudicated using the original 1978 triple test
- The interpretation of the repealed 1947 Act **cannot be treated as a "sheet-anchor"** for interpreting the Industrial Relations Code, 2020

The majority (CJI Surya Kant, Justices PS Narasimha, SC Sharma, Alok Aradhe, and Vipul M. Pancholi) also upheld the validity of the reference by a 6:3 margin, holding that it was justified to bring certainty to an unsettled area of law.

The Dissenting View?

Four judges disagreed with the need to refine the 1978 test:

- **Justice BV Nagarathna** held the reference unnecessary, stating the expansive definition was imperative and the "dominant nature" of activity – not the entity's identity – should be the key. She stressed that sovereign function does not automatically grant blanket immunity from labour laws.
- **Justice Dipankar Datta** (with Justice Ujjal Bhuyan) rejected the very basis for the reference, holding that the 1978 judgment was correct and that reopening it served "no jurisprudential purpose." He emphasised that institutional credibility lies in finality.

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- **Justice Joymalya Bagchi** agreed the reference was validly made but held the original triple test was sufficient. He gave particular emphasis to charitable and social institutions, stating the State cannot deny workers labour law benefits merely by invoking "sovereign" functions. All four dissenting judges, however, concurred that pending disputes should continue under the 1978 framework.

Additional Info

- **Constitutional & Legal Context:**

- **Article 145(3)** of the Constitution mandates that cases involving substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution must be decided by a Bench of at least five judges (Constitution Bench).
- **Section 2(j), Industrial Disputes Act, 1947:** Defined "industry" as any systematic activity carried on by cooperation between an employer and workmen for the production, supply, or distribution of goods or services. Repealed by the **Industrial Relations Code, 2020**.
- **Section 2(p), Industrial Relations Code, 2020:** Contains the corresponding definition of "industry" in the new labour code regime, which the Court explicitly refused to interpret.

- **Timeline of the Case:**

- **1978:** *Bangalore Water Supply* judgment by a seven-judge Bench
- **2005:** Five-judge Bench in *State of U.P. v. Jai Bir Singh* refers the issue for reconsideration
- **January 2017:** Seven-judge Bench directs placement before a nine-judge Bench
- **August 20, 2026:** Nine-judge Bench delivers its 489-page judgment

- **Labour Law Reforms:**

- The **Industrial Relations Code, 2020** is one of four labour codes enacted

to consolidate and simplify India's complex labour laws. The others are:

- Code on Wages, 2019
- Code on Social Security, 2020
- Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020

Social Issues

NITI Aayog Releases Roadmap to Professionalise India's Caregiving Ecosystem

What's the News?

- NITI Aayog released the report **"Reimagining Care: Strategies for Empowering Caregivers in Viksit Bharat@2047"**.
- It proposes transforming caregiving from a largely **informal, family-based activity into an organised, skilled and dignified profession**.
- The roadmap covers care for **older persons, persons with disabilities (PwDs), chronically ill persons**, as well as formal, family and community caregivers.
- Major proposals include a **National Policy on Caregiving, National Caregiver Council (NCC), standardised training and certification, National Caregiver Registry, social-security coverage and technology-enabled care services**.

Why Does India Need a Caregiving Framework?

- India is undergoing rapid **population ageing**:
 - Population aged **60+**: about **149 million (10.5%)** in 2022.
 - Projected: **194 million** by 2031.
 - Projected: **347 million (20.8%)** by 2050.
- Urbanisation, migration, smaller/nuclear families and increasing female workforce participation are reducing the availability of traditional family caregivers.
- Formal care remains concentrated largely in urban areas and is fragmented across different institutions and ministries.

Care Economy in India

- India's care system has two broad components:
 - **Informal caregiving**: family members, friends and communities.
 - **Formal caregiving**: trained professionals providing services such as nursing support, dementia care, physiotherapy, respite care and palliative care.
- India's care-services market was estimated at **USD 29.62 billion in 2023**.
- It is projected to reach **USD 72.31 billion by 2030**, growing at a **13.76% CAGR**.
- Globally, the care sector accounts for around **16% of employment**, while unpaid care contributes an estimated **USD 11 trillion annually** but remains largely unrecognised.

Women & Unpaid Care Work

- India's caregiving burden is strongly gendered.
- According to the **Time Use Survey 2019**:
 - Women spend about **299 minutes/day** on unpaid domestic and caregiving activities.
 - Men spend about **97 minutes/day**.
- Formal and affordable caregiving services can therefore:
 - Reduce women's unpaid-care burden.
 - Improve **female labour-force participation**.
 - Generate paid employment for women.
 - Enable more equitable sharing of household care responsibilities.

National Caregiving Framework

The report recommends a coordinated national architecture centred on the following:

- **National Policy on Caregiving**
 - Provide an overarching framework for caregiving services.
 - Improve Centre-State and inter-ministerial coordination.
- **National Caregiver Council (NCC)**
 - Proposed as the **apex institution** for regulation, coordination and professionalisation of caregiving.
 - Regulate/accredit training institutions and programmes.
 - Set standards for competency, curricula, certification and continuing professional development.
 - Assess caregiver demand and supply.
 - Facilitate grievance redressal.
- **National Caregiving Qualification Framework**
 - Standardise **education, training, accreditation and certification**.
 - Develop short- and long-term courses.
 - Build specialised skills for:
 - Geriatric care
 - Dementia
 - Mental-health care
 - Palliative and long-term care
- **National Caregiver Registry & Digital Portal**
 - Create a verified database of caregivers.
 - Connect **care seekers with certified caregivers**.
 - Support workforce planning, monitoring and technology-enabled service delivery.

Nine Strategic Pillars

The report organises its roadmap around **9 pillars**:

1. Formalising and scaling caregiving through policies and schemes.

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2. Recognition and regulation of caregiving services.
3. Building a skilled caregiving workforce.
4. Global caregiving and international cooperation.
5. Strengthening existing institutions and organisational structures.
6. Social security and financial protection for caregivers.
7. Strengthening family and community-based caregiving.
8. Emotional and social support for family caregivers.
9. Technology and oversight.

Social Security for Caregivers

The report seeks to recognise caregiving as a formal occupation with **defined roles, fair wages, job security and career progression.**

Proposed support includes:

- Sick leave and access to healthcare.
- Insurance and occupational accident protection.
- Financial incentives and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Labour protection for professional caregivers.
- Respite care, counselling and mental-health support for family caregivers.
- Workplace policies facilitating leave for employees undertaking caregiving responsibilities.

Global Care Workforce

- India can use its demographic and skilling advantage to become an important supplier of **trained caregivers globally.**
- Recommendations include:
 - Bilateral and multilateral labour-mobility agreements.
 - Language and cultural-competency training.
 - Ethical recruitment safeguards.
 - Social-security protection for caregivers working overseas.
 - Reintegration and career progression for returning workers.
- The report cites existing cooperation and placement pathways involving countries such as **Germany and Israel** as models for international caregiver mobility.

Purple Economy

- The report also links caregiving with the **Purple Economy**—economic activity designed to increase the participation and inclusion of **Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).**
- It recommends identifying caregiving occupations suitable for PwDs and developing **disability-inclusive skill programmes.**
- The objective is to view PwDs as **economic contributors and service providers,** rather

than only beneficiaries of welfare programmes.

Additional Info

• Existing Central Initiatives

- **National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE)**
 - Under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
 - Provides tiered geriatric healthcare, including home-based services and geriatric facilities.
- **Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP)**
 - Supports institutional and community-based care for senior citizens.
- **SHATAYU**

- *Senior Holistic Care Assistance and Training for Your Utility.*

- Dashboard aimed at strengthening caregiving services for senior citizens.

◦ JEEVAN

- Digital initiative consolidating information on welfare schemes, senior-citizen homes and support services, along with an SOS facility.

• State-Level Model – Kerala

◦ Kudumbashree K for Care/K4 Care

- Uses trained women to provide home-based services such as geriatric care, patient care, disability care and maternity care.

◦ Aswasakiranam Scheme

- Provides monthly assistance of **₹600** to eligible family caregivers of bedridden persons with physical or mental disabilities.

• NITI Aayog

- Government of India's premier **public-policy think tank.**
- Replaced the **Planning Commission** in 2015.
- Chairperson: **Prime Minister of India.**
- Full form: **National Institution for Transforming India.**

Supreme Court Constitutes Panel to Probe Police Excesses During Student Protests

What's the News?

The Supreme Court constituted a **five-member High-Powered Enquiry Committee (HPEC)**, headed by retired Supreme Court Justice **R. Subhash Reddy**, to conduct an independent fact-finding

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probe into allegations of police excesses during student protests over the **NEET paper leak**. The order was passed by a three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi, and Justice V. Mohana. The panel will examine the proportionality of force used, allegations of violence against women protesters, and preservation of electronic evidence.

High-Powered Enquiry Committee?

• Composition:

- **Chairperson:** Retired Supreme Court Justice **R. Subhash Reddy**
- **Members:**
 - Former Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court **Ravi Shankar Jha**
 - Former Delhi High Court Judge **Shalinder Kaur**
 - Former CBI Director **Rishi Kumar Shukla**
 - Retired Meghalaya DGP **Dr. L.R. Bishnoi**

- **Mandate:** The HPEC will conduct a **continuous and periodic assessment** of the issues and submit **interim findings** to the Court, rather than a single final report.

Scope of Inquiry?

- **Events Covered:** Student demonstrations held on **20 July 2026** at **Jantar Mantar, Delhi**, and in **Bihar**, linked to protests over alleged **NEET paper leaks**.
- **Allegations to Examine:**
 - Excessive use of **pellet guns, electric batons, tear gas, and lathi charges**
 - **Targeted violence, harassment, and molestation of female protesters** (marked as top priority)
 - Police surveillance and proportionality of crowd-control measures
 - Whether police wore **proper uniforms and visible nameplates** during arrests or use of force
- **Counter-Allegations:** Violence against police personnel and damage to public property.
- **Casualty Data:** Initial reports cited **118 police personnel and ~60 protesters** injured; later assessments revised figures to **over 240 police personnel and approximately 200–218 protesters** injured.
- **Compensation:** The panel will consider **interim compensation** for injured protesters and police personnel.

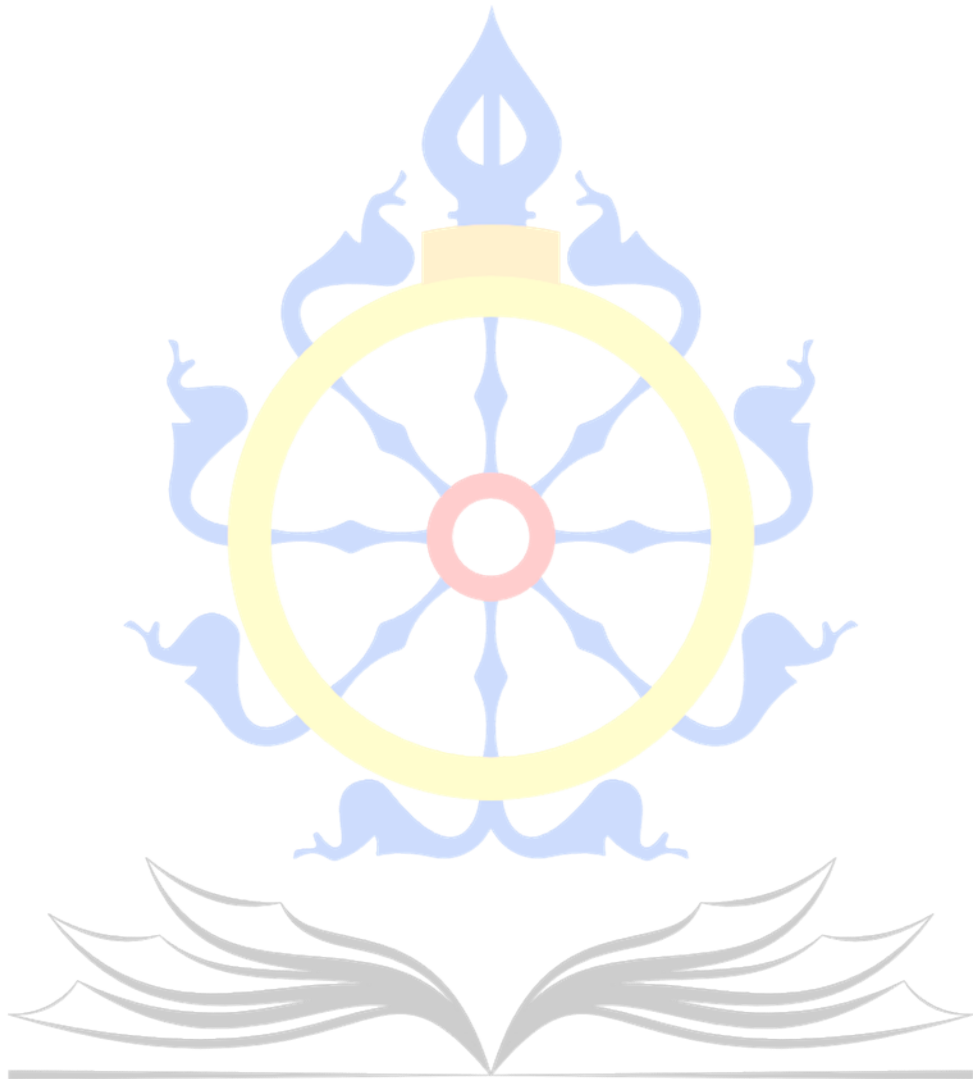
Evidence Preservation & Procedural Directions

- The Court directed preservation of **drone footage, CCTV recordings, body-camera footage, and PCR call records** to prevent tampering and enable independent examination.

- The HPEC has been directed to **secure the release of detained minors** unless they face **grave or heinous charges**.
- The Court asked **Solicitor General Tushar Mehta** to furnish details of FIRs against student protesters, indicating it may exercise its plenary powers under **Article 142** to quash them.
- In an earlier order (3 August 2026), the Court clarified that the term "**criminal antecedents**" applies only to those involved in **grave and heinous offences**, allowing states to close or withdraw FIRs against remaining students in accordance with law.

Additional Info

- **NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test):** The all-India entrance examination for admission to undergraduate medical courses (MBBS/BDS), conducted by the **National Testing Agency (NTA)**.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 124:** Establishment and composition of the Supreme Court.
 - **Article 142:** Grants the Supreme Court plenary power to pass any decree or order necessary for doing **complete justice** in any cause or matter pending before it.
- **Jantar Mantar:** A designated site for public demonstrations in New Delhi, located near Parliament House.
- **Context:** The protests erupted following allegations of paper leaks and irregularities in the NEET examination, sparking nationwide student agitation and demands for accountability.





Empowerment

Indian Para-Cyclists Win 12 Medals at UCI Parasport Denmark Grand Prix

What's the News?

- Indian para-cyclists won **12 medals** – **2 gold, 5 silver and 5 bronze** – at the **UCI Parasport Denmark Grand Prix** held in **Odense, Denmark**.
- India's medal haul came from three cyclists – **Arshad Shaikh, Vishwa Vasani and Anshuman Dhumal**.
- **Arshad Shaikh of Andhra Pradesh** was India's most successful competitor, winning **6 medals**, including both of India's gold medals.
- The performances of **17-year-old Vishwa Vasani** and **16-year-old Anshuman Dhumal** also highlighted India's emerging talent in international para-cycling.

India's Medal Winners

Arshad Shaikh – MC2

- **Total: 6 medals**
 - **2 Gold:** Elimination-race events
 - **3 Silver:** Individual Time Trial, Individual Pursuit and Scratch Race
 - **1 Bronze:** 200m Sprint
- The Paralympian from **Andhra Pradesh** accounted for half of India's total medal haul.

Vishwa Vasani – WC3

- The **17-year-old cyclist from Gujarat** won **4 bronze medals** in:
 - 1 km Individual Time Trial
 - Scratch Race
 - 200m Sprint
 - Elimination Race.

Anshuman Dhumal

- The **16-year-old cyclist from Maharashtra** secured **2 silver medals** in elimination-race events.
- The Indian contingent trained under **chief coach Aditya Mehta**.

UCI Parasport Denmark Grand Prix

- It is an international **track para-cycling competition** conducted within the **Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)** framework and featured on the UCI para-cycling calendar.
- Track para-cycling competitions are conducted on a **velodrome** and can include:
 - Individual Time Trial
 - Individual Pursuit
 - Scratch Race
 - Elimination Race
 - Sprint events.

Para-Cycling Classification

Para-cycling classifies athletes according to the **type and functional impact of their impairment**, allowing athletes with comparable activity limitations to compete together.

- **C – Cycle:** Athletes ride conventional bicycles, with adaptations where required.
- **T – Tricycle:** Used mainly by athletes with balance or coordination impairments.
- **H – Handcycle:** Used by athletes who compete using hand-powered cycles.
- **B – Tandem:** Used by athletes with visual impairments together with a sighted pilot.
- **C1-C5** are bicycle sport classes; a **lower number indicates a greater degree of activity limitation**.
 - **MC2:** Men's C2 category
 - **WC3:** Women's C3 category.

Additional Info

- **Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)**
 - Global governing body for competitive cycling, including para-cycling.
 - **Headquarters:** Aigle, Switzerland.
 - Governs major disciplines including road, track, mountain bike, BMX and para-cycling.
- **Para-cycling at Paralympics**
 - Para-cycling first entered the Paralympic programme with road events in **1984**.
 - **Track para-cycling** was subsequently introduced at the **1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games**.

NSG Launches India's First All-Women Commando Course in Manesar

What's the News?

The National Security Guard (NSG) Training Academy in Manesar, Haryana, launched India's first-ever **Mahila Commando Conversion Course (MCCC)**. The 12-week intensive residential programme is designed for selected women personnel from State Police Forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). The first batch comprises 25 women constables from the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary. Training covers physical conditioning, advanced weapons handling, marksmanship, tactical intervention, hostage rescue, and specialised counter-terrorism operations. The initiative carries the theme **"She Who Dares, Leads."**

Mahila Commando Conversion Course?

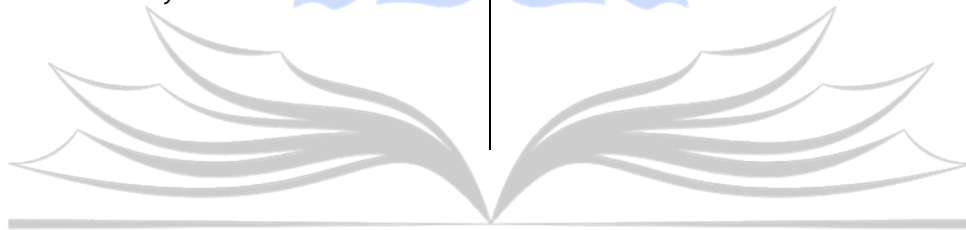
- **Duration & Nature:** 12-week residential programme at the NSG Training Academy, Manesar
- **Participants:** Selected women personnel from State Police Forces and CAPFs; first batch includes 25 constables from Rajasthan Armed Constabulary's 5th Battalion, Ghatgate
- **Training Modules:**



- Rigorous physical fitness and endurance
- Weapons proficiency and marksmanship
- Tactical intervention
- Hostage rescue drills
- Specialised counter-terrorism operations
- **Outcome:** On completion, trained personnel return to their respective parent forces as **force multipliers**, disseminating specialised skills across India's security architecture

Additional Info

- **National Security Guard (NSG):**
 - Popularly known as the "**Black Cats**"
 - A federal counter-terrorism force under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**
 - Raised in **1984** following Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi
 - Mandate includes counter-terrorism, anti-hijacking, and high-risk security operations
- **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs):**
 - Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
 - Border Security Force (BSF)
 - Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)
 - Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
 - Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)
 - Assam Rifles
- **Constitutional & Administrative Context:**
 - **State Police Forces** are maintained by individual States and Union Territories under the **State List (List II)** of the Seventh Schedule
 - **CAPFs** are central forces under the **Union List (List I)**
 - The initiative aligns with the broader "**Nari Shakti**" framework emphasising women's empowerment in national security roles



Culture & Arts

GI Recognition Boosts Gujarat's Pithora Tribal Art

What's the News?

Recent reports have highlighted how the **Geographical Indication status of Gujarat's Pithora painting** is improving recognition, market access and livelihood opportunities for tribal artisans.

Pithora was officially registered as a GI-tagged handicraft in **2021**. The renewed attention is therefore about the impact of the existing registration, rather than the grant of a new GI tag. It protects the art's regional identity and supports the preservation of indigenous knowledge associated with Gujarat's Rathwa community.

Pithora Painting

Pithora is a sacred and ritualistic wall-painting tradition associated primarily with the **Rathwa community** of Gujarat.

- **Region:** Mainly Chhota Udepur and adjoining tribal areas
- **Associated communities:** Rathwa, Bhil, Bhilala and Nayaka
- **Presiding deity:** Baba Pithora or Pithora Dev
- **Traditional painter:** *Lakhara*
- **Ritual priest:** *Badva*
- **Nature:** Religious and ceremonial, rather than merely decorative

The paintings are traditionally commissioned to fulfil a vow or seek divine blessings for prosperity, health, marriage, livestock and agricultural well-being.

Artistic Features

Pithora paintings are generally created on the principal interior walls of tribal homes after the surface is purified and whitewashed.

Common motifs include:

- Horses carrying gods and goddesses
- Baba Pithora and other tribal deities
- Sun and moon
- Elephants, birds and wild animals
- Forests, rivers and agricultural activities
- Weddings, festivals and scenes of community life

Traditional artists use brightly coloured pigments obtained from leaves, flowers and minerals. Brushes may be made from bamboo shoots or tree twigs. Contemporary versions are also produced on cloth and canvas for wider markets.

GI Registration Details

- **GI name:** Pithora
- **Application number:** 644
- **Product category:** Handicraft
- **Class:** 16

- **Applicant:** Rathwa Adivasi Samuday Trust
- **Geographical area:** Gujarat
- **Certificate number:** 385
- **Registration year:** 2021
- **Present validity:** Up to 2029

The GI registration establishes a legal link between authentic Pithora products and their recognised geographical origin.

Impact on Tribal Artisans

GI recognition can support Pithora artisans through:

- Protection against unauthorised imitation and misuse of the name
- Improved product authenticity and consumer confidence
- Greater access to handicraft exhibitions and organised markets
- Increased scope for cultural and tribal tourism
- Better visibility for individual artists and artisan groups
- Encouragement for younger generations to learn the traditional art

However, livelihood gains depend on effective branding, authorised-user registration, quality control, market linkages and ensuring that commercial benefits reach the original artisan communities.

Additional Info

Geographical Indication

- An intellectual-property right identifying goods whose quality, reputation or characteristics are linked to a particular geographical region.
- Governed in India by the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**.
- Administered by the GI Registry under the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- A GI registration is valid for **10 years** and can be renewed for further 10-year periods.

GI versus trademark

- A trademark distinguishes the goods or services of a particular enterprise.
- A GI is a collective right connected with producers from a recognised geographical area.
- Eligible producers may register themselves as authorised users of the GI.



Sangeet Natak Akademi Announces 2024 and 2025 Awards & Fellowships

What's the News?

- **Sangeet Natak Akademi**, India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, has announced its **Fellowships (Akademi Ratna) and Awards (Akademi Puraskar) for 2024 and 2025**.
- A total of **115 performing artists** have been selected – **7 Akademi Fellows and 108 Akademi Awardees** – from different States and Union Territories.
- The honours cover **music, dance, theatre, folk and tribal arts, puppetry, allied theatre arts, scholarship and other areas of the performing arts**.
- **President Droupadi Murmu** is to confer the Fellowships and Awards at a special investiture ceremony at **Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi**.
- Separately, the Akademi has selected **106 young artists** for the **Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for 2024 and 2025**.

Akademi Fellowship (Akademi Ratna)

- **Akademi Ratna** is the **highest honour conferred by Sangeet Natak Akademi**.
- The Fellowship is a rare honour, with the number of Fellows **restricted to 40 at any given time**.
- The seven newly selected Fellows are:
 - **Ramlal Bareth**
 - **A. V. Anand**
 - **Rita Ganguly**
 - **Puru Dadheech**
 - **Chittaranjan Jyotishi**
 - **Pasumarthi Rattaiah Sarma**
 - **Sudharani Raghupathy**
- **Award component: ₹3 lakh**, along with a **Tamrapatra and Angavastram**.

Akademi Puraskar

- **108 artists** have been selected for the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puraskar)** for the two award years.
- The awards recognise **sustained individual achievement and contribution** to India's performing arts.
- Major fields include:
 - **Hindustani and Carnatic music**
 - **Classical and other dance traditions**
 - **Theatre and allied theatre arts**
 - **Folk and tribal music and dance**
 - **Puppetry and traditional theatre**
 - **Instrument-making**
 - **Scholarship and overall contribution to performing arts**.
- **Award component: ₹1 lakh**, along with a **Tamrapatra and Angavastram**.
- The Akademi Awards have been conferred since **1952**.

Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar

- **106 young artists** have separately been selected for the **Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar** for 2024 and 2025.
- The award was instituted by Sangeet Natak Akademi to recognise **promising young practitioners** in music, dance, theatre and traditional performing arts.
- It is generally meant for outstanding practitioners **up to 40 years of age**.
- **Award component: ₹25,000**, a **Tamrapatra and Angavastram**.
- Unlike the Akademi Fellowship and Akademi Puraskar, which are conferred by the **President of India**, the Yuva Puraskar is conferred by the **Chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi**.

Sangeet Natak Akademi

- It is India's **apex national body for the performing arts**, covering **music, dance and drama**.
- It was created through a Government of India resolution in **1952** and became functional in **1953**.
- It is an **autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture** and is funded by the Government of India for implementing its programmes and schemes.
- **Headquarters:** Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi.
- Its management is vested in a **General Council**.
- Its major objective is the **preservation and promotion of India's intangible cultural heritage**, particularly traditions expressed through music, dance and drama.

Centre Delists 18 Monuments from Centrally Protected List

What's the News?

- The Central Government has **delisted 18 monuments** from the list of centrally protected monuments after determining that they had **ceased to be of national importance** under the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958**.
- The information was provided in Parliament by **Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**.
- After the delistings and subsequent changes in the protected list, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** currently has **3,688 centrally protected monuments/sites** under its jurisdiction.
- The government has also stated that **no centrally protected monument is currently classified as missing**.

How are Monuments Delisted?

- **Section 35 of the AMASR Act, 1958** empowers the **Central Government** to declare, through a notification in the Official Gazette,

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that a monument or archaeological site has **ceased to be of national importance**.

- Once delisted:
 - It ceases to enjoy its status as a **centrally protected monument of national importance** under the AMASR Act.
 - ASI's statutory conservation and maintenance responsibility under that status ends.
 - Delisting does not itself alter ownership of the land.**
- Monuments that are not of national importance may fall within the jurisdiction of **State Governments**, subject to applicable State heritage laws.

18 Delisted Monuments

The 18 sites are spread across **6 States/UTs**, with **Uttar Pradesh** accounting for half of them.

State/UT	Number	Examples
Uttar Pradesh	9	Gunner Burkill's Tomb, Telia Nala Buddhist Ruins, ancient banyan grove at Ghazipur
Delhi	3	Nicholson Statue, Bara Khamba Cemetery, Inchla Wali Gumti
Haryana	2	Kos Minar No. 13 at Mujessar; Kos Minar at Shahabad
Rajasthan	2	12th-century temple at Baran; inscription in fort at Nagar
Madhya Pradesh	1	Inscription in Fort of Bachhaun
Uttarakhand	1	Kutumbari area at Dwarahat

Some Important Delisted Sites

- Bara Khamba Cemetery – Delhi
- Nicholson Statue and surrounding enclosure – Delhi
- Kos Minar No. 13 – Mujessar, Haryana
- 12th-century Temple – Baran, Rajasthan
- Ancient banyan grove containing traces of buildings – Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh
- Remains of three small Linga temples, circa 1000 CE – Mirzapur
- Telia Nala Buddhist ruins – Varanasi.

AMASR Act, 1958

- Purpose:** Preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of **national importance**, regulation of archaeological excavations and protection of sculptures, carvings and similar objects.
- Section 4:** Central Government can declare an ancient monument or archaeological site to be of **national importance** through notification.

- Section 35:** Central Government can declare that such a monument/site has **ceased to be of national importance**.
- The Act is administered primarily through the **Archaeological Survey of India under the Ministry of Culture**.

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 49 – Directive Principles of State Policy**
 - Places an obligation on the State to protect monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest that are declared by Parliament to be of **national importance** from destruction, removal, disfigurement, spoliation or export.
- Union List – Entry 67**
 - Covers ancient and historical monuments, records and archaeological sites/remains declared by Parliament to be of **national importance**.
- State List – Entry 12**
 - Covers ancient and historical monuments and records **other than those declared by Parliament to be of national importance**.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- Established:** 1861.
- Founder/First Director-General:** Alexander Cunningham.
- Ministry:** Ministry of Culture.
- Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- Role:** Archaeological research and protection, conservation and maintenance of centrally protected monuments and archaeological sites.
- Current protected sites:** 3,688 centrally protected monuments/sites.

Heritage Conservation

- ASI follows the **National Policy for Conservation, 2014** for conservation of centrally protected monuments.
- Modern conservation tools include:
 - LiDAR mapping**
 - GIS**
 - Drone-based surveys.**
- Under **Adopt a Heritage 2.0**, public/private entities may assist with visitor amenities, but **conservation and preservation of centrally protected monuments remain with ASI**.

Related Heritage Data

- India had retrieved **662 antiquities/artefacts from four countries** up to June 2026:
 - United States:** 589
 - Australia:** 51
 - United Kingdom:** 21
 - Netherlands:** 1.



National Conclave on Tribal Languages and Museums Begins in Mysuru

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has organised a **three-day National Conclave on Tribal Languages and Museums** in Mysuru, Karnataka.
- It was inaugurated by **Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Durgadas Uikey**.
- The conclave seeks to develop a national approach for:
 - **Documentation, preservation and revitalisation of tribal languages.**
 - **Strengthening Tribal Museums and Tribal Freedom Fighter Museums (TFFMs).**
 - Expanding the use of digital technologies for tribal-language preservation and education.
- Major initiatives include the release of **Karnataka Primers in tribal languages**, an **MoU between the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)**, the launch of a tribal-welfare chatbot/TriBot and an upgrade of the **Adi Vaani** platform.

Tribal Language Preservation

- Several tribal languages and dialects are **unwritten, under-represented in formal education and vulnerable to inter-generational language loss.**
- Their decline can also result in loss of traditional knowledge relating to:
 - Ecology and biodiversity.
 - Traditional medicine.
 - Agriculture.
 - Oral histories, folklore and cultural practices.
- The conclave emphasises **community-led language revitalisation**, rather than documentation alone.
- Technical discussions cover:
 - **Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR).**
 - Text-to-Speech and Speech-to-Text.
 - Machine Translation.
 - Language corpus creation.
 - Data protection and commercial use of linguistic datasets.
 - **Multilingual Education (MLE).**

Adi Vaani

- **Adi Vaani** is an **AI-powered translation and language-preservation platform** of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- It enables translation between tribal languages and languages such as **Hindi and English**, along with tools for language learning and digitisation.
- Its capabilities include:
 - Text-to-Text translation.
 - Text-to-Speech.
 - Speech-to-Text.

- Speech-to-Speech translation.
- **Optical Character Recognition (OCR)** for digitising written material.
- Tribal dictionaries and primers.
- At the conclave, the platform is being expanded through:
 - Addition of **5 new languages.**
 - Launch of an **iOS application.**
 - Additional digital features.
- **Adi Vaani** is intended to improve tribal-language access to **education, governance and digital services.**

TriBot

- **TriBot** is the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' AI-enabled digital assistant.
- It provides information relating to:
 - Government schemes.
 - Scholarships.
 - Eligibility requirements.
 - Tribal welfare programmes.
- It complements broader efforts to reduce linguistic and information-access barriers for tribal communities.

Tribal Freedom Fighter Museums

- The initiative follows the policy emphasis on documenting the contribution of tribal communities to India's **anti-colonial and freedom struggles.**
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has sanctioned **11 Tribal Freedom Fighter Museums across 10 States.**
- **4 museums have been inaugurated** so far.
- The conclave is examining how such museums can function as **living institutions of memory and identity**, rather than merely repositories of artefacts.
- Proposed approaches include:
 - Community participation in curation.
 - Authentic representation of tribal freedom narratives.
 - **AR/VR**, interactive kiosks and other digital technologies.
 - Modern conservation and exhibition techniques.
- The Ministry has also indicated that establishment of a **permanent Tribal Museum in Mysuru** may be considered.

Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)

- **Location:** Mysuru, Karnataka.
- **Established:** 1969.
- It functions as a subordinate office under the **Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education.**
- Major functions include:
 - Research on Indian languages.
 - Language analysis and pedagogy.
 - Language technology.
 - Creation of linguistic content and corpora.



- Documentation and protection of **minor, minority and tribal languages**.
- An MoU between **CIIL and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs** forms part of the conclave's institutional push for tribal-language preservation.

Additional Info

- Article 29(1) of the Constitution**
 - Gives any section of Indian citizens having a distinct **language, script or culture** the right to conserve it.
- Article 342**
 - Deals with identification of **Scheduled Tribes**.
 - The President specifies STs for a State/UT, while Parliament may

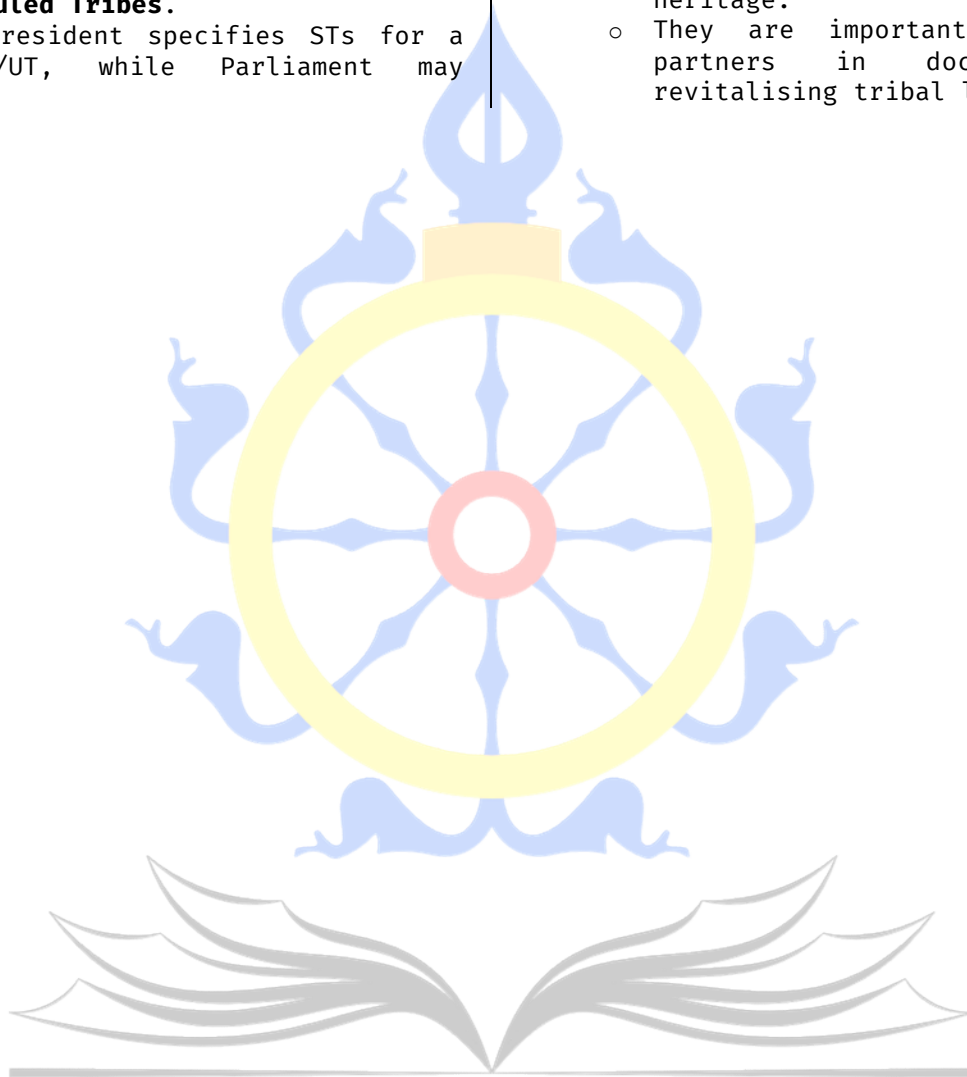
subsequently include or exclude communities through law.

- Article 350A**

- Requires States and local authorities to endeavour to provide adequate facilities for **mother-tongue instruction at the primary stage** for children belonging to linguistic minority groups.

- Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)**

- Work with State governments and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs on tribal research, documentation, training and preservation of cultural heritage.
 - They are important institutional partners in documenting and revitalising tribal languages.





Environment

New Catfish Species *Pseudolaguvia khairii* Discovered in Odisha

What's the News?

Researchers have described a new freshwater catfish species, *Pseudolaguvia khairii*, from the **Budhabalanga River in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha**.

The species has been named after **Khairi**, the renowned Royal Bengal tigress associated with the Similipal landscape and Odisha's wildlife-conservation history. The scientific description was published in the international taxonomic journal *Zootaxa*.

Pseudolaguvia khairii

It is a small hillstream catfish belonging to the genus *Pseudolaguvia*.

- **Order:** Siluriformes
- **Family:** Sisoridae
- **Genus:** *Pseudolaguvia*
- **Habitat:** Freshwater hill streams and fast-flowing rivers
- **Discovery location:** Budhabalanga River, Odisha
- **Researchers:** Balaji Vijayakrishnan, Gaurav Anil Shinde and Prakash Chand Gogineni

Members of the genus *Pseudolaguvia* occur mainly in clear, fast-flowing rivers of **India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar**.

Identification Features

The new species is only a few centimetres long. Its principal distinguishing feature is a **prominent fleshy protuberance along the base of the dorsal fin**, which has not been recorded in other known species of the genus. Other diagnostic characteristics include:

- Serrated anterior margin of the dorsal-fin spine
- Oval-shaped thoracic adhesive apparatus
- Cream-coloured bands on the body
- Pectoral-fin length of **25.7–31.8% of standard length**
- Caudal-fin length of **27.7–33.4% of standard length**
- Body depth at the anus of **15–19.2% of standard length**

Why Was It Named After Khairi?

Khairi was an orphaned Royal Bengal tiger cub rescued from the Similipal forests and raised by noted conservationist **Saroj Raj Choudhury** and **Nihar Nalini Swain**.

Khairi became associated with:

- Odisha's wildlife-conservation movement
 - Research on tiger behaviour and ecology
 - The unusual bond between humans and wild animals
 - The conservation history of Similipal
- The specific epithet *khairii* is the Latinised form used to honour the tigress.

Additional Info

• Budhabalanga River

- It is an east-flowing river of Odisha.
- It originates in the Similipal Hills.
- It flows through Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts before entering the Bay of Bengal.
- Hill streams in its upper catchment support specialised freshwater fauna adapted to strong currents.

• Thoracic adhesive apparatus

- A specialised structure on the underside of certain hillstream catfishes.
- It enables the fish to attach to rocks and other surfaces in fast-flowing water.

• Standard length

- A fish-measurement method taken from the tip of the snout to the base of the caudal fin.
- It excludes the tail fin, allowing consistent scientific comparison.

• Zootaxa

- An international peer-reviewed journal specialising in animal taxonomy.
- It publishes formal descriptions of newly identified animal species.

Glaw Lake Becomes Arunachal Pradesh's First Ramsar Site

What's the News?

Glaw Lake has been designated as **India's 101st Ramsar Site**, becoming the **first Ramsar-designated wetland in Arunachal Pradesh**. The announcement was made by Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister **Bhupender Yadav**.

The designation raises India's Ramsar-site count from **26 in 2014 to 101** and provides international recognition to the lake's ecological importance.

Glaw Lake

- **Location:** Lohit district, Arunachal Pradesh
- **Protected landscape:** Kamlang Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary
- **Region:** Eastern Himalayas
- **Wetland type:** Freshwater lake
- **Water source:** Perennial mountain streams
- **Ecological diversity:**
 - More than **150 tree species**
 - **49 orchid species** recorded within the site and its catchment

The lake forms part of the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot. Its wetland and forest

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ecosystems contribute to freshwater security, biodiversity conservation, carbon storage and livelihood support.

Ramsar Convention

The **Convention on Wetlands**, commonly called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides a framework for the **conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources**.

- Adopted at **Ramsar, Iran, in 1971**
- Entered into force in **1975**
- India became a contracting party in **1982**
- A wetland must satisfy at least **one of nine international criteria**, relating to factors such as biodiversity, threatened species, waterbirds, fish populations or representative wetland types, to qualify as a Ramsar Site.

Wetland Governance in India

- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**
 - Issued under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
 - Provide the principal regulatory framework for wetland identification, notification and management.
- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems**
 - A centrally sponsored scheme implemented through cost-sharing between the Union and state or Union Territory governments.
- **Amrit Dharohar**
 - Focuses on Ramsar Sites through:
 - Species and habitat conservation
 - Nature tourism
 - Wetland-based livelihoods
 - Wetland carbon assessment
- **Constitutional provisions**
 - **Article 48A:** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
 - **Article 51A(g):** Makes environmental protection a Fundamental Duty of every citizen.

Additional Info

- **Kamlang Tiger Reserve**
 - Located in Arunachal Pradesh's Lohit district.
 - Represents the tropical and montane ecosystems of the Eastern Himalayas.
 - Glaw Lake's location within an existing tiger reserve enables integrated conservation of aquatic, forest and wildlife habitats.
- **Notes**
 - First Ramsar Site of Arunachal Pradesh: **Glaw Lake**
 - India's 101st Ramsar Site: **Glaw Lake**
 - Location: **Kamlang Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary**

- District: **Lohit**
- Convention secretariat: **Gland, Switzerland**
- World Wetlands Day: **2 February**

India Launches Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan

What's the News?

India has launched a dedicated **Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan (CAP)** to protect the species and its forest habitats across Northeast India. The plan was released during the **91st meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wild Life** in Coimbatore.

Prepared by the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** under a Government of India-Global Environment Facility-United Nations Development Programme initiative, the CAP provides a science-based framework for habitat protection, ecological connectivity, population monitoring and community participation.

Conservation Action Plan

The CAP identifies **14 priority conservation landscapes** across Northeast India. Its principal components include:

- Restoration of degraded forest habitats.
- Conservation of wildlife corridors between fragmented forests.
- Standardised monitoring through:
 - Camera traps
 - Occupancy surveys
 - Genetic analysis
 - Environmental DNA or **eDNA**
- Strengthening anti-poaching and wildlife-crime prevention.
- Training frontline forest personnel, including the use of **M-STrIPES**.
- Community-based conservation and sustainable livelihood support.
- Climate-resilient and adaptive habitat management.
- Transboundary cooperation with neighbouring range countries.

The species has also been included under the **Species Recovery Programme** of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme-**Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats**-providing an institutional and funding framework for long-term conservation.

Clouded Leopard

- **Scientific name:** *Neofelis nebulosa*
- **Family:** Felidae
- **Habitat:** Tropical, subtropical and montane forests
- **Indian distribution:** Primarily Northeast India and the eastern Himalayan region
- **Global distribution:** Himalayan foothills and parts of South and Southeast Asia
- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable

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- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I
 - **CITES:** Appendix I
- The clouded leopard belongs to the genus **Neofelis** and is distinct from the common leopard, *Panthera pardus*. Its survival depends heavily on contiguous forest cover because habitat fragmentation restricts movement, breeding and access to prey.

Major Threats

- Forest loss and fragmentation
- Infrastructure expansion
- Illegal hunting and wildlife trade
- Decline in prey populations
- Snares intended for other wildlife
- Limited population and ecological data
- Climate-related changes in forest habitats

Protecting the species can also conserve other forest-dependent wildlife because the clouded leopard functions as an **umbrella species** for biodiverse forest landscapes.

International Clouded Leopard Day

- **Observed:** 4 August every year
- **First organised:** 2018
- **Initiated by:** Howletts Wild Animal Park in Kent, United Kingdom
- **Objective:** To raise awareness about clouded leopards, their habitats and conservation threats.

Theme note: No single official 2026 theme could be verified from the initiating organisation's observance page or the Government of India's official conservation-plan release. Different secondary platforms have circulated different slogans; these should not be treated as an officially confirmed theme.

Additional Info

- **Wildlife Institute of India**
 - Autonomous institution under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
 - Located in Dehradun.
 - Conducts wildlife research, training and conservation planning.
 - The complete CAP covers three priority felids:
 - Caracal
 - Fishing cat
 - Clouded leopard
- **National Board for Wild Life**
 - Constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
 - Chaired by the Prime Minister.
 - Its Standing Committee is chaired by the Union Environment Minister.
 - Advises governments on wildlife conservation and protected-area matters.
- **M-STrIPES**

- Full form: **Monitoring System for Tigers-Intensive Protection and Ecological Status.**
- A technology-based system used for patrolling, ecological monitoring and recording wildlife-related information.

Notes

- Priority landscapes identified: **14**
- Nodal scientific institution: **Wildlife Institute of India**
- Focus region: **Northeast India**
- IUCN status: **Vulnerable**
- CITES listing: **Appendix I**
- International Clouded Leopard Day: **4 August**

SC Extends 10-km Mining Buffer to Wetland Conservation Reserves

What's the News?

The Supreme Court has clarified that mining restrictions within a **10-km radius** of the **Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve** will apply to **all wetland conservation reserves across India**. Mining within this buffer will require clearance from the **Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife** or the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**. The clarification came while hearing objections related to the applicability of the restriction in Himachal Pradesh.

10-km Mining Buffer

- The Court extended the earlier mining restriction around **Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve, Uttarakhand**, to similarly placed wetland conservation reserves.
- Mining within the buffer is not automatically permitted.
 - It needs prior approval from:
 - **Standing Committee of NBWL**, or
 - **MoEFCC**
- The direction aims to ensure **uniform protection** for ecologically sensitive wetland reserves.
- The Court also asked authorities to verify whether relevant wetland reserve areas fall within Himachal Pradesh before applying the restriction there.

Wetland Conservation Reserves

- A **Conservation Reserve** is a protected area category under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- It generally covers government-owned land important for:
 - Wildlife corridors
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Habitat protection
 - Community-linked conservation
- Wetland conservation reserves protect water-linked ecosystems such as:
 - Marshes

- Lakes
- Floodplains
- Mangroves
- Riverine and barrage-linked wetlands

Additional Info

- **Asan Conservation Reserve**
 - Located in **Uttarakhand**.
 - Associated with the **Asan Barrage** near the Asan-Yamuna river system.
 - Recognised as a **Ramsar site**.
 - Important habitat for migratory and wintering birds.
- **Ramsar Convention**
 - International treaty for conservation and wise use of wetlands.
 - Adopted in **1971** at Ramsar, Iran.
 - India is a contracting party.
 - Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance.
- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**
 - Provide a framework for identification, notification and management of wetlands in India.
 - Implemented through **State Wetland Authorities**.
 - Emphasise conservation, wise use and regulation of activities harmful to wetlands.
- **National Board for Wildlife**
 - Statutory body under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.
 - Chaired by the **Prime Minister**.
 - Its Standing Committee considers proposals affecting protected areas and wildlife habitats.
- **Constitutional Link**
 - **Article 48A**: State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
 - **Article 51A(g)**: Fundamental duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.

Heatwaves and Lightning Added to NDRF Protocol

What's the News?

The Centre has included **heatwaves and lightning** in the list of notified natural calamities under the operational guidelines of the **State Disaster Response Fund** and **National Disaster Response Fund**. This allows States to use disaster-response funds for relief and assistance to people affected by these hazards. The move follows the **16th Finance Commission's** recommendation for the award period **2026–31**.

Notified Natural Calamities List

- The notified calamities list now includes **14 entries**.

- Earlier notified disasters included:
 - Cyclone
 - Drought
 - Earthquake
 - Fire
 - Flood
 - Tsunami
 - Hailstorm
 - Landslide
 - Avalanche
 - Cloudburst
 - Pest attack
 - Frost and cold wave
- New additions:
 - **Heatwave**
 - **Lightning**

SDRF and NDRF

- **State Disaster Response Fund**
 - Primary fund available with State governments for immediate relief after notified disasters.
 - Used for relief measures such as ex gratia assistance, shelter, food, evacuation and essential support.
- **National Disaster Response Fund**
 - Central fund used for additional assistance when disaster impact exceeds the capacity of the SDRF.
 - Operates under disaster-management guidelines issued by the Union Government.
- The inclusion means States can access the main SDRF/NDRF framework for heatwave and lightning-related relief, instead of relying only on limited provisions for locally notified disasters.

Why the Inclusion Matters

- Heatwaves and lightning have become major climate-linked hazards in India.
- The decision creates a uniform funding framework for States.
- It improves preparedness for:
 - Extreme heat deaths and illnesses
 - Lightning-related casualties
 - Climate-resilient local infrastructure
 - Early warning and public health response
- It also enables use of disaster mitigation funds for preventive measures, not only post-disaster relief.

Heatwave and Lightning Data

- India reported **4,853 heatstroke cases** during March–July 2026.
- **20 confirmed heatstroke deaths** were reported in the same period.
- Highest reported heatstroke cases:
 - **Telangana**: 915 cases
 - **West Bengal**: 733 cases
 - **Chhattisgarh**: 660 cases
- **Maharashtra** reported the highest confirmed heatstroke deaths, with **11 deaths**.

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Additional Info

- **Heatwave**
 - IMD generally declares a heatwave when:
 - Maximum temperature is at least **40°C in plains**, or
 - At least **30°C in hilly regions**, and
 - Departure from normal temperature is **4.5°C or more**.
 - Major impacts:
 - Heatstroke
 - Dehydration
 - Labour productivity loss
 - Power and water stress
 - Urban heat-island effect
- **Lightning**
 - A sudden atmospheric electrical discharge.
 - One of India's major weather-related causes of accidental deaths.
 - High-risk groups include:
 - Farmers
 - Outdoor workers
 - Rural households
 - People sheltering under trees during storms
- **Disaster Management Act, 2005**
 - Provides the legal framework for disaster management in India.
 - Establishes institutions such as:
 - **National Disaster Management Authority**
 - **State Disaster Management Authorities**
 - **District Disaster Management Authorities**
- **Mitigation Mechanisms**
 - **NDMA Guidelines:** National guidance on heatwave and lightning risk reduction.
 - **IMD Forecasts:** Impact-based forecasts and colour-coded alerts.
 - **Heat Action Plans:** City and State-level plans for reducing heat-related illness and deaths.
 - **SACHET Portal:** Multi-hazard early warning dissemination platform.

India's Asiatic Lion Population Rises to 891

What's the News?

- India's Asiatic lion population has increased to **891 in 2025**, compared with **523 in 2015**, marking a rise of over **70% in a decade**.
- The latest figure comes from the **16th Asiatic Lion Population Estimation**, covering the **Greater Gir landscape of Gujarat**.

- Compared with **674 lions in 2020**, the population increased by about **32% in five years**.
- The figures were highlighted by Union Environment Minister **Bhupender Yadav** on the occasion of **World Lion Day**.

Lion Population Trend

Year	Asiatic Lion Population
2015	523
2020	674
2025	891

- **2015–2025 growth:** More than **70%**

- **2020–2025 growth:** About **32%**

16th Asiatic Lion Population Estimation

- Conducted in **2025** in Gujarat.
- Recorded **891 Asiatic lions**.
- The lion range has expanded from about **30,000 sq km in 2020 to nearly 35,000 sq km**.
- Lions are now spread across **11 districts** in the Saurashtra region rather than remaining confined to the traditional Gir landscape.

The geographical range has therefore expanded by roughly **5,000 sq km**, or about **17%**, since 2020.

Expansion Beyond Gir

- Asiatic lions are increasingly occupying:
 - notified forest areas;
 - **river corridors**;
 - revenue wastelands; and
 - other habitats outside conventional protected areas.
- **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary** is being developed as a **second home for Asiatic lions**, reducing dependence on a single core population around Gir.
- Lions naturally returned to Barda, and its population reached **17 lions by 2025**.

Project Lion

- **Announced:** 2020.
- **Objective:** Long-term conservation of the Asiatic lion through a **landscape-level approach** rather than protection of Gir alone.
- Major interventions include:
 - habitat improvement and restoration;
 - strengthening of wildlife corridors;
 - disease surveillance and veterinary care;
 - scientific population monitoring;
 - radio telemetry and other technology-based monitoring;
 - prey-base augmentation;
 - biodiversity conservation; and
 - community participation and benefit sharing.

Why Has the Population Increased?

Important conservation factors include:

- **Strict habitat and species protection.**
- Restoration of **grasslands and natural prey base**.

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- Expansion and protection of movement corridors.
- Improved veterinary and disease-monitoring facilities.
- Community involvement in human-lion coexistence.
- Real-time monitoring through a **Hi-Tech Monitoring Unit at Sasan-Gir** and radio telemetry.
- More than **55,000 open wells have been secured** to reduce accidental lion deaths.

Conservation Challenges

Population recovery also creates new management challenges:

- greater **human-lion interaction** outside protected areas;
- road and railway accidents;
- disease outbreaks because much of the global Asiatic lion population remains geographically concentrated;
- habitat fragmentation and corridor disruption; and
- livestock depredation and associated human-wildlife conflict.

Measures include **speed restrictions for trains in identified hotspots, railway-track patrolling, water augmentation, elevated machans for farmers and community awareness through Vanya PraniMitras and trackers.**

Additional Info

- **Asiatic Lion**
 - Genus: *Panthera*
 - Family: **Felidae**
 - India contains the **last surviving wild population of Asiatic lions**, centred on Gujarat's Gir and Greater Gir landscape.
- **Gir Wildlife Sanctuary**
 - Established in **1965**.
 - It became the core protected landscape for recovering a population that had fallen to only around **40-60 lions in the early 20th century** due mainly to hunting and habitat loss.
- **Notes**
 - **891 – Asiatic lions in 2025**
 - **674 – population in 2020**
 - **523 – population in 2015**
 - **35,000 sq km – current approximate lion range**
 - **Project Lion – announced in 2020**
 - **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary – second lion habitat**

Unusual Stratospheric Ozone Enhancement Detected over North Bay of Bengal

What's the News?

- Indian scientists have detected an **unusually thick, ozone-rich layer at about**

21-23 km altitude over the North Bay of Bengal.

- The localized enhancement persisted for **more than 24 hours** and contained substantially more ozone than normally observed over the eastern Indian subtropical region.
- The findings, published in **Earth and Space Science** of the **American Geophysical Union (AGU)**, provide experimental evidence of how atmospheric circulation can redistribute stratospheric ozone over India.
- The study involved institutions under **ISRO, DST and MoES**, along with the University of Calcutta and other research institutions.

What Makes the Finding Unusual?

- The ozone layer is concentrated in the **stratosphere**, where ozone normally shows its major concentration at higher altitudes; the observed enhancement occurred relatively lower, at **21-23 km**.
- Ozone partial pressure in the anomalous layer was approximately **50 nanobar (nbar)** above the typical profile for the eastern Indian subtropical region.
- The enhanced layer was about **2.1-2.4 km thick**.
- It was observed during both **day and night**, making sunlight-driven local photochemistry an unlikely primary cause. This is **not a new permanent global ozone layer or an ozone hole**. It is a **localized, dynamically driven enhancement of stratospheric ozone**.

What Caused the Ozone Enhancement?

Researchers identified two major atmospheric processes:

- **Advection:** Transport of ozone-rich air from other regions towards the North Bay of Bengal.
- **Downward air motion and compression:** Persistent descending motion in the lower stratosphere compressed the ozone-rich air mass, increasing ozone concentration.

The study therefore shows that **atmospheric dynamics**, rather than only chemical reactions, can significantly alter regional ozone distribution.

NetRAD-ASMA Campaign?

- The discovery emerged from **Phase-I of the NetRAD-ASMA campaign**, a nationwide atmospheric research programme.
- NetRAD-ASMA refers to a network-based campaign using **ST/MST radars and balloon-borne observations** to study the **Asian Summer Monsoon Anticyclone** and **stratosphere-troposphere interactions**.
- The campaign used:
 - **Ozonesondes and radiosondes**
 - Atmospheric **ST/MST radars**

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- **Aura Microwave Limb Sounder (MLS)**
- **INSAT-3DR**
- Atmospheric models and reanalysis datasets.

Role of ARIES

- **Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES)** is an autonomous institute under the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)** and is located at **Nainital, Uttarakhand**.
- Its scientists **Dr Manish Naja** and **Dr Samaresh Bhattacharjee** participated in the research.
- The study prominently used ARIES' indigenously developed **206.5 MHz Stratosphere-Troposphere (ST) Radar**.
- Similar radar observations were obtained from **Haringhata, Gadanki and Kochi**.

Ozone Layer: Facts

- **Ozone (O_3)** consists of **three oxygen atoms**.
- Around **90% of atmospheric ozone occurs in the stratosphere**.
- Stratospheric ozone is regarded as **"good ozone"** because it absorbs a large proportion of biologically harmful **ultraviolet radiation** from the Sun.
- In contrast, excessive **tropospheric or ground-level ozone** is an air pollutant harmful to humans, animals and vegetation.

Additional Info

- **Montreal Protocol**
 - Global agreement for protecting the ozone layer by phasing out **Ozone-Depleting Substances (ODS)**.
 - Major ODS include **CFCs, halons, carbon tetrachloride and HCFCs**.
 - India became a party to the **Montreal Protocol in 1992**.
 - Implementation in India is handled by the **Ozone Cell, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- **Kigali Amendment**
 - Adopted under the Montreal Protocol to **phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)**.
 - HFCs generally do not deplete ozone but are powerful greenhouse gases.
- **Notes**
 - **Location:** North Bay of Bengal
 - **Altitude:** 21-23 km
 - **Layer thickness:** 2.1-2.4 km
 - **Ozone enhancement:** About 50 nbar above typical profile
 - **Campaign:** Phase-I NetRAD-ASMA
 - **Key institute:** ARIES, Nainital
 - **ARIES administrative ministry:** Department of Science & Technology
 - **Key indigenous instrument:** 206.5 MHz ST Radar
 - **Satellites used:** Aura MLS and INSAT-3DR

- **Cause:** Advection + downward motion/compression of ozone-rich air
- **Journal:** *Earth and Space Science*
- **Publisher:** American Geophysical Union

Centre Redefines Ganga Floodplain with Three-Tier Zoning

What's the News?

- The **Union Ministry of Jal Shakti** has amended the **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016** through the **Second Amendment Order, 2026**.
- The amendment gives a specific definition to the **"active floodplain"** and divides the broader floodplain of the **Ganga and its tributaries** into **active, regulatory and warning zones** according to flood-return periods.
- It also removes the earlier principle describing the entire river bank and floodplain as a **"construction-free zone"**, replacing it with an obligation to reduce pollution pressures and preserve **natural groundwater recharge functions**.
- However, the existing prohibition on construction in the **river, river banks, tributaries and active floodplain** has not been deleted.

New Floodplain Zoning

The amended framework classifies flood-prone areas according to how frequently they are expected to be inundated.

- **Active Floodplain**
 - Area inundated by a **1-in-5-year flood**.
 - This is the first explicit definition of "active floodplain" under the Ganga regulatory framework.
 - Equivalent annual probability of such a flood: approximately **20%**.
- **Regulatory Zone**
 - Covers areas inundated between the **1-in-5-year and 1-in-25-year flood levels**.
 - Upper return-period probability: about **4% annually**.
- **Warning Zone**
 - Covers areas inundated between the **1-in-25-year and 1-in-100-year flood levels**.
 - A 1-in-100-year flood corresponds to approximately **1% annual probability**.

Return period does not mean a flood occurs exactly once every 5, 25 or 100 years. It expresses the statistical probability of a flood of a specified magnitude occurring in any given year.

What Changed from the 2016 Order?

Earlier Framework

- The 2016 Order defined a **floodplain** broadly as an area inundated by the river's greatest flow or a flood with a frequency of **once in 100 years**.
- One of its governing principles stated that the **bank of the Ganga and its floodplain should be a construction-free zone** to:
 - reduce pollution sources and pressures; and
 - maintain natural groundwater recharge.
- It separately prohibited permanent or temporary structures for residential, commercial, industrial or other purposes in the **Ganga, its banks, tributaries and active floodplain**, subject to limited exceptions.

Revised Framework

- The general **"construction-free zone" wording has been removed**.
- In its place, river banks and floodplains are to be maintained through necessary measures to:
 - reduce pollution sources and pressures; and
 - preserve their natural groundwater recharge functions.
- The separate construction prohibition applicable to the **river, banks, tributaries and active floodplain remains unchanged**.
- The amendment itself **does not separately specify whether construction is permitted or prohibited in the newly defined regulatory and warning zones**.

Exam Caution: Removal of the phrase **"construction-free zone"** should **not** be interpreted as allowing unrestricted construction throughout the Ganga floodplain.

Why are Floodplains Important?

- **Flood buffering:** Provide space for excess river water during high-flow events.
- **Groundwater recharge:** Floodwater infiltration replenishes aquifers.
- **Pollution control:** Natural soils and vegetation can retain sediments and pollutants.
- **Biodiversity:** Support wetlands, riparian vegetation and aquatic ecosystems.
- **River morphology:** Allow rivers to migrate and adjust naturally instead of being permanently confined.

The revised Order specifically retains **pollution reduction and groundwater recharge** as core objectives of floodplain management.

Additional Info

- **River Ganga Authorities Order, 2016**
 - Issued under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.

- The Central Government exercises relevant powers under **Section 3** of the Act for environmental protection and establishment/empowerment of authorities.

- **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMG)**
 - Statutory authority under the Ganga governance framework.
 - Responsible for measures concerning rejuvenation, protection and management of the Ganga and its tributaries.
 - Certain projects such as **bridges, associated roads, embankments, ghats, jetties and specified hydraulic structures** require prior approval under the Ganga regulatory framework.
- **Constitutional Link**
 - **Article 48A:** Directive Principle requiring the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
 - **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, including **ivers**.

Parliamentary Panel Proposes National Pine-Needle Policy to Tackle Himalayan Forest Fires

What's the News?

- The **Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change**, chaired by **Dr. Medha Vishram Kulkarni**, has recommended a **National Pine-Needle Utilisation Policy** as part of its **412th Report on forest fires in the Himalayan region**.
- The policy aims to systematically remove highly combustible **Chir Pine needles (pirul)** from forest floors while creating **rural livelihoods and a biomass-based circular economy**.
- The Committee has advocated shifting Himalayan forest-fire management from a **reactive fire-suppression approach to prevention-led, livelihood-linked biomass management**.
- It also recommended improved satellite surveillance, region-specific fire-management strategies and stronger disaster-response infrastructure.

National Pine-Needle Utilisation Policy?

The proposed policy would be formulated by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** in coordination with Himalayan States.

- **Priority zones:** Scientifically identify fire-prone collection areas such as



roadsides, fire lines, forest edges and settlement-adjacent forests.

- **Collection support:** Provide about ₹3–4 per kg as government-supported collection incentive, linked to verified weightment and direct payment to collectors.
- **Market support:** Provide fiscal incentives, subsidised collection infrastructure and assured market access for community enterprises.
- **Ecological safeguard:** Pine litter should not be removed below levels required for soil protection and nutrient cycling.
- **Institutional mechanism:** Establish a National/Regional Pine Needle Management Board for coordination, standardisation and supply-chain development.
- **Local participation:** Use Van Panchayats, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community forest-management institutions for collection and aggregation.

The Committee also proposed a **Himalayan Pirul Management Mission** and a broader **Himalayan Biomass Management Framework**.

Pine Needles: Fire Hazard to Bioeconomy

Dry Chir Pine needles are resin-rich and highly combustible. Their accumulation produces a continuous fuel layer capable of rapidly spreading forest fires.

The Committee recommended decentralised units to convert pine needles into:

- **Briquettes and pellets**
- **Biochar**
- **Power-generation feedstock**
- **Handicrafts and packaging material**

Pine-needle pellets have an energy value of about **5,500 kcal/kg** and can potentially be used for **biomass co-firing in thermal power plants**.

The panel estimated that collection support of ₹3–4/kg could make pine-needle pellets competitive with conventional biomass pellets, whose end-user price is around ₹10–12/kg.

Why is Himalayan Forest-Fire Management Important?

- The Himalayan States examined by the Committee constitute about **17% of India's landmass but account for around 57% of forest-fire incidents**.
- **Western Himalaya:** Fire risk is strongly associated with extreme pre-monsoon heat, Chir Pine fuel loads and human ignition.
- **Eastern Himalaya:** Fires involve a more complex interaction of atmospheric dryness and cultivation-linked burning.
- Hence, the Committee rejected a uniform pan-Himalayan approach and called for **region-specific fire-management strategies**.

In the Western Himalaya specifically, **Chir Pine forests are associated with nearly 57%**

of forest-fire incidents, highlighting the importance of managing pine litter.

Other Major Recommendations

- **Dedicated satellite:** Department of Space should prioritise a **geostationary satellite for round-the-clock forest-fire monitoring**. Existing monitoring relies significantly on foreign polar-orbiting satellites, which leave observational gaps.
- **NDRF capacity:** Establish at least **two dedicated Regional Response Centres**—one each for the Western and Eastern Himalaya.
- **Early warning:** Integrate **FAST 3.0 fire alerts with cell-broadcast systems** to provide geo-targeted alerts to residents and tourists.
- **Fire database:** Develop a centralised national database on **forest-fire casualties and compensation**.
- **Climate-fire research:** Conduct region-specific research on the relationship between climate change and fire **frequency, intensity and seasonality**.
- **Forest restoration:** Establish a **Himalayan Oak and Deodar Regeneration Mission** and undertake scientific management of invasive species.
- **Post-fire recovery:** Develop protocols for **watershed and spring rejuvenation** after forest fires.
- **Financing:** Strengthen the **Forest Fire Prevention and Management (FFPM) Scheme** instead of excessive dependence on CAMPA funds, which are primarily intended for compensatory afforestation.

Additional Info

- **Chir Pine**
 - Scientific name: *Pinus roxburghii*.
 - Its dry needle litter is commonly known as **pirul** in Himalayan regions.
 - Dense litter can suppress grasses and other ground vegetation while increasing surface-fire risk.
- **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**
 - Functions under **MoEFCC**.
 - Headquarters: **Dehradun, Uttarakhand**.
 - Provides satellite-based forest-fire detection and alerts.
 - Current active-fire monitoring uses satellite inputs including **AQUA and Suomi-NPP**.
- **Forest Research Institute (FRI)**
 - Located in **Dehradun**.
 - Functions under the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**.
 - The Committee proposed an FRI-led historical-ecological study of changing forest composition in the Western Himalaya.
- **Constitutional Linkages**



- **Article 48A:** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Forests: Entry 17A of the Concurrent List.**
- Forests were shifted from the State List to the Concurrent List through the **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.**
- **NDRF**
 - Constituted under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005.**
 - It is India's specialised force for response to threatening disaster situations and disasters.

Himachal Pradesh Case Study

Himachal Pradesh is experimenting with converting collected pine needles into commercially useful products such as **biochar, oil and related biomass products**. Such models combine **forest-fire prevention, waste-to-wealth, clean energy and rural employment**, and could provide operational lessons for a national pine-needle policy.

Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026 Honour Frontline Elephant Conservation Efforts

What's the News?

- The **Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026** were conferred during the national celebrations of **World Elephant Day** at **Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.**
- The awards, associated with the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, recognise exemplary contributions to **elephant conservation, captive-elephant management and frontline wildlife protection.**
- **Kirti Vardhan Singh**, Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, presented the awards.
- The event also saw the launch of a **₹500-crore Regional Action Plan for Human-Elephant Conflict in Southern India** and the release of **"30 Giant Steps"**, documenting major achievements under Project Elephant.

Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026

The awards recognise frontline personnel and custodians involved in elephant conservation and wildlife management.

Notable Awardees

- **Seven mahouts/forest staff of Jaldapara Wildlife Division, West Bengal**, were recognised for exceptional wildlife rescue work during severe floods:
 - **Bikash Kharia and Rajiv Oraon** helped protect **six stranded captive**

elephants, including trained *kumki* elephants.

- **Ajibul Haque, Ajit Gabur, Momtaz Alam, Amasur Kharia and Dilip Munda** helped guide **13 displaced wild one-horned rhinoceroses** to safety.
- Reports also identify **Jugal Nayak, an Odisha forest officer**, as a **posthumous recipient** for his sacrifice while protecting elephants.

₹500-Crore Human-Elephant Conflict Action Plan

A **Regional Action Plan for Comprehensive Understanding and Management of Human-Elephant Conflict in Southern India** was released under **Project Elephant.**

- **States covered:** Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- **Central support: ₹500 crore.**
- It adopts a **landscape-level approach**, recognising that elephant ranges and corridors often cross State boundaries.
- Major focus areas:
 - Habitat connectivity and elephant-corridor conservation
 - Early-warning systems
 - Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) mitigation infrastructure
 - Habitat restoration
 - Community participation
 - Rapid-response mechanisms
 - Research and monitoring
 - Capacity building
 - Interstate coordination

Project Elephant

- **Launched: 1992**
- **Type:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme
- **Nodal Ministry:** MoEFCC
- Major objectives include:
 - Protecting elephants and their habitats.
 - Maintaining **elephant corridors** and landscape connectivity.
 - Mitigating **Human-Elephant Conflict.**
 - Improving welfare and management of captive elephants.
 - Supporting States through financial, technical and scientific assistance.

"30 Giant Steps"

The publication **"30 Giant Steps"** documents **30 major milestones, achievements and conservation initiatives** undertaken under **Project Elephant during 2020-2026.**

Elephant Conservation in India

- India hosts **nearly 60% of the world's wild Asian elephant population.**
- The **Synchronous All India Population Estimation of Elephants (SAIEE) 2021-25** estimated India's wild elephant population at **22,446.**
- India has:
 - **33 Elephant Reserves**

- 150 identified elephant corridors
- The 150 corridors occur across 14 elephant-range States:
 - East-Central region – 52
 - North-East – 48
 - Southern region – 32
 - Northern region – 18
- West Bengal has the highest number of identified corridors at 26.

H.A.N.U.M.A.N. Initiative

Andhra Pradesh highlighted its technology-driven **H.A.N.U.M.A.N. initiative** for wildlife protection.

H.A.N.U.M.A.N. stands for **Healing And Nurturing Units for Monitoring, Aid and Nursing of Wildlife**.

It combines:

- Modern wildlife-monitoring technology
- Local community participation
- Rapid-response mechanisms
- Capacity building of frontline forest personnel

The initiative forms part of Andhra Pradesh's broader approach of moving from human-wildlife **"Conflict to Coexistence."**

Additional Info

- **World Elephant Day**
 - Observed annually on **12 August**.
 - Focuses on protection of Asian and African elephants and their habitats.
 - The World Elephant Day platform uses the message **"Bringing the world together to help elephants"** for the 2026 observance.
- **Asian Elephant**
 - Scientific name: *Elephas maximus*.
 - Elephants are a **keystone species** because their movement, feeding and seed dispersal influence forest structure, nutrient cycling and biodiversity.
 - Individual elephant home ranges may extend roughly **100–3,000 km²**, making landscape connectivity and corridors particularly important.
- **Elephant Corridors**
 - Connect fragmented elephant habitats and enable movement between forest landscapes.
 - They help maintain **genetic connectivity** and can reduce Human-Elephant Conflict by securing traditional movement routes.
- **Jaldapara National Park**
 - Located in **West Bengal**.
 - Important habitat for the **Indian one-horned rhinoceros** and Asian elephant.
 - The 2026 awards highlighted the role of mahouts not only in elephant management but also in wider wildlife rescue operations.

India Launches First-Ever Guide to Grasslands and Open Natural Ecosystems

What's the News?

- India has launched its first-ever **Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) of India** at **UNCCD COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**.
- The guide provides a national framework for recognising, classifying, conserving and restoring India's naturally open ecosystems, many of which have historically been treated as degraded land or "wasteland".
- It classifies **24 ecosystem types**, covering grasslands, savannas, scrublands, deserts, rocky plateaus, ravines and coastal open ecosystems.
- Union Environment Minister **Bhupender Yadav** emphasised science-based conservation of these ecosystems alongside forests because of their importance for biodiversity, livelihoods and climate resilience.

Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)

- **Grasslands:** Natural ecosystems dominated mainly by grasses and other herbaceous vegetation, with few or no trees.
- **ONEs** are a broader category of naturally open landscapes with low tree cover and include:
 - Himalayan and Terai grasslands
 - Thar Desert and Banni landscapes
 - Deccan savannas
 - Rocky plateaus
 - Ravines and scrublands
 - Coastal ecosystems
 - Alpine meadows
- These ecosystems contribute to:
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Soil and water processes
 - **Soil carbon storage**
 - Pastoral and livestock-based livelihoods
 - Climate resilience.

Features of the Guide

- Documents the **geographical distribution, ecological characteristics and biodiversity** of India's major ONEs.
- Records communities and tribes associated with these landscapes.
- Contains dedicated sections on:
 - **Pastoralism**
 - **Fire ecology**
 - **Carbon sequestration**
- Supports better **land-degradation assessment** and landscape-level conservation and restoration planning.
- It can assist India in achieving its **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)** commitments.

Biodiversity Importance

- Several threatened and specialised species depend on open ecosystems, including:
 - Great Indian Bustard
 - Lesser Florican
 - Bengal Florican
 - Indian Wolf
 - Blackbuck
 - Sociable Lapwing.
- Important landscapes highlighted include:
 - Shola-grassland mosaics of the southern Western Ghats
 - Yamuna-Chambal ravines
 - Rocky plateaus of the northern Western Ghats
 - Theri Kaadu red-sand landscapes of Tamil Nadu
 - Central Nicobar grasslands.

Additional Info

- Institutional Collaboration**
 - The guide was launched under the aegis of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
 - Publication and the launch event were organised by **Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)** in collaboration with:
 - International Union for Conservation of Nature (**IUCN**)
 - Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management (**CoE-SLM**)
 - Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (**ICFRE**)
 - Space Applications Centre (**SAC**), ISRO.
- UNCCD**
 - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.**
 - Established in **1994**.
 - It is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development with **sustainable land management**.
- Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)**
 - Aims to maintain or increase the amount and quality of healthy and productive land resources.
 - Closely linked to **SDG 15 – Life on Land**.
 - SDG Target 15.3** seeks a **land degradation-neutral world by 2030**.
- Oran & Gauchar**
 - Oran:** Traditionally community-protected landscapes/commons, particularly associated with Rajasthan.
 - Gauchar:** Village common land traditionally reserved for livestock grazing.

- Their inclusion highlights the role of **community-based and traditional conservation systems**.

India Restored 21.76 Million Hectares of Degraded Land During 2011–2020 Under Bonn Challenge

What's the News?

India's second progress report on the Bonn Challenge revealed that **21.76 million hectares** of degraded and deforested land were restored between 2011 and 2020. Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhopender Yadav announced the figures at the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The restoration efforts generated approximately **1.22 billion person-days of employment**, demonstrating convergence of environmental goals with rural livelihoods. India has pledged to restore **26 million hectares by 2030** under the Bonn Challenge.

Bonn Challenge Target?

- Global Initiative:** Launched in 2011, the Bonn Challenge is a voluntary global pledge to restore degraded and deforested landscapes
- India's Pledge:**
 - Initial commitment in 2015: 13 million hectares by 2020
 - Additional 8 million hectares by 2030
 - Revised target at COP14: **26 million hectares by 2030**
- Progress:** 21.76 million hectares restored in the 2011–2020 decade, leaving roughly 4.24 million hectares to be restored in the current decade to meet the 2030 goal
- Monitoring Framework:** IUCN Restoration Barometer used to gauge progress across policies, institutional frameworks, financial flows, technical planning, and monitoring systems for forest landscape restoration (FLR)

State-wise Performance?

All 28 states and 8 Union Territories reported progress. Top performers in restoration (2011–2020):

Rank	State	Area Restored
1	Telangana	4.18 million ha
2	Madhya Pradesh	3.78 million ha
3	Odisha	2.64 million ha
4	Gujarat	1.73 million ha
5	Andhra Pradesh	1.61 million ha

- Methods used:** Afforestation, water resource management, sustainable farming practices, agroforestry, mangrove restoration, and natural regeneration of formerly forested land



Additional Info

• Land Degradation in India:

- India's Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas shows **97.8 million hectares** (nearly **29.8%** of the country's geographical area) are affected by land degradation and desertification
- Around **82%** of India's degraded land is concentrated in **9 states/UTs**: Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana

• Government Initiatives:

- **Green India Mission**: Greening and restoration across ~170,000 hectares
- **CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority)**: Afforestation over ~320,000 hectares in the past five years
- **Joint Forest Management (JFM)**: Covers about **81.53 million hectares** – one of the largest community-based forest management systems globally
- **Agroforestry**: More than 121,000 hectares brought under agroforestry
- **Bamboo Plantations**: Nearly 60,000 hectares established outside forests
- **"Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" Campaign**: Over 266 crore saplings planted across the country
- **Aravalli Green Wall Initiative**: Landscape-level restoration programme that surpassed its annual targets in FY 2025–26
- **MISHTI (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes)**: Target to restore **54,000 hectares** of mangrove area by 2028

• Financing Mechanisms:

- **Sovereign Green Bonds**: Mobilising capital for restoration
- **Green Credit Programme**: Enables public and private entities to finance restoration of degraded forest land
- India is preparing for the next reporting cycle (2021–2025) in collaboration with the **ICFRE Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land**

Management and IUCN, tracking three key indicators: areas of restoration, financial flows, and employment creation

• Institutional Context:

- **UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification)**: One of the three Rio Conventions alongside UNFCCC (climate change) and CBD (biodiversity)
- **COP17**: Held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; India highlighted the need for diversified, adequate, predictable, and sustained international finance for land restoration and drought resilience

Health & Pharma

Centre Proposes Safety Rules for Two-Wheeled Ambulances

What's the News?

The **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)** has proposed draft amendments to the **Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989**, creating a dedicated regulatory framework for two-wheeled road ambulances.

The proposal covers their construction, safety, type approval, registration, patient-handling systems and fitness inspection. These ambulances are intended to provide rapid emergency medical assistance in rural, remote, hilly and congested areas where conventional ambulances face access constraints. The rules remain in draft form and will be finalised after stakeholder consultation.

Two-Wheeled Road Ambulance

A two-wheeled road ambulance is proposed to be defined as an **L2-category vehicle** fitted or attached with:

- An ambulance accessory unit; or
- A patient-conveyance system.

It may function as a rapid-response medical vehicle or carry a patient using a specially designed attachment, depending on its approved configuration.

AIS-209 Safety Standard

The draft rules propose adopting **Automotive Industry Standard AIS-209 (Part 1):2026**, titled *Construction and Functional Requirements for Life Support Two-Wheeled Road Ambulances*.

L2-category ambulances manufactured from **October 2027** would have to comply with the standard. Major safety requirements include:

- Vehicle stability and braking performance
- Parking-brake efficiency and gradeability
- Rear visibility
- Secure coupling of the patient-conveyance unit
- Emergency warning lights and conspicuity
- Safe patient loading and unloading
- Patient-restraint and stretcher-locking systems
- Protection of patients from environmental exposure

Registration and Fitness

- The ambulances will be registered as **transport vehicles**.
- Their certificate of fitness must be renewed **every two years**.
- Fitness inspection will examine:
 - Tyres and rims
 - Ambulance-unit mounting
 - Emergency warning lights
 - Stretcher and locking mechanism
 - Patient restraints

- Loading and unloading systems
- Availability and validity of the fire extinguisher

- State governments will determine the geographical areas in which these ambulances may operate.

Why Are the Rules Needed?

Two-wheeled ambulances are not presently regulated as a distinct vehicle category under the Central Motor Vehicles Rules. Consequently, India lacks uniform national requirements for their design, patient safety, registration, approval and inspection.

The proposed framework seeks to:

- Reduce emergency-response time
- Improve last-mile healthcare access
- Standardise vehicle and equipment quality
- Ensure operator accountability
- Enable safer deployment in difficult terrain and narrow urban roads

Additional Info

• Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989

- Framed under the **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988**.
- Regulate vehicle registration, construction, safety, permits and fitness standards.

• Certificate of fitness

- Under **Section 56 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988**, a transport vehicle must possess a valid fitness certificate to be treated as validly registered.

• Automotive Industry Standards

- Technical standards relating to vehicle construction, safety, testing and performance.
- Developed through the **Automotive Industry Standards Committee** under the vehicle-regulation framework administered by MoRTH.

• Draft status

- The proposal is not yet a final rule.
- Comments will be examined after a **30-day consultation period**, following which the amendments may be notified.

India Records Over 20,000 Organ Transplants for the First Time

What's the News?

India performed a record **20,138 organ transplants in 2025**, crossing the 20,000 mark for the first time. This represents a **6.5% increase** over 18,911 transplants in 2024 and a fourfold rise from 4,990 procedures in 2013. India now ranks **third globally in total organ transplants**, after the United States and

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China, while retaining the **first position in living-donor organ transplants**. However, the continued dependence on living donors and the shortage of deceased donors remain major concerns.

Transplant Performance

- **Total transplants in 2025:** 20,138
- **Total transplants in 2024:** 18,911
- **Annual increase:** 6.5%
- **Total transplants in 2013:** 4,990
- **Deceased-donor transplants in 2025:** 3,526
- **Deceased-donor transplants in 2013:** 837

Deceased-donor transplants increased more than fourfold over the period. Nevertheless, they constituted only about **17.5% of total transplants in 2025**, indicating that nearly four-fifths of India's transplant activity continues to depend on living donors.

State-wise Performance

Total organ transplants

- **Delhi-NCR:** 4,564
- **Tamil Nadu:** 2,796
- **Maharashtra:** 2,136
- **Telangana:** 1,523
- **Kerala:** 1,489

Deceased organ donors

- **Tamil Nadu:** 266
- **Maharashtra:** 205
- **Telangana:** 198
- **Karnataka:** 154
- **Kerala:** 152

Delhi-NCR recorded the highest number of transplant procedures, while Tamil Nadu led the country in deceased organ donation.

Critical Donation Gap

India's transplant capacity has expanded rapidly, but the availability of organs remains substantially below demand. The principal weakness is the low level of deceased organ donation.

Key constraints include:

- Limited identification and certification of brain-stem death
- Lack of trained transplant coordinators in many hospitals
- Family refusal due to misconceptions or inadequate counselling
- Uneven transplant infrastructure among states
- Delays in organ retrieval, allocation and transportation
- Heavy dependence on living kidney and liver donors

More than **1,200 families** consented to deceased organ donation in 2025. Although this represents progress, deceased-donor organs accounted for only around **18% of all transplants**.

Organ-Donation Pledges

More than **five lakh Aadhaar-verified organ-donation pledges** have been recorded since the national digital pledge portal was launched

in 2023. Over **2.58 lakh pledges** were registered during 2025 alone.

A pledge expresses an individual's intention to donate organs after death. Actual deceased donation generally requires medical eligibility, brain-stem-death certification and consent or cooperation from the donor's family.

New Initiatives

e-Pratyaropan

- Unified national digital platform for organ and tissue donation and transplantation.
- Integrates hospitals, doctors, donors, recipients and regulatory authorities.
- Supports registration, waiting-list management, organ allocation and monitoring.

NOTTO Mobile Application

- Provides digital access to organ-donation and transplantation services.
- Supports awareness, registration and stakeholder coordination.

Jug Jug Jiyo Abhiyaan

- Year-long national awareness campaign.
- Honours organ donors and their families.
- Seeks to increase voluntary organ-donation pledges.

National Brain-Stem Death Certification Guidelines

- Seek uniform diagnosis and certification across hospitals.
- Important because legally certified brain-stem death enables deceased organ donation.

National Guidelines on Swap Transplantation

- Standardise kidney-swap procedures.
- Permit incompatible donor-recipient pairs to exchange donors with another compatible pair.

Additional Info

NOTTO

- Full form: **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation**
- Functions under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Maintains the national registry and coordinates organ allocation across regions.

Organ-transplantation network

- **NOTTO:** National level
- **ROTO:** Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation
- **SOTTO:** State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation

Legal framework

- **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994**
 - Regulates the removal, storage and transplantation of human organs and tissues.
 - Recognises brain-stem death.
 - Prohibits commercial dealings in human organs.
- **2011 Amendment**
 - Expanded the definition of near relatives.
 - Provided statutory recognition to swap transplantation.
- **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014**
 - Prescribe procedures for donor approval, brain-stem-death certification, registration and transplantation.
- **Government support**
 - **National Organ Transplant Programme:** Supports transplant infrastructure, coordinators, training, organ transport and networking.
 - **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi:** Provides financial assistance for eligible patients from economically weaker sections.
- **Days & Themes**
 - **Indian Organ Donation Day:** 3 August
 - **World Organ Donation Day:** 13 August

Parliamentary Panel Recommends 20% Cap on Medicine & Medical Device Mark-ups

What's the News?

The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare** presented its **176th Report** in the Rajya Sabha, titled "*Affordability and Accessibility of Healthcare Facilities in Public and Private Sector.*" The panel recommended that the gap between the **landing price** (entry cost at which a product reaches the market) and the **Maximum Retail Price (MRP)** of medicines and medical devices should not exceed **20%**, to curb inflated out-of-pocket expenses for patients.

20% Cap on Price Gap?

- **Rationale:** Wide disparities between landing cost and MRP directly increase patients' out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure.
- **Example:** The clot-busting drug **Tenecteplase** – used during the "golden hour" of a heart attack – has a landing cost of approximately **₹18,000** but an MRP of **₹50,000**.
- **Clear Aligners:** The panel flagged prices ranging from **₹1.5 lakh to ₹5 lakh** and recommended that regulators consider **standardising prices** of clear aligners and dental materials.

- **Other Devices:** The committee urged a review of prices for **peripheral stents** and **drug-eluting balloons**.
- **Quality Safeguard:** The panel stressed that lower prices must not compromise device quality or availability, and called for stringent **Quality Management Systems** for manufacturers.

Past Precedent & Domestic Manufacturing Push

- **Coronary Stent Price Cap (2017):** The panel cited the stent price cap as a successful regulatory intervention – prices fell from around **₹1.9 lakh** to **₹25,000–₹30,000**, generating estimated annual consumer savings of **₹13,353 crore**.
- **Procurement Reform:** Recommended **centralised, transparent, tender-based procurement** in private empanelled hospitals to limit internal mark-ups on high-end devices and consumables.
- **Make in India for MedTech:** The committee advocated promoting domestic production of costly devices such as **implantable cardioverter defibrillators, heart valves, pacemakers, cardiac cath labs, and PET scanners** – many of which are **not covered under Ayushman Bharat**.
 - Proposed a **dedicated subsidy fund for R&D and scaling**.
 - Recommended **preferential government procurement** for devices with at least **50% domestic content**.
 - Called for expansion of **MedTech parks and testing facilities**.

Additional Info

- **Quality Standards Referenced:**
 - **ISO 13485:** International standard for Quality Management Systems in the medical devices sector.
 - **US FDA 21 CFR Part 820:** Quality System Regulation for medical device manufacturers in the United States.
- **Standing Committees:** Parliamentary Standing Committees are permanent committees constituted under the **Rules of Procedure** of each House. The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare examines subjects related to health policy and healthcare delivery.
- **Price Control Framework:** In India, prices of essential medicines are regulated under the **Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO)**, issued under the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**, and administered by the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)**.

Sources

- Mirror Now
- The Times of India



Centre Restricts Chlorpheniramine-Phenylephrine FDCs for Children Under Four

What's the News?

- The **Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** has restricted the manufacture, sale and distribution of **all Fixed-Dose Combination (FDC) formulations containing both Chlorpheniramine Maleate and Phenylephrine Hydrochloride** for use in children below **4 years**.
- Manufacturers must carry the warning: **"Fixed Dose Combination shall not be used in children below four years of age"** on the **label, package insert and promotional literature**.
- The government cited potential risks to young children and the availability of **safer alternatives**.
- The decision followed recommendations of an **Expert Committee** and the **Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB)**.

What Has Changed?

- An earlier notification, **S.O. 1717(E)**, imposed the warning on the specific FDC of **Chlorpheniramine Maleate + Phenylephrine Hydrochloride**.
- The latest notification, **S.O. 4595(E)**, widens the restriction to **all FDC formulations containing these two ingredients**, including combinations containing additional drugs.
- Thus, it is an **age-specific restriction**, not a blanket prohibition on all cough-and-cold medicines or on these medicines for every age group.

What are the Two Drugs?

Chlorpheniramine Maleate

- A **first-generation antihistamine/H1-receptor antagonist**.
- Used to relieve symptoms associated with allergies and upper-respiratory conditions.

Phenylephrine Hydrochloride

- A **nasal decongestant**.
- Used for temporary relief of nasal and sinus congestion associated with colds or allergies.

Fixed-Dose Combination (FDC)

- An **FDC contains two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs)** in a single combination for a particular therapeutic indication.
- Potential advantages include simpler treatment regimens and improved patient compliance.
- However, an FDC must have adequate justification regarding **safety, efficacy and rationality**; combining individually approved drugs does not automatically make the combination appropriate.

Section 26A of Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940

- The restriction has been issued under **Section 26A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.
- It empowers the **Central Government**, in the public interest, to **regulate, restrict or prohibit** the manufacture, sale or distribution of a drug or cosmetic where:
 - its use is likely to pose risks to humans or animals;
 - it lacks the therapeutic value claimed; or
 - its ingredients or quantities lack therapeutic justification.
- The present notification becomes operative through publication in the **Official Gazette**.

DTAB & CDSCO

Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB)

- Constituted under **Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.
- It is the highest statutory technical advisory body on matters relating to drugs and cosmetics under the Act.
- DTAB examined the proposal before recommending the age-specific restriction.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

- India's **National Regulatory Authority for drugs**.
- Functions under the **Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- Responsibilities include:
 - Approval of new drugs.
 - Regulation of clinical trials.
 - Setting drug standards.
 - Quality control of imported drugs.
 - Coordination with State Drug Control Organisations.

Additional Info

- Regulatory nature:** The government has not prohibited manufacture or sale of these FDCs altogether; manufacture, sale and distribution are permitted **subject to the mandatory warning and the prohibition on use in children below four years**.
- The Centre had also recently prohibited **16 other FDCs** considered to have inadequate therapeutic justification, reflecting wider scrutiny of irrational or unsafe drug combinations.

IPC Launches Seven Nitrosamine Reference Standards for Drug Quality

What's the News?

- The **Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)** has launched **seven Indian Pharmacopoeia Nitrosamine Impurities Reference**



Standards, the first such nitrosamine standards introduced by the Commission.

- They were unveiled during IPC's first interactive meeting with the **Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL)** and **Central Cosmetics Laboratory (CCL)** in Kolkata.
- The initiative strengthens India's capacity to **detect and quantify potentially carcinogenic nitrosamine impurities** in pharmaceutical products and supports testing, method validation, quality assurance and regulatory compliance.
- The meeting was held under the theme "**IP 2026: Perspectives, Suggestions & Way Forward**", focusing on stronger pharmacopoeial standards and medicine quality.

Seven Reference Standards

The seven standards are:

- **NDMA** – N-Nitrosodimethylamine
- **NDEA** – N-Nitrosodiethylamine
- **NEIPA** – N-Nitrosoethylisopropylamine
- **NDBA** – N-Nitrosodibutylamine
- **NMPA** – N-Nitrosomethylphenylamine
- **NDIPA** – N-Nitrosodiisopropylamine
- **NMBA** – N-Nitroso-N-methyl-4-aminobutyric acid

A **reference standard** is an authenticated material used as a benchmark by laboratories to identify and quantitatively measure a substance in a sample. IPC reference substances serve as official standards for pharmacopoeial testing.

Why Nitrosamines Matter?

- **Nitrosamines** are chemical compounds of concern because many members of the group have **genotoxic and carcinogenic properties**.
- They may arise unintentionally during:
 - Drug manufacturing processes.
 - Storage of pharmaceutical products.
 - Packaging.
 - Contamination from raw materials or other materials used in production.
- Their control is particularly relevant in certain formulations used for **hypertension, gastric disorders, diabetes and tuberculosis**.

The new standards enable laboratories to measure these impurities against a uniform benchmark, improving the reliability and comparability of pharmaceutical quality-control results.

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

- **IPC** is an **autonomous institution under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- It became fully operational as an autonomous body in **2009**.
- Its major functions include:
 - Publishing and revising the **Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)**.

- Developing official drug-quality standards.
- Preparing and supplying **IP Reference Substances and impurity standards**.
- Publishing the **National Formulary of India (NFI)**.
- Serving as the **National Coordination Centre for the Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI)**.

Additional Info

• Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)

- India's official book of standards for drugs manufactured and/or marketed in the country.
- Prescribes authoritative specifications and analytical procedures relating to the **identity, purity and strength** of medicines.
- Pharmacopoeial standards are enforced by regulatory authorities for ensuring drug quality.

• IP Reference Substances (IPRS)

- Authentic reference materials issued by IPC for use in pharmacopoeial testing.
- Secondary or working standards may be used for routine analysis when regularly standardised against the official reference substance.
- Where an IPRS is specified in an IP monograph, it serves as the **authoritative official reference standard in cases of doubt or dispute**.

• Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL), Kolkata

- A major national laboratory involved in statutory testing and quality assessment of drugs.
- IPC's interaction with CDL aims to strengthen cooperation between **pharmacopoeial standard-setting and regulatory drug testing**.

FSSAI Proposes Front-of-Pack Warning Labels for Packaged Foods

What's the News?

- The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** has proposed mandatory **Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FoPNL)** for packaged foods containing excessive sugar, salt or saturated fat.
- The proposal, submitted before the **Supreme Court**, envisages prominent **red hexagonal warning symbols** carrying declarations such as "**HIGH FAT**", "**HIGH SUGAR**", "**HIGH SALT**" and "**HIGHLY SWEETENED BEVERAGE**".
- The objective is to enable consumers, particularly **children and vulnerable groups**, to quickly identify foods high in nutrients associated with non-communicable diseases.

- **Important:** The system is still at the proposal stage; a final notification and implementation timeline have not yet been announced.

Proposed Warning Labels

- The warning will appear on the **principal/front display panel** rather than requiring consumers to interpret the detailed nutrition table on the back.
- The warning text is proposed to be **at least one font point larger** than the text used in the back-of-pack nutrition information table.
- Nutrients of concern include **added sugar, added saturated fat and salt**.
- The nutrient limits are proposed to be linked to the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**, prepared by **ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN)**.

Two-Phase Rollout

- **Phase I:** Warning labels would apply to foods exceeding limits for **at least two of the three nutrients of concern**. Specified highly sweetened beverages would also carry a separate warning.
- **Phase II:** The warning requirement would expand to foods exceeding the threshold for **even one nutrient**.
- The phased approach is intended to allow the food industry time for **product reformulation and packaging changes**. No timeline for moving from Phase I to Phase II has yet been specified.

Exemptions

The proposed warning-label requirement would not apply to:

- **Single-ingredient foods**, such as milk.
- Foods inherently rich in fat, sugar or salt, including:
 - Ghee
 - Edible oils
 - Sugar
 - Jaggery
 - Salt
 - Honey

These products would, however, remain subject to other applicable food-safety and labelling requirements.

ICMR-NIN Nutrition Benchmarks

The *Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024* specify the following threshold criteria for nutrients of concern in cooked/packaged foods and beverages:

Nutrient	Liquids – per 100 ml	Solids – per 100 g
Energy	70 kcal	250 kcal
Salt	175 mg	625 mg
Added sugar	2 g	3 g
Added fat	1.5 g	4.2 g

These are **ICMR-NIN dietary benchmarks**, not yet independently notified as final statutory

FoPNL limits under the new proposal. The guidelines also regard salt intake above **5 g/day**, sugar above **25 g/day or 5% of total energy**, and excessive saturated-fat intake as health concerns.

Why Front-of-Pack Labelling?

- FoPNL is an **interpretive nutrition-labelling mechanism** designed to communicate nutritional risks at a glance.
- Excessive consumption of sugar, salt and unhealthy fats is associated with **obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases**.
- Around **450 million Indians could be overweight or obese by 2050**, highlighting India's growing NCD burden.
- Similar front-of-pack systems are used internationally. Reported evidence from **Chile** showed about a **24% decline in sugary-drink consumption** following implementation of warning labels.

Shift from the Earlier Star-Rating Model

- FSSAI had earlier proposed the **Indian Nutrition Rating (INR)**, under which packaged foods would receive between **½ star and 5 stars** based on their nutritional profile.
- Public-health experts argued that even an unhealthy product receiving a partial star could create a misleading positive perception.
- The present proposal therefore moves toward a more direct **warning-label approach** instead of a summary health-star score.

Additional Info

- **FSSAI**
 - Statutory food regulator established under **Section 4 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
 - Administrative Ministry: **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
 - Mandate: Set science-based food standards and regulate manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food.
- **Relevant regulations:** Food labelling is governed principally through the **Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020**.
- **Constitutional linkage:** The Supreme Court has recognised the **right to health as an integral part of the Right to Life under Article 21** of the Constitution.

India Records Nearly 80% Decline in Malaria Cases and Deaths

What's the News?

- India recorded a **nearly 80% decline in both malaria cases and deaths between 2015 and 2025**, reflecting sustained progress towards malaria elimination.

- The number of **high-burden districts declined from 155 to 33**.
- **160 districts reported zero indigenous malaria cases continuously during 2022–2025**.
- The Union Health Ministry reviewed progress towards the national target of **malaria elimination by 2030**, with emphasis on surveillance, early diagnosis and geographically targeted interventions.

Malaria Indicators

Indicator	Progress
Decline in malaria cases, 2015–2025	Nearly 80%
Decline in malaria deaths, 2015–2025	Nearly 80%
High-burden districts	155 → 33
Districts with zero indigenous cases, 2022–2025	160
High-burden States/UTs under focused review	9

- The remaining **33 high-burden districts accounted for 64% of India's malaria cases and 54% of malaria deaths in 2025**.
- They are spread across **Mizoram, Odisha, Tripura, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra**.

India's Malaria Elimination Targets

- **National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME), 2016–2030**
 - Provides the overarching roadmap for malaria elimination.
- **National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination, 2023–2027**
 - **Vision:** Malaria-Free India.
 - **Target:** **interrupt indigenous/local malaria transmission and achieve zero indigenous cases across India by 2027**.
 - National objective: **malaria elimination by 2030**.
- This timeline is significant because WHO malaria-free certification requires interruption of indigenous transmission for **at least three consecutive years**, along with a functioning surveillance system capable of preventing re-establishment.

Elimination Strategy

India follows a **“Test, Treat and Track”** approach:

- **Test**
 - Early detection through microscopy and **Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs)**.
 - Active surveillance, especially in remote and high-risk areas.
- **Treat**
 - Prompt and complete treatment of confirmed cases.

- Continuous availability of diagnostic kits and anti-malarial medicines.

Track

- Surveillance and monitoring of every case.
- Real-time reporting through the **Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP)**.

District-Level Focus

- **District Action Plans** are to be implemented in all 33 high-burden districts.
- **Village Action Plans** are being prioritised in high-burden villages.
- Strategies are to be tailored according to **local epidemiological and geographical conditions**.
- Greater involvement of:
 - Panchayati Raj Institutions
 - Self-Help Groups
 - Community volunteers
 - Rural and Urban Development Departments
- Intersectoral action focuses particularly on **waterlogging, mosquito-breeding-site reduction and environmental management**.

Surveillance Indicators

- **API – Annual Parasite Incidence**
 - Number of confirmed malaria cases per **1,000 population under surveillance in a year**.
 - Important indicator for assessing malaria transmission.
- **ABER – Annual Blood Examination Rate**
 - Proportion of the population whose blood is examined for malaria parasites during a year.
 - Indicates the **intensity of malaria surveillance**.
- The Health Ministry has stressed accurate API and ABER calculations and advised that **asymptomatic cases detected through mass screening should be reported separately** to avoid distortion of surveillance indicators.

India and WHO's HBHI Initiative

- India was earlier part of WHO's **High Burden to High Impact (HBHI)** group of countries.
- India **exited the HBHI group in 2024** after achieving substantial reductions in malaria incidence and mortality.
- WHO's *World Malaria Report 2024* estimated that between 2017 and 2023:
 - Malaria cases in India declined by about **69%**.
 - Malaria deaths declined by about **68%**.

Additional Info

- **Malaria**
 - A **vector-borne parasitic disease** caused by *Plasmodium* parasites.

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- Transmitted primarily through bites of infected **female Anopheles mosquitoes**.
- Important human malaria parasites include:
 - *Plasmodium falciparum*
 - *Plasmodium vivax*
 - *P. malariae*
 - *P. ovale*
 - *P. knowlesi*
- *P. falciparum* is associated with the greatest risk of severe and fatal malaria.
- **NCVBDC**
 - **National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases Control** functions under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
 - Coordinates national programmes for diseases including malaria, dengue, chikungunya, lymphatic filariasis, kala-azar and Japanese encephalitis.
 - India's malaria burden remains disproportionately concentrated in **tribal, hilly, remote and difficult-to-access regions**.
- **WHO Malaria-Free Certification**
 - Requires:
 - **Zero indigenous malaria transmission for at least 3 consecutive years** nationwide.
 - A fully functional surveillance and response system capable of preventing re-establishment.
- **World Malaria Day**
 - Observed: **25 April**
 - **2026 Theme/Campaign:** *"Driven to End Malaria: Now We Can. Now We Must."*



Education

Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026 Introduced in Lok Sabha

What's the News?

- The **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2026** has been introduced in the **Lok Sabha** by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (**MoSPI**).
- It seeks to **repeal and replace the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959** and establish a modern statutory framework for ISI.
- The Bill proposes to convert ISI from a **registered society into a statutory, not-for-profit body corporate**, while strengthening its governance, academic autonomy and accountability.
- **Current status:** the Bill has only been **introduced in Lok Sabha**; it has not yet become law.

What Will Change for ISI?

- **Present system:** ISI functions as a society registered under the **West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961**.
- **Proposed system:** ISI will become a **body corporate**, giving it a distinct statutory legal identity.
- Its objectives will include:
 - Advancement and dissemination of **statistical sciences and allied disciplines**.
 - Interdisciplinary research involving **statistics, mathematics, economics, computer science and related fields**.
 - Greater **industry-academia-government collaboration**.
 - Development as a **global centre of excellence**.
- The Bill's conception of statistical sciences extends to areas such as **data science, computer science, cryptology and other quantitative sciences**.

New Governance Structure

- **President of India:** will be the **Visitor of ISI**.
 - Can review the Institute's work and progress.
 - Can order inquiries into its affairs.
 - Can issue directions based on such reviews/inquiries, which will be binding.
- **Board of Governors:** will become the principal **policy-making and executive body**.
 - It will have **11 members**.
 - Includes the Chairperson, MoSPI representation, **4 eminent experts** and **4 ISI representatives**.

- The Chairperson will be nominated by the Visitor on the recommendation of the Central Government.

- The new Board replaces the existing larger **33-member Council-based governance structure**.

Other Statutory Bodies

The Bill provides for three major institutional bodies:

- **Academic Council**
 - Principal academic body.
 - Deals with courses, admissions, examinations and evaluation.
- **Finance Committee**
 - Scrutinises accounts and expenditure.
- **Management Council for each Centre**
 - Responsible for general supervision and administration of individual ISI centres.

Director of ISI

- The **Board of Governors** will appoint the Director with the **prior approval of the Visitor**.
- The Director will serve as the **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** of ISI.
- Responsibilities include:
 - Day-to-day administration.
 - Implementation of decisions of the Board and Academic Council.
- Removal of the Director will also require prior approval of the Visitor.

Autonomy vs Government Oversight

- The Bill permits the Central Government to issue directions where necessary for **efficient administration**.
- However, it removes the existing government's power to **take over the management of ISI for up to two years** in specified circumstances.
- Under the existing framework, prior government approval is needed for amendments to rules/regulations; under the Bill, such approval is required only for the **first regulations framed by the Board**.
- Some faculty, students and staff have raised concerns that the new governance structure could lead to **greater centralisation and affect institutional autonomy**.

Additional Info

- **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)**
 - Founded: **1931**
 - Founder: **Prof. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis**
 - Headquarters: **Kolkata, West Bengal**
 - Declared an **Institution of National Importance (INI)** through the **Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959**.



- The 1959 Act originally empowered ISI to award degrees and diplomas in statistics.
- A **1995 amendment** expanded degree/diploma powers to mathematics, quantitative economics, computer science and related subjects.
- **Body Corporate**
 - An organisation incorporated through law with a **separate legal personality**.
 - It can generally hold property, enter legal relations and sue or be sued in its own name.

India Wins Four Medals at International Linguistics Olympiad 2026

What's the News?

- India won **4 medals – 1 Gold and 3 Bronze – and one Honourable Mention** at the **23rd International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)** held in **Bucharest, Romania**.
- **Shrilakshmi Venkatraman** won the **Gold Medal** with a score of **70.0**.
- **Aarav Anil Rao, Nishanth Shankar Lakshmanan and Advay Misra** won **Bronze Medals**, while **Soham Amit Pednekar** received an **Honourable Mention**.
- The competition featured **255 participants from more than 40 countries**.

International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)?

- The **International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)** is an annual international competition for **secondary-school students** and is part of the broader group of International Science Olympiads.
- It tests the ability to analyse unfamiliar languages through **logic, pattern recognition and problem-solving** rather than prior knowledge of particular languages.
- Problems can involve:
 - **Phonetics** – study of speech sounds.
 - **Morphology** – structure and formation of words.
 - **Syntax** – arrangement of words and sentences.
 - **Semantics** – meaning in language.
- The **23rd edition** was hosted in **Bucharest, the capital of Romania**.

IOL 2026

- **Participants:** 255
- **Individual medals awarded:** 84
 - Gold: **14**
 - Silver: **30**
 - Bronze: **40**
- **Honourable Mentions:** 44

India's Performance

Award	Indian Student
Gold	Shrilakshmi Venkatraman
Bronze	Aarav Anil Rao
Bronze	Nishanth Shankar Lakshmanan
Bronze	Advay Misra
Honourable Mention	Soham Amit Pednekar

- India has participated in the IOL since **2009**.
- Its cumulative individual medal tally has reached **37 medals**:
 - **6 Gold**
 - **9 Silver**
 - **22 Bronze**

Panini Linguistics Olympiad (PLO)?

- The **Panini Linguistics Olympiad (PLO)** serves as India's national selection pathway for the International Linguistics Olympiad.
- It evaluates **linguistic reasoning, computational thinking and problem-solving skills**.
- In the 2026 selection cycle:
 - **525 students** registered for the first qualifying round.
 - **338 students** appeared for the test.
 - **34 top qualifiers** subsequently attended an intensive **10-day residential training camp** at IIIT Hyderabad.
- The final Indian contingent comprised **8 students**.

Role of IIIT Hyderabad

- The **Language Technologies Research Centre (LTRC)** at the **International Institute of Information Technology Hyderabad (IIIT-H)** has been associated with mentoring the Indian Linguistics Olympiad programme since **2015**.
- Training includes lectures, linguistic problem-solving, mock Olympiads, tests and mentoring.
- Skills developed through linguistic problem-solving have applications in areas such as:
 - **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
 - **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**
 - **Computational Linguistics**
 - **Language Technologies**

Additional Info

- **Panini**
 - Ancient Indian Sanskrit grammarian.
 - Best known for the **Ashtadhyayi**, a systematic description of Sanskrit grammar.
 - The Indian national linguistics competition is named the **Panini Linguistics Olympiad** in his honour.
- **Romania**
 - **Capital:** Bucharest



- Located in **South-Eastern Europe**.
- Bucharest hosted the **23rd International Linguistics Olympiad**.

• Notes

- **IOL 2026 host:** Bucharest, Romania
- **Edition:** 23rd
- **India:** 1 Gold + 3 Bronze + 1 Honourable Mention
- **Gold medallist:** Shrilakshmi Venkatraman
- **India's selection competition:** Panini Linguistics Olympiad
- **Mentoring institution:** IIIT Hyderabad's Language Technologies Research Centre

NSP-Based Scholarship System Launched for Agriculture Students

What's the News?

- Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** launched a **National Scholarship Portal (NSP)-based scholarship and fellowship payment system** for agriculture students at **ICAR-IARI, Pusa, New Delhi**.
- Under the initiative, **₹21.35 crore** was transferred through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** to **more than 6,000 agriculture students** across India.
- Eligible students will now receive scholarship and fellowship assistance **every month through DBT**, aimed at ensuring timely, transparent and hassle-free payments.

NSP-Based System for Agriculture Students?

- The initiative integrates agricultural scholarships and fellowships with the existing **National Scholarship Portal and DBT architecture**.
- Objectives:
 - Ensure **timely monthly payments**.
 - Transfer assistance directly to students' bank accounts.
 - Reduce administrative delays and manual processing.
 - Improve transparency and predictability in scholarship disbursement.

• **Initial disbursement:** ₹21.35 crore.

• **Beneficiaries:** More than 6,000 students.

National Scholarship Portal (NSP)?

- **NSP** is the Government of India's **one-stop digital platform** for scholarship-related services.
- It facilitates:
 - Student applications
 - Application processing and verification
 - Scholarship sanction
 - Disbursement of funds

- It functions as a **Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)**.
- Its objective is to create a **simplified, accountable, responsive and transparent** scholarship administration system and facilitate direct transfer of funds to beneficiaries.

One-Time Registration (OTR)

- NSP uses a **One-Time Registration (OTR)** system.
- OTR is a **unique 14-digit number** linked to a student's Aadhaar/Aadhaar Enrolment ID.
- It remains applicable throughout the student's **academic career**, reducing the need for repeated registration for each academic year.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)?

- **DBT** transfers government benefits directly to beneficiaries, including through their bank accounts, instead of routing cash assistance through multiple administrative layers.
- It was introduced by the Government of India in **2013** to reform welfare delivery.
- Major objectives include:
 - Faster flow of government benefits.
 - Accurate targeting of beneficiaries.
 - **De-duplication** of beneficiaries.
 - Reduction in fraud and leakages.
 - Greater transparency and efficiency.

Focus on Agricultural Education

- The government emphasised that agricultural education should combine **classroom learning with practical training**.
- Students were encouraged to explore:
 - Agricultural research and innovation.
 - **Agri-start-ups and entrepreneurship**.
 - Technology-based solutions for agriculture.
 - Opportunities that can contribute to **food security and enhancement of farmers' incomes**.

Additional Info

- **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**
 - Apex national body for coordinating, guiding and managing **agricultural research and education**.
 - Its mandate covers agriculture as well as **horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences**.
 - Functions under the **Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE)**.
 - ICAR was established in **1929**.
- **ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)**
 - Located at **Pusa, New Delhi**.



- A premier institution of ICAR associated with agricultural education, research and development.
- The NSP-based agriculture scholarship initiative was launched at ICAR-IARI.

• Notes

- **Initiative:** NSP-based scholarship/fellowship payment system for agriculture students.
- **Launched by:** Shivraj Singh Chouhan.
- **Launch venue:** ICAR-IARI, Pusa, New Delhi.
- **Amount released:** ₹21.35 crore.
- **Beneficiaries:** More than 6,000 students.
- **Payment mechanism:** Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- **Payment frequency:** Monthly.
- **NSP:** Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan.
- **ICAR:** Apex body for agricultural research and education in India.

NTA Overhauls Examination System with Four-Tier Question Paper Checks What's the News?

- The **National Testing Agency (NTA)** has initiated a major overhaul of its examination system following question-paper errors and concerns over the integrity of high-stakes examinations.
- **600 subject experts** have been removed from NTA panels and new specialists are being onboarded.
- A **four-tier question-paper scrutiny system** will be introduced to minimise factual, typographical/grammatical, translation and formatting errors.
- Union Education Minister **Pralhad Joshi** has also directed the agency to strengthen physical and digital security, audit examination processes and improve accountability.

Four-Tier Question Paper Checks

- Every question paper will undergo **four levels of scrutiny before finalisation**.
- The system is intended to detect:
 - Factual errors
 - Typographical/grammatical errors
 - Translation errors
 - Formatting and presentation errors
- The **exact composition of the four scrutiny tiers has not yet been publicly detailed by NTA**.
- The reform follows serious deficiencies in some **UGC-NET** papers, including English, Commerce and Sociology, which required re-examination.

Personnel & Institutional Revamp

- **600 experts** associated with examination work have been removed and replaced with new specialists.
- Around **20-25 additional officials** are to be inducted into NTA.
- NTA has advertised **10 specialised leadership posts**, including:
 - Chief Technology Officer (CTO)
 - Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
 - Chief Information Security Officer (CISO)
 - General Manager – Test Security
 - General Manager – Research & Development and Psychometrics
- Specialists from the private sector are also being brought in for **cybersecurity, psychometrics and question-paper design**.

Security & Confidential Operations

- NTA offices are being shifted to more secure premises, with the headquarters planned to move from **Okhla to central Delhi**.
- **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)** teams are proposed for strengthened physical security.
- NTA's **Confidential Operations (CONOPS)** architecture is being overhauled through:
 - Secluded rooms for sensitive examination work
 - **Air-gapped computer systems**
 - Mandatory **device-deposit protocols**
- A comprehensive audit of examination processes has also been ordered to identify deficiencies and corrective measures.

Additional Info

- **National Testing Agency (NTA)**
 - Established in **2017**.
 - An autonomous testing organisation under the **Ministry of Education**.
 - Conducts major national entrance and eligibility examinations.
- **CISF**
 - A **Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)** under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
 - Provides security to critical infrastructure and selected government establishments.
- **Air-gapped system**
 - A computer or network kept physically isolated from unsecured networks such as the public internet.
 - Used to reduce the risk of unauthorised access, data theft and cyber intrusion in confidential operations.
- The reforms have gained importance against the broader backdrop of **NEET-UG controversies and UGC-NET question-paper errors**, which raised concerns over

examination integrity and institutional accountability.

National Teachers' Awards 2026 Announced for 48 School Teachers

What's the News?

- **48 school teachers** have been selected for the **National Teachers' Awards 2026**.
- **President Droupadi Murmu** will confer the awards at **Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi**, on **5 September – National Teachers' Day**.
- The awardees comprise **26 men and 22 women** and represent **27 States, 7 Union Territories and 6 Central Government organisations**.
- They were selected through a **three-stage process** at the **District, State/Organisation and National levels**.

National Teachers' Awards

- **Instituted:** 1958
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Education
- **Implementing Department for school teachers:** Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSE&L)
- **Purpose:** To recognise teachers whose work has:
 - Improved the quality of school education.
 - Enriched students' learning experiences.
 - Demonstrated commitment, innovation and effective teaching practices.
- The awards are traditionally presented by the **President of India** on **National Teachers' Day**.

Award Components

Each National Teachers' Award carries:

- **Cash prize:** ₹50,000
- **Silver medal**
- **Certificate of merit**

2026 Awardees

Particular	2026
Total school teachers	48
Male	26
Female	22
States represented	27
Union Territories represented	7
Central Government organisations	6

Uttar Pradesh has the highest representation among States with **3 awardees**.

- Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal have **2 awardees each**.
- Awardees come from diverse school systems, including:
 - Government schools
 - **PM SHRI Schools**
 - **Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs)**
 - **Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs)**
 - **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)**

- **Sainik Schools**
- CBSE and CISCE school systems.

Selection Process

The National Teachers' Awards follow a transparent online selection mechanism:

1. **Self-nomination** by eligible teachers through the Ministry of Education portal.
2. **District/Regional Selection Committee** shortlists applicants.
3. **State/Organisation Selection Committee** forwards selected nominations.
4. An **Independent National Jury** evaluates shortlisted candidates.
5. Final names are approved by the **Union Education Minister**.

Evaluation Criteria

- **Objective Criteria: 10 marks**
 - **Performance Criteria: 90 marks**
- Performance assessment covers areas such as:
- Innovative teaching practices
 - Improvement in learning outcomes
 - Experiential learning
 - Development/use of teaching-learning material
 - Co-curricular activities
 - Wider contribution to students and the school community.

Eligibility

Teachers and Heads of recognised **primary, middle, high and higher-secondary schools** are eligible, including those from:

- State/UT government and aided schools
- Local-body schools
- Kendriya Vidyalayas
- Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas
- Sainik Schools
- Atomic Energy Education Society schools
- CBSE-affiliated schools
- CISCE-affiliated schools.

Conditions include:

- Generally, only **regular teachers and Heads of Schools** are eligible.
- **Contractual teachers and Shiksha Mitras** are not eligible.
- Teachers indulging in private tuition are not eligible.
- The award operates primarily through **self-nomination**.

National Teachers' Day

- **Observed: 5 September every year**
- Marks the birth anniversary of **Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**, born on **5 September 1888**.
- Radhakrishnan was:
 - **First Vice-President of India**
 - **Second President of India**
 - Philosopher, scholar and teacher.
- National Teachers' Day recognises the contribution of teachers to education and nation-building.



Additional Info

- **Expansion of National Teachers' Awards**
 - From **2023**, the award framework was expanded beyond school teachers to also recognise:
 - Teachers of **Higher Education Institutions/Polytechnics**.
 - **Skill trainers** under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship.
- **School Award Administration**
 - Conducted by the **Department of School Education & Literacy** under the Ministry of Education.
 - Selection is conducted through an online, multi-level evaluation process.

NITI Aayog Flags Major Skilling Gaps in India

What's the News?

- **NITI Aayog** has released the report "**Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047**", highlighting gaps between education, skills and employment in India.
- Around **8.7 crore youth aged 15-29** are classified as **NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training**.
- Only **8.25% of graduates** are employed in jobs aligned with their qualifications, indicating a significant education-employment mismatch.
- The report recommends shifting the skilling system from measuring **enrolments and training numbers to employment, wage and career outcomes**.
- It also calls for skilling systems to respond to changing labour-market requirements arising from **AI, automation, green industries and emerging occupations**.

Skilling Gaps

- India has formally trained **over 7.67 crore people since 2014-15**.
- Around **₹34,000 crore** was allocated towards skilling-related expenditure across Central ministries in FY 2025-26.
- Despite this scale, major gaps include:
 - Outdated curricula and weak industry alignment.
 - Limited practical and work-based learning.
 - Fragmented apprenticeship opportunities.
 - High cost of additional skilling for low-income students.
 - Limited flexibility for people who need to **learn while earning**.
- **Fewer than 1 in 12 secondary schools** currently offer vocational subjects.
- The report divides learners and workers into **five segments**:
 - School students.

- Tertiary students.
- Formal and informal workers.
- NEET youth.
- Women.

- Together, these groups cover around **60 crore people**.

Skilling in Schools

- The report proposes introducing **General Employability and Entrepreneurship Skills (GEES)** universally from **Class 6 to Class 12**.
- It recommends **Kaushal Tracks from Class 9**, providing structured vocational pathways based on local and national labour demand.
- Vocational subjects should receive **equal weightage in Classes 10 and 12 board subject schemes**.
- The approach seeks to integrate vocational education with mainstream schooling rather than treating skilling as a separate post-school activity.

Higher Education & Apprenticeships

- Higher education should move towards:
 - Industry-aligned specialisations.
 - Work-integrated degree and diploma programmes.
 - Apprenticeships.
 - Modular courses and micro-credentials.
 - **Earn-while-you-learn** models.
- The report recommends increasing apprenticeship opportunities, particularly through **MSME participation**, and improving access through integrated digital platforms.
- Reskilling should focus on sectors such as **green industries, electric vehicles and technology-driven occupations**, while supporting workers affected by declining occupations.

Digital Skills Passport

- NITI Aayog proposes a **Digital Skills Passport linked with APAAR ID**.
- It would serve as a lifelong digital record of an individual's:
 - Educational qualifications.
 - Verified skills.
 - Work experience.
 - Micro-credentials.
- It could integrate existing platforms such as:
 - **Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH)**.
 - **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)**.
 - **National Career Service (NCS)**.
- The system is intended to improve **job matching, apprenticeships, recognition of skills and lifelong learning**.

Outcome-Linked Financing

- The report recommends moving away from funding based mainly on **enrolment and course completion**.



- Funding should increasingly depend on outcomes such as:
 - Verified job placements.
 - Wage improvement.
 - Sustained employment.
 - Career progression.
- Proposed financing instruments include:
 - **Digital Skill Vouchers.**
 - Placement-linked loans.
 - **Skill Impact Bonds.**
- This model seeks to make training providers more accountable for employment outcomes.

National Credit Framework-Based Mobility

- The **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** can enable movement between:
 - Academic education.
 - Vocational education.
 - Skill training.
 - Work-based learning.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** can convert skills and experience acquired through work into recognised credits.
- The objective is to allow learners to move between ITIs, universities, vocational programmes and employment without losing accumulated learning credits.

Additional Info

- **NITI Aayog**
 - Full form: **National Institution for Transforming India.**
 - It is the Government of India's apex public-policy think tank.
 - It replaced the **Planning Commission.**

- **Chairperson:** Prime Minister of India.
- Promotes cooperative and competitive federalism and provides policy inputs to Central and State governments.

• NEET

- Means **Not in Education, Employment or Training.**
- The report's estimate of **8.7 crore NEET youth** is based on the **78th Round of the National Sample Survey.**
- It covers people aged **15–29 years** who are outside education, employment and training, including unemployed persons.

• National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

- Supports integration of **vocational education with mainstream education.**
- Envisages greater exposure to vocational learning beginning from the school level.





Economy & Finance

Centre Releases ₹1.09 Lakh Crore Advance Tax Devolution to States

What's the News?

The Union Government has released **₹1,09,019 crore** to State governments as an advance instalment of tax devolution.

This instalment is separate from the regular monthly devolution scheduled for release later. It aims to strengthen State finances and enable faster expenditure on infrastructure, capital projects and development programmes.

The transfer is neither a loan nor a discretionary grant. It forms part of the States' constitutionally determined share in Union tax revenues.

Tax Devolution

Tax devolution refers to the distribution of a portion of the Union Government's net tax proceeds among the States.

- **Constitutional basis:** Article 270
- **Recommending body:** Finance Commission
- **Current award period:** 2026–31
- **States' vertical share:** 41% of the divisible pool
- **Nature of funds:** Untied; States can use them according to their expenditure priorities

The **Sixteenth Finance Commission** retained the States' vertical devolution share at **41%**.

The divisible pool generally includes shareable Union taxes after excluding:

- Cesses and surcharges collected for specific purposes
- Cost of tax collection
- Taxes assigned exclusively to the Union or States

State-Wise Allocation

Major allocations under the advance instalment include:

- **Uttar Pradesh:** ₹19,208 crore
- **Bihar:** ₹10,845 crore
- **Madhya Pradesh:** ₹8,010 crore
- **West Bengal:** ₹7,866 crore
- **Maharashtra:** ₹7,022 crore
- **Rajasthan:** ₹6,460 crore
- **Odisha:** ₹4,819 crore
- **Andhra Pradesh:** ₹4,597 crore
- **Karnataka:** ₹4,504 crore
- **Tamil Nadu:** ₹4,466 crore

Among the smaller allocations, Nagaland received ₹524 crore, Goa ₹398 crore and Sikkim ₹365 crore.

Why Advance Devolution Matters

Advance release of tax devolution can:

- Improve the immediate cash flow of State governments.
- Accelerate infrastructure and capital expenditure.

- Support welfare and development programmes.
- Reduce reliance on short-term borrowing for temporary funding requirements.
- Generate multiplier effects through higher public investment and economic activity.

State capital expenditure is particularly important because States undertake significant spending on health, education, roads, irrigation, power and urban infrastructure.

Vertical and Horizontal Devolution

• Vertical devolution

- Determines the share of the divisible pool allocated collectively to all States.
- The States currently receive **41%**.

• Horizontal devolution

- Determines how the States' share is distributed among individual States.
- It is based on criteria recommended by the Finance Commission, such as population, income distance, area, demographic performance, forest cover and contribution to GDP.

Additional Info

• Article 279

- Deals with the calculation of the net proceeds of taxes.
- The net proceeds are certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

• Article 280

- Provides for the constitution of a Finance Commission by the President.
- It recommends:
 - Distribution of taxes between the Union and States
 - Inter-State distribution of the States' share
 - Principles governing grants-in-aid
 - Measures to strengthen the finances of local bodies

• Article 275

- Provides for grants-in-aid from the Union to certain States.

• Tax devolution versus grants

- Tax devolution is a formula-based constitutional share of Union taxes.
- Grants-in-aid are separate transfers that may be general, sector-specific or conditional.
- Tax devolution is generally untied, while some grants may prescribe specific uses.



IRDAI Tightens Ownership-Change Rules for Insurers

What's the News?

The **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)** has amended regulations governing insurer registration, capital structure, share transfers and amalgamations. Prior approval is now required whenever an investor's shareholding crosses **5%, 10%, 25%, 50% or 75%**, or when the investor becomes the insurer's **single largest shareholder**.

The framework strengthens scrutiny of changes in control while simplifying smaller capital infusions and group restructuring. It assumes significance as India's insurance sector opens to greater domestic and foreign investment.

Ownership Approval Framework

Prior IRDAI approval is required when:

- An investor's holding crosses **5%, 10%, 25%, 50% or 75%**.
- An investor becomes the **single largest shareholder**, even without crossing another specified threshold.
- Shares are transferred between entities belonging to the same promoter group.
- Direct or indirect ownership structures appear designed to avoid the 5% approval threshold.
- An existing shareholder's stake is diluted because it does not participate proportionately in a fresh issue of shares. Such passive dilution is treated as a transfer event.

The thresholds allow IRDAI to reassess an investor's financial soundness, beneficial ownership and influence whenever its position in an insurer becomes materially stronger.

Capital Infusion Reforms

The underlying insurance-law amendments raised the general threshold for prior approval of a share transfer or issuance from **1% to 5% of paid-up equity capital**. Consequently, transactions below 5% ordinarily face fewer regulatory approvals, unless they involve control concerns or arrangements intended to circumvent the rules.

For fresh equity issues:

- Approval depends on the resulting shareholding pattern.
- Crossing a prescribed threshold triggers fresh regulatory scrutiny.
- Non-participation by an existing shareholder may be treated as a share transfer because it changes relative ownership.
- The rules cover both direct acquisitions and potentially disguised indirect holdings.

Thus, the framework combines easier access to capital with stronger oversight at control-sensitive ownership levels.

Group Restructuring

The wider reforms facilitate the merger of a **non-operative holding company** into its insurance subsidiary, subject to IRDAI approval and prudential safeguards.

Conditions include:

- The holding company must ordinarily hold more than **50%** of the insurer.
- It should not conduct independent business operations.
- The insurer must remain the surviving entity.
- Policyholders' funds cannot be used to meet liabilities arising from the merger.
- The insurer must maintain solvency above the prescribed control level.
- The merger must not adversely affect policyholders' interests.

This provides insurance groups with a route to remove unnecessary holding-company layers and simplify corporate structures.

Why Are the Changes Significant?

- **Regulatory oversight:** Multiple approval checkpoints help IRDAI detect gradual or indirect changes in control.
- **Policyholder protection:** Ownership changes can affect an insurer's governance, solvency and long-term ability to settle claims.
- **Capital access:** Fewer approvals for smaller transactions may support faster equity infusion.
- **Market opening:** The rules accompany reforms permitting up to **100% foreign investment** in private insurance companies.
- **Corporate restructuring:** Insurer and non-insurer entities can be amalgamated if the resulting entity continues to conduct insurance business and obtains regulatory approval.

Additional Info

- **IRDAI**
 - Statutory regulator of India's insurance and reinsurance sector.
 - Established under the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999**.
 - Regulates insurers, intermediaries, capital structures, investments, solvency and policyholder protection.
- **Relevant legal framework**
 - **Insurance Act, 1938:** Principal legislation governing insurance business.
 - **Section 6A:** Regulates transfer and issuance of shares of insurers.



- **IRDAI Act, 1999:** Establishes IRDAI and defines its regulatory functions.
- **IRDAI Registration Regulations, 2024:** Governs registration, capital structure, share transfers and amalgamations.
- **Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025:**
 - Raised the share-transfer approval threshold from **1% to 5%.**
 - Increased the foreign-investment limit from **74% to 100%.**
 - Enabled specified mergers between insurance and non-insurance entities.

Government Proposes Flexible MDR Framework for Select UPI Payments

What's the News?

The Union government has introduced the **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** in the Lok Sabha. Clause 2 of the Bill seeks to amend **Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**, allowing the Central Government to specify which electronic payment modes will continue to receive zero-charge protection.

The amendment **does not immediately impose Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) on UPI**, prescribe a rate or introduce a direct fee for consumers. Separate government notifications would be required to determine the payment modes, transactions and entities covered. The Bill is currently pending in Parliament.

What Will Change?

Existing provision

Section 10A currently prohibits banks and payment-system providers from directly or indirectly charging a person making or receiving payments through electronic modes prescribed under **Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961.**

These notified modes include:

- Unified Payments Interface or **UPI**
- BHIM-UPI
- UPI QR-based payments
- RuPay debit cards

Proposed provision

The Bill replaces the reference to payment modes prescribed under the Income-tax Act with:

One or more electronic modes of payment as the Central Government may, by notification, specify.

This would shift zero-MDR protection from a fixed statutory arrangement to a **notification-based framework.** The government could consequently retain zero MDR for

certain modes or categories while allowing charges on others.

Merchant Discount Rate

MDR is the fee paid by a merchant to banks, payment aggregators and payment-service providers for processing a digital payment.

- It is generally calculated as a percentage of the transaction value.
- It helps cover expenditure on:
 - Payment processing
 - Technology infrastructure
 - Cybersecurity
 - Fraud prevention
 - Settlement and dispute resolution
- MDR is normally a **merchant-side charge**, not a direct fee collected from the customer making the payment.
- Businesses may nevertheless absorb the cost or indirectly account for it in product prices.

Possible MDR Framework

No official MDR rate, transaction threshold or merchant category has been finalised. Reported models under consideration include:

- Applying MDR only to transactions above a specified value.
- Linking applicability to the merchant's annual turnover.
- Protecting person-to-person transfers and small merchants.
- One reported option involves an MDR of approximately **0.3–0.5%** on merchant payments exceeding **₹2,000**, subject to merchant-turnover conditions.

Transactions above ₹2,000 constitute only around **4% of merchant-payment volume**, but account for approximately **67–70% of transaction value.** This makes large-value transactions a potential starting point for generating revenue without charging the majority of small-ticket payments. These figures represent reported proposals and industry estimates, not provisions contained in the Bill.

Why Is MDR Being Considered?

UPI has expanded into India's dominant retail-payment platform. It processed approximately:

- **23.6 billion transactions** in one recent month.
- Transactions worth nearly **₹29.9 lakh crore** during the same period.

Banks and payment companies argue that a zero-revenue model makes it difficult to finance growing expenditure on payment infrastructure, cybersecurity and system capacity. A limited MDR could create a sustainable revenue stream while retaining free or subsidised access for ordinary users and small businesses.

Likely Impact

- **Banks and fintech firms**



- Could recover part of their processing and infrastructure costs.
- Industry estimates indicate a potential annual revenue pool of around **₹5,000–10,000 crore**, depending on the final framework.
- **Large merchants**
 - May face higher digital-payment acceptance costs.
 - Could negotiate rates with payment intermediaries or absorb the charge.
- **Small merchants and consumers**
 - Reported proposals seek to keep small-value payments and person-to-person transfers free.
 - Their exemption is not yet legally final because the detailed notification has not been issued.
- **Government**
 - Must balance payment-system sustainability against financial inclusion, merchant adoption and the risk of businesses returning to cash.

Additional Info

- **Unified Payments Interface**
 - Developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India**.
 - NPCI is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.
 - Built over the Immediate Payment Service infrastructure.
 - Facilitates instant bank-to-bank transfers.
 - Supports:
 - **P2P:** Person-to-person payments
 - **P2M:** Person-to-merchant payments
- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**
 - Provides the legal framework for regulation and supervision of payment systems.
 - Designates the **Reserve Bank of India** as the regulatory authority.
 - **Section 10A:** Deals with prohibition on charges for specified electronic-payment modes.
 - Section 10A was inserted through the **Finance Act, 2019**, with the zero-MDR framework operating from 2020.
- **Notes**
 - **MDR:** Fee paid by a merchant for payment-processing services.
 - **Convenience fee:** Additional fee that a platform may charge for providing a particular service or payment channel.
 - **UPI transaction value:** The underlying amount transferred; it is not itself MDR.
 - The Bill creates an **enabling legal framework**—it does not itself impose a UPI charge.

India Achieves 99.92% Banking Coverage of Inhabited Villages

What's the News?

India has achieved **near-universal banking coverage**, with **6,00,868 out of 6,01,328 inhabited villages**—or **99.92%**—having access to a banking outlet within a **5-km radius**. Banking access is provided through bank branches, **Business Correspondents (BCs)** and **India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) centres**. Only **460 inhabited villages** remain outside the prescribed coverage radius.

What Counts as Banking Coverage?

A village is considered covered when residents can access at least one of the following within 5 km:

- A bank branch
 - A Business Correspondent outlet
 - An India Post Payments Bank centre
- The figures are based on data uploaded by banks to the **Jan Dhan Darshak App**.

Banking coverage does not mean that every village has a physical bank branch. It means that an approved banking access point is available within the stipulated distance.

Banking Network

India's rural banking expansion is supported by:

- More than **1.81 lakh bank branches**
- Around **17.36 lakh Business Correspondents**
- Approximately **1.65 lakh IPPB centres**

Business Correspondent

A Business Correspondent is an authorised agent who provides basic banking services on behalf of a bank, especially in locations where opening a full-scale branch may not be commercially viable.

Common services include:

- Opening basic bank accounts
- Cash deposits and withdrawals
- Fund transfers
- Balance enquiries
- Aadhaar-enabled payments
- Collection of loan repayments
- Delivery of government benefits

PM Jan-Dhan Yojana Link

The expansion of banking outlets complements the **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana**, India's flagship financial-inclusion programme.

- **PMJDY accounts:** 58.77 crore
- **Total deposits:** ₹3,12,414 crore
- Major objectives:
 - Universal access to basic savings accounts
 - Remittance facilities
 - Access to need-based credit
 - Insurance and pension coverage
 - Direct transfer of government benefits

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PMJDY forms the financial component of the **JAM Trinity—Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile—** which supports targeted and digitally authenticated delivery of welfare benefits.

Role of RBI and Banking Committees

The Reserve Bank of India permits eligible banks to open banking outlets without case-by-case prior approval, subject to rural-inclusion requirements.

- At least **25% of new banking outlets** must generally be opened in unbanked rural centres.
- **State Level Bankers' Committees** and **Union Territory Level Bankers' Committees** identify uncovered locations and coordinate with governments and banks to expand services.
- Coverage of the remaining villages is treated as a continuous process based on accessibility, infrastructure and commercial viability.

Additional Info

- **Jan Dhan Darshak App**
 - A location-based platform used to identify financial-service touchpoints.
 - Helps map bank branches, BC outlets, ATMs and other banking facilities.
 - Supports identification and monitoring of uncovered villages.
- **India Post Payments Bank**
 - Operates through the Department of Posts' network.
 - Provides doorstep and last-mile banking services.
 - As a payments bank, it can accept deposits and facilitate payments but cannot undertake conventional lending from its own balance sheet.
- **Unbanked rural centre**
 - A rural centre without a qualifying Core Banking Solution-enabled banking outlet.
 - RBI classifies rural centres broadly as those with populations of up to **9,999**.

Lok Sabha Passes Appropriation (No. 3) Bill, 2026

What's the News?

The Lok Sabha passed the **Appropriation (No. 3) Bill, 2026**, moved by **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman**, by voice vote amid Opposition protests. The Bill authorises withdrawal from the **Consolidated Fund of India** to regularise excess expenditure on certain services for an earlier financial year. Accessible reporting indicates that the Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha; Rajya Sabha passage was not clearly verifiable from the accessible text of the provided links.

Appropriation Bill

- An **Appropriation Bill** gives legal authority to the government to withdraw money from the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
- It is introduced after the Lok Sabha votes on demands for grants.
- It covers:
 - Expenditure voted by Parliament
 - Expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund
- Without an Appropriation Act, the government cannot legally withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund for specified expenditure.

Appropriation (No. 3) Bill, 2026

- The Bill relates to **excess expenditure** incurred on certain services for the financial year ending **31 March 2023**.
- It seeks Parliament's approval to regularise expenditure that exceeded earlier authorisation.
- Such Bills are part of parliamentary financial control over the executive.
- The Bill was passed quickly amid protests and without detailed discussion in the Lok Sabha.

Consolidated Fund of India

- It is the main account of the Union Government under **Article 266**.
- It includes:
 - Government revenues
 - Loans raised by the government
 - Recoveries of loans
- Money can be withdrawn from it only through appropriation made by law.
- This ensures that executive spending remains subject to legislative approval.

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 114**
 - Deals with appropriation of money from the Consolidated Fund of India.
 - No money can be withdrawn except under appropriation made by law.
- **Article 110**
 - Defines a **Money Bill**.
 - Appropriation Bills fall within the Money Bill framework.
- **Article 112**
 - Provides for the **Annual Financial Statement**, i.e., Union Budget.
- **Article 113**
 - Deals with voting on demands for grants in the Lok Sabha.
- **Article 266**
 - Provides for the Consolidated Fund of India, Contingency Fund and Public Account.

Additional Info

- **Excess Grants**
 - Needed when actual expenditure exceeds the amount authorised by Parliament.

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- Examined by the **Public Accounts Committee** before regularisation.
- Later approved by Parliament through an Appropriation Bill.
- **Public Accounts Committee**
 - Examines CAG reports and government expenditure.
 - Helps ensure legislative oversight over public funds.
 - Traditionally chaired by a member of the Opposition.
- **Charged vs Voted Expenditure**
 - **Charged expenditure**
 - Not voted by Parliament.
 - Can be discussed.
 - Examples: President's salary, Supreme Court judges' salaries, CAG expenses, debt charges.
 - **Voted expenditure**
 - Submitted to Lok Sabha as demands for grants.
 - Requires Lok Sabha approval.

Lok Sabha Passes Bankers' Books Evidence Bill to Recognise Digital Bank Records

What's the News?

The Lok Sabha passed the **Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026**, which seeks to modernise the law on the use of bank records as evidence in legal proceedings. The Bill replaces the **Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891** and gives legal recognition to **electronic, digital, virtual and cloud-based banking records**. It aims to align banking evidence law with digital banking, online transactions and electronic record-keeping.

Bankers' Books Evidence Bill

- The Bill deals with the evidentiary value of records maintained by banks.
- It allows certified copies of bank records to be used as evidence without requiring production of original records in most cases.
- It updates the legal framework for records maintained through:
 - Physical books
 - Electronic databases
 - Digital records
 - Virtual records
 - Cloud-based systems
- It creates a technology-neutral framework so that future forms of banking records can also be covered.

Changes

- Expands the meaning of **"bankers' books"** to include all forms of records maintained by banks.
- Recognises **electronic and digital bank records** as admissible, valid and legally enforceable evidence.

- Permits bank records to be produced in **physical or electronic form** during legal proceedings.
- Provides for **standardised certificate formats**.
- Allows authentication through:
 - Manual signatures
 - Digital signatures
 - Electronic signatures
- Defines **"special cause"**, under which courts may require a bank officer to appear or produce original bankers' books when the bank is not a party to the case.
- Empowers the Central Government to extend the law to other financial sector entities, subject to conditions.

Why was the 1891 Act Replaced?

- The **Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891** was framed when banking records were mainly paper-based.
- Modern banking now relies heavily on:
 - Internet banking
 - Mobile banking
 - UPI
 - NEFT
 - RTGS
 - IMPS
 - Core banking systems
 - Cloud-based data storage
- The old law did not adequately reflect current digital banking practices.
- The new Bill seeks to reduce dependence on physical records and improve efficiency in litigation, investigation and record verification.

Additional Info

- **Bankers' Books**
 - Refers to records maintained by banks for accounts, transactions and related financial entries.
 - Under the new Bill, the term covers both physical and electronic forms.
- **Certified Copy**
 - A certified copy is a verified copy of a bank record.
 - It can be submitted as evidence instead of producing the original record, subject to legal requirements.
- **Digital Evidence Link**
 - The Bill aligns with India's broader shift towards recognising electronic records in legal proceedings.
 - Related frameworks include:
 - **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023**
 - **Information Technology Act, 2000**
 - Digital signature and electronic record provisions



Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 Passed by Lok Sabha

What's the News?

- The **Lok Sabha passed the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, introduced by Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman**.
- It aims to **attract foreign capital, strengthen domestic manufacturing, improve tax certainty and ease business compliance** amid global trade and supply-chain disruptions.
- The Bill amends:
 - **Income-tax Act, 2025**
 - **Finance Act, 2026**
 - **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**
- It also seeks to replace the **Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026** while protecting actions already taken under the Ordinance.
- The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha **without debate amid disruptions**. It still requires passage by the Rajya Sabha and Presidential assent before becoming law.

Foreign Investment & G-Secs

- **Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)** and the **Bank for International Settlements (BIS)** are exempted from income tax on:
 - Interest earned from **Government Securities (G-Secs)**.
 - Capital gains from their sale, exchange or transfer.
- The exemption applies to eligible income from **tax year 2026-27**, subject to prescribed reporting requirements.
- Objective: deepen the Government securities market and make Indian sovereign debt more attractive to overseas investors.

Offshore Investment Funds

The Bill substantially relaxes conditions for **Eligible Investment Funds (EIFs)** managed from India.

Conditions proposed to be removed include:

- Minimum **25 investors**.
- Maximum **10% participation** by a single investor.
- Maximum **25% of corpus** investment in a single entity.
- Restrictions on investment in associate entities.
- Minimum average monthly corpus of **₹100 crore**.
- Separate exemption conditions applicable to funds operating from an **International Financial Services Centre (IFSC)** are also proposed to be removed, creating a more uniform framework.

Electronics Manufacturing Push

- Tax exemption for foreign companies supplying **capital goods, equipment and tooling** to Indian contract manufacturers

of specified electronics is extended up to **tax year 2040-41**, compared with the earlier 2030-31 sunset.

- Eligible products are expanded to include:
 - Laptops
 - Tablets
 - Servers
 - Hearables
 - Wearables
 - Related accessories
- Foreign companies storing electronic components in **customs-bonded warehouses** for supply to Indian manufacturers will receive a **15-year income-tax exemption**.

Data Centres

- The Bill relaxes conditions for **foreign cloud-service companies using Indian data centres**.
- It removes certain approval requirements and allows eligible data centres to function on a **leased basis**, rather than requiring direct ownership.
- The measure seeks to strengthen India's position as a global cloud and digital-infrastructure hub.

Rough Diamond Trade

- Tax exemptions are extended up to **tax year 2040-41** for eligible foreign:
 - Diamond-mining companies
 - Sightholders
 - Brokers
 - Aggregators
 - Auction entities
- The benefit applies to qualifying income from the sale of **rough diamonds through notified special zones in India**.

UPI & Merchant Discount Rate

- The Bill amends the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007** to create an independent framework under which the Central Government can notify electronic payment modes on which banks or payment-system providers **cannot levy charges**.
- This gives the government flexibility to determine which digital-payment modes continue under the **zero-MDR regime**.
- **Important:** the Bill itself does **not immediately impose an MDR or transaction charge on UPI users**; any change would depend on subsequent government notification.

Merchant Discount Rate (MDR): the fee paid by a merchant to banks/payment-service providers for processing digital transactions.

REITs & InvITs

- The Bill modifies taxation of **Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)** and **Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs)**.
- Dividend income received by unit holders can remain **tax-exempt even where the underlying Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) opts for the concessional/new tax regime**.

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- A corresponding higher levy at the SPV level seeks to maintain revenue neutrality.
- Reports indicate the surcharge for qualifying SPVs under the new regime is **25%**, against **10% under the old regime**.

Additional Info

- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**
 - Provides the statutory framework for regulation and supervision of payment systems in India.
 - **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** is the designated regulatory authority under the Act.
- **Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026**
 - Had earlier introduced tax relief for FIIs and BIS investing in Government securities.
 - It was promulgated under **Article 123 of the Constitution**, which empowers the President to promulgate Ordinances when Parliament is not in session.
- **BIS**
 - Bank for International Settlements.
 - International financial institution headquartered in **Basel, Switzerland**.

SECI Discovers ₹5.25/Unit Tariff for Firm Round-the-Clock Renewable Power

What's the News?

- **Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI)** has discovered a lowest tariff of **₹5.25 per unit (kWh)** in its **1,000 MW Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy-Round-the-Clock (FDRE-RTC)** tender through competitive reverse bidding.
- **Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Secretary, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**, highlighted the tariff as evidence that combinations of **solar, wind and energy storage** are becoming capable of supplying reliable renewable electricity at increasingly competitive prices.
- The tariff is significant because the tender seeks to make renewable power operationally comparable with **firm conventional sources such as coal-based thermal and nuclear power**, rather than merely supplying intermittent solar or wind electricity.

What is FDRE-RTC Power?

- **RTC (Round-the-Clock) Renewable Energy:** Renewable electricity structured to remain available across different periods of the day rather than only when the sun shines or wind blows.
- **FDRE (Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy):** Renewable power that can be **scheduled and supplied reliably according to electricity demand**.
- It generally combines:

- **Solar power**
- **Wind power**
- **Energy Storage Systems (ESS)** such as battery storage.
- Storage absorbs surplus renewable electricity and supplies it when renewable generation is insufficient, reducing the intermittency problem associated with solar and wind.

SECI-FDRE-RTC-V Tender

- **Capacity:** 1,000 MW
- **Connectivity:** Projects connected to the **Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS)**
- **Project model:** Renewable-energy projects integrated with **Energy Storage Systems**
- Developers will establish and operate projects and supply power to SECI, which can subsequently sell it to purchasing entities across India.
- The procurement is based on **contracted power capacity in MW**, rather than simply the total electricity generated.

Demand Fulfilment Ratio

Under the amended tender conditions, each electricity scheduling **time block is 15 minutes**. Developers must maintain:

- **Peak Hours:** Minimum **90% Demand Fulfilment Ratio (DFR)** in every time block.
 - **Solar Hours:** Minimum **50%** and maximum **60%** DFR.
 - **Remaining Hours:** Minimum **70% DFR**.
- DFR = Power scheduled for injection ÷ Contracted capacity.**

Thus, "round-the-clock" does **not mean 100% of contracted capacity must be generated every minute**; it refers to a prescribed firm supply profile across different periods of the day.

Why is ₹5.25/Unit Significant?

- Ordinary solar and wind tariffs mainly price **variable generation**; the ₹5.25 tariff incorporates the additional cost of making renewable power **firm and dispatchable**, including storage and hybridisation.
- It demonstrates the increasing commercial feasibility of using renewable energy for consumers requiring dependable electricity, including **data centres and other continuous-load industries**.
- Greater deployment of FDRE can:
 - Reduce dependence on fossil-fuel generation for balancing renewable energy.
 - Improve **grid stability**.
 - Address solar and wind **intermittency**.
 - Support higher penetration of renewable electricity in India's power system.

Additional Info

- **Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI)**



- A **Navratna Central Public Sector Undertaking** under **MNRE**.
- Established in **2011** initially for implementation of the National Solar Mission.
- Functions as a **Renewable Energy Implementing Agency (REIA)**.
- Conducts competitive bidding for solar, wind, hybrid, RTC and FDRE projects and also undertakes renewable-power trading.
- **ISTS**
 - **Inter-State Transmission System** carries electricity across State boundaries through the national transmission network.
 - ISTS-connected renewable projects allow power generated in one region to be supplied to buyers in other States.
- **Energy Storage Systems**
 - Important for integrating variable renewable energy by shifting electricity from periods of surplus generation to periods of higher demand.
 - India's expanding renewable capacity makes storage increasingly important for **grid balancing and uninterrupted power supply**.

Parliament Clears MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026

What's the News?

- Parliament has passed the **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, after its approval by both the **Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha**. It amends the **MSMED Act, 2006**.
- The Bill primarily seeks to address **delayed payments to MSMEs**, strengthen dispute resolution, mandate greater use of **TReDS**, formalise digital registration and decriminalise minor compliance violations.
- As reflected in the current parliamentary record, it has been **passed by both Houses**. The Bill provides that its provisions will come into force on a date notified by the Central Government after enactment.

Amendments

Faster Resolution of Delayed Payments

- **Mediation:** Must be completed within **90 days** from the date fixed for first appearance.
- If mediation fails, referral to **arbitration must occur within 30 days**.
- **Arbitral award:** Must be delivered within **90 days after completion of pleadings**.
- It also enables **Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)** for payment disputes.
- A mediated settlement or arbitral award can be recovered as an **arrear of land**

revenue through the District Collector, Deputy Commissioner or another notified authority.

Relief During Court Challenges

- Under the existing **MSMED Act**, a buyer challenging an award must generally deposit **75% of the award amount** before the court entertains the application.
- The amendment provides that if such a challenge remains pending for **more than six months**, the court must order payment of **at least 50% of the awarded amount** to the MSE supplier.

Mandatory TReDS for CPSEs

- All **Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)** must settle invoices for goods and services procured from MSMEs through the **Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS)**.
- Central and State governments are also empowered to extend such requirements to other public-sector entities.
- Invoice discounting through TReDS increased from about **₹40,000 crore in 2022-23 to ₹3.47 lakh crore in 2025-26**.

What is TReDS?

- An **RBI-regulated electronic platform** for financing MSME trade receivables.
- MSMEs can obtain early payment against invoices owed by buyers through financiers.
- It improves **working-capital liquidity** and reduces the impact of delayed payments.

MSME Classification & Registration

- The Bill incorporates the twin criteria of:
 - **Investment in plant/machinery or equipment**
 - **Annual turnover**
- Instead of keeping numerical thresholds in the Act itself, the **Central Government may prescribe them through notification**.
- MSME registration will be **voluntary, digital and free**, with statutory recognition for the digital registration framework, including the **Udyam Registration Portal**.

Current MSME Classification

The revised limits currently in force are:

- **Micro:** Investment ≤ **₹2.5 crore** and turnover ≤ **₹10 crore**
- **Small:** Investment ≤ **₹25 crore** and turnover ≤ **₹100 crore**
- **Medium:** Investment ≤ **₹125 crore** and turnover ≤ **₹500 crore**

The 2026 Bill does not itself prescribe these numerical limits; it gives the Central Government power to specify classification thresholds through notification.

Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils

- **MSEFCs** deal with disputes involving delayed payments to **micro and small enterprises**.
- The amendment gives States greater flexibility in determining their composition and establishing **multiple MSEFCs** for quicker disposal of cases.
- State governments are also empowered to frame rules concerning these councils.

Decriminalisation of Offences

- The Bill replaces several conviction-based offences with **graded civil penalties**.
- Furnishing false registration information:
 - First instance → **Warning**
 - Subsequent violations → **₹1,000-₹50,000 penalty**
- Failure by buyers to disclose unpaid MSME dues:
 - First violation → **Warning**
 - Second → **₹10,000-₹50,000**
 - Subsequent → **₹50,000-₹1 lakh**
- Minimum penalties will rise by **10% every three years**.

Additional Info

- **MSMED Act, 2006**
 - Principal legislation for promotion, development and competitiveness of MSMEs.
 - **Section 15:** Payment to an MSE supplier cannot be delayed beyond **45 days** where a written agreement exists.
 - **Section 16:** Delayed payments attract compound interest with monthly rests at **three times the RBI bank rate**.
 - **Section 18:** Provides reference of payment disputes to the **MSEFC**.
 - **Section 19:** Requires the **75% pre-deposit** for challenges to specified awards/orders.

Parliament Passes MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026 to Standardise Mineral Taxation

What's the News?

- Parliament has passed the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026**, which amends the **MMDR Act, 1957**.
- The Bill primarily seeks to create a **uniform and predictable fiscal framework for the mining sector** by restricting States' ability to independently impose taxes, cesses and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands.
- It also extends Union regulatory control to **mineral-bearing lands**.

- The Bill will become law after receiving the **President's assent under Article 111 of the Constitution**.

Changes under MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026 Union Control over Mineral-Bearing Land

The MMDR Act currently declares Union control over the **regulation of mines and development of minerals** in public interest.

The Bill expands this to include **"mineral-bearing lands"**, defined as land containing minerals according to parameters prescribed by the Central Government.

New Section 9D: Restrictions on State Levies

A new **Section 9D** is proposed under the MMDR Act.

States cannot impose a **tax, cess or any other levy** on:

- Mineral rights; or
- Mineral-bearing land, whether calculated on:
 - Mineral quantity
 - Mineral value
 - Royalty payable
 - Any other basis

Such levies can be imposed only according to **conditions or restrictions prescribed by the Central Government**.

Treatment of Past Taxes

- State taxes or levies that were **not deposited or recovered before commencement of the amended law** will be treated as invalid.
- Taxes or levies already collected by States **will not be refunded**.

Central Rule-Making Power

- **Section 13 of the MMDR Act** will be amended.
- The Central Government can prescribe rules governing the conditions under which States may impose taxes or other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands.

Why Was the Amendment Introduced?

The Centre highlighted several problems associated with differing State-level mineral levies:

- Multiple taxes, cesses and charges on mineral production or dispatch.
- Non-uniform tax rates across States.
- Introduction of additional levies after mining operations had commenced.
- Retrospective taxation.
- Higher compliance and mining costs.
- Risk of domestic minerals becoming less competitive than imports.

The objective is therefore to provide **certainty, stability and predictability** to mining taxation and encourage investment in the sector.

Mining Revenue

- Around **90% of taxes and statutory payments from mining accrue to States**.
- Mining operations currently face around **14 types of taxes, charges, fees and**

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statutory levies, including royalty, auction premium, DMF contributions and other payments.

- Major mining States received **over ₹5 lakh crore** during FY 2015-16 to FY 2025-26, while the Centre received about **₹82,000 crore**.
- Major mining States collected more than **₹96,000 crore as auction premium** between FY 2020-21 and FY 2025-26.
- India's mineral imports were valued at about **₹10.13 lakh crore in FY 2025-26**.

Constitutional & Federalism Angle

Mining regulation involves a division of legislative powers under the **Seventh Schedule**:

- **Union List – Entry 54**
 - Regulation of mines and mineral development to the extent Parliament declares Union regulation expedient in public interest.
- **State List – Entry 23**
 - Regulation of mines and mineral development, subject to Union List provisions.
- **State List – Entry 49**
 - Taxes on lands and buildings.
- **State List – Entry 50**
 - Taxes on mineral rights, subject to limitations imposed by Parliament through a law relating to mineral development.

Supreme Court's 2024 Mineral Taxation Ruling

In **Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India Ltd.**, the Supreme Court held that:

- **Royalty is not a tax**; it is a contractual payment arising from the right to extract minerals.
- State legislatures possess the power to **tax mineral rights** under Entry 50.
- Parliament may impose limitations on this State power through legislation relating to mineral development.
- States can also tax **mineral-bearing land** under Entry 49.
- Parliament's power under Entry 54 does not automatically allow it to restrict States' taxation power over land under Entry 49.

The 2026 amendment is therefore significant for **Centre-State fiscal relations and legislative federalism**.

Issues Raised

PRS Legislative Research has highlighted several constitutional questions:

- **Legislative competence**: Whether Parliament can bring mineral-bearing land within Union regulation when land falls under the State List.
- **Retrospective effect**: The Bill invalidates certain previously imposed but unrecovered

State levies despite the Supreme Court allowing States to raise specified past tax demands.

- **Article 14**: Entities that already paid the levies cannot claim refunds, while entities that had not paid them may escape liability.
- **Delegated legislation**: The Bill leaves the detailed conditions governing State taxation to rules framed by the Central Government, raising questions about excessive delegation.

Additional Info

- **MMDR Act, 1957**
 - Principal Central legislation governing India's mines and mineral sector.
 - The Central Government regulates major minerals and fixes royalty rates.
 - Mineral concessions are generally granted by State governments under the statutory framework prescribed by the Centre.
- **District Mineral Foundation (DMF)**
 - Established under the MMDR framework.
 - Works for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations.
- **Auction Premium**
 - Amount quoted by the successful bidder for obtaining an auctioned mining lease.
 - It constitutes an important source of revenue for mineral-producing States.

India to Launch Exchange-Based Trading for Major Minerals

What's the News?

- The Government has decided to enable **exchange-based trading of major minerals** to improve **price discovery, transparency and market access** in the mineral sector.
- The proposed mineral exchange is expected to become operational from the **next financial year**.
- Initially, trading is likely to cover **iron ore, bauxite, limestone and manganese**.
- The **Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM)** has been designated as the **nodal agency and regulator** for the mineral exchange.
- A separate framework is being developed for **coal trading through a Coal Exchange**, regulated by the **Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)**.

Mineral Exchange

- It will operate as a **centralised electronic trading platform** for minerals.
- Transactions will primarily involve **physical delivery-based contracts**.

- Objectives:
 - Facilitate transparent and competitive **price discovery**.
 - Expand market access for mineral producers and consumers.
 - Reduce disputes relating to **quality, pricing and contractual terms**.
 - Develop a more organised national market for minerals.
- The regulatory framework is provided through the **Mineral Exchange Rules, 2026**.

Regulatory Safeguards

- Mineral quality must be verified through **accredited assaying agencies**.
- Market-surveillance mechanisms will seek to prevent:
 - Market manipulation**
 - Cartelisation**
 - Insider trading**
- IBM will oversee the registration and regulation of entities operating mineral exchanges.

Critical Mineral Processing Parks

- The Government also plans **four dedicated critical mineral processing parks** in:
 - Andhra Pradesh**
 - Odisha**
 - Gujarat**
 - Maharashtra**
- Initial processing focus will be on **lithium and nickel**, which are important for batteries and clean-energy technologies.
- States:** Provide land and incentives for processing industries.
- Central Government:** Provide technical support.
- The parks are intended to create integrated, mineral-specific ecosystems covering **processing to downstream manufacturing**.

Additional Info

- National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)**
 - Aims to strengthen India's critical-mineral supply chain across **exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, recycling and overseas acquisition**.
 - Total planned outlay/investment: **₹34,300 crore over seven years**.
 - Government expenditure: **₹16,300 crore**.
 - Expected investment by PSUs and other entities: **₹18,000 crore**.
 - India remains highly import-dependent for several critical minerals; the reports place overall dependence at around **95%**.
 - Critical minerals include **lithium, nickel, cobalt, copper and rare-earth elements**, which are important for batteries, renewable energy,

electronics and strategic industries.

- Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957**
 - Principal legislation governing the **development and regulation of mines and minerals** in India.
 - The **MMDR Amendment Act, 2025** provided the statutory basis for establishing and regulating **mineral exchanges**.
 - The **MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026** is a separate reform aimed primarily at improving **fiscal stability and predictability in the major-minerals sector**.
- Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM)**
 - Functions under the **Ministry of Mines**.
 - Plays a major role in mineral conservation, scientific development of mineral resources and regulation of the mining sector.
 - It will serve as the regulatory authority for the proposed major-mineral exchange.
- Coal Exchange**
 - Being developed separately by the **Ministry of Coal**.
 - Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)** is the designated regulator.
 - It should not be confused with the mineral exchange regulated by IBM.

Cabinet Approves ₹9,450 Crore Railway Multi-Tracking Projects Across Four States

What's the News?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved four railway multi-tracking projects worth approximately ₹9,450 crore. Spanning about 410 km across West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, these projects are planned for completion by 2030-31. They will enhance capacity on the high-density Howrah-Chennai trunk route, improve connectivity to around 6,448 villages (population ~60 lakh), and enable an additional 76 million tonnes of annual freight traffic.

Multi-Tracking Projects?

- Overview:** Multi-tracking involves adding third or fourth railway lines on existing saturated corridors to separate passenger and freight traffic, decongest routes, and boost line capacity.
- Approved Corridors:**
 - Kharagpur-Bhadrak (Ranital):** 173 km fourth line (West Bengal & Odisha) – ₹3,352 crore



- **Bhadrak-Haridaspur:** 75 km fourth line (Odisha) – ₹1,583 crore
- **Cuttack-Paradeep (Badabandha):** 72 km third & fourth lines (Odisha) – ₹2,286 crore
- **Gummidipundi-Gudur:** 90 km third & fourth lines (Andhra Pradesh & Tamil Nadu) – ₹2,229 crore
- **Strategic Significance:** These projects will complete quadrupling of the Howrah-Chennai trunk route, a major eastern coastal corridor carrying coal, iron ore, cement, iron & steel, containers, automobiles, and food grains.
- **Tourism Connectivity:** Improved rail access to Bhitarkanika National Park, Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary, Chandipur Beach, Pulicat Lake, Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Lalitgiri (Buddhist site), and several temples across the region.
- **Implementation Framework:** Planned under the **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan**, with integrated planning and stakeholder consultations for multi-modal connectivity and logistics efficiency.

Freight & Environmental Impact?

- **Freight Capacity:** Additional freight traffic of **76 MTPA** (Million Tonnes Per Annum), significantly decongesting existing lines and improving operational efficiency.
- **Environmental Benefits:**
 - Reduction in oil imports by **13 crore litres**
 - Lower CO₂ emissions by **65 crore kg**
 - Equivalent to plantation of **2.6 crore trees**
- **Logistics Cost:** Railways being an energy-efficient mode, the projects align with India's climate goals and aim to reduce national logistics costs.

Additional Info

- **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA):**
 - Chaired by the Prime Minister
 - Approves major economic policies and infrastructure projects
- **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan:**
 - Launched in October 2021
 - Aims to break silos among ministries and integrate infrastructure planning for seamless multi-modal connectivity
- **Howrah-Chennai Trunk Route:**
 - One of Indian Railways' busiest and most saturated corridors on the eastern coast
 - Connects major industrial zones and port-linked regions
- **Multi-Tracking in Indian Railways:**
 - Third/fourth lines are added on high-density routes where existing double lines are saturated

- Separates fast passenger trains from slow-moving freight, improving punctuality and safety

Government Allows Duty-Free Import of 10 Lakh Tonnes Raw Sugar to Curb Price Rise

What's the News?

The government has permitted duty-free imports of up to 10 lakh tonnes of raw sugar under the Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) arrangement until October 2026, alongside imposing stockholding limits on bulk consumers. The twin measures aim to augment domestic supply, check a sharp rise in retail sugar prices, and ensure adequate availability during the upcoming festive season. This marks the first duty-free raw sugar import decision in a decade.

Duty-Free Raw Sugar Imports?

- **Overview:** The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) amended the import policy to allow 10 lakh metric tonnes (MT) of raw sugar under TRQ without customs duty. The permission is temporary and valid until October 2026.
- **Rationale:** Domestic sugar prices have risen sharply due to lower opening stocks ahead of the 2026-27 sugar season. The all-India average ex-mill price surged to ₹5,400-5,500 per quintal, up from ₹3,900 per quintal a year earlier. Retail prices climbed approximately 13% year-on-year to ₹52.30 per kg.
- **Seasonal Factor:** Demand typically surges between August and November due to festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra, and Diwali, straining domestic stocks.
- **Eligibility & Allocation:** Applications are invited from sugar mills and refiners possessing functional capacity to convert raw sugar into white/refined sugar. Applicants must submit refining capacity declarations and a copy of the Consent to Operate issued by the relevant State Pollution Control Board. Preference is given to importers undertaking to complete imports by mid-October 2026. Non-utilisation or non-surrender of the allocated quota within the prescribed period constitutes non-compliance.

Stockholding Limits on Bulk Consumers?

- **Overview:** To discourage speculative stocking and ensure adequate supplies, the government notified the Sugar (Stockholding Limit of Bulk Consumers) Order, 2026.
- **Details:** Bulk consumers – institutional buyers with average monthly sugar consumption exceeding 10 tonnes – cannot hold stocks beyond 15 days of their

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consumption. The restriction applies from September to November 2026.

- **Coverage:** Includes confectioners, soft drink manufacturers, food processing units, sweetmeat sellers, and other institutional buyers.
- **Dealer Limits:** This follows an earlier order capping sugar stocks held by dealers at 4,000 quintals for 30 days during the same period.

Additional Info

- **Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ):**
 - A trade policy tool allowing a specified quantity of a product to be imported at a reduced or zero duty rate; imports above the quota attract higher duties.
- **Sugar Season in India:**
 - The sugar year runs from October to September.
 - Opening stocks for the 2026-27 season are estimated at 32-42 lakh tonnes, below the estimated domestic requirement of around 50 lakh tonnes.
- **Entities:**
 - **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT):** Operates under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry; formulates and executes export-import policy.
 - **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution:** Oversees sugar pricing, stock limits, and public distribution.
- **Related Policies & Context:**
 - **Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP):** Diverts sugarcane and sugar for ethanol production, impacting domestic sugar availability. The government is promoting E20 (20% ethanol blending) to reduce oil import dependency.
 - **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP):** The minimum price payable by sugar mills to sugarcane farmers, fixed annually by the Centre.
 - **State Advised Price (SAP):** Some states (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Punjab) announce SAPs, often higher than the central FRP.
 - **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Empowers central and state governments to regulate production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities, including sugar.
- **Constitutional Context:**
 - Agriculture falls under the **State List** (Entry 14), while trade and commerce in foodstuffs is under the **Concurrent List** (Entry 33) of the Seventh Schedule.

- **Article 301** of the Constitution declares that trade, commerce, and intercourse throughout India shall be free, subject to reasonable restrictions under subsequent articles.

India Notifies ₹62,500 Crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has notified the **Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS)** with an outlay of **₹62,500 crore**.
- The five-year scheme aims to expand mobile-phone production, increase **Domestic Value Addition (DVA)**, strengthen local supply chains and improve India's global competitiveness.
- It also provides dedicated support for **Indian mobile-phone brands**, including incentives for indigenous design, R&D and intellectual property creation.

Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS)

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
- **Outlay:** ₹62,500 crore
- **Tenure:** FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31
- **Incentive:** 2.25%-5% of eligible sales of mobile phones manufactured in India.
- **Additional domestic-sourcing incentive:** Up to 1.5%.
- **Indian design & R&D:** Eligible Indian brands can receive an additional 3% incentive.

Two Target Segments

Target Segment 1: Mobile Phone Manufacturing

- Covers mobile-phone manufacturers, including **Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS)** companies registered in India.
- Minimum turnover requirement: **₹10,000 crore in FY 2025-26**.
- Existing brands must achieve incremental sales above their FY 2025-26 sales:
 - ₹5,000 crore in FY 2026-27
 - Rising progressively to **₹25,000 crore in FY 2030-31**.
- New brands become eligible after achieving annual Indian sales of **₹10,000 crore**.

Target Segment 2: Indian Mobile Phone Brands

- Minimum turnover requirement: **₹1,000 crore in FY 2025-26**.
- An Indian brand must:
 - Be registered/incorporated in India.
 - Hold its **IP and trademark in India**.
 - Have management control with Indian citizens.
 - Have **more than 51% Indian shareholding**.

- Maintain in-house R&D and design capabilities in India.
- Eligible Indian brands receive 5% incentive on eligible sales, besides domestic-sourcing incentives and an additional 3% for Indian design and R&D.
- No minimum annual threshold-sales requirement applies to eligible Indian brands.

Domestic Sourcing Incentive

Manufacturers can receive an additional incentive of up to 1.5% by localising specified components/sub-assemblies in at least 25% of total mobile-phone units sold during a financial year.

- Enclosures: 0.5%
- Display modules: 0.3%
- Camera modules: 0.3%
- Batteries, including cells: 0.2%
- USB cables/connectors: 0.2%

Additional Info

- **Predecessor:** Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing (PLI-LSEM), whose tenure ended in FY 2025-26.
 - Mobile-phone production under the earlier programme reached about ₹11.61 lakh crore, against a target of ₹8.12 lakh crore.
 - Investment exceeded ₹20,500 crore, against a target of ₹7,000 crore.
- **India's mobile manufacturing position:**
 - India is the world's second-largest mobile-phone manufacturer by volume.
 - Around 99.2% of mobile phones used in India are manufactured domestically.
 - Electronics manufacturing has expanded about 7 times, while electronics exports have increased about 11 times since FY 2014-15.
 - Smartphones have emerged as India's single-largest exported product category, overtaking traditional products such as diesel fuel and cut diamonds.

Paradip Port Gets ₹427.80 Crore Infrastructure Boost and 18.5-Metre Deep Draft

What's the News?

- Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal inaugurated major infrastructure projects worth ₹427.80 crore at Paradip Port Authority (PPA), Odisha.
- The key development is a ₹352 crore capital-dredging project, enabling an 18.5-metre deep draft and allowing fully laden Capesize vessels to enter the inner harbour.

- PPA also signed concession agreements for three berth-mechanisation projects worth ₹1,580.36 crore, adding 23 MTPA of mechanised cargo-handling capacity.
- The port also marked the plantation of its one-millionth tree.

Major Infrastructure Projects

- **Capital Dredging – ₹352 crore**
 - Deepens the navigational draft to 18.5 metres.
 - Enables handling of fully laden Capesize vessels.
 - Expected to improve economies of scale and reduce vessel turnaround and logistics costs.
- **Atharbanki Second New Bridge – ₹24.89 crore**
 - 500-metre, three-lane bridge across Atharbanki Creek.
 - Includes footpaths and a dedicated pipeline corridor.
 - Designed to ease congestion on a route carrying nearly 3,000 trucks per day.
- **Advanced Vessel Traffic Management and Information System – ₹15.50 crore**
 - Developed with the National Technology Centre for Ports, Waterways and Coasts (NTCPWC), IIT Madras.
 - Integrates AI, AIS, solid-state radar, CCTV, oil-spill monitoring and 3D visualisation.
 - Monitors vessel movement up to 20 nautical miles.
- **PNG Supply – ₹20 crore**
 - Developed with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd.
 - First phase covers 546 residential quarters.
 - Paradip is set to become the first major port to provide piped natural gas to its residential township.
- Other works include a ₹12.18 crore administrative-building façade upgrade and a ₹2.10 crore sports hostel.

₹1,580.36 Crore Mechanisation Projects

PPA signed three concession agreements as part of its objective of increasing berth mechanisation from about 80% to 100% by 2030.

- **South Quay Berth**
 - Capacity: 5 MTPA
 - Investment: ₹498.69 crore
 - Mode: Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)
- **Multipurpose Berth**
 - Capacity: 8 MTPA
 - Investment: ₹630.67 crore
 - Mode: BOT
- **Captive CQ-III Berth**
 - Capacity: 10 MTPA
 - Investment: ₹451 crore

Total additional mechanised capacity: 23 MTPA.

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The projects are expected to enable faster and cleaner cargo handling while reducing vessel turnaround time and logistics costs.

Deep-Draft & Capesize Vessels

- **Draft/Draught:** Vertical distance between the waterline and the lowest point of a ship's hull; deeper drafts allow larger, more heavily loaded ships.
- **Capesize vessels:** Large bulk carriers generally used for commodities such as **coal and iron ore**.
- Paradip's **18.5-metre draft** allows fully laden Capesize vessels to access its inner harbour, reducing the requirement for partial loading or cargo transfer and improving freight economics.

Paradip Port

- **Location:** Paradip, Jagatsinghpur district, **Odisha**, on the **Bay of Bengal**, near the Mahanadi river system.
- It is the **only Major Port in Odisha**.
- **Administrative Ministry:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
- **Authority:** Paradip Port Authority.
- Functions as an autonomous statutory body under the **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021**.
- Foundation stone was laid in **1962**.
- Became India's **8th Major Port in 1966** and the **first Major Port on India's east coast commissioned after Independence**.
- Cargo handled in **FY 2025-26: 156.45 MMT**, its highest-ever annual throughput; it ranked **second among India's Major Ports by cargo volume**.

Additional Info

- **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021**
 - Provides for regulation, operation and planning of India's Major Ports.
 - Vests their administration, control and management in the **Boards of Major Port Authorities**.
 - Intended to provide greater operational and financial autonomy to Major Ports.
- **Constitutional Context**
 - **Union List, Entry 27:** Ports declared by or under Parliamentary law to be **Major Ports**, including their delimitation and port authorities.
 - **State List, Entry 31:** Ports other than those declared as Major Ports.
- **Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030)**
 - Government roadmap for modernising port infrastructure, improving logistics efficiency and strengthening India's maritime sector.
 - Focus areas include higher port capacity, lower turnaround time, coastal shipping and better multimodal connectivity.

Green Initiative

- Paradip Port has completed plantation of its **one-millionth tree**.
- Recent plantation drives have added nearly **one lakh trees annually**, supporting green-cover expansion and biodiversity around the port.

PNGRB Authorises 1,800-km LPG

Pipeline Network Worth ₹7,000 Crore

What's the News?

- The **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB)** has authorised development of nearly **1,800 km of new LPG pipelines** involving an estimated investment of **₹7,000 crore**.
- The three pipelines will be developed by **GAIL (India) Ltd.** across **Telangana, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Goa**.
- On completion, India's PNGRB-authorised **common-carrier LPG pipeline network** will increase from about **7,700 km to 9,500 km**, an expansion of nearly **23.5%**.
- The projects aim to improve **LPG supply security**, reduce dependence on road tankers and lower logistics costs, road-safety risks and emissions.

Three LPG Pipeline Corridors

Pipeline	Length	States Covered
Cherlapally-Nagpur	556 km	Telangana-Maharashtra
Jhansi-Sitarganj	611 km	Uttar Pradesh-Uttarakhand
Shikrapur-Goa & Hubli	633 km	Maharashtra-Goa-Karnataka
Total	~1,800 km	6 States

All three projects have been authorised for development by **GAIL (India) Ltd.**

Common-Carrier Pipeline

- A **common carrier** pipeline is infrastructure in which capacity beyond an entity's own requirement is made available to other eligible users under regulated conditions.
- It promotes:
 - **Third-party access**
 - Better utilisation of pipeline infrastructure
 - Competition among market participants
 - Reduced duplication of infrastructure
- PNGRB regulates access and transportation tariffs for common-carrier pipelines.

PNGRB

- **Full Form:** Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board

- **Statutory Basis: Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006**
- It is India's regulator for specified **downstream petroleum and natural-gas activities**.
- Major functions include:
 - Authorising petroleum-product and natural-gas pipelines.
 - Regulating common and contract carriers.
 - Regulating City Gas Distribution networks.
 - Protecting consumer interests and promoting competition.
 - Prescribing technical and safety standards.
- The Act covers refining, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, marketing and sale of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas, but **excludes production of crude oil and natural gas**.

Additional Info

- **GAIL (India) Ltd.**
 - A **Maharatna Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE)**.
 - Major businesses include natural-gas transmission and marketing, petrochemicals, LPG and other liquid hydrocarbons, and LPG transmission.
- **Kandla-Gorakhpur LPG Pipeline**
 - Length: **2,757 km**.
 - It is India's **longest LPG pipeline**.
 - Its earlier authorisation forms an important part of India's expanding LPG pipeline infrastructure.

SEBI Introduces IT Resilience Index for Market Infrastructure Institutions

What's the News?

- The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has introduced an **IT Resilience Index (ITRI)** framework for **Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs)**.
- The index will assess the robustness and resilience of **critical IT systems** supporting India's securities market.
- It will evaluate MIIs across **9 parameters with a total weightage of 100**, covering areas such as availability, cybersecurity, business continuity and system reliability.
- MIIs must also establish an **Early Warning System (EWS)** and real-time monitoring mechanisms to identify deterioration or disruption in technology services.

IT Resilience Index (ITRI)

- ITRI is a **system-driven framework** for periodically measuring the health and resilience of critical IT systems operated by MIIs.

- It covers:
 - Critical systems specified under SEBI's regulatory framework.
 - Other IT systems feeding into or connected with these critical systems.
- Its objectives are to:
 - Identify emerging technological weaknesses at an early stage.
 - Ensure uninterrupted delivery of securities-market services.
 - Strengthen cyber and operational resilience.
 - Enable timely corrective measures.
- Computation is intended to be **automatic and non-discretionary**, using data directly from IT systems.
- Manual data retrieval is permitted only in exceptional cases after prior discussion with the **Standing Committee on Technology (SCOT)**.

9 Parameters & Weightage

Parameter	Weightage
Availability	20
Security	20
Integrity	10
Governance	10
Reliability & Monitoring	10
Business Continuity	10
Modularity & Flexibility	10
Scalability	5
Others, including Incident Handling	5
Total	100

- **Availability and Security** receive the highest weightage at **20 each**.
- The framework therefore gives particular importance to keeping market systems continuously operational and protected against cyber threats.

Monitoring & Early Warning System

- MIIs must develop an **Early Warning System** capable of detecting deterioration in ITRI parameters that could cause:
 - Performance issues.
 - System slowness.
 - Service disruptions.
- They must establish **consolidated dashboards** providing continuous visibility into:
 - System and application performance.
 - Service delivery to market participants.
 - Deviations and anomalies.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be developed for identifying and responding to disruptions.

Assessment & Implementation

- ITRI will be computed **half-yearly**, within **60 days** from the end of each half-year.
- MIIs must present:



- Comparative analysis of **two consecutive half-years**.
- Corrective actions taken or proposed.
- Findings to their **SCOT and Governing Board**.
- The **Industry Standards Forum (ISF) of MIIs** will finalise:
 - Sub-parameters.
 - Measurement criteria.
 - Baseline parameters.
 - Acceptable threshold scores.
 - System-driven scoring methodology.
- Implementation milestones:
 - **30 November 2026**: ISF to finalise sub-parameters and measurement criteria.
 - **31 January 2027**: Detailed SOPs, after SCOT review, to be submitted to SEBI.
 - **28 February 2027**: ITRI framework, EWS and real-time service monitoring to become operational.
 - First ITRI computation will cover the **half-year ending 31 March 2027**.
- MIIs have already implemented a **beta version** of the ITRI framework.

Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs)

- MIIs provide the essential infrastructure required for the functioning of the securities market.
- Under the framework, they include:
 - **Stock Exchanges** – provide platforms for trading securities.
 - **Clearing Corporations** – facilitate clearing and settlement of trades and manage counterparty risk.
 - **Depositories** – hold securities in electronic form and facilitate their transfer.
- The circular applies to stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories, with **AMC Repo Clearing Ltd. excluded** from its coverage.
- Disruption of an MII's technology systems can affect trading, clearing, settlement and investor confidence across the financial market.

Additional Info

- **SEBI**
 - Established as a non-statutory body in **1988** and given statutory status under the **SEBI Act, 1992**.
 - It is the principal regulator of India's securities market.
 - Its broad objectives are:
 - Protecting investors' interests.
 - Promoting development of the securities market.
 - Regulating the securities market.

- The ITRI circular has been issued under **Section 11(1) of the SEBI Act, 1992**.

• Standing Committee on Technology (SCOT)

- Provides technology-related oversight within MIIs.
- Under ITRI, it will review performance trends, exceptions involving manual computation and proposed corrective measures.

• Industry Standards Forum (ISF)

- A SEBI-constituted industry mechanism for developing common implementation standards for MIIs.
- Under ITRI, it is responsible for creating uniform measurement and scoring standards to ensure **comparability across MIIs**.

45 Thermal Power Plants Face Critical Coal Shortage Amid Monsoon Disruption

What's the News?

Government data reveals that 45 coal-fired power plants in India are operating with critically low coal inventories, a sharp rise from 31 plants at the end of July. Of these, 40 are domestic coal-based plants. The affected units hold less than 25% of required coal stocks or have fuel for fewer than three days of operation. Heavy monsoon rainfall in key coal-producing states has disrupted mining and rail transport, while above-normal temperatures have spiked electricity demand for cooling.

Coal Stock Crisis?

- Total coal stocks at power plants fell by 19% from end-July levels to 30.95 million tonnes – equivalent to roughly 10 days of operational requirement, down from about 12 days earlier.
- Industry assessments indicate stocks covering only about 11 days of coal burn and just 55% of the normative requirement, marking a 34.5% decline year-on-year.
- The number of critical plants has more than doubled from 15 a year earlier.
- Despite rising national coal production, the squeeze reflects a logistics and distribution bottleneck rather than an overall supply shortfall.

Monsoon & Demand Pressure?

- Heavy rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh – India's key coal-bearing states – has hit mining operations and slowed railway coal movement.
- India is experiencing its weakest monsoon since 2009, with cumulative rainfall roughly 12% below normal, linked to strengthening El Niño conditions.
- The uneven monsoon has reduced hydropower output while hotter-than-usual weather has



driven up air-conditioning demand, particularly during night hours when solar generation drops.

- NTPC, India's largest thermal power producer, reports that some plants require five to six railway rakes daily but are receiving only about half that number.

Govt Response?

- The Ministry of Power has directed some coal-fired plants to defer scheduled maintenance until the fuel supply situation stabilises, aiming to keep generation capacity online during the crunch.
- Thermal coal imports by power plants declined 22% to 12.28 million tonnes in Q1 FY 2026-27, with blending imports down 39%, limiting relief from international markets.
- The crisis underscores a widening gap between aggregate coal availability and plant-level receipt, pointing to distribution and rail logistics as the core constraint.

Additional Info

- **Central Electricity Authority (CEA):** Statutory body under the Ministry of Power that monitors power sector data, including plant-wise fuel status. It classifies coal stock as 'critical' when inventory falls below 25% of requirement or supports less than three days of generation.
- **NTPC Limited:** India's largest thermal power producer, operating multiple coal-based stations across the country.
- **Coal Stock Norms:** Thermal plants are required to maintain buffer stocks measured in days of operational coverage. Railway rakes remain the primary mode of bulk coal transport from mines to generating stations.
- **El Niño:** A climate pattern characterised by warming of the Pacific Ocean, often linked to suppressed monsoon rainfall and higher temperatures in India.



Science & Technology

Gaganyaan Clears Human-Rating Milestones; First Uncrewed Flight Targeted for Q4 2026

What's the News?

- India's **Gaganyaan Human Spaceflight Programme** has achieved major milestones in the development and validation of systems required for human-rated spaceflight.
- The **Human Rated Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (HLVM3)** has completed development and ground testing of its propulsion stages and structures.
- Propulsion systems for the **Crew Module (CM)** and **Service Module (SM)** have been developed, tested and qualified.
- The first uncrewed experimental Gaganyaan mission, carrying the **Vyommitra half-humanoid robot**, is targeted for **Q4 2026**.
- Further uncrewed missions will progressively validate the spacecraft and safety systems before India attempts its first indigenous crewed orbital mission.

Human-Rating Milestones

Human-rating is the process of qualifying a launch vehicle and spacecraft to safely carry humans by incorporating enhanced **reliability, redundancy, safety margins and failure-management systems**.

Progress includes:

- HLVM3:** Development and ground testing of propulsion stages and structures completed.
- Orbital Module:**
 - Crew Module and Service Module propulsion systems developed and qualified.
 - Thermal Protection System, deceleration system, Crew Module Up-righting System and end-to-end avionics have undergone development/testing.
 - An engineering model of the indigenous **Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS)** has been realised; qualification activities continue as part of the programme.
- Crew Escape System (CES):**
 - All **five types of escape motors** have been developed and successfully static-tested.
 - CES is designed to rapidly separate the Crew Module from the launch vehicle during a launch emergency.

Gaganyaan Mission

- Nodal Agency:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Department of Space.
- Objective:** Demonstrate India's capability to undertake an indigenous human

spaceflight to **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** and safely recover the crew.

- Launch Vehicle:** **HLVM3**, the human-rated version of LVM3.
- Target Orbit:** Around **400 km LEO**.
- Orbital Module:** Comprises:
 - Crew Module (CM):** Habitable module for astronauts.
 - Service Module (SM):** Provides propulsion and other spacecraft support functions.
- Crew Escape System:** Provides emergency escape capability during launch and ascent.

Mission Roadmap

- G1:** First experimental uncrewed orbital mission; targeted for **Q4 2026** and expected to carry Vyommitra.
- G2 & G3:** Additional uncrewed missions planned to conduct end-to-end testing before human flight.
- Thus, the current programme envisages **three uncrewed missions-G1, G2 and G3-before the first crewed mission**.

Precursor testing has also included the **TV-D1 Test Vehicle mission** and Integrated Air Drop Tests to validate the Crew Escape System and parachute-based deceleration/recovery systems.

Vyommitra

- Vyommitra** derives from *Vyoma* (space) and *Mitra* (friend).
- It is an ISRO-developed **half-humanoid robot** intended for uncrewed Gaganyaan missions.
- It can monitor spacecraft parameters, issue alerts, operate panels and interact with life-support systems, helping validate crew-module conditions before astronauts are flown.

Additional Info

- Major ground infrastructure**
 - Orbital Module Preparation Facility
 - Gaganyaan Control Centre
 - Crew Training Facility
 - Modified Second Launch Pad
 - Ground communication/tracking network and recovery infrastructure
- Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) linkage**
 - Gaganyaan now forms the technological foundation for India's long-term human-spaceflight programme.
 - BAS is planned as a **five-module Indian space station**.
 - BAS-01**, its first module, is targeted for **2028**.
 - Full operationalisation is targeted for **2035**.

- The revised Gaganyaan programme has a total approved funding of about **₹20,193 crore**.

India Develops Indigenous Beam Catcher for FAIR Mega-Science Project

What's the News?

- India has developed an **indigenous Beam Catcher** for the **Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR)**, an international mega-science particle accelerator project being built at **Darmstadt, Germany**.
- The **first of three Beam Catcher units** has reached the FAIR site for installation in the **Super Fragment Separator (Super-FRS)**, which produces radioactive ion beams for scientific research.
- It was **designed by CSIR-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-CMERI), Durgapur**, under the supervision of **Bose Institute, Kolkata**, and manufactured by **Trident Autocomponents Pvt. Ltd., Kanpur**.
- The achievement highlights India's growing capability to supply **high-precision equipment for international mega-science projects** under the *Make in India* framework.

What is FAIR?

- **FAIR: Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research**.
- Location: **Darmstadt, Germany**, adjoining the **GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research**.
- It is a large **multipurpose particle-accelerator facility** designed to generate high-intensity beams of ions and antiprotons.
- Research areas include:
 - Nuclear and particle physics
 - Nuclear astrophysics
 - Atomic and plasma physics
 - Properties of matter under extreme conditions.
- FAIR's central ring accelerator has a circumference of around **1,100 metres**, and the facility is expected to support around **3,000 scientists worldwide**.

India and FAIR

- India became a **founding member of FAIR in 2010**.
- **Bose Institute, Kolkata** is:
 - India's designated shareholder in **FAIR GmbH**.
 - Nodal institution for coordinating India's participation in FAIR.
- India's contribution is financed **50:50 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**.

What is a Beam Catcher?

A **Beam Catcher** is an advanced accelerator component that safely absorbs the residual high-energy particle beam after useful particles have interacted with a production target.

- At FAIR, it forms a component of the **Super Fragment Separator (Super-FRS)**.
- It absorbs remnants of primary **heavy-ion beams with energies of 0.4–1.5 GeV per nucleon**.
- Typical operating conditions:
 - Particles per pulse/spill: **$\sim 5 \times 10^{11}$**
 - Energy deposited: **~ 29 kJ**
 - Pulse duration: **50–100 nanoseconds**
 - Peak energy density: **~ 300 J/gram**
 - Pulse interval: **~ 1.67 seconds**.
- Such rapid energy deposition creates intense **thermal shock waves**, making heat management and structural durability major engineering challenges.

Design Features

- Absorbers consist of **fine-grained graphite and hyper-pure copper**.
- Operates inside a vacuum chamber at approximately **10^{-7} mbar**.
- Absorbers can undergo precision **motorised horizontal and vertical movement**.
- They are **water-cooled** to withstand extreme heating.
- Iron shielding protects against unwanted radiation.
- A complete unit with shielding weighs about **40 tonnes**.

Super Fragment Separator (Super-FRS)

- **Super-FRS = Super Fragment Separator**.
- It separates and identifies rare radioactive isotopes produced when high-energy heavy ions strike a target.
- These radioactive beams enable research on:
 - Exotic atomic nuclei
 - Nuclear structure
 - Nuclear reactions
 - Origin of chemical elements in stars and stellar explosions.

India's In-Kind Contributions to FAIR

Apart from Beam Catchers, India is supplying several critical accelerator components:

- **3 Beam Catcher units** – designed by CSIR-CMERI, Durgapur.
- **58 Ultra-High Vacuum chambers** – manufactured in Bengaluru.
- **932 km of specialised IT and diagnostic cables** – manufactured in Chennai.
- **524 ultra-stable power converters** – manufactured by **Electronics Corporation of India Ltd. (ECIL), Hyderabad**.
- Indian scientific groups are also developing detector systems for major FAIR experiments such as:

- **NUSTAR** – Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions.
- **CBM** – Compressed Baryonic Matter.

Additional Info

- **Antiproton**
 - Antiparticle of the proton.
 - Has the **same mass as a proton but opposite electric charge**.
 - FAIR will use antiproton and ion beams for fundamental research.
- **Particle Accelerator**
 - Uses **electric fields to accelerate charged particles** and magnetic fields to steer/focus them.
 - Enables study of matter at very small scales and extremely high energies.
- **Mega-Science Projects**
 - Large-scale, technologically complex scientific facilities involving international collaboration.
 - Other major projects involving India include **CERN, ITER, LIGO-India, Square Kilometre Array (SKA) and Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)**.

Government Unveils Roadmap for a Self-Reliant Nuclear Energy Ecosystem

What's the News?

- The Government has outlined a roadmap to build a **self-reliant and globally competitive nuclear-energy ecosystem**, centred on indigenous reactor technology, domestic manufacturing, private-sector participation and utilisation of India's thorium resources.
- Under the **Nuclear Energy Mission**, India aims to expand nuclear-power capacity to **100 GWe by 2047**.
- The strategy combines large **700 MWe Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** with indigenous **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** and advanced reactor technologies.
- At least **five indigenous SMRs are targeted for operationalisation by 2033**.

Nuclear Energy Mission?

The **Nuclear Energy Mission**, announced in the **Union Budget 2025-26**, provides the principal framework for accelerating India's nuclear-power expansion.

- **Capacity target:** 100 GWe by 2047.
- **SMR allocation:** ₹20,000 crore for design, development and deployment.
- **SMR target:** At least **5 indigenous SMRs by 2033**.
- The Mission supports India's objectives of **energy security, technological self-reliance and low-carbon baseload electricity**.

Two-Pronged Reactor Strategy

Large Reactors at Greenfield Sites

India will expand deployment of:

- Indigenous **700 MWe PHWRs**.
- Other advanced large reactor designs.
- Primarily at **greenfield nuclear-power sites** for rapid capacity expansion.

SMRs at Brownfield Sites

SMRs are proposed for:

- Retiring **fossil-fuel power plant sites**.
- Captive power requirements of **energy-intensive industries**.
- **Remote and off-grid areas**.

This can allow existing power infrastructure to be repurposed while supporting industrial decarbonisation.

Indigenous SMRs

The **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)** is developing major indigenous reactor designs:

- **Bharat Small Modular Reactor (BSMR-200): 220 MWe**
- **SMR-55: 55 MWe**
- **High Temperature Gas Cooled Reactor (HTGCR): up to 5 MWth**
 - Intended primarily for high-temperature applications such as **hydrogen production** through an appropriate thermochemical cycle.

Note:

- **MWe** = Megawatt electrical, indicating electricity output.
- **MWth** = Megawatt thermal, indicating reactor heat output.

Three-Stage Nuclear Power Programme

India's long-term nuclear strategy remains based on a **closed nuclear fuel cycle** designed to utilise limited uranium resources and India's large thorium resource base.

Stage I – PHWRs

- Fuel: **Natural uranium**
- Reactor: **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor**
- Spent fuel is reprocessed to recover **plutonium**.

Stage II – Fast Breeder Reactors

- Uses plutonium obtained from Stage-I spent fuel.
- **Sodium-Cooled Fast Breeder Reactors** are central to this stage.
- The **Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR)** is leading research and engineering work on these reactors and associated closed fuel-cycle facilities.

Stage III – Thorium

- **Thorium-232 is fertile, not fissile**.
- It must first be converted into fissile **Uranium-233 (U-233)** inside a reactor.
- The third stage envisages large-scale energy production using **U-233 bred from thorium**.

India's Thorium Progress

India has already undertaken significant thorium-related R&D:

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- **Thorium oxide (Thoria) pellets** have been used in initial cores of PHWRs.
- Thoria-based fuel has been irradiated in BARC research reactors.
- Irradiated thorium fuel has been reprocessed to obtain **U-233**.
- U-233 has subsequently been fabricated as fuel for the **KAMINI reactor** at **IGCAR, Kalpakkam**.

SHANTI Act, 2025

The **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025** is a major institutional pillar of the new nuclear roadmap.

It enables broader participation of **public and private entities** in India's nuclear-energy ecosystem, particularly in:

- Nuclear manufacturing
- Engineering services
- Research and development
- Equipment and component supply chains

At the same time, nuclear safety, security and safeguards remain subject to regulatory oversight.

Atomic Energy Regulatory Board

The SHANTI Act gives **statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)**, strengthening its legal foundation for nuclear-safety regulation and oversight.

Indigenous Manufacturing Push

The Department of Atomic Energy is working with domestic industries and start-ups to build an indigenous nuclear supply chain. Critical components already developed through Indian industry include:

- **Low-alloy steel forgings** for reactor pressure vessels.
- **Reactivity control drive mechanisms**.

Further localisation of nuclear equipment is being pursued through technology sharing, industrial handholding and domestic R&D.

Nuclear Medicine Component

The roadmap also includes expansion of nuclear technology beyond electricity generation.

- An **Isotope Production Reactor (IPR)** is planned to strengthen India's domestic production of **medical isotopes**.
- Such radioisotopes have applications in **diagnosis and treatment of diseases, including cancer**.

Additional Info

- **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**
 - Responsible for India's nuclear-energy programme.
 - Functions under the **Prime Minister's Office**.
- **BARC**
 - Premier nuclear research institution of India.

- Major role in indigenous reactor, fuel-cycle and SMR technology development.

IGCAR

- Located at **Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu**.
- Major centre for **Fast Breeder Reactor and fuel-cycle research**.

PHWR

- Uses **heavy water** as moderator and coolant.
- India's indigenous PHWR programme is a major component of Stage I of its nuclear strategy.

Why Nuclear Energy Matters

- Provides **firm/baseload low-carbon electricity**.
- Complements variable renewable sources such as solar and wind.
- Reduces dependence on fossil-fuel imports.
- Supports India's long-term energy-security and decarbonisation objectives.

ISRO Steps Up Measures to Tackle Space Debris and Satellite Congestion

What's the News?

- **ISRO** is strengthening measures to tackle growing **space debris and congestion in Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**, particularly due to the rapid expansion of large satellite and satellite-internet constellations.
- The measures centre on the **Debris Free Space Mission (DFSMS)**, post-mission disposal of satellites and rocket stages, **Space Situational Awareness (SSA)**, collision avoidance and development of **Active Debris Removal (ADR)** technologies.
- Minister of State **Dr Jitendra Singh** informed Parliament that small, untrackable debris and failed satellites pose serious collision risks because they may neither be manoeuvrable nor avoidable by operational spacecraft.
- ISRO has also initiated **on-orbit precursor demonstrations for ADR**, while strengthening indigenous space-object monitoring capabilities.

Debris Free Space Mission (DFSMS)

- **Launched by:** ISRO/Department of Space.
- **Goal:** Achieve **debris-free space missions by all Indian space actors—governmental and non-governmental—by 2030**.
- It follows the principle of preventing debris throughout the **entire mission life cycle**, rather than dealing with debris only after it is created.

Major Guidelines

- Avoid debris generation during:
 - Satellite/launch-vehicle operations.

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- Post-mission disposal.
- Prevent on-orbit collisions and accidental break-ups through:
 - High-reliability mission design.
 - Redundant systems.
 - Failure-mode analysis.
- Avoid deliberate break-ups that generate long-lived debris.
- **Post-Mission Disposal (PMD) success probability: More than 99%.**
- At end-of-life, spacecraft and rocket stages should either:
 - Undergo **controlled atmospheric re-entry**, or
 - Be moved to an orbit where the remaining orbital lifetime is **less than 5 years**.

Space Debris

- **Space debris** refers to non-functional human-made objects in space, including:
 - Defunct satellites.
 - Spent rocket stages.
 - Fragments produced by collisions or explosions.
- **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** generally extends to about **2,000 km above Earth** and hosts Earth-observation satellites, human space missions and large communication constellations.
- Large internet constellations may contain **thousands of satellites**, increasing the probability of conjunctions and collisions around populated orbital shells.
- Small, untrackable fragments are particularly dangerous because spacecraft cannot reliably perform collision-avoidance manoeuvres against them.

Active Debris Removal (ADR)

- **ADR** involves actively removing existing orbital debris rather than merely preventing creation of new debris.
- Possible approaches include:
 - Capturing defunct spacecraft.
 - De-orbiting debris into the atmosphere.
 - Moving objects away from heavily used orbital regions.
- ISRO has begun **precursor on-orbit demonstrations** related to ADR technologies; a full operational debris-removal mission timeline has not yet been announced.

Mitigation vs Removal

- **Space Debris Mitigation:** Prevents or reduces creation of *new* debris.
- **Active Debris Removal:** Removes *existing* debris from orbit.

Space Situational Awareness (SSA)

- **SSA** involves detection, tracking and assessment of objects and hazards in space to enable safe space operations.
- It supports:

- Tracking of satellites and debris.
- Collision/conjunction assessment.
- Collision Avoidance Manoeuvres.
- Re-entry prediction.
- Monitoring of orbital break-ups.
- India is expanding **indigenous space-object monitoring capabilities** while promoting international data sharing.

IS4OM

- **Full Form:** ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations Management.
- It is the **nodal mechanism for implementing DFSM** with support from other Department of Space entities.
- DFSM implementation is subject to **annual progress assessment**.
- IS4OM supports safe and sustainable operation of India's space assets, including monitoring potential collision and re-entry risks.

Human Spaceflight Safety

DFSM gives special attention to the orbital zone used for human space missions.

- The **400 km ± 30 km orbital band** is treated as an important human-spaceflight region.
- Missions should minimise unnecessary orbital transfers through this band.
- Satellites should remain:
 - **Trackable**
 - **Identifiable**
 - **Manoeuvrable**

throughout relevant mission phases.

Policy Framework

- **Indian Space Policy, 2023**
 - Requires adoption of internationally recognised space-debris mitigation practices, including proper **end-of-life disposal** of satellites.
- **IN-SPACE Norms, Guidelines and Procedures**
 - Encourage Indian space actors to incorporate adequate **Post-Mission Disposal** measures.
 - Space assets should either be actively disposed of or have a sufficiently short orbital lifetime through natural decay.

LVM3-M5: Example of Debris Mitigation

- The **C25 upper stage of LVM3-M5**, used for the **CMS-03 communication satellite mission**, re-entered Earth's atmosphere within about **9 months** of launch.
- The stage had been **passivated** after satellite injection to minimise the risk of accidental explosion or break-up.
- Its orbital lifetime complied with:
 - **IADC guideline:** Maximum **25-year** post-mission orbital lifetime for objects ending their missions in the LEO region.
 - **India's DFSM guideline:** A stricter **5-year** orbital-lifetime



recommendation for rocket stages passing through crowded LEO.

International Cooperation

- **Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)**
 - Established: **1993**.
 - Major international forum for coordination among space agencies on orbital-debris research and mitigation.
 - **ISRO has been a member since 1996**.
- **UN-COPUOS**
 - **United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space**.
 - Addresses space-debris mitigation, safety of space operations and long-term sustainability of outer space.
- India also participates in:
 - **UN-STSC Working Group on Long-Term Sustainability**.
 - Expert Group on **Space Situational Awareness**.
 - **International Academy of Astronautics (IAA) Space Debris Working Group**.
 - **ISO Working Group 7** on relevant space-debris issues.

Additional Info

- **Kessler Syndrome**
 - A theoretical cascading process in which collisions between orbital objects generate additional debris.
 - The newly generated debris increases the probability of further collisions, potentially making heavily used orbital regions progressively unsafe.
- **Passivation**
 - Process of removing or neutralising stored energy in a spent spacecraft or rocket stage.
 - May include depletion of residual fuel and batteries to reduce chances of accidental explosion and fragmentation.
- **Why DFSM Matters**
 - Growing commercial and satellite-internet constellations are increasing orbital congestion.
 - India's expanding government and private space ecosystem makes common debris-mitigation standards increasingly important.
 - DFSM combines **prevention, disposal, tracking, collision avoidance, regulation and international coordination** into a long-term space-sustainability framework.

India's First Virtual Zoo Opens in Indore

What's the News?

- **India's first virtual zoo** has been inaugurated at the **Kamla Nehru Zoological Garden, Indore, Madhya Pradesh**.
- It was inaugurated by **Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav**.
- Developed under the **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model** at a cost of about **₹4.5 crore**, the project combines digital technology with wildlife education and entertainment.
- Major attractions include a **14-D cinema theatre, virtual jungle safari and 3-D dome theatre**.

Virtual Zoo

- A virtual zoo uses **digital projection, sound, motion and environmental effects** to simulate wildlife and natural habitats rather than relying only on viewing live animals.
- The Indore facility covers around **8,000 sq ft**.
- It allows visitors to experience simulated forests and wildlife through immersive audiovisual technology.
- The initiative is aimed particularly at **wildlife education, environmental awareness and technology-based tourism**.

Features

- **14-D Cinema**
 - Combines visual projection with multiple sensory effects.
 - Effects include **moving seats, wind blasts, water sprays, fog, bubbles, vibrations and smell**.
 - Uses a waterproof screen reportedly imported from **South Korea**.
- **Digital Jungle Safari**
 - Digitally recreates forests and wildlife to provide an immersive safari experience.
- **3-D Dome Theatre**
 - Uses a curved projection surface to create a wider, immersive field of view.
- The facility conducts **16 shows per day**, with each show lasting about **20 minutes**.
- Entry covering the attractions has been fixed at **₹70 per person**.

Additional Info

- **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)**
 - A **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
 - Established under **Section 38A of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.
 - Responsible for prescribing minimum standards for the **housing, upkeep and veterinary care of animals in**



zoos and for recognition of zoos in India.

- **PPP Model**

- **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** involves collaboration between a government/public authority and private-sector entities for developing or operating infrastructure and services.
- The Indore virtual zoo's 14-D cinema and virtual jungle safari were developed using this model.

Government Notifies ₹1.275 Lakh Crore Semicon 2.0 Scheme

What's the News?

- The Government of India has notified **Semicon 2.0**, the next phase of its semiconductor programme, with a total outlay of **₹1,27,500 crore**.
- It seeks to create a **complete, resilient and globally competitive semiconductor ecosystem**, covering chip design, fabrication, equipment, materials, packaging, R&D and skilled manpower.
- The programme is organised into **6 pillars and 10 categories**, with the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** as the nodal agency.
- The government expects the semiconductor ecosystem to generate around **50,000–60,000 direct jobs**, while India could account for nearly **10% of the global semiconductor market** in the coming years.

Six Pillars of Semicon 2.0

1. Design

- Semiconductor Intellectual Property (IP), chips, System-on-Chips (SoCs) and modules.
- Covers both strategic/national-priority applications and commercial products.

1. Machines & Materials

- Semiconductor manufacturing equipment, components, wafers, substrates, chemicals and specialty gases.
- Also covers equipment R&D and semiconductor testing facilities.

1. More Fabs

- Silicon semiconductor wafer fabs.
- Compound semiconductor, photonics, sensors/MEMS and discrete semiconductor fabs.
- Display fabs such as **OLED, Micro-LED and LCD**.

1. ATMP/OSAT

- Supports semiconductor assembly, testing and advanced packaging facilities.

1. Research & Development

- Advanced semiconductor processes and technologies, including silicon photonics and advanced packaging.

1. Talent Development

- Training for semiconductor designers, researchers, engineers, technicians and manufacturing personnel.

Major Fiscal Incentives

- **Silicon wafer fabs:** **40%** of eligible capital expenditure.
 - Minimum investment: **₹20,000 crore**.
 - Eligible plants include 300-mm wafer fabs with at least **40,000 wafer starts per month**.
- **Compound semiconductor/specialised fabs:** **35%** of eligible capital expenditure.
- **Display fabs:** **35%** support.
- **Advanced ATMP/OSAT packaging:** **35%** support.
- **Legacy/conventional packaging:** **25%** support.
- Semiconductor equipment and materials facilities can receive up to **30% capex support**.
- Advanced semiconductor R&D and eligible talent-development projects can receive support of up to **75% of project cost**.

Chip Design Push

- Indian-owned or controlled companies, startups and MSMEs are eligible for major design incentives.
- Eligible startups/MSMEs can receive **seed funding of up to 50% of project cost or ₹15 crore, whichever is lower**.
- Government equity co-investment can supplement private venture capital/private equity funding.
- A **Deployment-Linked Incentive (DLI)** provides:
 - **9% reimbursement of net sales;**
 - For up to **5 years;**
 - Maximum **₹30 crore per application;**
 - Overall ceiling of **₹120 crore per company/group**.
- Strategic semiconductor IP developed under the relevant category can be **jointly owned by the applicant and C-DAC**.

Strategic Chips

- The government has identified roughly **100 strategic chips** for prioritisation.
- They fall broadly under six technology groups:
 - **Compute**
 - **Memory**
 - **Radio Frequency (RF)**
 - **Power**
 - **Networking**
 - **Sensors**
- Applications include aviation, transportation, drones, consumer electronics and strategic infrastructure.



- Expert evaluation of strategic chips involves the **Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA)** and the **National Security Adviser (NSA)**.

Talent & Implementation

- India had earlier targeted training **85,000 semiconductor engineers**; this target was achieved in about four years.
- Semicon 2.0 targets development of **another 1 lakh semiconductor engineers**.
- Semiconductor-design facilities have been extended to hundreds of educational institutions, including institutions in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.
- Projects will generally run for up to **6 years**, while applications will initially be accepted for **3 years**.
- India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** will:
 - Invite and assess applications;
 - Conduct technical and financial appraisal;
 - Recommend projects;
 - Monitor implementation.
- C-DAC** may assist ISM in implementing design-related components.

Additional Info

India Semiconductor Mission

- Administrative Ministry:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**).
- ISM was created to build domestic capability across the semiconductor value chain.
- Semicon 1.0 outlay: ₹76,000 crore.**
- Under the first phase:
 - 12 semiconductor projects** were approved across **6 states**.
 - Committed investments exceeded **₹1.64 lakh crore**.
 - 3 facilities** have commenced commercial production.

Semicon 2.0 Targets

- Targeted cumulative investment: around **₹4 lakh crore**.
- Targeted production: around **₹2 lakh crore**.
- Targeted exports: around **₹1 lakh crore**.
- The broader objective is **technological sovereignty, supply-chain resilience and reduced dependence on imported semiconductor technologies**.

Terms

- Fab:** Fabrication facility where semiconductor devices are manufactured on wafers.
- ATMP:** Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging.
- OSAT:** Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test.
- SoC:** System-on-Chip – integrates multiple computing components/functions on a single chip.
- MEMS:** Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems.

- C-DAC:** Centre for Development of Advanced Computing; an autonomous scientific society under MeitY.

Centre Mandates Indian Standard Time as Common National Time Reference

What's the News?

- The Union Government has notified the **Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026**, making **Indian Standard Time (IST)** the common time reference for legal, administrative, commercial and other official purposes across India.
- The Rules have been framed under **Section 52 of the Legal Metrology Act, 2009** and will come into force after a **180-day transition period**.
- Government departments, businesses, financial institutions and critical infrastructure operators will have to synchronise relevant systems with authorised Indian timing sources.
- The initiative forms part of the broader **"One Nation, One Time"** effort to establish secure and uniform national timekeeping and reduce dependence on foreign satellite-based timing sources.

What Do the New Rules Provide?

- IST becomes the standard reference** across sectors including:
 - Commerce and financial operations
 - Transport
 - Public administration
 - Legal contracts and official records
 - Digital and communication systems
- Government offices and public institutions must synchronise time-dependent applications and public displays with IST.
- Major public locations such as **railway stations, airports and government offices** are required to display synchronised IST.
- Use, display or recording of alternative time references is generally prohibited.
- Foreign time zones may be displayed where permitted, provided they are **clearly labelled alongside IST**.
- Alternative time scales may be permitted for **scientific research, navigation and astronomy**, subject to prior approval.

Authorised Timing Sources

Critical systems must obtain time traceable to **UTC(NPLI)/IST** through authorised sources such as:

- CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL)**
- Regional Reference Standards Laboratories (RRSLs)**
- NavIC-based timing references/devices**
- National Informatics Centre (NIC)**
- Other sources authorised by the **Director of Legal Metrology**



Time dissemination may use standard protocols such as:

- **Network Time Protocol (NTP):** Commonly used for synchronising clocks in computer networks.
- **Precision Time Protocol (PTP):** Enables much higher precision, useful in telecom, industrial and critical infrastructure systems.

Critical Infrastructure & Cybersecurity

- Sectors specifically requiring reliable synchronisation include:
 - Defence
 - Banking and finance
 - Telecommunications
 - Power grids and utilities
 - Transportation
 - Broadcasting
 - Data centres
- Critical infrastructure must maintain **redundant time-synchronisation systems**.
- Timing systems must incorporate **NavIC or another authorised Indian timing source** in addition to other authorised references.
- Organisations must prepare contingency systems against:
 - **GNSS jamming**
 - **Spoofing**
 - Cyber-attacks
 - Failure of primary timing references
- Highly stable atomic clocks calibrated by CSIR-NPL/RRSLs may be used to maintain continuity during disruptions.

Indian Standard Time

- **IST = UTC + 5 hours 30 minutes.**
- Official IST is realised and maintained by **CSIR-NPL, New Delhi**.
- CSIR-NPL maintains **UTC(NPLI)**, India's realisation of Coordinated Universal Time.
- IST is derived by adding **5 hours 30 minutes to UTC(NPLI)**.
- India does **not follow Daylight Saving Time (DST)**.
- India's Standard Meridian is **82°30' E longitude**, passing near **Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh**.

Role of CSIR-NPL

- **CSIR-National Physical Laboratory** is India's **National Metrology Institute**.
- It maintains India's primary time scale and ensures its traceability to **Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)**.
- UTC is internationally coordinated through the **International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM)**.
- Under the new Rules, CSIR-NPL, RRSLs, ISRO and other authorised sources will disseminate official time and frequency signals.

"One Nation, One Time" Initiative

- The initiative seeks to develop an indigenous, highly accurate and secure

national time-dissemination infrastructure.

- The Department of Consumer Affairs is working with **CSIR-NPL and ISRO** to strengthen IST dissemination.
- **NavIC**, India's indigenous satellite navigation system, is an important component for secure positioning, navigation and timing services.
- A **White Rabbit Technology-based IST Dissemination Demonstration Network** has also been commissioned at **RRSL Bengaluru**.
 - White Rabbit combines Ethernet-based networking with high-precision time synchronisation.
 - It is intended for applications requiring very accurate timing, including telecom, power, finance and digital infrastructure.

Compliance & Monitoring

- A **180-day window** has been provided to allow organisations to modify and calibrate their systems.
- Periodic audits will verify compliance and traceability of authorised timing systems.
- The **Legal Metrology Division, Department of Consumer Affairs** will oversee and enforce implementation.
- Violations will attract penalties under the **Legal Metrology Act, 2009**, with enforcement by the Director of Legal Metrology or an authorised officer.

Additional Info

Legal Metrology Act, 2009

- Provides India's statutory framework relating to **weights, measures and standards of measurement**.
- **Section 52** empowers the Central Government to make rules for carrying out provisions of the Act.
- The new IST Rules have been issued using this rule-making power.

SI Unit of Time

- The SI base unit of time is the **second (s)**.
- It is defined using the transition frequency of the **caesium-133 atom**.
- The prescribed frequency is **9,192,631,770 Hz**.

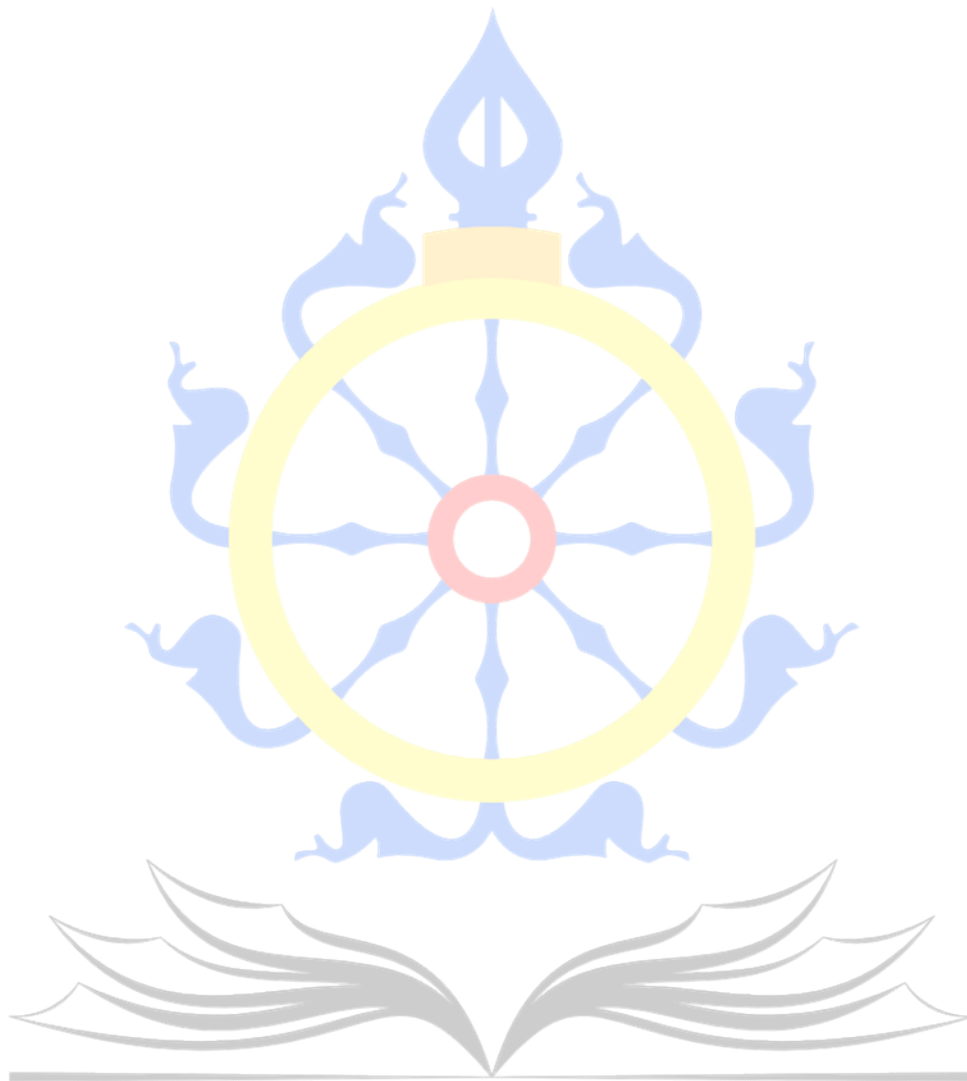
Why Uniform Time Matters

Precise synchronisation is crucial for:

- Digital-payment and banking transaction timestamps
 - Power-grid stability
 - Telecom and internet networks
 - Railway and aviation coordination
 - Government and judicial records
 - Cybercrime investigation and digital forensics
 - Emergency and disaster-response systems
- A nationally traceable timing architecture therefore has implications for both **digital governance and national security**.

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Agriculture

Cabinet Extends PM-KISAN Scheme for Five Years

What's the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)** Scheme from FY 2026–27 to FY 2030–31 with a total financial outlay of **₹3.15 lakh crore**.

Eligible landholding farmer families will continue to receive **₹6,000 annually** through Direct Benefit Transfer, supporting expenditure on agricultural inputs and household requirements.

PM-KISAN Scheme

PM-KISAN is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in 2019 to provide income support to eligible landholding farmer families.

- **Annual assistance:** ₹6,000
- **Instalments:** Three equal instalments of ₹2,000
- **Payment mechanism:** Direct Benefit Transfer
- **Funding:** 100% funded by the Union Government
- **Nodal ministry:** Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare
- **Beneficiary identification:** Undertaken by State and Union Territory administrations using land records
- **Farmer-family definition:** Husband, wife and minor children owning cultivable land as per official land records

Payments are linked with Aadhaar authentication, digital beneficiary verification and eligible bank accounts.

Scheme Performance

- More than **₹4.47 lakh crore** has been transferred through **23 instalments**.
- The 23rd instalment benefited over **9.49 crore farmers**, with more than **₹18,984 crore** released.
- More than **₹1.71 lakh crore** was disbursed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Women farmers have received over **₹1.06 lakh crore**.
- Nearly **one in four beneficiaries** is a woman.

Impact Assessment

An evaluation by the **Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office of NITI Aayog** found that:

- More than **92% of beneficiaries** used the assistance for agriculture-related activities and investments.
- Around **85% reported** improved agricultural income and reduced dependence on informal credit.

Additional Info

- **Major exclusion categories**
 - Institutional landholders

- Income-tax payers
- Serving or retired senior government employees
- Holders of constitutional posts
- Present or former ministers and legislators
- Certain professionals and higher-income pensioners

• Nature of benefit

- PM-KISAN is an income-support programme, not a crop-insurance, loan-waiver or pension scheme.
- Assistance can be used for seeds, fertilisers, irrigation, machinery and other farm requirements.

• Governance significance

- Demonstrates the use of **JAM architecture**—Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar and mobile connectivity.
- Reduces intermediaries and leakages through DBT.
- Supports financial inclusion and formalisation of beneficiary databases.
- States and Union Territories remain responsible for identifying and verifying eligible farmer families.

APEDA Organises BIOFACH INDIA 2026 to Boost Organic Exports

What's the News?

- **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)** organised **BIOFACH INDIA 2026** with **NuernbergMesse India** at the **India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, Delhi-NCR**.
- The international trade fair focuses on **organic, natural and sustainable products**, linking Indian producers and exporters with global buyers.
- The event featured **200+ exhibiting companies**, including **60+ exhibitors under the APEDA Pavilion**.
- APEDA facilitated participation of **35+ international buyers from 13 overseas markets** to expand market access for India's certified organic products.

BIOFACH INDIA 2026

- **Edition:** 18th
- **Focus sectors:** Organic, natural and millet-based products.
- **Participants:** Exporters, FPOs, Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), women entrepreneurs, startups and organic enterprises.
- It forms part of the wider **BIOFACH World** network connecting organic producers, manufacturers and buyers across major international markets.

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- The event includes:
 - Buyer-Seller Meets (BSMs)
 - Technical conferences
 - Product demonstrations
 - Sessions on organic certification and traceability
 - Sustainability and quality standards
 - Global regulatory and market-access requirements.

APEDA Pavilion & Global Market Access

- **Pavilion area:** About **2,000 sq. metres.**
- **APEDA exhibitors:** More than **60.**
- Products showcased included:
 - Cereals, pulses and millets
 - Spices, tea and coffee
 - Fruits and vegetables
 - Honey and cocoa products
 - Oilseeds and edible oils
 - Herbs and medicinal plants
 - Organic nutraceuticals
 - Processed and other value-added foods.
- Participating producers represented states including **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra.**
- International buyers came from **13 markets**, including **Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Mongolia and Egypt.**

National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)

- NPOP provides the regulatory framework for **organic production, accreditation and certification** in India.
- APEDA functions as the Secretariat to the **National Accreditation Board (NAB)** for accreditation of certification bodies under NPOP for organic exports.
- Exported products represented as organic must be **produced, processed and packed according to NPOP standards.**

India's Organic Sector

- **Organic cultivated area:** ~22.54 lakh hectares
- **Area under conversion:** ~17.14 lakh hectares
- **Organic farm production:** ~4.39 million MT
- **Organic exports:** ~3.68 lakh MT
- **Export value:** ₹5,394.32 crore or about US\$665.97 million
- Major export destinations include the **USA, European Union, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, UAE, New Zealand and Japan.**
- India ranks **2nd globally in organic agricultural land** and **1st in number of organic producers**, based on FiBL-IFOAM statistics cited by APEDA.

Additional Info: APEDA

- **Full Form:** Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority.

- **Type:** Statutory body.
- **Ministry:** **Ministry of Commerce & Industry**, Department of Commerce.
- **Legal Basis:** **APEDA Act, 1985 (Act No. 2 of 1986).**
- APEDA replaced the erstwhile **Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPCC).**
- Major functions include:
 - Promoting exports of scheduled agricultural and processed food products.
 - Registration of exporters.
 - Fixing export standards and specifications.
 - Improving packaging and overseas marketing.
 - Promoting export-oriented production.
 - Providing training and collecting trade statistics.

NBSS&LUP Develops India's First Digital Soil Texture Map

What's the News?

- The **ICAR-National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning (NBSS&LUP)** has developed **India's first digital soil texture map.**
- The map provides **hectare-level soil-texture information across the country**, enabling highly localised assessment of agricultural land.
- It integrates **field observations, remote sensing, satellite imagery and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** for digital soil mapping.
- The database can help farmers identify suitable crops and assist governments in **crop planning, land-use planning and location-specific agricultural policy.**

Soil Texture Map

- **Soil texture** refers to the relative proportions of:
 - **Sand**
 - **Silt**
 - **Clay**
- Their relative proportions determine different **textural classes**, such as sandy, clayey and loamy soils.
- Soil texture is an important physical property because it influences:
 - Water infiltration and drainage
 - Water-holding capacity
 - Soil aeration
 - Root penetration
 - Nutrient retention
 - Irrigation requirements
 - Crop suitability
- **Texture ≠ Structure**
 - **Soil texture:** Proportion of sand, silt and clay.



- **Soil structure:** Arrangement of soil particles into aggregates.

How Was the Map Developed?

NBSS&LUP combined multiple sources and technologies:

- **Field studies:** Ground-level soil observations and samples.
- **Remote sensing:** Collection of information about land and soil characteristics from a distance.
- **Satellite imagery:** Provides spatial and spectral information over large areas.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Helps analyse large datasets and predict soil characteristics across areas where direct observations are limited.

This approach is known broadly as **Digital Soil Mapping**, which combines field data with geospatial information and predictive modelling.

Why is Hectare-Level Mapping Important?

- Indian farm holdings are generally small, while soil properties can vary considerably even across short distances.
- Hectare-level information can therefore support:
 - **Plot-specific crop selection**
 - Village-level agricultural planning
 - Better irrigation planning
 - Identification of suitable areas for particular crops
 - Targeted allocation of agricultural resources
 - Region-specific land-use policies
- ICAR Director General **Dr M. L. Jat** described the soil database and information system created by NBSS&LUP as an important foundation for **crop improvement, agricultural development and decision-support systems**.

NBSS&LUP

- **Full Name:** National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning
- **Headquarters:** Nagpur, Maharashtra
- Functions under the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**.
- Falls under ICAR's **Natural Resource Management** division.
- Major functions include:
 - Soil survey and classification
 - Soil-resource mapping
 - Land-resource assessment
 - Land-use planning
 - Soil and water conservation planning
 - Development of soil-information databases
- It attained its present bureau status in **1976** and completed **50 years in 2026**.

Other Major Soil-Mapping Initiatives

Digital Soil Depth Map

- Before the soil texture map, NBSS&LUP developed **India's first digital soil depth map**.
- It has a spatial resolution of **90 metres**.
- It was prepared using data from **25,683 soil profiles** and **machine-learning models**.
- Soil depth is important for determining:
 - Rooting depth
 - Available soil-water storage
 - Crop suitability
 - Land-resource planning.

National Soil Spectral Library

- NBSS&LUP has also developed the **National Soil Spectral Library (NSSL)**.
- Contains geotagged hyperspectral information from **more than 36,000 Indian soil samples**.
- Uses spectroscopy and AI for faster prediction of important soil properties.
- ICAR reports accuracy of **over 80%** for prediction of key soil characteristics.

Next: Soil Water-Retention Maps

- NBSS&LUP is developing **high-resolution maps of soil water-retention and absorption capacity**.
- Initial emphasis is on **Maharashtra and southern states**, where variations in soil texture and soil depth strongly influence water availability.
- Such information can support:
 - Irrigation scheduling
 - Drought management
 - Crop selection
 - Efficient water use
 - Climate-resilient agriculture.

Additional Info

- **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**
 - Apex organisation for coordinating agricultural research and education in India.
 - Functions under the **Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE)**.
 - **Ministry:** Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
 - NBSS&LUP is one of ICAR's **National Bureaux**.
- **NBSS&LUP's Earlier Mapping Work**
 - Soil-resource map of India: **1:1 million scale**.
 - State soil-resource maps: **1:250,000 scale**.
 - Soil-resource maps for several districts: **1:50,000 scale**.
 - It has also delineated **20 Agro-Ecological Regions** and **60 Agro-Ecological Sub-Regions** of India.

ICAR Registers 16 New Indigenous Livestock and Dog Breeds

What's the News?

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has recognised 16 new indigenous livestock and dog breeds, strengthening documentation and conservation of India's animal genetic resources.
- The breeds represent 9 species and originate from 13 States and one Union Territory.
- With these additions, the total number of breeds registered by ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (ICAR-NBAGR) has increased to 262, comprising:
 - 258 indigenous breeds.
 - 4 synthetic breeds.
- Each newly registered breed has been assigned a unique accession number by ICAR-NBAGR.

16 Newly Registered Breeds

Species	Breed	Home Tract
Cattle	Koppal	Karnataka
	Mahakaushali	Madhya Pradesh
	Periyar	Kerala
	Umarda	Maharashtra
Buffalo	Gomanchali	Goa
Goat	Battisi	Rajasthan & Uttar Pradesh
	Totapuri	Rajasthan
Sheep	Asomi	Assam
	Kow Debar	Uttarakhand
	Madgyal	Maharashtra & Karnataka
	Seemanchali	Bihar
Donkey	Braj	Uttar Pradesh
Horse/Pony	Kashmiri	Jammu & Kashmir
Pig	Nagal	Nagaland
Yak	Sikkimese	Sikkim
Dog	Kombai	Tamil Nadu

- Cattle and sheep account for the largest additions, with 4 breeds each, followed by 2 goat breeds and one breed each of the remaining species.

Why Register Indigenous Breeds?

- Breed registration involves the scientific identification, characterisation and official documentation of distinct animal populations.
- It helps reduce the proportion of non-descript livestock populations by bringing scientifically identified breeds into the national database.
- Indigenous breeds are important because they often possess traits suited to local agro-climatic conditions, including:
 - Heat and climate resilience.
 - Adaptation to local diseases and environmental stresses.
 - Ability to perform under low-input production systems.

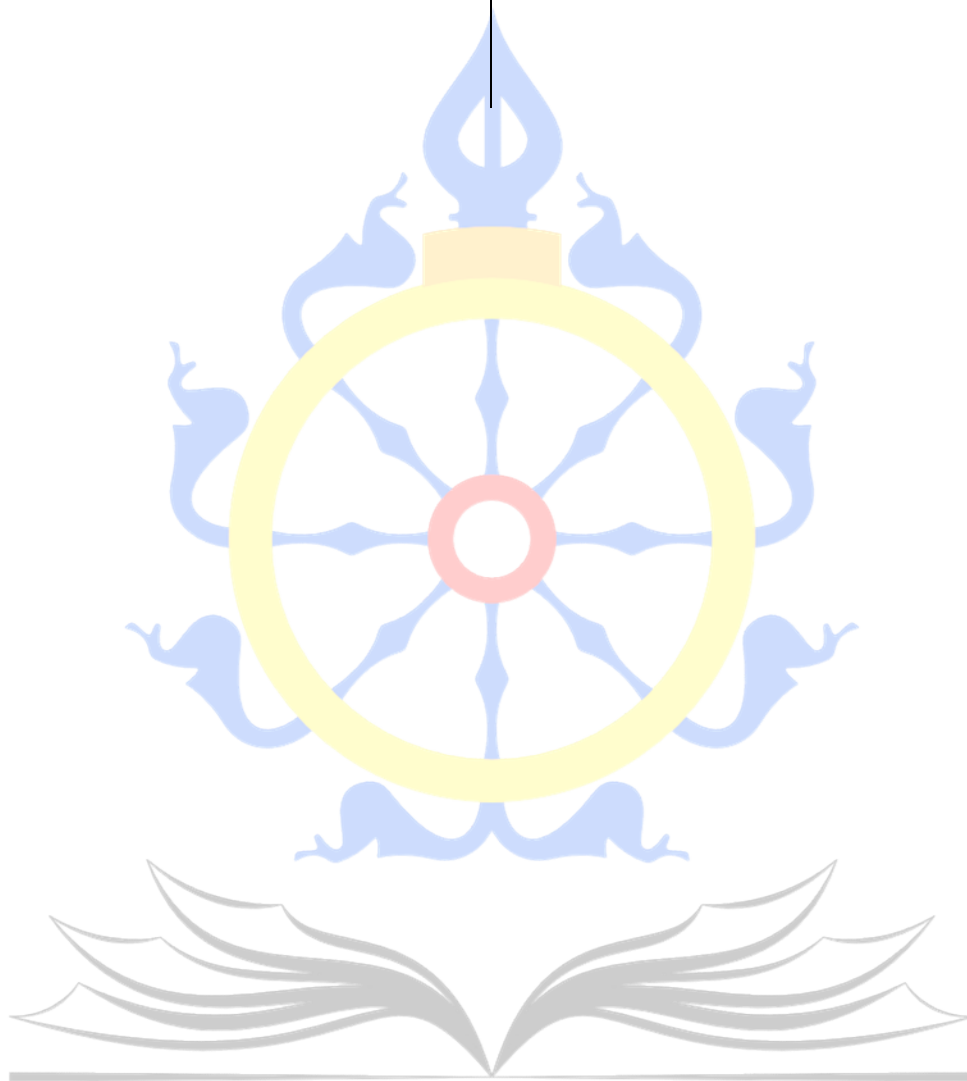
- Support for rural livelihoods and sustainable livestock farming.
- Formal recognition also facilitates targeted conservation, breeding and sustainable utilisation programmes.

ICAR-NBAGR

- ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR) is located at Karnal, Haryana.
- It is the nodal institute for registration of livestock and poultry breeds in India.
- Its major functions include:
 - Identification and characterisation of indigenous animal genetic resources.
 - Registration and documentation of recognised breeds.
 - Conservation of livestock biodiversity.
 - Maintenance of information on India's animal genetic resources.
- The Breed Registration Committee (BRC) examines breed proposals, while ICAR-NBAGR assigns unique accession numbers to approved breeds.

Additional Info

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)
 - Apex national organisation for coordinating, guiding and managing agricultural research and education in India.
 - Functions under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- Animal Genetic Resources
 - Include animal breeds and populations possessing genetic characteristics of actual or potential value for agriculture and food production.
 - Indigenous genetic resources are important for maintaining genetic diversity, particularly as climate change increases pressure on livestock productivity.
- Breed Registration
 - Provides a recognised identity to locally adapted animal populations.
 - Supports systematic conservation and prevents valuable genetic traits from being lost through indiscriminate crossbreeding or decline of local populations.
 - Recognises the contribution of livestock keepers, breeders, State Animal Husbandry Departments, universities and research institutions in conserving indigenous breeds.



Important Days

World Wide Web Day 2026 Highlights Digital Connectivity and Inclusion What's the News?

World Wide Web Day was observed on **1 August 2026** to recognise the transformative impact of the World Wide Web on communication, education, commerce, governance and access to information.

The observance promotes an open, accessible, secure and inclusive Web. However, it is an informal global observance rather than a United Nations-designated international day. No official global theme was announced for World Wide Web Day 2026. The broader focus remained on digital inclusion, online safety, privacy, accessibility and responsible use of Web technologies.

World Wide Web

The World Wide Web is an information system consisting of interconnected webpages and digital resources accessed through the Internet using Web browsers.

Its three foundational technologies are:

- **HTML – HyperText Markup Language**
 - Structures and displays content on webpages.
- **HTTP – HyperText Transfer Protocol**
 - Enables communication between Web browsers and servers.
 - Its secure version is HTTPS.
- **URL – Uniform Resource Locator**
 - Specifies the address of a resource on the Web.

History of the Web

- **March 1989:** British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee submitted his first proposal for an Internet-based hypertext information system at CERN.
- **November 1990:** Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau formalised the proposal.
- **End of 1990:** The first Web browser, Web server and website became operational at CERN.
- **6 August 1991:** Berners-Lee announced the World Wide Web project on Internet newsgroups, introducing it to a wider public.
- **30 April 1993:** CERN made the Web software available on a royalty-free basis, accelerating its global adoption.
- **1994:** Berners-Lee founded the World Wide Web Consortium to develop open Web standards.

The first website was hosted at **info.cern.ch** and provided information on the World Wide Web project and instructions for creating webpages and servers.

Internet and Web

The Internet and the World Wide Web are related but distinct:

Internet

- Global network connecting computers and digital devices.
- Provides the underlying communication infrastructure.
- Supports services such as email, file transfer, messaging and the Web.

World Wide Web

- An information-sharing system operating over the Internet.
- Consists of websites, webpages, hyperlinks and multimedia resources.
- Accessed primarily through Web browsers.

Thus, the Web is a service built on the Internet; it is not the Internet itself.

Objectives of the Observance

World Wide Web Day seeks to:

- Recognise the Web's contribution to global information exchange.
- Promote universal and affordable digital access.
- Encourage digital literacy and responsible online conduct.
- Improve Web accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- Raise awareness about cybersecurity, privacy and misinformation.
- Protect the Web's open and interoperable character.

Global Digital Divide

Despite the rapid expansion of digital connectivity, access remains unequal.

According to the latest available global estimates:

- Around **6 billion people**, or approximately **three-fourths of the world's population**, used the Internet in 2025.
- Nearly **2.2 billion people** remained offline.
- Internet use stood at approximately:
 - **77% among men**, compared with **71% among women**
 - **85% in urban areas**, compared with **58% in rural areas**
- About **94% of people in high-income countries** used the Internet, compared with only **23% in low-income countries**.

These disparities demonstrate that connectivity alone is insufficient; affordability, digital skills, device availability, service quality and online safety are also essential.

Additional Info

CERN

- European Organization for Nuclear Research.
- Located near Geneva on the France–Switzerland border.

Download Our App



- The World Wide Web was developed there to facilitate information-sharing among researchers.
- **World Wide Web Consortium**
 - Commonly known as **W3C**.
 - Founded by Tim Berners-Lee in 1994.
 - Develops open technical standards to maintain the Web's accessibility, interoperability and long-term growth.

World Lung Cancer Day 2026 Highlights Prevention and Early Detection

What's the News?

World Lung Cancer Day was observed on **1 August 2026** to raise awareness about lung-cancer prevention, early diagnosis, equitable treatment and support for patients and caregivers.

Some awareness campaigns used the slogan **"Every Breath Counts, Every Screening Matters."** However, no single global theme was officially confirmed by major international organisations such as the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer or the Forum of International Respiratory Societies.

World Lung Cancer Day

The observance has been marked globally since **2012** with support from respiratory-health organisations, cancer institutions, hospitals and patient-advocacy groups.

Its main objectives are to:

- Increase awareness of symptoms and risk factors.
- Promote tobacco cessation and cleaner air.
- Encourage timely diagnosis and treatment.
- Reduce stigma against patients.
- Improve access to screening for defined high-risk groups.
- Support research into targeted therapy and immunotherapy.

Global Lung-Cancer Burden

According to the latest GLOBOCAN estimates:

- Around **2.6 million new lung-cancer cases** occurred globally in 2024.
- Lung cancer represented approximately **12.8% of all new cancer cases**.
- It caused nearly **1.9 million deaths**, or about **19.1% of global cancer deaths**.
- It remained both the world's most commonly diagnosed cancer and the leading cause of cancer mortality.

Types of Lung Cancer

- **Non-small cell lung cancer**
 - Accounts for approximately **85% of cases**.
 - Includes adenocarcinoma, squamous-cell carcinoma and large-cell carcinoma.

- Generally progresses more slowly than small-cell cancer.

- **Small cell lung cancer**

- Less common but usually more aggressive.
- Spreads rapidly and is strongly associated with tobacco smoking.

Major Risk Factors

Tobacco smoking is the principal preventable risk factor and is associated with approximately **85% of lung-cancer cases**.

Other risk factors include:

- Second-hand tobacco smoke
- Outdoor and household air pollution
- Radon exposure
- Asbestos and silica
- Diesel-engine exhaust and welding fumes
- Occupational exposure to carcinogenic chemicals
- Chronic lung diseases
- Genetic susceptibility and family history

Symptoms and Detection

Common warning signs include:

- Persistent or worsening cough
- Coughing up blood
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Recurrent lung infections
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue and hoarseness

Lung cancer is frequently diagnosed at an advanced stage because its early symptoms may be mild or mistaken for common respiratory illnesses.

Low-dose computed tomography, or LDCT, can help detect lung cancer among defined high-risk individuals, particularly current or former heavy smokers. It is not recommended as indiscriminate population-wide screening and requires appropriate follow-up and quality assurance.

Additional Info

- **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases**
 - Implemented under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
 - Covers prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and referral for cancers and other NCDs.
 - India's population-based cancer-screening package for people aged 30 years and above currently focuses on:
 - Oral cancer
 - Breast cancer
 - Cervical cancer
 - Lung cancer is not included in the routine population-wide screening package.
- **National Tobacco Control Programme**
 - Launched in 2007-08.

- Promotes awareness, tobacco cessation and enforcement of tobacco-control laws.
- Supports implementation of the **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003**.
- **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control**
 - The first international public-health treaty negotiated under WHO.
 - Provides measures covering tobacco taxation, advertising restrictions, smoke-free environments, packaging warnings and cessation support.
 - India is a party to the convention.
- **Note**
 - World Lung Cancer Day: **1 August**
 - World Cancer Day: **4 February**
 - World No Tobacco Day: **31 May**

World Breastfeeding Week 2026: Strengthen Proven Breastfeeding Support

What's the News?

- **World Breastfeeding Week (WBW)** is observed every year from **1-7 August** to promote, protect and support breastfeeding worldwide.
- The **2026** theme is **"Breastfeeding for a Sustainable Start in Life: Strengthen What Works."**
- The theme focuses on **tracking progress, evaluating impact and scaling proven interventions** rather than creating entirely new approaches.
- WHO calls for coordinated support from **governments, health systems, workplaces, communities, civil society and families** through a strong **"Warm Chain of Support"** for breastfeeding.

What Works?

WHO highlights several evidence-based interventions:

- **Skilled Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) counselling**
 - Integrated counselling across health facilities, communities and households increased **exclusive breastfeeding by 58%** in pooled evidence.
- **Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)**
 - Associated with a **45% increase in exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months**.
 - Continued breastfeeding increased by **26%**.
- **Mass-media campaigns**
 - When combined with counselling and community mobilisation, exclusive breastfeeding increased by **17%**.
- **Paid maternity leave**
 - Associated with a **52% increase in exclusive breastfeeding** in studies

from low- and middle-income countries.

• **Breast-milk substitute regulation**

- Countries with legislation substantially aligned with the International Code reported average exclusive-breastfeeding rates of **54%**, compared with **24%** where no legal measures existed.

WHO Breastfeeding Recommendations

WHO and UNICEF recommend:

- Initiate breastfeeding **within 1 hour of birth**.
- **Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months**.
 - No other food or liquids, including water, except where medically required.
- Introduce safe and adequate **complementary foods from 6 months**.
- Continue breastfeeding until **2 years of age or beyond**.
- Breastfeed on demand, day and night.

World Breastfeeding Week

- WBW commemorates the **Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding**, adopted at a WHO-UNICEF policymakers' meeting in **Florence, Italy, in 1990**.
- **World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)** was established in **1991**.
- The first World Breastfeeding Week was celebrated in **1992**.
- Since **2016**, WBW has been aligned with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- The **World Health Assembly endorsed WBW as an important breastfeeding-promotion strategy in 2018**.

India's Breastfeeding Initiatives

- **MAA Programme**
 - Full form: **Mothers' Absolute Affection**.
 - Implemented under the **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
 - Promotes:
 - Breastfeeding within the first hour.
 - Exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months.
 - Appropriate complementary feeding thereafter.
 - Continued breastfeeding for **2 years and beyond**.
 - Uses **ASHAs, ANMs and health-facility staff** for counselling and lactation support.
- **Lactation Management Centres (LMCs)**
 - Established particularly in high-delivery-load facilities.
 - Support lactation and provide **safe pasteurised donor human milk** or



expressed mother's milk for sick, preterm and low-birth-weight babies.

- **IMS Act, 1992**
 - **Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992.**
 - Regulates production, promotion, supply and distribution of breast-milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods.
 - Objective: **protect and promote breastfeeding** and ensure appropriate use of infant foods.
- **Maternity Benefit Framework**
 - Provides maternity protection that can facilitate breastfeeding.
 - **Section 11 of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961** provides **two nursing breaks** for a woman returning to work until her child reaches **15 months**.
 - Establishments covered by the relevant provision with **50 or more employees** are required to provide a crèche facility.

Additional Info

- **Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)**
 - Joint WHO-UNICEF initiative.
 - Based on the **Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding**, aimed at improving maternity and newborn-care practices.
- **International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes**
 - Global public-health framework aimed at protecting breastfeeding from inappropriate marketing of infant formula and related products.
- **SDG Linkages**
 - **SDG 2:** Zero Hunger
 - **SDG 3:** Good Health and Well-being
 - **SDG 5:** Gender Equality
 - **SDG 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth
 - **SDG 12:** Responsible Consumption and Production
 - **SDG 13:** Climate Action

National Handloom Day 2026 Highlights India's Weaving Heritage What's the News?

- India observed the **12th National Handloom Day on 7 August 2026** to honour handloom weavers and promote the country's traditional textile heritage.
- The observance commemorates the **Swadeshi Movement**, launched on **7 August 1905**, which encouraged the boycott of foreign goods and promotion of indigenous products.
- The central celebration was held at the **Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, New Delhi**.

- **22 awards for the year 2025** were conferred— **3 Sant Kabir Handloom Awards** and **19 National Handloom Awards**.
- Four commemorative postage stamps and two publications on India's handloom traditions were also released.

National Handloom Day

- **Observed:** 7 August every year
- **First observed:** 7 August 2015
- **Organised by:** Ministry of Textiles
- **Historical linkage:** Swadeshi Movement of 1905
- **Purpose:** Recognition of weavers, preservation of traditional weaving, promotion of indigenous handlooms and strengthening artisan livelihoods.
- **2026 Theme:** No specific official theme had been announced by the Ministry of Textiles as of the 2026 observance. Aspirants should avoid treating unofficial slogans as the official theme.

Handloom Sector

- India has about **35.22 lakh handloom weavers and allied workers**.
- More than **72%**, or approximately **25.46 lakh**, are women.
- The sector is therefore important for:
 - Rural and semi-rural employment
 - Women's economic empowerment
 - Preservation of traditional knowledge
 - Cottage and household industries
 - Sustainable, low-energy textile production.

Major Highlights of 2026 Celebration

- Exhibition of **award-winning handloom textiles**.
- Live demonstrations of traditional techniques including:
 - **Kani weaving**
 - **Wall-hanging weaving**
- **Four commemorative postage stamps** were released.
- Two publications were launched:
 - *Earth. Root. Thread – Aal Dyed Handloom Textiles of Central India*
 - *Handloom Awards Book 2025*
- The awards recognised excellence in traditional weaving and preservation of handloom craftsmanship.

e-Pehchan Portal

- **e-Pehchan** provides digital identity facilities for handloom weavers and allied workers.
- The online portal was launched in **January 2025**.
- It facilitates identification and registration of workers in the handloom ecosystem.
- Around **84,000 additional handloom workers** had been approved on the portal by July



2026, according to the reported 2026 National Handloom Day data.

Government Initiatives for Handlooms

- **National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP)**
 - Supports cluster development, skill upgradation, design innovation, marketing and institutional strengthening.
- **Raw Material Supply Scheme**
 - Facilitates availability of yarn and other raw materials to handloom weavers at affordable rates.
- **India Handloom Brand**
 - Promotes high-quality authentic handloom products and builds consumer confidence.
- **Handloom Marketing Assistance**
 - Supports exhibitions, expos, buyer-seller interactions and wider market access.
- **Weaver MUDRA**
 - Facilitates institutional credit and working capital for handloom weavers and entrepreneurs.

Additional Info

- **Swadeshi Movement**
 - Formally launched at **Calcutta Town Hall on 7 August 1905**.
 - Emerged against the **Partition of Bengal**.
 - Advocated boycott of foreign goods and use of indigenous products.
 - Hand-spun and handwoven textiles subsequently became major symbols of **economic nationalism and self-reliance**.
- **Authenticity of Handlooms**
 - Important mechanisms include:
 - **Handloom Mark** – identification of genuine handwoven products.
 - **India Handloom Brand** – quality-oriented branding of handloom products.
 - **GI tags** – protection of geographically distinctive textile traditions such as regional weaves.

World Lion Day 2026 Highlights Asiatic Lion Conservation

What's the News?

- **World Lion Day 2026** was observed on **10 August** to raise awareness about lion conservation, habitat protection and threats such as habitat fragmentation, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, prey depletion and disease.
- The observance is particularly significant for India as it hosts the **world's only wild population of Asiatic lions**, concentrated in the **Greater Gir Landscape of Gujarat**.

- **Theme:** The provided 2026 sources do **not specify an officially designated annual theme**; therefore, an unverified theme should not be used for exam preparation.

World Lion Day

- **Observed:** 10 August every year.
- **First observed:** 2013.
- **Objective:** Build awareness and support for protecting lions, their habitats and prey base.
- Lions are **apex predators** and help:
 - regulate herbivore populations;
 - maintain predator-prey balance;
 - limit excessive grazing pressure;
 - support scavengers such as vultures and jackals; and
 - conserve wider landscapes and biodiversity.

Asiatic Lion

- **Scientific name:** *Panthera leo persica*
- **Family:** Felidae
- **Order:** Carnivora
- **Wild distribution:** Restricted to **Gujarat, India**, particularly the Greater Gir landscape.
- Important habitats include **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, Girnar, Mitiyala, Pania and surrounding coastal/satellite habitats**.

Lion Population in India

India has recorded a substantial recovery of the Asiatic lion:

- **2015:** 523 lions
- **2020:** 674 lions
- **2025: 891 lions**
- Population increased by **32% between 2020 and 2025** and by **over 70% between 2015 and 2025**.
- Their distribution range has expanded by about **59%**.
- Lions now occupy roughly **35,000 sq km across 11 districts of Saurashtra, Gujarat**.

Project Lion

- **Announced:** 2020.
- **Objective:** Long-term conservation and ecological security of the Asiatic lion.
- Major interventions include:
 - habitat restoration and management;
 - conservation of wildlife corridors;
 - population monitoring and scientific research;
 - disease surveillance;
 - use of modern monitoring technologies;
 - prey-base improvement;
 - human-lion conflict mitigation; and
 - development of additional suitable habitats.

Barda Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Location:** Gujarat.

- Being developed as an **additional/second habitat for Asiatic lions**.
- It reduces conservation risk arising from excessive concentration of the species in one geographical landscape.
- Habitat improvement, corridor development and grassland restoration are being undertaken to facilitate natural dispersal.

Major Threats

- **Habitat loss and fragmentation:** Agriculture, settlements and infrastructure disrupt movement corridors.
- **Human-wildlife conflict:** Livestock depredation can trigger retaliatory action.
- **Disease: Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and bovine tuberculosis (bTB)** are important risks, particularly for geographically concentrated populations.
- **Prey depletion:** Can increase dependence on livestock.
- **Illegal wildlife trade and poaching.**
- **Climate change:** Alters water availability, vegetation and prey distribution.

Additional Info

- **Conservation Status**
 - **IUCN Red List:** *Panthera leo* – **Vulnerable**.
 - **CITES:** Lion population of **India** – **Appendix I**; other lion populations are listed under Appendix II.
 - **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:** Asiatic Lion – **Schedule I**, providing the highest level of statutory protection.
- **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**
 - An **India-led international initiative** for cooperation on the conservation of seven major big cats:
 - Tiger
 - Lion
 - Leopard
 - Snow Leopard
 - Cheetah
 - Jaguar
 - Puma
 - Focuses on international cooperation, knowledge sharing, capacity building and resource mobilisation for big-cat conservation.

World Elephant Day 2026 Highlights Global Elephant Conservation

What's the News?

- **World Elephant Day** is observed annually on **12 August** to raise awareness about the conservation and protection of Asian and African elephants.

- The **2026 campaign message/theme** is **"Bringing the world together to help elephants"**, emphasising collective action by governments, conservation organisations and communities.
- The observance highlights major threats such as **habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching and illegal wildlife trade, human-elephant conflict, infrastructure-related deaths and captive-elephant welfare**.
- For India, the occasion is significant as the country supports **nearly 60% of the world's wild Asian elephant population**.

World Elephant Day

- World Elephant Day was first launched in **2012**.
- It was co-founded by:
 - **Patricia Sims**, Canadian filmmaker and conservationist.
 - **Elephant Reintroduction Foundation of Thailand**, an initiative associated with Queen Sirikit of Thailand.
- Its objective is to draw global attention to the threats facing elephants and promote solutions for the conservation and welfare of both **wild and captive elephants**.

Elephants in India

- India is home to the **Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)**, the country's largest terrestrial mammal.
- The **Synchronous All India Population Estimation of Elephants (SAIEE) 2021-25** estimated India's wild elephant population at **22,446**.
- India currently has:
 - **33 Elephant Reserves**
 - **150 identified elephant corridors**
 - **Nearly 60% of the global wild Asian elephant population**.
- Major elephant populations occur across:
 - **Southern India**
 - **North-Eastern India**
 - **East-Central India**
 - **North-Western India**.

Project Elephant

- **Project Elephant** is the Government of India's flagship programme for elephant conservation.
- It was launched in **1991-92** as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** and is implemented by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- Major objectives include:
 - Protecting **elephants, their habitats and migratory corridors**.
 - Reducing **human-elephant conflict**.
 - Supporting the welfare and management of **captive elephants**.

- Providing **financial and technical assistance** to elephant-range States and Union Territories.
- Recent conservation measures increasingly use **radio-collaring, AI-enabled monitoring, genetic databases and early-warning systems** for scientific management and conflict mitigation.

Conservation Status of Asian Elephant

- **Scientific Name:** *Elephas maximus*
- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- **CITES: Appendix I**, providing the highest level of protection against international commercial trade.
- **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS):** Mainland Asian/Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) – **Appendix I**.
- **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:** Receives the highest level of legal protection in India.
- The elephant has also been declared India's **National Heritage Animal**.

Why are Elephants Ecologically Important?

- Elephants are often described as **ecosystem engineers** because their movement and feeding patterns shape forest ecosystems.
- They contribute to:
 - **Seed dispersal**
 - **Nutrient cycling**
 - Maintenance of forest structure
 - Creation of pathways and access to water used by other species
- Their large habitat requirements also make them important **umbrella species** – conserving elephant landscapes protects numerous other plants and animals.

Major Conservation Challenges

- **Habitat fragmentation** due to roads, railways, settlements and other infrastructure.
- Loss or disruption of traditional **elephant corridors**.
- Increasing **human-elephant conflict**, including crop and property damage and casualties.
- **Railway collisions and electrocution**.
- **Poaching and illegal ivory trade**.
- Climate and land-use changes affecting the availability of **food and water**.

India has identified sensitive railway stretches in elephant landscapes and is adopting mitigation measures such as crossing structures, improved monitoring and coordination between wildlife and railway authorities.

International Youth Day 2026 Focuses on Shared Aspirations of Young People

What's the News?

- **International Youth Day** is observed annually on **12 August** to highlight the role, challenges and contributions of young people in social, economic and sustainable development.
- The **2026 theme** is **"Different Contexts, Common Aspirations."**
- The theme recognises that young people live under widely different economic, social and political conditions but share aspirations for **education, decent work, participation, peace, dignity and sustainable development**.
- Special attention in 2026 is placed on young people living in **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**, where structural barriers can restrict access to education, employment, technology and decision-making.

2026 Theme

"Different Contexts, Common Aspirations"

- It emphasises that youth policies cannot follow a **one-size-fits-all approach**.
- Policies should respond to differences in:
 - Economic conditions
 - Geography and conflict exposure
 - Gender and social inequalities
 - Access to education and employment
 - Digital connectivity
- At the same time, international cooperation is required to address shared youth priorities and strengthen youth participation in achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

International Youth Day

- The idea for an International Youth Day emerged from the **World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth**, held in **Lisbon, Portugal, in 1998**.
- The **UN General Assembly**, through **Resolution 54/120**, subsequently endorsed **12 August as International Youth Day**.
- It has been observed internationally since **2000**.
- The observance brings youth-related issues to the attention of governments and the international community while promoting young people's participation as partners in development.

Who are 'Youth'?

- For statistical purposes, the **United Nations** defines youth as persons aged **15–24 years**.
- However, there is **no universally binding international definition**, and countries may adopt different age ranges for national policies.

- In India, the **National Youth Policy (NYP), 2014** defines youth as persons in the **15–29 years** age group.

Youth Development in India

National Youth Policy

- **National Youth Policy, 2014** provides the foundational framework for youth development in India.
- Major priority areas include:
 - Education and skill development
 - Employment and entrepreneurship
 - Health and healthy lifestyles
 - Sports
 - Social participation
 - Youth leadership and community engagement
 - Inclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- A newer youth-policy framework has also been proposed with greater emphasis on **future-ready skills, entrepreneurship, digital participation, leadership and sustainable development.**

MY Bharat

- **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** was established as an autonomous “**phygital**” – **physical + digital – platform** for youth engagement.
- It targets young people aged **15–29 years** and provides opportunities for:
 - Volunteering and community service
 - Experiential learning
 - Mentorship
 - Career support
 - Youth participation in governance and civic activities.
- The MY Bharat platform had **over 2.19 crore registered youth by June 2026.**

Additional Info

- **International Youth Day vs National Youth Day**
 - **International Youth Day:** 12 August; established through the **United Nations** framework.
 - **National Youth Day (India):** 12 January; observed on the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda.**
- **Ministry concerned in India**
 - Youth-development programmes are primarily administered through the **Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.**
- **Major youth-related initiatives**
 - **MY Bharat:** Volunteering, experiential learning and civic participation.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** Skill development and industry-oriented training.
 - **National Service Scheme (NSS):** Student participation in community service.

- **Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS):** Grassroots youth mobilisation, particularly in rural areas.
- **Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue:** Platform for youth participation in leadership and policy discussions.

World Organ Donation Day 2026 Highlights Need to Bridge Organ Demand-Supply Gap

What's the News?

- **World Organ Donation Day** was observed on **13 August 2026** to promote voluntary organ and tissue donation, dispel misconceptions and highlight the shortage of organs available for transplantation.
- The observance encourages people not only to **pledge their organs but also communicate their decision to their families**, since a pledge represents an intention and does not by itself result in automatic retrieval of organs after death.
- **Exam caution:** World Organ Donation Day is an international awareness observance, but it is **not an officially designated UN or WHO international day.** No universally recognised official global theme for 2026 was announced.

World Organ Donation Day?

- **Observed:** 13 August annually
- **Purpose:**
 - Increase awareness about organ and tissue donation.
 - Encourage voluntary donor pledges.
 - Reduce myths surrounding brain-stem death and transplantation.
 - Honour organ donors and their families.
 - Promote ethical and equitable transplantation.

Historical Context

- The first successful human organ transplant was performed in **1954**, when **Ronald Lee Herrick donated a kidney to his identical twin Richard Herrick** in the United States.
- The surgery was led by **Dr. Joseph Murray**, who later shared the **1990 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** for discoveries concerning organ and cell transplantation.

What Happens After an Organ Pledge?

A donor pledge records a person's **wish to donate**; actual deceased donation follows prescribed medical and legal procedures.

1. The individual registers a pledge and should inform family members.
2. If the person later suffers irreversible brain injury, doctors first make all efforts to save the patient's life.

3. **Brain-stem death** must be formally certified under the prescribed legal procedure.
4. Medical teams assess which organs are suitable for transplantation.
5. Family consent and statutory documentation are completed.
6. Organs are allocated through the authorised transplant network based on applicable allocation criteria.
7. Retrieval and transplantation are performed at registered centres.

Organ Transplantation in India

India recorded major growth in transplantation during 2025:

- **20,138 organ transplants** – highest ever in a single year.
- Up from **4,990 in 2013**, representing about a fourfold rise.
- **3,526 deceased-donor transplants**, compared with 837 in 2013.
- More than **5 lakh Aadhaar-verified organ-donation pledges** have been recorded since the national digital pledge portal was introduced in 2023.
- India ranks **3rd globally in total organ transplants**, after the US and China.
- India ranks **1st globally in living-donor organ transplants**.

Legal Framework: THOTA

The **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994** is India's principal legislation governing organ donation and transplantation.

Provisions include:

- Regulates removal, storage and transplantation of organs and tissues for therapeutic purposes.
- **Recognises brain-stem death as legal death**, facilitating deceased-organ donation.
- Prohibits **commercial trade in human organs**.
- The **2011 amendment** expanded the framework to tissues and strengthened safeguards.
- The **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014** prescribe operational procedures for donation and transplantation.

NOTTO-ROTO-SOTTO Network

India follows a multi-level institutional system under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**:

- **NOTTO – National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization**
 - Apex national organisation.
 - Coordinates national allocation, registry, networking and awareness.
- **ROTO – Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization**
 - Coordinates organ sharing across States within a region.

• SOTTO – State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization

- Coordinates donation, waiting lists and organ allocation at State level.

The network currently includes **5 ROTTOS, 26 SOTTOs and around 1,200 registered hospitals**, covering 31 States and Union Territories.

National Organ Transplant Programme

The **National Organ Transplant Programme (NOTP)** is a **Central Sector Scheme** aimed at:

- Strengthening transplant infrastructure.
- Promoting deceased-organ donation.
- Supporting organ retrieval and transportation.
- Training transplant coordinators and medical professionals.
- Strengthening NOTTO, ROTTO and SOTTO networks.
- Improving public awareness and transparent organ allocation.

Additional Info

• Indian Organ Donation Day (IODD)

- Observed on **3 August**, separately from World Organ Donation Day.
- The **16th Indian Organ Donation Day** was observed in 2026.
- It commemorates India's **first successful deceased-donor heart transplant**, performed at **AIIMS New Delhi on 3 August 1994**.

• Major initiatives launched in 2026

- **Jug Jug Jiyo Abhiyaan**: Year-long nationwide organ-donation awareness campaign.
- **e-प्रत्यारोपण**: Integrated digital platform connecting hospitals, doctors, donors and recipients for registration, waiting-list management and organ allocation.
- **NOTTO Mobile App**
- **National Brain Stem Death Certification Guidelines**
- **National Guidelines on Swap Transplantation**

• Living Donation

- Commonly includes one kidney or part of the liver; selected cases may involve portions of other organs.

• Deceased Donation

- Can include heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas and intestine.

• Tissue Donation

- May include corneas, skin, bone, tendons and heart valves.

80th Independence Day: Yuva Shakti and Viksit Bharat@2047

What's the News?

- India celebrated its **80th Independence Day**, highlighting the role of **Yuva Shakti**

(youth power) in achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat by 2047**.

- The celebrations also commemorated **150 years of "Vande Mataram"**, with the National Song being rendered as part of the Red Fort Independence Day ceremony for the first time.
- **Viksit Bharat @2047** was displayed as the central theme at Gyanpath, while the celebrations specifically highlighted **"Yuva Shakti for Viksit Bharat@2047."**
- Around **5,000 special guests** representing beneficiaries, workers, entrepreneurs, innovators and youth volunteers were invited to the Red Fort celebrations.

2026 Celebration Focus

- **Viksit Bharat @2047:** Transforming India into a developed nation by the centenary of Independence.
- **Yuva Shakti:** Positioning India's youth as a major driver of innovation, entrepreneurship, skills and nation-building.
- **150 Years of Vande Mataram:** The celebrations highlighted the historical and national significance of India's National Song.
- Around **2,500 NCC cadets and MY Bharat volunteers** participated at Gyanpath and formed the words **"वंदे मातरम्"**.

Independence Day Themes: Last Decade

Year	Theme/Message commonly cited
2015	Towards True Freedom
2016	Yaad Karo Kurbanī
2017	Yeh India Ka Time Hai
2018	One Country, One People
2019	Support Our Troops, Salute Our Troops
2020	Atmanirbhar Bharat
2021	Nation First, Always First
2022	Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav
2023	Nation First, Always First
2024	Viksit Bharat / Viksit Bharat @2047
2025	Naya Bharat
2026	Yuva Shakti for Viksit Bharat@2047

Viksit Bharat @2047

- **Goal:** Make India a developed nation by **2047**, when the country completes 100 years of Independence.
- The vision covers:
 - Economic growth.
 - Social progress.
 - Environmental sustainability.
 - Good governance.
- Youth participation is considered central to achieving the vision through education, skills, innovation, entrepreneurship and technological development.
- India has a significant demographic advantage, with **nearly 65% of its population below 35 years of age**.

Additional Info

- **Independence Day**

- India became independent from British colonial rule in **1947**.
- The **Indian Independence Act, 1947** provided the legal framework for the transfer of power and legislative sovereignty.
- **15 August 2026 = 80th Independence Day**, while India completed **79 years since Independence**.

Vande Mataram

- Written by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**.
- Appeared in his novel **Anandamath**.
- It is India's **National Song**.
- The 2026 celebrations commemorated **150 years of Vande Mataram**.

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

- Government initiative commemorating **75 years of India's Independence**.
- Began with a **75-week countdown** to the 75th anniversary of Independence.
- Promoted people's participation through initiatives such as **Har Ghar Tiranga**.

Notes:

- **2021:** 75th Independence Day.
- **2022:** 75 years of Independence completed; Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav was at its peak.
- **2026:** 80th Independence Day; 79 years of Independence completed.

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day: Remembering the Human Cost of Partition

What's the News?

- India observes **14 August as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day (Vibhajan Vibhishika Smriti Diwas)** to commemorate those who suffered displacement, violence and loss during the **Partition of India in 1947**.
- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**, marking the 2026 observance, paid tribute to the courage and resilience of people affected by Partition and highlighted how many rebuilt their lives and contributed to India's development.

- He emphasised **harmony, brotherhood, solidarity and collective nation-building towards Viksit Bharat** as key lessons from the remembrance.
- The observance has been held annually since it was announced by the Prime Minister in **2021**.

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day

- **Observed on:** 14 August every year.
- **Announced:** 2021.
- **Purpose:**
 - Remember people who lost their lives during Partition.



- Recognise millions who suffered displacement and loss of homes and livelihoods.
- Preserve the historical memory of Partition for future generations.
- Reinforce the values of **social harmony, unity and human empowerment.**
- The government describes the observance as a reminder of the dangers posed by **social division, disharmony, hatred and violence.**

Why 14 August?

- **14 August immediately precedes India's Independence Day on 15 August.**
- The observance highlights that India's achievement of independence was accompanied by the enormous human suffering associated with the **Partition of British India.**
- Partition triggered mass migration across the newly created borders and severe communal violence, particularly affecting **Punjab and Bengal.**

Partition of India

- The **Partition of British India in 1947** created two independent Dominions:
 - **India**
 - **Pakistan.**
- Major provinces affected included:
 - **Punjab:** Divided into East Punjab and West Punjab.
 - **Bengal:** Divided into West Bengal and East Bengal/East Pakistan; the latter eventually became **Bangladesh.**
- Partition produced one of the largest population movements of the 20th century, as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs migrated across the newly drawn borders amid widespread violence.

Indian Independence Act, 1947

- Passed by the **British Parliament.**
- Provided for the establishment of **two independent Dominions—India and Pakistan.**
- Ended British constitutional authority over the territories becoming the two Dominions.
- Each Dominion received its own **Constituent Assembly**, with legislative authority over its territory.

Radcliffe Line

- The boundaries separating India and Pakistan were drawn under boundary commissions chaired by **Sir Cyril Radcliffe.**
- Radcliffe was tasked with drawing the borders within roughly **six weeks.**
- Two principal boundary commissions dealt with:
 - **Punjab**
 - **Bengal**
- The resulting boundary is commonly known as the **Radcliffe Line.**

2026 Message

Prime Minister Modi's message centred on three major ideas:

- **Remembrance:** Honour families uprooted and people who lost loved ones during Partition.
- **Resilience:** Recognise those who rebuilt their lives from almost nothing and contributed to national progress.
- **National Unity:** Strengthen harmony, brotherhood and solidarity while working collectively towards **Viksit Bharat.**

Additional Info

- **Mountbatten Plan**
 - Also known as the **3 June Plan.**
 - Provided the political framework for Partition and transfer of power.
 - Associated with **Lord Louis Mountbatten**, the last Viceroy of British India.
- **Radcliffe Boundary Commission**
 - Chairman: **Sir Cyril Radcliffe.**
 - Separate commissions were constituted for **Punjab and Bengal.**
 - Their task was to demarcate boundaries between the territories forming India and Pakistan.
- **Constituent Assembly of India**
 - First met in **1946.**
 - Became the sovereign constitution-making body of independent India.
 - Adopted the Constitution of India in **1949.**

World Humanitarian Day 2026: Honouring Fallen Humanitarians and Protecting Health Care

What's the News?

World Humanitarian Day 2026 was observed on **19 August** to honour humanitarian and health workers who risk and lose their lives while serving communities affected by conflicts, disasters, and crises. The 2026 campaign, led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), focused on the theme *"Honouring fallen humanitarians and calling for greater protection of health care."* It highlighted the personal stories of fallen aid workers through the voices of their families and communities, while urging governments and conflict parties to respect International Humanitarian Law and protect health workers, patients, facilities, and medical transport.

Theme and Campaign Focus?

- **Theme 2026:** *"Honouring fallen humanitarians and calling for greater protection of health care"*
- **Highlights:**
 - Tribute to humanitarian and health workers killed in the line of duty

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- Protection of health care workers, patients, hospitals, and medical transport
- Call to end attacks on humanitarian workers and civilians
- Encouragement to leaders and citizens to **#ActForHumanity**

- Campaign Angle:** The 2026 campaign specifically spotlights the *families of fallen humanitarians*, recognising the personal loss behind humanitarian service.

Attacks on Health Care?

- WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care:** Launched in December 2017
- Data Recorded (since Dec 2017):**
 - 10,400+ attacks** across **29 countries/territories**
 - 5,700+ deaths** and **8,500+ injuries**
- Data Recorded (2026 so far):**
 - 914 attacks** on health care
 - 911 deaths** and **1,486 injuries**
 - Majority reported in **Ukraine, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory, and Myanmar**
- UN Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016):** Condemned attacks on medical facilities and personnel in conflict, calling for stronger compliance with International Humanitarian Law, reporting, and accountability. Ten years later, such attacks continue at an unacceptable scale.

Additional Info

- History of the Day:**
 - 19 August** commemorates the **2003 bombing of the Canal Hotel (UN headquarters) in Baghdad, Iraq**, where **22 humanitarian workers** died, including UN Special Representative **Sergio Vieira de Mello**
 - UN General Assembly** officially designated 19 August as World Humanitarian Day in **2008**
- Organisations:**
 - OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs):** Leads the annual global campaign
 - WHO:** Provides global leadership on documenting attacks on health care; World Health Assembly Resolution **WHA65.20 (2012)** mandated WHO to systematically collect and disseminate information on attacks on health care
- International Humanitarian Law (IHL):**
 - Also known as the Law of Armed Conflict
 - Protects persons not participating in hostilities and restricts means and methods of warfare
 - Requires protection of medical personnel, facilities, and transport in conflict zones

- India Context:** While the day is globally observed, India contributes humanitarian aid and peacekeeping personnel under the UN framework and supports disaster relief operations in the region.

World Mosquito Day 2026: Raising Awareness on Vector-Borne Diseases

What's the News?

World Mosquito Day 2026 was observed on **20 August** to commemorate the landmark discovery by British-Indian physician **Sir Ronald Ross in 1897**, who proved that malaria is transmitted by the bite of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. The day underscores the continuing public health threat posed by mosquito-borne diseases and the need for vector control, community participation, and preventive healthcare.

Major Mosquito-Borne Diseases in India?

Disease	Vector (Mosquito)	Symptoms
Malaria	Female <i>Anopheles</i>	Fever, chills, sweating, weakness; <i>Plasmodium falciparum</i> can be life-threatening
Dengue	<i>Aedes aegypti</i>	High fever, headache, pain behind eyes, muscle/joint pain, skin rash, occasional bleeding
Chikungunya	<i>Aedes</i> species	Fever, rash, severe joint pain (may persist long after recovery)
Japanese Encephalitis	<i>Culex</i> species	Brain inflammation, confusion, seizures, coma; vaccine-preventable
Zika Virus	<i>Aedes</i> species	Mild fever, rash, muscle pain; dangerous for pregnant women (risk to fetus)

Prevention & Vector Control?

- Source Reduction:** Eliminate stagnant water from flowerpots, coolers, tyres, buckets, and drains – even small collections enable breeding.
- Water Management:** Seal storage tanks tightly, clean gutters, fix leaking pipes, and prevent waterlogging.



- **Personal Protection:** Use mosquito nets, window screens, repellents, and protective clothing.
- **Community Action:** Participate in cleanliness drives, report persistent breeding sites to local authorities, and support public health surveillance.
- **Vaccination:** Japanese Encephalitis vaccine is available and recommended in endemic areas.

Additional Info

- **Sir Ronald Ross:** British-Indian physician and scientist awarded the **Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1902** for his work on malaria transmission.
- **Seasonal Risk:** Outbreaks peak during **monsoon and post-monsoon seasons** due to increased rainfall, humidity, and stagnant water.
- **Public Health Impact:** Mosquito-borne diseases strain healthcare facilities, cause loss of economic productivity, and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.
- **Global Observance:** World Mosquito Day is marked worldwide to promote research, vector control, and integrated disease-management strategies.

World Senior Citizens Day 2026 Observed on 21 August

What's the News?

World Senior Citizens Day is observed annually on 21 August to honour the contributions, wisdom, and life experiences of the elderly, while raising awareness about the challenges they face – including healthcare access, social inclusion, emotional well-being, and security. The observance serves as a global reminder of the need for age-friendly policies and intergenerational solidarity.

World Senior Citizens Day?

- **Overview:** Also referred to as International Senior Citizens Day, the observance focuses on recognising the achievements of older persons and addressing issues such as loneliness, age discrimination, inadequate healthcare, and elder abuse. It encourages respect, dignity, independence, and accessible housing and transport for senior citizens.
- **History:** The day traces its origins to 1988, when the President of the United States officially proclaimed National Senior Citizens Day. The proclamation acknowledged the debt of gratitude owed to senior citizens for their lifetime contributions and called for communities that support independence and dignity in old age.

- **Significance:** With the global population ageing rapidly, the day underscores the importance of bridging generational gaps and ensuring that elderly citizens remain active, valued participants in society. Simple community initiatives – such as storytelling events, healthcare camps, and volunteer outreach – are encouraged to mark the occasion.

Additional Info

• Demographic Context (WHO):

- By 2030, one in six people worldwide will be aged 60 years or older.
- The number of people aged 60+ is projected to double by 2050.
- The population aged 80+ is expected to triple by 2050 compared to current levels.

• Constitutional & Legal Framework (India):

- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State to make effective provision for securing the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement.
- **Article 46 (DPSP):** Mandates the State to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, including the elderly.
- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:** Enacted to ensure maintenance, welfare, and protection of senior citizens and parents; mandates children or relatives to provide maintenance.

• Government Initiatives for Senior Citizens (India):

- **National Policy on Senior Citizens, 2011:** Aims to promote the well-being of older persons through financial security, healthcare, shelter, and protection against abuse.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:** Provides physical aids and assisted-living devices to senior citizens belonging to BPL households.
- **Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana (VPBY):** A pension scheme for senior citizens offering assured returns.
- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS):** Provides monthly pensions to BPL senior citizens under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).
- **SAGE Portal (Seniorcare Aging Growth Engine):** A government portal to identify and promote products and services for elderly care.
- **Elderline (14567):** National toll-free helpline for senior citizens to report abuse, seek guidance, and access emergency support.

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• Related Observances:

- **International Day of Older Persons:** Observed on 1 October annually under the United Nations to highlight the well-being and rights of older persons globally.

India Celebrates Third National Space Day

What's the News?

- India celebrated its **third National Space Day on 23 August 2026**, commemorating the successful soft landing of **Chandrayaan-3** on the Moon.
- **Theme 2026: "Towards Viksit Bharat: Innovating, Collaborating and Aspiring to Global Space Leadership."**
- The national-level celebration was held at the **Space Applications Centre (SAC), Ahmedabad**, a major centre of ISRO.
- The observance highlighted India's achievements in lunar exploration, human spaceflight preparations, private-sector participation and plans for an indigenous space station.

National Space Day

- **Observed:** 23 August every year.
- It commemorates the landing of the **Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-3 on 23 August 2023**.
- The first National Space Day was celebrated in **2024**.
- The observance aims to:
 - Celebrate India's achievements in space science and technology.
 - Promote public awareness of space applications.
 - Encourage students and youth to pursue **STEM and space-related fields**.

Chandrayaan-3

- Chandrayaan-3 was India's **third lunar mission** and a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2.
- Its major components were:
 - **Propulsion Module.**
 - **Vikram Lander.**
 - **Pragyan Rover.**
- Its objectives included demonstrating:
 - Safe and soft landing on the lunar surface.
 - Rover mobility on the Moon.
 - In-situ scientific experiments.
- India became:
 - The **fourth country** to achieve a successful soft landing on the Moon.
 - The **first country to land near the Moon's south polar region**.
- The Chandrayaan-3 landing site was named **Shiv Shakti Point**.

India's Future Space Programme

- **Gaganyaan**

- India's human spaceflight programme.
- Designed to demonstrate India's capability to send astronauts to **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** and return them safely to Earth.
- Preparations include uncrewed missions and testing of human-rated systems.

• Chandrayaan-4

- Planned as a **lunar sample-return mission**.
- It is intended to demonstrate technologies for collecting lunar samples, launching them from the Moon and returning them to Earth.

• Chandrayaan-5 / LUPEX

- A proposed **ISRO-JAXA Lunar Polar Exploration Mission**.
- Intended to study water and other volatile substances in the lunar polar region.

• Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)

- India's proposed indigenous space station.
- The Government has approved development of its **first module**.
- India aims to establish the space station by **2035**.

Expanding Private Space Ecosystem

- Space-sector reforms introduced in **2020** opened the sector to greater private participation.
- India now has **more than 440 space start-ups**.
- **IN-SPACE** facilitates and promotes participation of private entities in India's space sector.
- The National Space Day theme emphasises **innovation, collaboration and global leadership**, reflecting the growing role of public-private partnerships in India's space ambitions.

Additional Info

• ISRO

- Full form: **Indian Space Research Organisation.**
- Functions under the **Department of Space**.
- Headquarters: **Bengaluru, Karnataka**.
- Established in **1969**.
- Its predecessor was the **Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR)**.

• Space Applications Centre (SAC)

- Located in **Ahmedabad, Gujarat**.
- One of ISRO's major research and development centres.
- Works on space-borne and air-borne instruments and applications of space technology.

• IN-SPACE

- Full form: **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre.**

- Acts as the single-window agency for promoting, enabling and authorising private-sector space activities in India.
- Headquarters: **Ahmedabad, Gujarat.**

World Lake Day 2026: Promoting Conservation and Sustainable Management of Lakes

What's the News?

- **World Lake Day** is observed annually on **27 August** to raise awareness about the ecological, social and economic importance of lakes.
- The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** designated the day through **Resolution A/RES/79/142**.
- The first World Lake Day was observed in **2025**, making **2026 the second global observance**.
- The observance promotes the **conservation, restoration and sustainable management of lakes and associated ecosystems**.

World Lake Day?

- **Date:** 27 August
- **Established by:** United Nations General Assembly
- **UN Resolution:** A/RES/79/142
- **Facilitated by:** United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- The date is associated with the **First World Lake Conference**, held in **Shiga Prefecture, Japan, in 1984**.
- Shiga Prefecture is home to **Lake Biwa**, Japan's largest freshwater lake.

Why are Lakes Important?

- **Freshwater Security:** Supply water for drinking, irrigation and industry.
- **Biodiversity:** Provide habitats for fish, aquatic plants, birds and other species.
- **Climate Regulation:** Store carbon and influence local climatic conditions.
- **Flood Regulation:** Store excess water and reduce flood impacts.
- **Livelihoods:** Support fisheries, agriculture, tourism and transportation.

Major Threats to Lakes

- Untreated sewage and industrial pollution.
- Agricultural runoff and **eutrophication/algal blooms**.
- Excessive withdrawal of water.
- Urbanisation and habitat destruction.
- Invasive species and overfishing.
- Climate change, rising evaporation and altered rainfall patterns.

Important Lakes (World Geography)

- **Caspian Sea:** World's largest enclosed inland water body by surface area.
- **Lake Baikal, Russia:** World's deepest freshwater lake; maximum depth about **1,642 m**.

- **Lake Superior:** World's largest freshwater lake by surface area; shared by the **USA and Canada**.
- **Lake Victoria:** Africa's largest lake by surface area; shared by **Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya**.
- **Lake Tanganyika:** One of the world's deepest and longest freshwater lakes; located in East Africa.
- **Lake Titicaca:** Located between **Peru and Bolivia**; widely recognised as the world's highest commercially navigable lake.
- **Dead Sea:** Hypersaline lake between **Jordan and Israel/West Bank**.

Additional Info

- **SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation**
 - Sustainable management of lakes contributes to the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems.
- **Ramsar Convention**
 - International treaty for the **conservation and wise use of wetlands**.
 - Adopted at **Ramsar, Iran, in 1971**.
 - Lakes may qualify as wetlands under the Ramsar framework.
- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)**
 - Centrally sponsored scheme of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
 - Covers conservation and management of **lakes and wetlands**.
 - It merged the earlier **National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP)** and **National Wetlands Conservation Programme (NWCP)**.
- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**
 - Provide the principal regulatory framework for conservation and management of notified wetlands in India.
 - Implemented through the **Central Government and State/UT Wetland Authorities**.

National Sports Day 2026: India Honours Major Dhyhan Chand

What's the News?

- India observes **National Sports Day on 29 August** every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of hockey legend **Major Dhyhan Chand**.
- In 2026, it marked his **121st birth anniversary** and was expanded into a **three-day nationwide campaign from 28-30 August** to encourage sports, fitness and youth participation.
- The observance also reinforces the government's broader objective of making



sports a **mass movement** and strengthening India's grassroots-to-elite sporting ecosystem.

National Sports Day 2026

- **Date:** 29 August
- **2026 Campaign Theme:** "Tribute, Play, and Move"
- **National slogan:** "Khelega Bharat, Jeetega Bharat"
- A major focus of the celebrations was encouraging citizens to dedicate **at least one hour to sports and physical activity** through the "Ek Ghanta Khel Ke Maidan Mein" initiative.
- Activities included:
 - Sports competitions and fitness events
 - Tributes to sporting legends
 - Fit India activities
 - Community participation
 - Cycling and other mass physical-activity programmes

Why 29 August?

- **Major Dhyan Chand** was born on **29 August 1905**.
- Popularly called the "**Hockey Wizard**", he was one of the central figures in India's dominance of international hockey.
- He was part of India's Olympic gold-medal-winning hockey teams at:
 - **Amsterdam 1928**
 - **Los Angeles 1932**
 - **Berlin 1936**
- He captained India at the **1936 Berlin Olympics**, where India defeated Germany **8-1 in the final**.
- He received the **Padma Bhushan** in **1956**.

History of National Sports Day

- National Sports Day was **first observed in 1995** and has been **celebrated nationally since 2012**.
- It aims to:
 - Honour Indian sportspersons.
 - Promote physical fitness and healthy lifestyles.
 - Encourage youth participation in sports.
 - Promote discipline, teamwork and sporting excellence.

Fit India Movement

- The **Fit India Movement** was launched on **National Sports Day, 29 August 2019**.
- Objective: Make **fitness an integral part of daily life** and transform it into a people's movement.
- It promotes participation through:
 - Schools and colleges
 - Villages and panchayats
 - Workplaces
 - Community organisations
 - Sports and traditional games

Government Sports Initiatives

- **Khelo India**
 - National programme for development of sports.
 - Focuses on **grassroots participation, talent development, infrastructure and competitive excellence**.
- **KIRTI**
 - Full form: **Khelo India Rising Talent Identification**.
 - Targets children in the **9-18 years** age group.
 - Uses systematic assessment to identify promising sporting talent.
- **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)**
 - Provides selected elite athletes with customised **training, financial and scientific support**.
 - Focuses particularly on preparation for the **Olympic and Paralympic Games**.

Additional Info

- **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award**
 - India's **highest sporting honour**.
 - The former **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award** was renamed after Major Dhyan Chand in **2021**.
- **Hockey is NOT India's National Game**
 - The Government of India has **not officially designated any sport as India's national game**.
 - Therefore, the frequently repeated claim that hockey is India's official "National Game" is incorrect.
- **Sports Authority of India (SAI)**
 - Functions under the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**.
 - Key roles include talent identification, training, sports-science support and development of sports infrastructure.
- **National Sports University**
 - **Location:** Imphal, Manipur.
 - Focus: Sports education, coaching, sports sciences, technology and sports management.

World Sanskrit Day 2026: Celebrating India's Classical Linguistic Heritage

What's the News?

- **World Sanskrit Day 2026** was observed on **28 August 2026**, corresponding to **Shravana Purnima** in the Hindu lunar calendar.
- Also known as **Sanskrit Diwas** or **Vishva Sanskrit Diwas**, the observance promotes the preservation, study and contemporary use of Sanskrit.
- Sanskrit Day has been officially observed in India since **1969**, following an

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initiative of the Union Ministry of Education.

- **Exam Note on Theme:** No single official **2026 theme** was specified in the available Government of India observance material. Avoid relying on unofficial themes circulated by educational websites.

Why Shravana Purnima?

- World Sanskrit Day does **not have a fixed Gregorian-calendar date**; it is observed annually on **Shravana Purnima**, the full-moon day of the Shravana month.
- Shravana Purnima is traditionally associated with:
 - **Upakarma** – renewal/commencement of Vedic studies.
 - India's traditional **Gurukula and Vedic learning traditions**.
 - **Raksha Bandhan**, which also fell on the same day in 2026.

Sanskrit

- Sanskrit belongs to the **Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family**.
- Two broad historical forms are:
 - **Vedic Sanskrit** – language of the Vedas and early Vedic literature.
 - **Classical Sanskrit** – standardised grammatical tradition closely associated with **Panini**.
- **Panini**
 - Author of the **Ashtadhyayi**.
 - His grammatical system provided a highly systematic description of Sanskrit.
- Major Sanskrit literary works include:
 - *Ramayana*
 - *Mahabharata*
 - Vedas and Upanishads
 - Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Raghuvamsha* and *Meghaduta*.

Constitutional Status

- Sanskrit is one of the **22 languages in the Eighth Schedule** of the Constitution.
- The Eighth Schedule is specifically referred to in:
 - **Article 344(1):** Commission and Parliamentary Committee relating to Official Language.
 - **Article 351:** Directive for development of Hindi; it provides for enrichment primarily by drawing vocabulary from **Sanskrit** and secondarily from other languages.
- **Important:** Sanskrit is a **Scheduled Language**, but the Constitution does not designate it as India's "national language".

Classical Language Status

- Sanskrit was granted **Classical Language status on 25 November 2005**.

- It was the **second Indian language**, after Tamil, to receive Classical Language status.
- Classical-language recognition aims to facilitate preservation, research and study of India's ancient linguistic and literary traditions.

Government Initiatives for Sanskrit

- **Central Sanskrit Universities Act, 2020**
 - Converted three existing institutions into Central Universities:
 - **Central Sanskrit University**, New Delhi
 - **Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University**, New Delhi
 - **National Sanskrit University**, Tirupati
 - The Act came into force in **2020**.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**
 - Emphasises promotion of **Indian languages**, including Sanskrit.
 - Provides opportunities for Sanskrit to be studied at school and higher-education levels.
 - Encourages Sanskrit universities to become **multidisciplinary institutions**.
- Other measures include:
 - Merit scholarships for Sanskrit students.
 - Financial assistance to Sanskrit institutions and research.
 - **Shashtra Chudamani Scheme** for traditional Sanskrit learning.
 - Publication and reprinting of rare Sanskrit works.
 - Non-formal Sanskrit education and language-learning centres.

Additional Info

- **Central Sanskrit University**
 - Headquarters: **New Delhi**
 - Functions under the **Ministry of Education**.
 - Promotes Sanskrit language, literature, traditional Shastras, teaching and research.
 - Functions as an important nodal institution for Sanskrit education.
- **Notes**
 - World Sanskrit Day → **Shravana Purnima**
 - 2026 Date → **28 August**
 - Official observance began → **1969**
 - Sanskrit → **Eighth Schedule**
 - Relevant Articles → **344(1) & 351**
 - Classical Language status → **2005**
 - Panini → **Ashtadhyayi**
 - Central Sanskrit Universities Act → **2020**



National Small Industry Day 2026: Recognising India's Small Enterprises

What's the News?

- **National Small Industry Day** is observed in India every year on **30 August** to recognise the contribution of small industries to employment, entrepreneurship, manufacturing, exports and local economic development.
- The observance is associated with the **Comprehensive Policy Package for Small Scale Industries**, introduced by the Government of India on **30 August 2000**.
- No official theme for National Small Industry Day 2026 was reported in the available coverage.

National Small Industry Day?

- Small industries historically formed part of India's **Small Scale Industries (SSI)** framework.
- The policy framework later evolved into the broader **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** system through the **MSMED Act, 2006**.
- Small enterprises are important for:
 - Employment and self-employment
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Rural and semi-urban industrialisation
 - Ancillary production for large industries
 - Exports and integration into supply chains
- A national convention of small-scale industry entrepreneurs was also organised in **2001**, reinforcing the significance of the observance.

Revised MSME Classification

The revised MSME classification has been applicable from **1 April 2025** and uses **both investment and annual turnover** criteria.

Category	Investment Limit	Turnover Limit
Micro	≤ ₹2.5 crore	≤ ₹10 crore
Small	≤ ₹25 crore	≤ ₹100 crore
Medium	≤ ₹125 crore	≤ ₹500 crore

Note: An enterprise must satisfy the applicable investment and turnover limits to remain within its MSME category.

MSMEs in India

- MSMEs contribute around **31.1% of India's GDP**.
- They account for around **35.4% of manufacturing output**.
- Their share in India's exports is around **48.58%**.
- More than **38.9 crore persons** are associated with employment reported through the MSME registration ecosystem.
- MSMEs are regarded as the **second-largest source of employment after agriculture**.

The MSME Ministry's dashboard recorded about **8.95 crore enterprises**, including Udyam-registered enterprises and informal micro enterprises registered through the Udyam Assist Platform, by August 2026.

Major Government Initiatives

Udyam Registration

- Online system for formal registration of MSMEs.
- Launched in **2020**.
- Provides enterprises access to various government benefits, credit-support measures and market opportunities.

PMEGP

- **Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme**.
- Credit-linked subsidy programme promoting establishment of micro-enterprises and self-employment.
- Implemented by the **Ministry of MSME**, with **KVIC** as the national-level nodal agency.

CGTMSE

- **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises**.
- Facilitates **collateral-free credit** to eligible Micro and Small Enterprises.
- Set up jointly by the Government of India and **SIDBI**.

TReDS

- **Trade Receivables Discounting System**.
- Electronic platform facilitating financing/discounting of MSME trade receivables.
- Helps address the problem of **delayed payments and working-capital constraints**.

NSIC

- **National Small Industries Corporation**.
- A Central Public Sector Enterprise under the **Ministry of MSME**.
- Supports MSMEs through marketing, finance facilitation, technology and other business services.

Additional Info

MSMED Act, 2006

- Full name: **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006**.
- Provides the principal statutory framework for development and promotion of MSMEs.
- Covers both **manufacturing and service enterprises**.
- Contains provisions relating to **delayed payments to Micro and Small Enterprises**.

National Small Industry Day vs MSME Day

- **National Small Industry Day: 30 August** – Indian observance focused on small industries.
- **Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day: 27 June** – international observance recognised by the **United Nations**.
- India observed MSME Day 2026 through the **"Udyami Bharat"** programme under the Ministry of MSME.

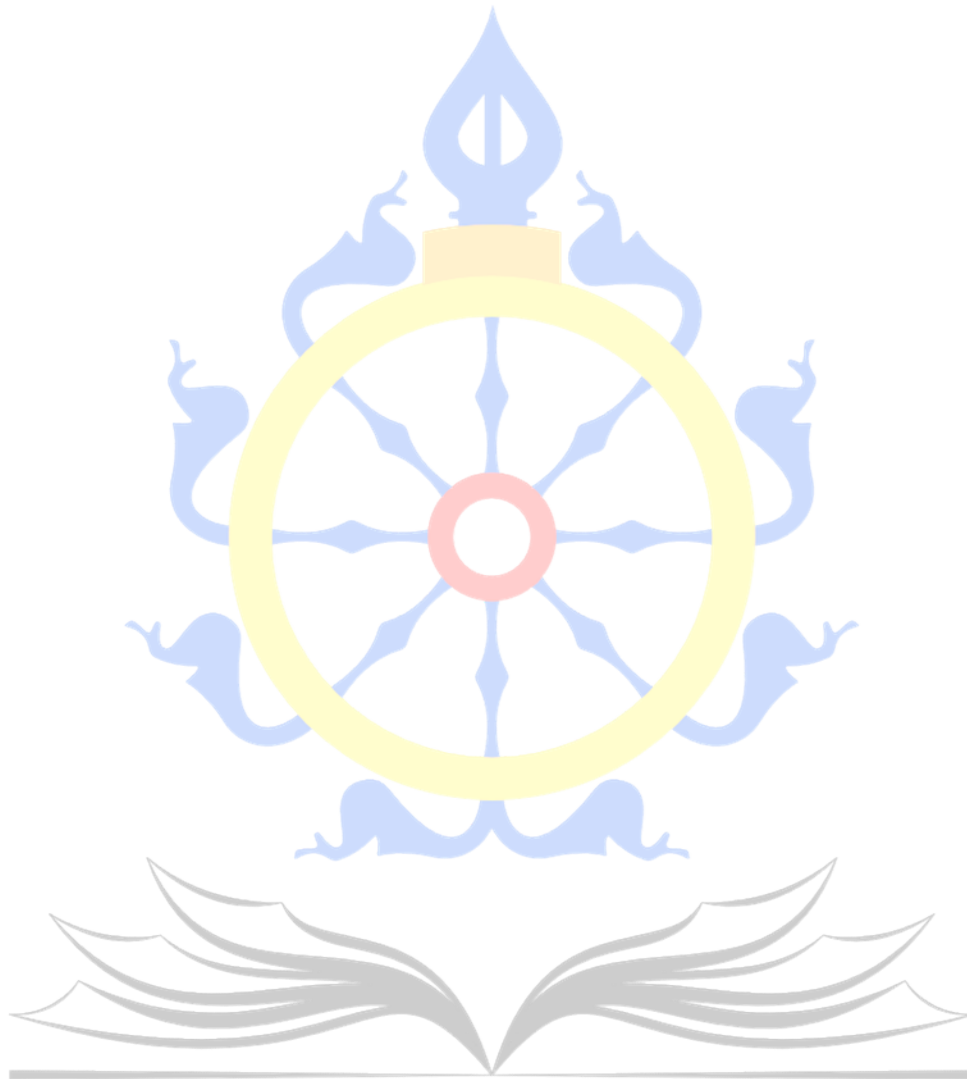
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Ministry of MSME

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- Major organisations associated with it include:
 - **KVIC** – Khadi and Village Industries Commission
 - **NSIC** – National Small Industries Corporation
 - **Coir Board**
- MSMEs are important to the objectives of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India, employment generation and inclusive regional development.**





State Affairs

Assam Releases ₹160 Crore as Interim Flood Relief

What's the News?

The Assam government released the first tranche of an approximately **₹160-crore interim relief package** for households severely affected by floods in **Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat** districts.

Eligible households were provided **₹15,000 each** through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** to meet immediate needs and begin repairing damaged homes while detailed loss assessments continued. The assistance package also included Assam's subsidy contribution under the **PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana** for eligible families.

Relief Coverage

- **Interim package:** Approximately ₹160 crore
- **Household assistance:** ₹15,000 per eligible family
- **Targeted beneficiaries:** Nearly 75,000 households
- **Districts covered:** Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat
- **Transfer mechanism:** Direct credit into beneficiaries' bank accounts

The initial assessment identified:

- More than **35,000 families** in Sivasagar
- Over **19,000 families** in Charaideo
- More than **4,000 families** in Jorhat
- Over **2,000 families** in Golaghat

Additional households may be included after verification of flood-related damage.

Additional Assistance

Severely affected families in **Sivasagar and Charaideo** who remained unable to return to their homes were promised an additional **₹10,000**.

The state also planned a comprehensive field assessment to determine:

- Damage to houses and household property
- Agricultural and livestock losses
- Deaths and injuries
- Damage to public infrastructure
- Eligibility for final compensation under government norms

The ₹15,000 payment is therefore an **interim measure**, distinct from the final compensation determined after damage assessment.

Flood Situation

At the time of the relief announcement:

- Around **1.36 lakh people** remained affected across five districts.
- **85 deaths** had been recorded during the year's floods.

- **54 relief camps and distribution centres** were operating.
- Around **13,771 people** were staying in relief facilities.
- Approximately **15,422 hectares of farmland** remained submerged.
- The Dhansiri River was flowing above the danger level at Numaligarh.

Direct Benefit Transfer

DBT is a governance mechanism through which government benefits, subsidies and financial assistance are transferred directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts.

Its disaster-relief advantages include:

- Faster delivery of emergency assistance
- Reduced dependence on intermediaries
- Improved transparency and traceability
- Lower risk of duplication and leakage
- Immediate liquidity for affected households

Beneficiary identification and accurate bank-account verification remain essential for preventing exclusion and payment failures.

Disaster-Relief Framework

- **Primary responsibility**
 - Disaster management and immediate relief are primarily the responsibility of state governments.
- **Disaster Management Act, 2005**
 - Provides the institutional framework for disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and rehabilitation.
 - Establishes disaster-management authorities at national, state and district levels.
- **Assam State Disaster Management Authority**
 - Coordinates disaster preparedness, response and risk-reduction measures in Assam.
 - Works with district administrations, departments and response agencies.
- **State Disaster Response Fund**
 - The SDRF is the principal fund available to states for providing immediate relief following notified disasters.
 - Flood is included among the disasters eligible for SDRF assistance.
 - The Union government supplements state efforts through SDRF and, in severe cases, the National Disaster Response Fund.

Punjab Lead School Education Indicators in NITI Aayog's 2026 Report

What's the News?

- Punjab has emerged as a **leading performer in school education**, recording the highest Grade 3 foundational learning scores among States/UTs in NITI Aayog's 2026 assessment.
- Punjab recorded **82% competency in Language** and **78% in Mathematics** at the foundational stage, compared with the national averages of **64% and 60%**, respectively.
- Punjab also performed strongly in school infrastructure, including electricity, computers, internet connectivity and functional smart classrooms.

Punjab's Learning Outcomes

According to **PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024** data used in the NITI Aayog report:

Indicator	Punjab	Kerala	India
Grade 3 Language	82%	75%	64%
Grade 3 Mathematics	78%	70%	60%
Grade 9 Mathematics	52%	45%	—

- Punjab recorded the **highest Grade 3 scores nationally** in both Language and Mathematics.
- The gap between Punjab and the lowest performer was:
 - 30 percentage points** in Language.
 - 29 percentage points** in Mathematics.
- Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala were identified among the strongest performers in foundational learning.

School Infrastructure

Punjab also performs strongly on several **UDISE+ 2024-25** indicators:

- Functional electricity:** 99.9% of schools
- Computer facilities:** 99%
- Internet connectivity:** 88.9%
- Functional smart classrooms: 80.1%**
 - National average: **30.6%**
 - Punjab has the **highest smart-classroom coverage among States**; Chandigarh and Lakshadweep, both UTs, have higher coverage.
- Secondary-to-higher-secondary transition: 90.7%.**

NITI Aayog School Education Report 2026

The relevant NITI Aayog publication is titled **"School Education System in India: Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap for Quality Enhancement."**

- It provides a **decade-long assessment** of India's school education system.
- Major areas examined:
 - Access and enrolment
 - Infrastructure
 - Equity and inclusion
 - Learning outcomes
- Major datasets used:
 - UDISE+ 2024-25**
 - PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024**
 - National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2017 & 2021**
 - ASER 2024**
- The report proposes:
 - 13 major recommendations**
 - 33 implementation pathways**
 - More than **125 measurable Performance Success Indicators.**

Punjab's Education Initiatives

- Mission Samarth**
 - Focuses on **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)**.
 - Uses learning-level-based rather than merely class-based interventions.
 - Reported coverage extends to around **12 lakh students and 70,000+ teachers.**
- Schools of Eminence**
 - Designed to provide upgraded infrastructure, laboratories, digital learning and specialised academic support in government schools.
- PACE – Punjab Academic Coaching for Excellence**
 - Provides academic and competitive-examination support, including coaching and mock tests.
 - 882 government-school students qualified NEET-UG 2026**, up from 437 in 2024.
- Sarbat.AI**

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- Punjab became the **first State to introduce Artificial Intelligence as a mainstream school subject from Classes 1–12.**
- Planned phased coverage: about **31.5 lakh students across 25,172 schools.**

Additional Info

- **NITI Aayog**
 - Full form: **National Institution for Transforming India.**
 - Established in **2015**, replacing the Planning Commission.
 - **Chairperson:** Prime Minister of India.
 - Functions as the Union Government's public-policy think tank and promotes **cooperative and competitive federalism.**
- **Constitutional Link**
 - **Article 21A:** Free and compulsory education for children aged **6–14 years.**
 - **Article 45:** State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education to children below six years.
 - **Article 51A(k):** Fundamental Duty of a parent/guardian to provide educational opportunities to a child aged 6–14.
 - **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act)** operationalises Article 21A.

Odisha Secures ₹43,437 Crore Food-Processing Investment Proposals

What's the News?

- **Odisha secured investment proposals worth ₹43,437 crore** in the food-processing sector at **Odisha Food Pro 2026**, its first sector-specific investment roadshow held outside the state, in New Delhi. The programme involved the Odisha government, industry representatives and **ASSOCHAM.**
- The proposals have an estimated potential to generate **43,316 employment opportunities.**
- Chief Minister **Mohan Charan Majhi** projected food processing as a tool for **raising farmer and fisher incomes, rural employment, value addition and export growth**, rather than merely as an industrial activity.

Investment Proposals

- **27 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)**
 - Proposed investment: **₹41,748 crore**
 - Employment potential: **35,252**
- **12 Investment Intent Forms (IIFs)**
 - Proposed investment: **₹1,689 crore**
 - Employment potential: **8,064**
- **Total: ₹43,437 crore with potential for 43,316 jobs.**

MoUs and Investment Intent Forms indicate proposed/committed investment and should not be equated with investment actually realised.

Five-Pillar Food-Processing Roadmap

Odisha outlined a strategy based on five pillars:

1. **Specialised food-processing clusters**
2. **Integrated cold-chain and warehousing infrastructure**
3. **Food-quality and certification systems**
4. **Integration of FPOs, MSMEs and women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with organised industry**

5. Creation of a globally competitive skilled workforce

The broader objective is to process more of Odisha's agricultural and marine output **within the state**, thereby retaining greater value locally.

Why Odisha for Food Processing?

- Odisha has **10 agro-climatic zones** and a **575-km coastline**, along with significant fisheries resources.
- Major raw materials include **rice, pulses, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables and spices**, besides tribal products such as **turmeric, tamarind and honey.**
- Expanding ports, logistics connectivity and cold-chain infrastructure can facilitate both domestic marketing and exports.
- The state aims to expand its economy from about **\$113 billion to \$500 billion by 2036** and further to **\$1.5 trillion by 2047**, while targeting **10 million non-farm jobs by 2047.**

Additional Info

- **Food processing:** Conversion of agricultural, livestock or fisheries produce into processed/value-added food products. It can reduce post-harvest losses, increase shelf life and improve price realisation for producers.
- **Related Central Government initiatives:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY):** Supports food-processing infrastructure, including integrated cold chains and value-addition facilities. The cold-chain component aims to create an uninterrupted chain from **farm gate to consumer.**
 - **Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry (PLISFPI):**
 - Outlay: **₹10,900 crore**
 - Period: **2021–22 to 2026–27**

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- Major segments include **RTC/RTE foods, processed fruits & vegetables, marine products and mozzarella cheese.**
- **PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME):** A ₹10,000-crore scheme based substantially on the **One District One Product (ODOP)** approach, aimed at formalising and upgrading micro food-processing enterprises.

Cabinet Approves Permanent Bench of J&K High Court in Ladakh

What's the News?

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the establishment of a permanent bench of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in the Union Territory of Ladakh. Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the decision, stating it will significantly improve access to justice for residents in the remote, high-altitude region by reducing travel time and distance for judicial proceedings.

Permanent Bench in Ladakh?

- **Current Structure:** The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh is a common High Court for both Union Territories, with its principal seats at Srinagar and Jammu. The new Ladakh bench will be its third judicial location.
- **Objective:** To bring High Court services closer to Ladakh's residents, who currently must travel long distances through difficult mountainous terrain to access the court at Jammu or Srinagar.
- **Significance:** The move strengthens local judicial infrastructure rather than creating a separate High Court for Ladakh.

Why is Judicial Access Critical?

- **Geographic Challenge:** Ladakh is a vast, sparsely populated Himalayan UT with scattered settlements across districts like Leh and Kargil. Connectivity remains limited, making travel to Jammu or Srinagar arduous for litigants and lawyers.
- **Pending Cases:** As of 30 July 2026, the High Court had **44,557 pending cases**, including over **6,100 cases pending for more than ten years.**
- **Infrastructure Gap:** A late-2025 Lok Sabha reply from the Law Ministry noted that only **five of Ladakh's ten subdivisions** had court infrastructure – namely Zaskar, Sankoo, Khaltsi, Nubra, and Drass.

Additional Info

- **J&K Reorganisation (2019):**
 - Ladakh became a separate Union Territory on **31 October 2019** following the bifurcation of the

erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into two UTs – Jammu & Kashmir (with Legislature) and Ladakh (without Legislature).

- The existing High Court was retained as the common High Court for both UTs.

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 214:** Provides for a High Court for each State.
- **Article 231:** Empowers Parliament to establish a common High Court for two or more States or UTs.

Current Administration:

- **Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh:** Vinai Kumar Saxena.

Other Cabinet Decisions (Same Briefing):

- Four railway projects and one highway project worth a combined **₹13,041 crore** were also approved, including quadrupling of sections on the Howrah-Chennai corridor.

Kerala Officially Renamed 'Keralam'

What's the News?

- The Union Government has officially renamed **Kerala** as **"Keralam"** by bringing the **Kerala (Alteration of Name) Act, 2026** into force.
- The change aligns the State's official name with **"Keralam" (കേരളം)**, the form traditionally used in Malayalam.
- The renaming followed resolutions of the **Kerala Legislative Assembly**, consideration under the constitutional procedure for altering a State's name, passage of the Bill by both Houses of Parliament and Presidential assent.

Kerala (Alteration of Name) Act, 2026

- The legislation is **Act No. 18 of 2026.**
- It provides that the **State of Kerala shall be known as the State of Keralam.**
- Consequential changes have been made to:
 - **Article 31A** of the Constitution.
 - **Article 290A** of the Constitution.
 - **First Schedule** – Entry 5 relating to the name of the State.
 - **Fourth Schedule** – Entry 9 relating to the State's representation in the Rajya Sabha.
- Central and State governments may make necessary adaptations to pre-existing laws **within one year of commencement.**
- In pending legal proceedings involving the "State of Kerala", the **State of Keralam is automatically deemed to be substituted.**

How is a State Renamed?

- **Article 3 of the Constitution** empowers Parliament to:
 - Form new States.
 - Increase or diminish the area of a State.



- Alter State boundaries.
- **Alter the name of a State.**
- A Bill involving alteration of a State must be introduced in Parliament **only on the recommendation of the President.**
- Where the proposal affects a State, the President refers it to the **concerned State Legislature for its views.**
- The State Legislature's opinion is **consultative and not binding on Parliament.**
- Parliament may enact the law through the **ordinary legislative process by a simple majority.**
- Under **Article 4**, laws made under Articles 2 and 3 can make necessary changes to the First and Fourth Schedules and are **not treated as constitutional amendments under Article 368.**

Why 'Keralam'?

- **Keralam** is the name traditionally used for the State in the **Malayalam language**, while "Kerala" became the commonly used English form.
- The move seeks to align the State's official nomenclature with its **linguistic and historical identity.**
- The earliest known epigraphic reference associated with the region occurs in **Emperor Ashoka's Rock Edict II**, which refers to "**Keralaputra**".
- One prominent interpretation links **Keralam/Cheram** with the ancient **Chera dynasty**, one of the major dynasties of early South India.
- Another popular derivation associates *kera* with **coconut** and *alam* with **land**, although the etymology of "Keralam" remains debated among scholars.

Additional Info

- **Formation of modern Keralam**
 - The modern State was created in **1956** during the linguistic reorganisation of States.
 - It brought together major Malayalam-speaking regions, including **Travancore-Cochin and the Malabar region.**
 - The **movement** for political integration of Malayalam-speaking areas was known as the **Aikya Kerala Movement.**
- **First Schedule**
 - Contains the names and territorial descriptions of India's **States and Union Territories.**
- **Fourth Schedule**
 - Deals with the **allocation of seats in the Rajya Sabha** to States and Union Territories.
- **Article 290A**

- Provides for annual payments to specified **Devaswom Funds** from the Consolidated Funds of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Article 31A

- Protects specified categories of laws, particularly those concerning **acquisition of estates and agrarian reforms**, from invalidation on certain Fundamental Rights grounds.

Uttar Pradesh Completes 700-km Ganga Floodplain Demarcation

What's the News?

- Uttar Pradesh has completed the **physical demarcation of the Ganga floodplain along about 700 km**, extending from **Unnao to Ballia** across **13 districts.**
- The State installed **7,350 boundary pillars** to physically identify the floodplain zone.
- The development was reported to the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** by the Uttar Pradesh Irrigation and Water Resource Department.
- Physical demarcation is intended to improve monitoring of **unauthorised construction, encroachment and other prohibited activities** in the floodplain.
- The exercise advances the objectives of the **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016** and earlier NGT directions.

What is a Floodplain?

- A **floodplain** is the low-lying land adjoining a river channel that is naturally inundated when river discharge exceeds the channel's carrying capacity.
- Major functions include:
 - **Flood moderation:** Provides space for floodwater to spread and reduces downstream flood intensity.
 - **Temporary water storage:** Wetlands and depressions retain excess runoff.
 - **Groundwater recharge:** Periodic inundation facilitates infiltration into aquifers.
 - **Ecological connectivity:** Supports riparian vegetation, wetlands, fisheries and other riverine ecosystems.
 - **Sediment deposition:** Accommodates natural sediment deposition and changes in river channels.
- Construction and encroachment can reduce the floodplain's water-storage capacity and aggravate flooding, erosion and waterlogging.

Ganga Floodplain Demarcation

- **Stretch:** About **700 km**
- **Coverage:** **13 districts**

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- **Endpoints: Unnao-Ballia**
- **Boundary pillars installed: 7,350**
- Physical pillars convert mapped or delineated floodplain boundaries into **identifiable on-ground limits**, helping revenue, irrigation, urban-development and local authorities regulate land use.

Status of Other Rivers

- **Delineation completed:** Yamuna, Ramganga, Betwa, Suvav, Tedhi, Budhi Ganga, Solani and Khokhri.
- **Work underway:** Includes Kali, Varuna, Hindon, Pandu, Noon, Sengur, Assi, Ishan and Krishni.
- The State has also targeted completion of delineation for the **Gomti, Ghaghra and Rapti** by the end of the current implementation timeline.
- The **Budhi Ganga** exercise was based on hydrological studies undertaken by the **National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee**, highlighting the importance of scientific river-flow data in floodplain determination.

River Ganga Authorities Order, 2016

- The **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016** provides an institutional framework for conservation and management of the Ganga.
- It seeks to regulate activities affecting the river and its **active floodplain**.
- Construction and other activities in regulated floodplain areas are subject to environmental restrictions.
- Projects falling within the framework may require clearance from the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)**.
- Municipal or development-authority approval alone does not override restrictions imposed under the Ganga conservation framework.

National Green Tribunal

- **Established:** Under the **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010**.
- It is a specialised statutory body dealing with environmental disputes and enforcement of environmental laws.
- In river-conservation cases, the NGT can:
 - seek compliance/status reports from governments;
 - monitor implementation of its directions;
 - examine violations involving encroachment and unauthorised construction; and
 - direct competent authorities to take remedial action.
- Actual demarcation, land administration and local enforcement remain primarily with State and local authorities.

Why is Floodplain Demarcation Important?

- **Disaster Management:** Preserves natural areas required for accommodating floodwater.
 - **Land-use Regulation:** Provides identifiable boundaries for controlling construction.
 - **River Conservation:** Protects wetlands, riparian habitats and natural river processes.
 - **Groundwater Security:** Safeguards important recharge zones.
 - **Governance:** Helps integrate floodplain limits into cadastral maps, development plans and building-permission systems.
 - **Enforcement:** Boundary pillars make detection of fresh encroachments easier.
- However, demarcation alone cannot restore river ecology; it must be accompanied by pollution control, scientific zoning, encroachment management and effective inter-departmental coordination.

Additional Info

• Constitutional Context

- **State List, Entry 17:** Water, irrigation, canals, drainage and related matters are primarily State subjects, subject to Union List Entry 56.
- **Union List, Entry 56:** Enables Union regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys when Parliament declares such regulation expedient in the public interest.
- **Article 48A:** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.

• Floodplain Governance Challenges

- Differences between hydrological boundaries and revenue/cadastral records.
- Urbanisation and infrastructure pressure on river-adjacent land.
- Coordination among irrigation, revenue, urban-development, pollution-control and disaster-management authorities.
- Limited uniform implementation of floodplain-zoning principles across States.
- Need to update boundaries where rivers migrate or hydrological conditions change.

Bihar Launches 'Vidya Saathi' App for 3 Lakh Students

What's the News?

- Bihar Chief Minister **Samrat Choudhary** launched the '**Bihar Vidya Saathi**' app to provide **24*7 academic assistance** to school students.

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- The platform has initially been introduced in **700 Saraswati Vidya Niketan Model Schools across all 38 districts** of Bihar.
- It is expected to directly benefit around **3 lakh students of Classes IX-XII**.
- Around **75,000 teachers** have been associated with the platform to provide personalised academic support.
- The service is **free** and provides **one-to-one live tutoring** along with AI-enabled learning resources.

Bihar Vidya Saathi App?

- **Type:** 24×7 interactive digital-learning platform.
- Students can log in using an **OTP** and select teachers according to their academic requirements.
- Major features include:
 - **One-to-one live interaction** with teachers.
 - Round-the-clock resolution of academic doubts.
 - **AI-based digital study material** and learning tools.
 - Unlimited study and practice facilities.
 - Digital resources for examination preparation.

Academic Coverage

- **Classes IX-X:** Digital study material for all subjects.
- **Classes XI-XII:** Live tutoring support, particularly for **Science-stream students**.
- Study resources are also available for:
 - **Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB)** examinations.
 - **JEE**.
 - **NEET**.
- The system is planned to be expanded beyond the initial **700 model schools** to other schools in Bihar.

Facts

- **Beneficiaries:** ~3 lakh students
- **Schools:** 700
- **Districts:** 38
- **Teachers:** ~75,000
- **Classes covered:** IX-XII
- **Availability:** 24×7
- **Mode:** Free, personalised one-to-one digital academic support

Meghalaya Assembly Unanimously Opposes Uranium Mining

What's the News?

- The **Meghalaya Legislative Assembly** unanimously adopted a resolution opposing **uranium exploration, mining and uranium ore-processing facilities** in the State.
- The resolution was moved by Chief Minister **Conrad K. Sangma** and supported by **all 60 MLAs**.

- It urges the **Union Government, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** and **Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL)** not to permit or undertake uranium-mining activities in Meghalaya.
- It specifically opposes the proposed **Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong-Mawthabah (KPM) Uranium Mining Project** in the Khasi Hills region.
- The State government will communicate the Assembly's resolution to the Union Government.

Why is Meghalaya Opposing Uranium Mining?

- Uranium deposits occur in parts of the **Khasi Hills**, including the Domiasiat-Mawthabah region.
- Local communities, traditional institutions, student organisations and civil-society groups have opposed uranium mining for decades.
- Major concerns include:
 - **Radiation and public-health risks**
 - Contamination of **streams and groundwater**
 - Ecological damage in a region characterised by **high rainfall and steep terrain**
 - Displacement and loss of community-controlled land
- Meghalaya is estimated to possess around **9,500 tonnes of uranium oxide reserves**.

KPM Uranium Mining Project

- **KPM:** Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong-Mawthabah.
- Located in the uranium-bearing Khasi Hills region of Meghalaya.
- The project was proposed by **UCIL** for uranium mining and ore processing.
- Earlier plans involved **open-cast mining** and establishment of an associated uranium ore-processing facility.
- Despite exploration and project planning, mining could not proceed because of sustained local opposition and unresolved land-related issues.

Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL)

- A **Central Public Sector Enterprise** under the **Department of Atomic Energy**.
- Responsible for the mining and processing of uranium ore for India's nuclear programme.
- Uranium extracted by UCIL forms part of the domestic fuel supply chain for nuclear-energy production.

Sixth Schedule & Land Rights in Meghalaya

- Tribal areas of Meghalaya are administered under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**.



- The Sixth Schedule operates under **Articles 244(2) and 275(1)** and provides for **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)**.
- Land in Meghalaya is extensively held under **community, clan and individual customary ownership**, making land acquisition and mining proposals particularly sensitive.
- The Supreme Court, in **State of Meghalaya v. All Dimas Students Union (2019)**, recognised that private/community landowners in Meghalaya can possess rights over both the **surface and sub-soil minerals**.

Uranium Regulation in India

- Uranium is a strategically important **radioactive/atomic mineral**.
- The **Atomic Energy Act, 1962** gives the Central Government extensive powers over:
 - Discovery of uranium and thorium
 - Mining and concentration of uranium-bearing substances
 - Acquisition and disposal of uranium
 - Radiation and nuclear safety
- **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE):**
 - Functions directly under the **Prime Minister**.
 - Responsible for India's nuclear-energy and atomic-mineral programmes.
- **Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD):**
 - Constituent unit of DAE.

- Undertakes exploration and assessment of uranium and other atomic-mineral resources.

Resolution vs Legal Ban

- The Assembly resolution formally records the **unanimous political position of Meghalaya** against uranium mining.
- It calls upon the Centre, DAE and UCIL to halt or avoid such activities.
- An **Assembly resolution itself is not equivalent to a separate statutory prohibition enacted through legislation**, but it carries substantial political and institutional significance given Meghalaya's distinctive land-tenure system.



Defence

IAF Conducts Counter-Drone Exercise ROTOR CLAP III in Rajasthan

What's the News?

The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** concluded the week-long **Exercise ROTOR CLAP III** at the **Pokhran Field Firing Range** in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan.

The third edition of the specialised helicopter exercise was based on the theme "**Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (Counter-UAS)**". It brought together helicopter units from across the IAF to test operational concepts, improve coordination and strengthen preparedness against emerging drone threats.

Exercise ROTOR CLAP III?

- **Conducted by:** Indian Air Force
- **Edition:** Third
- **Location:** Pokhran Field Firing Range, Rajasthan
- **Type:** Specialised rotary-wing or helicopter exercise
- **Theme:** Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems
- **Nature:** Domestic IAF exercise; not a bilateral or multinational drill

Its primary objective was to validate **Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs)** for integrated helicopter operations against low-altitude unmanned aerial threats under realistic desert conditions.

Major Operational Activities

The exercise included:

- Detection, tracking and neutralisation of simulated aerial threats.
- Live firing of missiles and rockets from helicopters.
- Precision-strike and battlefield-support missions.
- Aerial reconnaissance.
- Troop insertion and casualty evacuation.
- Coordinated operations against aerial and ground-based threats.
- Testing of mission planning, rapid response and interoperability among helicopter units.

Participating Helicopter Platforms

Nearly all major IAF helicopter platforms participated:

- **Attack and combat helicopters**
 - AH-64E Apache
 - HAL Prachand Light Combat Helicopter
 - Mi-25/35 gunships
- **Transport and utility helicopters**
 - CH-47F Chinook
 - Mi-17
 - HAL Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter

The combination enabled the IAF to test attack, transport, battlefield-support and utility roles within an integrated operational framework.

Counter-UAS?

Counter-UAS refers to systems and operational measures used to:

- Detect unmanned aerial vehicles.
- Track and identify potential threats.
- Disrupt or intercept hostile drones.
- Neutralise them through kinetic or non-kinetic means.

The exercise specifically assessed helicopter-based responses to evolving drone threats and their integration into wider battlefield operations.

Additional Info

- **Pokhran Field Firing Range**
 - Located in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan.
 - It is a major military training area used for live operational drills and weapons exercises.
- **Rotary-wing aircraft**
 - Aircraft that generate lift through rotating blades, primarily helicopters.
 - They can perform vertical take-off and landing, low-altitude operations, troop transport and close battlefield support.
- **Tactics, Techniques and Procedures**
 - **Tactics:** Employment of forces to achieve an operational objective.
 - **Techniques:** Methods used to perform specific military tasks.
 - **Procedures:** Standardised steps followed during operations.
- **Notes**
 - Exercise: **ROTOR CLAP III**
 - Conducting force: **Indian Air Force**
 - Venue: **Pokhran Field Firing Range**
 - State: **Rajasthan**
 - Central theme: **Counter-UAS**
 - Indigenous combat helicopter: **HAL Prachand**

India Successfully Test-Fires Nuclear-Capable Agni-IV Ballistic Missile

What's the News?

- India successfully conducted a **user trial of the nuclear-capable Agni-IV ballistic missile** from the **Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha**.
- The launch was conducted under the aegis of the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**.
- The test successfully validated **all operational and technical parameters**, reaffirming the missile system's reliability and operational readiness.



- The Ministry of Defence officially describes **Agni-IV as a Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)**.

Agni-IV Missile

- **Developer:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)
- **Type:** Surface-to-surface ballistic missile
- **Range:** Around **4,000 km**
- **Length:** About **20 metres**
- **Propulsion:** **Two-stage solid-fuel** system
- **Payload:** Around **1,000 kg**
- **Warhead:** Capable of carrying **nuclear or conventional** payloads
- **Mobility:** **Road-mobile**, improving survivability and deployment flexibility.
- **Navigation:** Uses technologies such as:
 - Ring Laser Gyro-based **Inertial Navigation System (INS)**
 - Micro-navigation system
 - Digital control system
 - Advanced onboard computer and avionics
- Its re-entry heat shield is designed to withstand external temperatures exceeding **3,000°C** while protecting internal systems.

Why is Agni-IV Significant?

- Agni-IV strengthens the **land-based component of India's strategic nuclear deterrent**.
- Its approximately **4,000-km range** provides India with a substantial regional strike capability.
- **Solid-fuel propulsion** enables faster preparation than liquid-fuel systems.
- **Road mobility** makes the missile more difficult to detect and pre-emptively target, increasing survivability.
- Periodic user trials by the SFC validate an already-developed weapon system under operational conditions rather than merely testing a new technology.

Strategic Forces Command

- **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** is the tri-service organisation responsible for operational management of India's strategic nuclear forces.
- It forms part of India's **Nuclear Command Authority (NCA)** framework.
- It was established in **2003**.
- The NCA comprises:
 - **Political Council:** Chaired by the **Prime Minister**; it is the sole authority that can authorise the use of nuclear weapons.
 - **Executive Council:** Provides inputs and executes directions of the Political Council.

Additional Info

- **India's Nuclear Doctrine**
 - Based on **Credible Minimum Deterrence**.

- Follows a **No First Use (NFU)** posture—nuclear weapons are intended for retaliation against a nuclear attack on India or Indian forces.
- Nuclear retaliation to a first strike is envisaged as **massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage**.
- India maintains a policy of non-use against non-nuclear-weapon states, while retaining a nuclear-response option in case of a major **chemical or biological weapons attack**.

Indian Navy-US Navy EOD Exercise 2026 Begins in Kochi

What's the News?

- The **Indian Navy and US Navy** have begun the **Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Exercise 2026** at the **Southern Naval Command (SNC), Kochi, Kerala**.
- The **five-day bilateral exercise** brings together specialist **diving and EOD teams** from both navies.
- It is the **8th edition** of the specialised India-US Salvage and EOD training series.
- The primary objective is to improve **interoperability, operational coordination and professional cooperation** in specialised maritime operations.

EOD Exercise 2026

- **Participants:** Indian Navy and US Navy
- **Venue:** Southern Naval Command, Kochi
- **Edition:** 8th
- **Nature:** Bilateral specialised naval exercise
- **Focus:** Diving, underwater salvage and Explosive Ordnance Disposal operations.
- India and the US have conducted joint **Salvage and EOD exercises since 2005**.

Training Components

The exercise includes:

- **Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs)**
 - Exchange of technical knowledge, contemporary EOD methodologies and operational practices.
- **Cross-training**
 - Personnel train with each other's procedures, equipment and operational concepts.
- **Equipment demonstrations**
 - Familiarisation with modern and emerging EOD technologies.
- **Scenario-based practical exercises**
 - Training for realistic maritime explosive-ordnance and salvage situations.

It enables both navies to understand each other's **capabilities, operational concepts, employment philosophies and best practices** while refining common procedures.

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What is Explosive Ordnance Disposal?

EOD is the specialised process of detecting, identifying, rendering safe, recovering and disposing of explosive hazards.

In the maritime domain, EOD personnel may deal with:

- underwater mines;
- unexploded ordnance (UXO);
- bombs and other explosive devices;
- underwater explosive threats; and
- explosive hazards encountered during salvage operations.

Additional Info

- **Southern Naval Command (SNC)**
 - Headquarters: **Kochi, Kerala.**
 - It is the **Training Command of the Indian Navy.**
 - The other two principal naval commands are:
 - **Western Naval Command – Mumbai**
 - **Eastern Naval Command – Visakhapatnam**
 - The SNC is responsible for training naval personnel from basic to advanced stages.
- **India-US Salvage & EOD Cooperation**
 - Joint Salvage and EOD exercises have been conducted since **2005.**
 - The 2026 exercise is the **8th edition.**
 - Earlier iterations of this specialised cooperation have also been associated with the **SALVEX (Salvage Exercise)** series.

Indian Navy Launches Next-Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel 'Shruti'

What's the News?

- **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE), Kolkata,** has launched '**Shruti**' (Yard 3037), a **Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (NGOPV)** being built for the **Indian Navy.**
- It is the **second NGOPV launched by GRSE,** following *Sanghmitra*, under the Navy's larger **11-ship NGOPV programme.**
- **Manika Sadhu** formally launched the vessel in the presence of **Vice Admiral Sanjay Sadhu,** Controller of Warship Production & Acquisition (CWP&A), Indian Navy.
- The vessel will strengthen the Navy's capabilities in **maritime surveillance, anti-piracy operations, search and rescue, offshore asset protection and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).**
- The project supports **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** and **Make in India** through indigenous warship design and construction.

NGOPV 'Shruti'?

- **Builder:** Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE), Kolkata
- **Yard Number:** 3037

- **Type:** Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel
- **Length:** ~113 metres
- **Width:** ~14.6 metres
- **Displacement:** ~3,000 tonnes
- **Maximum Speed:** 23 knots
- **Endurance/Range:** ~8,500 nautical miles at 14 knots
- Compared with earlier Offshore Patrol Vessels, the NGOPVs provide **greater endurance, enhanced firepower, modern sensors and higher operational versatility.**

Operational Roles

The NGOPVs are designed for multi-mission deployment, including:

- **Maritime surveillance and interdiction**
- **Protection of coastal and offshore assets**
- **Anti-piracy and counter-infiltration operations**
- **Anti-poaching and anti-trafficking operations**
- **Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS)**
- **Search and Rescue (SAR)**
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**
- **Mine-warfare and special operations**
- **Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO)**
- **Out-of-Area Contingency Operations**
- **Specialised hospital, communications-intelligence and fleet-maintenance support roles.**

NGOPV Programme

- The Ministry of Defence is procuring **11 Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels** for the Indian Navy at a total contracted cost of **₹9,781 crore.**
- The programme is being executed under the **Buy (Indian-IDDMM)** procurement category.
- **Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL): 7 vessels**
- **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE): 4 vessels**
- The vessels are to be **indigenously designed, developed and manufactured.**
- The programme is estimated to generate around **110 lakh man-days of employment over 7.5 years** while supporting domestic shipbuilding and associated MSMEs.

Additional Info

- **Buy (Indian-IDDMM)**
 - **IDDMM** stands for **Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured.**
 - It is a defence-procurement category intended to prioritise indigenous design, manufacturing and domestic defence-industrial capability.
- **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)**
 - Headquarters/shipbuilding facilities: **Kolkata, West Bengal**

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- A **Government of India** undertaking under the **Ministry of Defence**.
- GRSE was accorded **Navratna PSU status in 2026**.
- It has supplied **more than 110 warships to the Indian Navy** and has built over **800 ships and platforms** for domestic and overseas customers.

India and Malaysia Conduct Exercise Udara Shakti 2026

What's the News?

- The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** and **Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF)** conducted the five-day bilateral air exercise **Udara Shakti 2026** at **Subang Air Base, Malaysia**.
- The exercise focused on **joint field training, operational learning, exchange of best practices and interoperability** between the two air forces.
- It involved **83 personnel and 11 aircraft**, including the **first participation of IAF Rafale fighters in Exercise Udara Shakti**.

Exercise Udara Shakti?

- **Type:** Bilateral Air Force exercise
- **Participants:** Indian Air Force and Royal Malaysian Air Force
- **Venue:** Subang Air Base, Selangor, Malaysia
- **Duration:** Five days
- **Major objectives:**
 - Enhance interoperability between the two air forces.
 - Familiarise personnel with each other's operational procedures and tactics.
 - Conduct advanced air-combat training.
 - Exchange professional expertise through **Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs)**.

The formal Udara Shakti series began in **2022**, when the first exercise under this name was held at Kuantan Air Base, Malaysia. The 2024 edition also involved IAF Su-30MKI and RMAF Su-30MKM fighters.

Aircraft Participation

Indian Air Force

- **4 Rafale fighter aircraft** – No. 101 Squadron
- **2 C-17 Globemaster III strategic transport aircraft** – No. 81 Squadron

Royal Malaysian Air Force

- **2 Su-30MKM fighters** – No. 12 Squadron
- **2 F/A-18D Hornet fighters** – No. 18 Squadron
- **1 Airbus A400M transport aircraft** – No. 8 Squadron

Training Focus

Major activities included:

- **Dissimilar Basic Fighter Manoeuvres (DBFM)**
- **Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT)**
- **Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR)**

- Strategic airlift operations
- Joint field training
- Aerial photography missions (**PHOTEX**)
- Subject Matter Expert Exchanges on:
 - Integrated air operations
 - Doctrine and scenario planning
 - Training concepts
 - Application of science and technology in modern air warfare

Dissimilar Air Combat Training is particularly significant because pilots train against aircraft with different performance characteristics, improving their ability to operate in complex combat environments.

Additional Info

India-Malaysia Defence Exercises

- **Udara Shakti**
 - Air Forces
 - IAF + Royal Malaysian Air Force
- **Harimau Shakti**
 - Armies
 - Indian Army + Malaysian Army
 - Fifth edition was conducted in 2025.
- **Samudra Laksamana**
 - Navies
 - Indian Navy + Royal Malaysian Navy
 - Focuses on maritime interoperability and operational cooperation.
- **India-Malaysia Relations**
 - Diplomatic relations were established in **1957**.
 - Relations became a **Strategic Partnership in 2010**.
 - Upgraded to an **Enhanced Strategic Partnership in 2015**.
 - Elevated to a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2024**.
 - Malaysia is an important partner in India's **Act East Policy** and wider Indo-Pacific engagement.

India-Thailand Joint Military Exercise MAITREE-XV Begins in Thailand

What's the News?

- The **15th edition of Exercise MAITREE (MAITREE-XV)**, a bilateral military exercise between **India and Thailand**, has begun at **Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp, Surat Thani, Thailand**.
- The **Indian Army** and **Royal Thai Army** have deployed **85 personnel each**, taking total participation to **170 troops**.
- The exercise focuses on **joint counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations** in **jungle and semi-urban terrain**.

- Its primary objectives are to improve **interoperability, operational coordination and military cooperation** between the two armies.

Exercise MAITREE

- **Type:** Bilateral Army exercise
- **Countries:** India and Thailand
- **Started:** 2006
- **Current Edition:** 15th (MAITREE-XV)
- **Venue:** Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp, **Surat Thani, Thailand**
- **Level:** Company-level joint training
- It provides a platform to:
 - Share operational experience and best practices.
 - Develop common tactical procedures.
 - Improve interoperability between the two armies.
 - Demonstrate contemporary military equipment and technologies.

Participating Contingents

- **Indian Army**
 - Strength: **85 personnel**
 - Mainly represented by troops of **9 Gorkha Rifles**.
- **Royal Thai Army**
 - Strength: **85 personnel**
 - Represented by the **3rd Battalion, 25th Infantry Brigade, 5th Division**.

Training Focus

- Joint **counter-insurgency operations**.
- Joint **counter-terrorist operations**.
- Operations in:
 - **Jungle terrain**
 - **Semi-urban environments**
- Training components include:
 - Field exercises
 - Combat discussions
 - Lectures
 - Tactical demonstrations
 - Exchange of operational experience
 - A **culminating validation exercise**
- The operations are practised within the framework of **Chapter VII of the UN Charter**.

Additional Info

- **Chapter VII of the UN Charter**
 - Deals with **"Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression."**
 - Empowers the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** to determine threats to international peace and take appropriate measures.
 - Measures may include:
 - **Non-military measures** such as economic sanctions.
 - **Military action** when necessary for maintaining or restoring international peace and security.
- **Previous MAITREE Edition**

- **MAITREE-XIV** was conducted in **2025** at the **Foreign Training Node, Umroi, Meghalaya**.
- The exercise alternates training exposure across Indian and Thai operational environments.
- **India-Thailand Defence Relevance**
 - Thailand is an important Southeast Asian partner under India's **Act East Policy**.
 - Both countries are members of **BIMSTEC**, strengthening India's strategic engagement across the Bay of Bengal region.
 - Regular military exercises such as MAITREE support **defence diplomacy, interoperability and regional security cooperation**.

Defence Ministry Notifies Sixth Positive Indigenisation List of 405 Items

What's the News?

- The **Department of Defence Production (DDP)**, Ministry of Defence has notified the **Sixth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL)** covering **405 strategically important defence items**.
- The items have an estimated domestic **business potential of ₹3,070 crore**.
- Of the 405 items:
 - **389** are associated with **Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)**.
 - **16** are associated with the **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)**.
- The initiative is part of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence**, aimed at reducing import dependence and expanding opportunities for Indian industry, particularly **MSMEs**.

Sixth Positive Indigenisation List

- The list covers:
 - **Line Replaceable Units (LRUs)**
 - Sub-systems and sub-assemblies
 - Spares and components
 - Raw materials
- After successful indigenous development, these items will be **procured from Indian industry**.
- Indigenisation will be undertaken by DPSUs and the ICG through routes including the **'Make' procedure and in-house development**, with industry participation.

Major Platforms & Systems Covered

- **Air platforms:** Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), Light Utility Helicopter (LUH), **Su-30MKI, Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)** and AL-31FP engine.
- **Armoured platforms:** **T-72, T-90 and BMP-II**.
- **Missile systems:** **Konkurs-M, Invar and MRSAM**.



- Other items relate to:
 - Warships
 - Radars and sonars
 - Fire-control systems
 - Satellite communication systems
 - **High Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) ammunition.**

SRIJAN Defence Portal

- The **SRIJAN Defence Portal** was launched by the DDP to provide a platform for **DPSUs and Service Headquarters (SHQs)** to offer defence items to Indian industry for indigenous development.
- It particularly facilitates participation by **MSMEs and start-ups.**
- Figures:
 - **More than 33,000 items** have been offered for indigenisation through the portal.
 - The **first five PILs contained 5,012 items.**
 - **More than 15,700 defence items** have already been indigenised.
 - Estimated **import substitution: about ₹9,000 crore** over the last five years.
 - DPSUs have placed domestic procurement orders, including in-house production, worth around **₹10,000 crore.**

Additional Info

- **Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs)**
 - Identify defence equipment, components and materials targeted for **indigenous development and domestic procurement.**
 - They support:
 - Import substitution
 - Domestic defence manufacturing
 - Technology development
 - MSME and private-sector participation
 - Strategic autonomy
- **Department of Defence Production (DDP)**
 - Functions under the **Ministry of Defence.**
 - Deals with development of India's defence production ecosystem and indigenisation of defence equipment.
- **Indian Coast Guard**
 - An armed force under the **Ministry of Defence.**
 - Responsible primarily for maritime law enforcement, coastal security assistance, search and rescue, and protection of India's maritime interests.

DRDO Invites Private Firms as Strategic Weapon Partners Under DcPP Model

What's the News?

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), through its **Research Centre Imarat (RCI)** in Hyderabad, issued an **Expression of Interest (EoI)** inviting Indian private defence firms to partner in the development and production of **missile and guided bomb systems.** This marks the first time DRDO has opened strategic weapon manufacturing – including the **Agni-series missiles** and future nuclear weapon variants – to the private sector under the **Development-cum-Production Partner (DcPP)** model.

DcPP Model & Weapon Systems?

- **Development-cum-Production Partner (DcPP):** A defence production framework where DRDO retains control over **design and development**, while the private partner handles **prototype integration, qualification testing, and mass production.**
- **Weapon Systems Covered:**
 - **Agni-series ballistic missiles**
 - **Future nuclear weapon variants**, including submarine-launched systems
 - **Hypersonic missiles** under development
- **Selection:** At least **two private companies** will be selected for each project. They will co-develop prototypes and subsequently compete for bulk production orders of **50 to 100+ units** from strategic forces.

Eligibility & Qualifying Criteria?

- **Mandatory Licences:**
 - Industrial licence for **defence manufacturing**
 - **PESO (Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation)** licence for handling and storing explosives
- **Financial Thresholds:**
 - **Minimum annual turnover:** ₹100 crore
 - **Minimum net worth:** ₹34 crore (or >5% of the Acceptance of Necessity value of the project)
 - **Profitability:** In at least two of the last five years
 - **Credit rating:** Minimum BBB (stable) from CRISIL, ICRA, or equivalent
- **Technical & Infrastructure Requirements:**
 - Proven **project management expertise** and track record in executing production orders at scale
 - **Quality Management System:** ISO 9001:2015 or AS9100 (preferred)
 - **Explosives storage facility:** Capacity to hold at least **5 tonnes** of explosives (including TNT and



RDX) within one year of production order

- **SAMAR Assessment Certificate** from DRDO's DIIQM required by May 2027
- Compliance with **DRDO cyber-security guidelines**
- **Evaluation:** 100 marks across technical criteria, licences, management experience, and infrastructure; firms must score **>60% overall** and **≥50% in each technical category**.
- **Due Diligence:** A DRDO-formed panel of experts will visit each applicant's premises to assess capabilities before shortlisting.

Additional Info

- **DRDO:** Functions under the **Ministry of Defence**; premier agency for military research and development in missiles, aeronautics, electronics, and combat systems.
- **Research Centre Imarat (RCI):** Located in Hyderabad; specialises in missile systems development and advanced avionics.
- **Current Production Landscape:** Strategic weapons have primarily been produced by public sector undertakings such as **Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL)**.
- **Expected Contenders:** Established private players such as **Solar Aerospace and Defence** and **Tata Advanced Systems Ltd** are expected to participate.
- **Transfer of Technology (ToT):** Will be provided **free of cost on a non-exclusive basis** after successful completion of the DRDO development phase; ToT for high-energy materials will be restricted to PESO-licensed industries.
- **Timeline:**
 - **Technical interaction:** 2 September 2026
 - **Proposal submission deadline:** 24 September 2026
 - **Proposal opening:** 25 September 2026
 - **Validity of shortlisted firms:** Two years from approval

Territorial Army Launches Terrier Cyber Quest 2026 (TCQ 3.0)

What's the News?

The Territorial Army of India, in collaboration with the non-profit organisation CyberPeace, has launched the third edition of its national hackathon – Terrier Cyber Quest 2026 (TCQ 3.0). The initiative aims to crowdsource indigenous technological solutions for emerging defence and cybersecurity challenges. It is open to students, startups, security researchers, and digital content creators, with registrations currently underway and the grand finale scheduled in New Delhi.

Terrier Cyber Quest 2026?

- **Overview:** TCQ 3.0 is a national-level hackathon focused on cyber defence, artificial intelligence, threat mitigation, and digital awareness for national security. It seeks to promote home-grown technological solutions aligned with India's defence needs.
- **Organisers:** The Territorial Army (a part-time reserve force of the Indian Army) is partnering with CyberPeace, an Indian cybersecurity non-profit. The Ministry of Defence is associated with the shortlisting phase.
- **Timeline:** Registrations opened in late July and the deadline has been extended to 31 August 2026. Online screening and shortlisting will follow, with the grand finale and award ceremony held in New Delhi in October 2026.
- **Participation:** The competition is open to students, startups, security researchers, and digital content creators across the country.

Competition Tracks?

- **Bug Hunting:** Participants compete in an online Capture-the-Flag (CTF) qualifier, followed by a 36-hour live sandbox finale. Finalists must identify and document vulnerabilities in simulated critical infrastructure systems.
- **AI Kavach:** This track invites solutions based on machine learning and artificial intelligence for automated cyber defence, predictive threat intelligence, and anomaly detection.
- **National Creators Challenge:** Digital content creators are tasked with designing educational media campaigns to raise awareness against deepfakes, phishing, and online misinformation.

Additional Info

- **Territorial Army (TA):**
 - A part-time reserve force of the Indian Army, providing military training to citizens who can serve during national emergencies.
 - Established under the Territorial Army Act, 1948.
 - Comprises departmental units (e.g., railways, oil, telecommunication) and non-departmental infantry battalions.
- **CyberPeace:**
 - An Indian non-profit organisation working in the domain of cybersecurity, digital safety, and cyber hygiene awareness.
 - Engages in policy research, capacity building, and public-private partnerships to strengthen India's cyber resilience.
- **Capture-the-Flag (CTF):**

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- A standard cybersecurity competition format used globally to test offensive and defensive skills.
- Participants solve security-related challenges to find hidden "flags" (strings of text) embedded in systems.
- **Digital Threats Addressed:**
 - **Deepfakes:** AI-generated synthetic media that can manipulate audio/video to spread disinformation.
 - **Phishing:** Fraudulent attempts to obtain sensitive information by disguising as trustworthy entities.
 - **Misinformation:** False or inaccurate information spread regardless of intent to mislead.

IAF Expands Indigenous Maintenance Network with 930 Indian Firms

What's the News?

- The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** has expanded its indigenous aircraft-maintenance ecosystem to around **930 Indian companies**, covering mechanical, electrical, electronic and rubber-based components.
- The IAF Maintenance Command has indigenised around **62,300 spares**, reducing dependence on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and improving operational availability.
- The initiative combines domestic manufacturing with technologies such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Twins and 3D printing**, supporting the broader objective of **Aatmanirbharta in defence**.

Indigenisation Achievements

- Around **97% of frequently required operational spares** have been indigenised.
- Around **93% of mandatory spares required for overhaul of decentralised fleets** are now indigenous.
- Approximately **₹582 crore in foreign exchange** has been saved over the previous five years.
- The domestic share of IAF's **capital budget expenditure reached about 90%** during the previous two financial years.
- Indigenised items include:
 - Aircraft batteries and tyres
 - Pilot parachutes
 - Escape-air explosives used in ejection systems
 - Power carts
 - Hydraulic components, including equipment for the **Su-30** fleet.

Technology-Led Maintenance

- **Artificial Intelligence:** Used to analyse equipment and maintenance data to identify patterns and potential failures.

- **Digital Twin:** A virtual representation of a physical aircraft, component or system that can help monitor performance and support **predictive maintenance**.
- **3D Printing/Additive Manufacturing:**
 - The IAF operates an in-house **3D Additive Manufacturing Centre**.
 - It can manufacture selected **non-critical airborne spares and ground-equipment components** on demand.
 - Materials used for suitable applications include **aluminium, steel and titanium alloys**.

These technologies can reduce maintenance turnaround time and dependence on lengthy overseas supply chains.

MSMEs & Start-ups

- Around **180 projects involving MSMEs and start-ups** are being pursued through defence-indigenisation programmes.
- These projects represent reported business opportunities exceeding **₹17,000 crore**.
- Major mechanisms include:
 - **Make projects**
 - **Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)**
 - **Technology Development Fund (TDF)**

Additional Info

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)

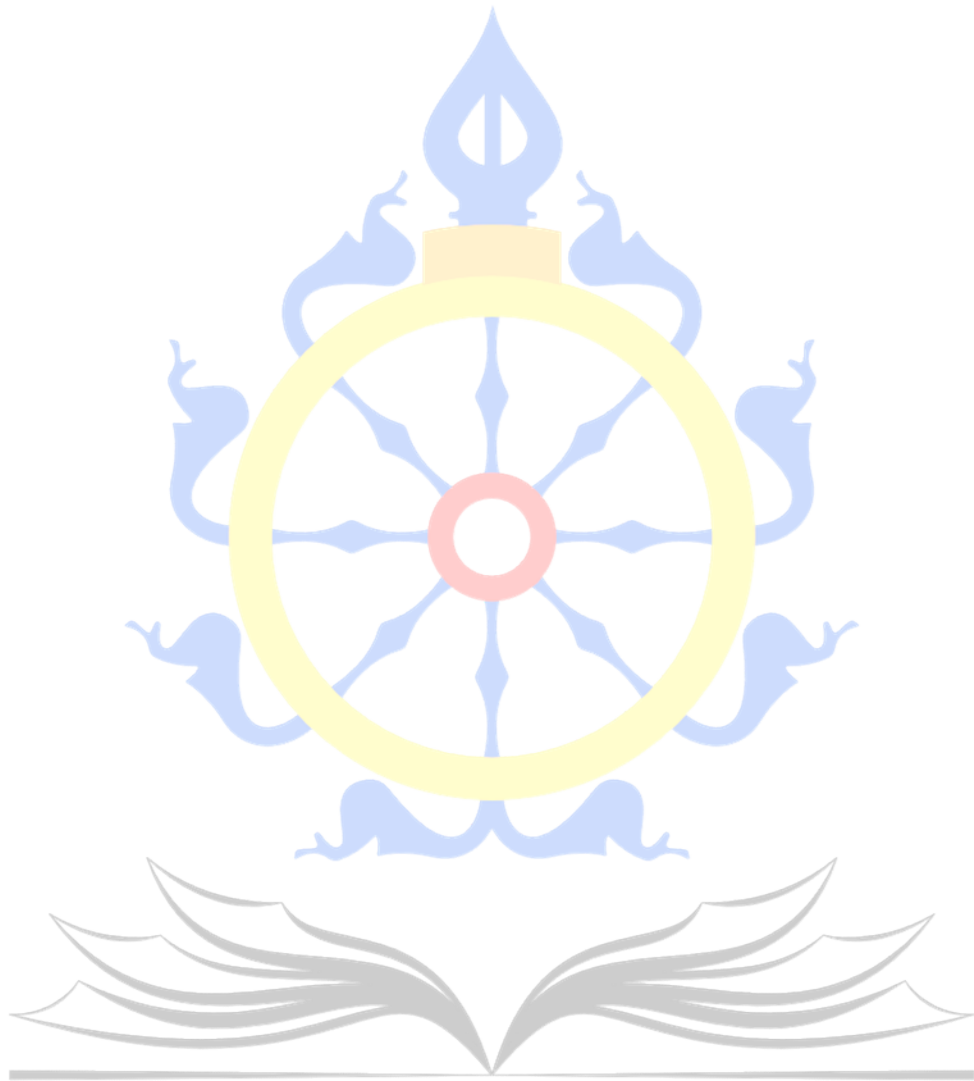
- A flagship initiative of the **Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence**.
- Seeks to promote defence and aerospace innovation through **start-ups, MSMEs, individual innovators, academia and R&D institutions**.
- Implemented through the **Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO)**.

Technology Development Fund (TDF)

- A **Ministry of Defence** programme executed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- Encourages development of indigenous cutting-edge defence technologies, particularly through **MSMEs and start-ups**.
- Provides grant support for industry-led R&D, including collaboration with academia and research institutions.

Make Procedure

- Part of India's defence-acquisition framework for promoting indigenous design and development.
- **Make-I:** Primarily government-funded development.
- **Make-II:** Industry-funded development aimed at import substitution and indigenous manufacture.



International Relations

Operation Trishul Brings Back 274 Fugitives from 36 Countries

What's the News?

India has brought back **274 fugitives from 36 countries since 2019** under **Operation Trishul**, a fugitive-tracking and repatriation initiative. The fugitives were wanted in serious cases such as terrorism, narco-terrorism, organised crime, financial fraud, murder, sexual offences and human trafficking. The operation uses technology-based tracking and international police cooperation to locate fugitives hiding abroad.

Operation Trishul

- Operation Trishul is aimed at tracing and bringing back Indian fugitives who escape to other countries.
- It uses:
 - Satellite imagery
 - Surveillance inputs
 - Digital footprints
 - Profile mapping
 - International police databases
- It targets fugitives who may change names, identities or locations after leaving India.
- The operation involves coordination among:
 - **Intelligence Bureau**
 - **Central Bureau of Investigation**
 - **Research and Analysis Wing**
 - **State police forces**
 - **Interpol**

Data

- **274 fugitives** brought back since 2019.
- Fugitives brought back from **36 countries**.
- Category-wise cases included:
 - **17** fugitives wanted in terrorism and narco-terrorism cases.
 - **42** fugitives linked to organised crime, gangsterism and extortion.
 - **53** fugitives booked in sexual offences, including POCSO-related cases.
- **70 fugitives** were brought back in 2025.
- At least **45 fugitives** were brought back by July 2026.
- Assets worth **₹17,874 crore** were attached under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002**.
- Restitution worth **₹18,762 crore** was recovered during the same period.

Institutional Mechanism

- **CBI Special Global Operations Centre**
 - Coordinates with foreign law-enforcement agencies.
 - Helps track and process return of fugitives through legal and diplomatic channels.

Interpol

- Supports cross-border policing through notices, databases and secure communication systems.
- Helps locate fugitives and coordinate with member countries.

BHARATPOL

- Launched to connect Indian law-enforcement agencies with Interpol-linked mechanisms.
- Links more than **1,400 Central and State law-enforcement units**.
- Helps speed up requests related to fugitives, cybercrime, narcotics and organised crime.

Extradition and Repatriation

- **Extradition** is the formal surrender of an accused or convicted person by one country to another.
- India uses:
 - Extradition treaties
 - Mutual legal assistance treaties
 - Interpol notices
 - Deportation and repatriation channels
 - Diplomatic coordination
- The process is important in cases involving:
 - Economic offences
 - Terror financing
 - Organised crime
 - Narcotics networks
 - Cyber-enabled offences

Additional Info

Extradition Act, 1962

- Governs extradition of fugitive criminals in India.
- Applies through extradition treaties, arrangements or notified conventions.
- Covers both extradition from India and extradition to India.

Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002

- Enables attachment, confiscation and recovery of proceeds of crime.
- Relevant for economic offenders, fraud cases and terror-financing cases.

POCSO Act, 2012

- Provides legal protection to children from sexual offences.
- Some fugitives brought back under Operation Trishul were linked to sexual offences, including POCSO cases.

Interpol Notices

- **Red Notice:** Request to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition or similar legal action.



- **Blue Notice:** Request to collect information about a person's identity, location or activities.
- **Yellow Notice:** Used to help locate missing persons.

Sources

- Hindustan Times
- Zee News

Massachusetts Declares August 15 as "India Day"

What's the News?

- **Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey** has proclaimed **August 15 as "India Day"**, recognising the contributions of the Indian diaspora to the US state.
- **Boston Mayor Michelle Wu** issued a similar proclamation for the city.
- The observance coincides with the **79th anniversary of India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947**.
- The proclamations recognise Indian-Americans' contribution to **medicine, science, technology, education, business and public service**, while promoting cultural exchange and civic engagement.

Why "India Day"?

- The proclamation highlights India as the **world's largest democracy** and recognises its cultural diversity and civilisational heritage.
- It also acknowledges the Indian-American community's role in strengthening the **social, economic and civic fabric** of Massachusetts.
- Community organisations in the state regularly organise Independence Day celebrations and community-service activities.

Indian Diaspora in the US

- The proclamation notes:
 - **36 million+** people of Indian origin live outside India.
 - **5 million+** people of Indian origin live in the **United States**.
- Indian-Americans have a significant presence in sectors such as:
 - Healthcare
 - Science & technology
 - Higher education
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Public administration and civic life.

India-Boston Connect

- Boston's proclamation also welcomed the establishment of the **Consulate General of India in Boston**.
- The Consulate serves five New England states:
 - **Maine**
 - **Massachusetts**

- **New Hampshire**
- **Rhode Island**
- **Vermont**.

- Boston also highlighted the visit of **INS Sudarshini** during **SAILBOSTON-250**.
 - **INS Sudarshini** is a sail-training ship of the **Indian Navy**.
 - SAILBOSTON-250 formed part of the international **Sail250** tall-ships gathering linked to the **250th anniversary of US independence**.

Additional Info

- **Massachusetts**
 - Region: **New England, northeastern United States**
 - Capital: **Boston**
 - Governor: **Maura Healey**
 - Massachusetts is one of the **50 US states**; it officially uses the designation **"Commonwealth"**, which does not give it a different constitutional status from other US states.
- **India's Independence Day**
 - Observed on **August 15**.
 - India became independent from British rule in **1947**.
 - 2026 represents the **79th anniversary of independence** (79 completed years since 1947).
- **Earlier Recognition**
 - Massachusetts had also proclaimed **August 15 as India Day in 2025**, indicating continuing official recognition of the Indian-American community and its Independence Day celebrations.

BRICS Adopts Joint Declaration to Strengthen Industrial Cooperation

What's the News?

- The **10th BRICS Industry Ministers' Meeting**, held in **Jaipur, Rajasthan**, concluded under **India's BRICS Chairship 2026**.
- BRICS members adopted a **Joint Declaration** aimed at strengthening industrial cooperation and promoting **innovation-led, resilient and sustainable industrial growth**.
- The meeting focused particularly on **MSMEs, photovoltaic industries, startups, digital transformation, transport and logistics**.
- The ministerial engagement was conducted under the **BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR)**.

Outcomes

Four major areas of practical cooperation were advanced:

- **MSMEs**
 - Framework for Cooperation under the **SME Working Group** was finalised.



- Focus: stronger MSME ecosystems, capacity building and cross-BRICS industrial cooperation.
- **Photovoltaic Industry**
 - **Terms of Reference and Action Plan** for the BRICS Working Group on Photovoltaic Industry were adopted.
 - Creates a structured mechanism for cooperation in the **solar photovoltaic sector**.
- **Startups**
 - An Action Plan for **innovation-led growth through startups** was finalised.
 - India additionally proposed a **BRICS Incubator Network** and **BRICS Startup Innovation Fund**.
- **Logistics**
 - Emphasis was placed on resilient industry-related transport and logistics systems.
 - Areas highlighted included **GIS-based infrastructure planning** and **City Logistics Planning**.

PartNIR

PartNIR stands for **BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution**.

- It is the principal BRICS mechanism for practical cooperation relating to:
 - Advanced manufacturing
 - Industrial digitalisation
 - Industry 4.0
 - Innovation
 - Technology cooperation
 - Skills and capacity building
 - MSME competitiveness.
- The Jaipur meeting reaffirmed PartNIR as a platform for moving from policy dialogue towards **implementable industrial partnerships**.

BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies

- The **BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC)** operates in partnership with the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**.
- It provides integrated support to manufacturing companies and MSMEs, particularly for developing **Industry 4.0 capabilities**.
- India formally joined BCIC in 2026.
- **National Productivity Council (NPC)** has been designated as the **India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies**.
- **DPIIT**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, provides policy guidance for India's participation.

India's BRICS Chairship 2026

- **Theme:** *Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability.*
- India's industrial-cooperation agenda seeks to create more durable institutional

mechanisms in areas such as MSMEs, clean technology, startups and logistics.

- The Jaipur declaration therefore emphasises **implementation-oriented cooperation**, rather than only ministerial dialogue.

Additional Info: BRICS

- **Nature:** Intergovernmental grouping of major emerging economies.
- **Original members:** Brazil, Russia, India and China; South Africa subsequently joined.
- **Current full members:** **Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE and Indonesia.**
 - Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and UAE became members in **2024**.
 - Indonesia became a full member in **2025**.
- **First BRIC Summit:** Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- Major pillars of BRICS cooperation:
 - Political and security
 - Economic and financial
 - Cultural and people-to-people cooperation.
- BRICS has **no permanent secretariat**.

Russia Imports Gasoline from India for the First Time

What's the News?

- **Russia has begun importing gasoline (petrol) from India for the first time**, as repeated Ukrainian attacks on Russian refineries have disrupted domestic fuel production and created shortages.
- The first physical cargo of Indian gasoline to reach Russia contained about **42,000 tonnes** of fuel loaded from **Nayara Energy's Vadinar refinery in Gujarat**.
- The shipment was routed through **Damietta, Egypt**, where it underwent a **ship-to-ship (STS) transfer** before proceeding to Russia.
- The development represents an unusual reversal in energy trade: **India is a major buyer of Russian crude oil, while Indian-refined gasoline is now being supplied back to Russia** amid its refining crisis.

Why is Russia Importing Gasoline?

- Ukrainian strikes have repeatedly damaged Russian refining infrastructure, reducing the country's ability to convert crude oil into petrol, diesel and other petroleum products.
- Russia's crude-processing rate fell to about **3.6 million barrels per day**, roughly **one-third below the normal seasonal level**, according to EA Analytics.
- Domestic shortages have resulted in:
 - Fuel rationing in some regions
 - Long queues at filling stations
 - Sharp increases in **domestic oil prices**.



- Russia, traditionally an exporter of refined fuels, has restricted **gasoline and diesel exports** to prioritise its domestic market.
- Russia is also sourcing gasoline from **Belarus and other markets** to bridge the supply gap.

India-Russia Gasoline Trade

- At least **60,000 tonnes of gasoline** had been dispatched from India as Russia sought emergency supplies.
- Russia was reported to be considering imports of up to **400,000 tonnes of gasoline per month from multiple countries**.
- Russian summer gasoline consumption is at least **110,000 tonnes per day**, highlighting the scale of domestic demand.
- Further Indian shipments are expected:
 - One tanker loaded nearly **40,000 tonnes** from Vadinar.
 - Other vessels have also moved Indian-origin gasoline through the **Damietta STS hub**.

Nayara Energy

- **Nayara Energy Ltd.** operates the **Vadinar refinery in Gujarat**, from where the gasoline cargo originated.
- The refinery has a processing capacity of around **400,000 barrels per day**.
- Russian oil major **Rosneft holds a 49% stake in Nayara Energy**.
- Nayara has increasingly relied on traders for crude imports and refined-product exports after **European Union sanctions** complicated its international payments and trade relationships.
- India's Petroleum Minister **Hardeep Singh Puri** stated that Indian companies were not directly selling fuel to Russia, while noting that Russia could purchase **Indian-origin fuel through traders**.

Shipping Route

- The initial gasoline cargo followed the broad route:
 - **Vadinar, Gujarat → Damietta, Egypt → Russia**
- At Damietta, the cargo was transferred between tankers through a **ship-to-ship transfer**, in which petroleum cargo is moved directly from one vessel to another rather than being unloaded at a conventional terminal.
- Kpler data indicates that this route is emerging as a channel for moving **Indian-origin gasoline into Russian import networks**.

Additional Info

- **Gasoline:** A refined petroleum product primarily used as fuel in petrol-powered vehicles.

- **Crude Oil:** Unprocessed petroleum that must be refined to produce gasoline, diesel, aviation turbine fuel and other products.
- **Kpler**
 - A global commodities and shipping-data analytics firm.
 - Its tanker-tracking data was used to identify the Indian gasoline shipments to Russia.
- **Vadinar**
 - Located in **Gujarat** on India's western coast.
 - Hosts Nayara Energy's large oil-refining complex.

8th BRICS Ocean and Polar Science & Technology Meeting Held in Goa

What's the News?

- India hosted the **8th Meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology (OPST)** in Goa under its **BRICS Presidency 2026**.
- The meeting was organised by the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)** under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**.
- Scientists and officials from **eight countries—Brazil, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, UAE and India**—participated.
- Discussions focused on **joint ocean and polar research, capacity building, scientific exchanges, sharing of research infrastructure and multilateral scientific programmes**.
- **Dr. Thamban Meloth**, Director of NCPOR, chaired the Working Group meeting, while **Dr. M. Rajeevan**, former Secretary of MoES, delivered a keynote address on **India's Blue Economy initiatives**.

BRICS OPST Working Group?

The **BRICS Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology (OPST)** was established in **2018** to strengthen scientific cooperation among BRICS countries.

Its objectives include:

- Collaborative research in **ocean and polar sciences**.
- Exchange of scientific knowledge and data.
- **Capacity building and researcher exchanges**.
- Sharing expensive scientific and research infrastructure.
- Developing bilateral, trilateral and multilateral research projects.
- Coordinating research on common challenges related to oceans, climate and polar regions.

India had earlier hosted the **3rd meeting of the Working Group in 2020**.

OPST activities in India are led by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** under the broader



BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation framework, coordinated through the Department of Science and Technology.

Focus Areas

The Goa meeting sought to move BRICS cooperation from individual bilateral projects towards more integrated **multilateral scientific programmes**.

Major areas included:

- **Ocean exploration**
- Polar and cryosphere studies
- Joint scientific research
- Climate and ocean observations
- Capacity building
- Exchange of scientists and researchers
- Shared use of research vessels, laboratories and polar infrastructure
- Identification of common research priorities
- Sustainable utilisation of marine resources
- Resilience and sustainability of ocean and polar ecosystems

India's Blue Economy

A major theme of the meeting was India's **Blue Economy**, which involves sustainable use of ocean resources for economic development while maintaining marine ecosystem health.

Important sectors include:

- Fisheries and aquaculture
- Shipping and ports
- Offshore energy
- Marine biotechnology
- Coastal and marine tourism
- Deep-sea minerals
- Ocean-based renewable energy

The meeting highlighted the role of **technology, marine science and international cooperation** in sustainably harnessing ocean resources.

Deep Ocean Mission

India's **Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)** is an important component of its Blue Economy strategy.

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Earth Sciences
- **Type:** Central Sector Scheme
- **Approved outlay:** ₹4,077 crore
- Major focus areas include:
 - Deep-sea mining technologies
 - Manned submersibles
 - Ocean-climate advisory services
 - Deep-sea biodiversity
 - Marine biological resources
 - Ocean-energy technologies

Samudrayaan

- **Samudrayaan** is a project under the Deep Ocean Mission.
- It involves development of **MATSYA 6000**, India's indigenous human-occupied submersible.
- **Capacity:** 3 persons
- **Target depth:** 6,000 metres

- Developed by the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)**, Chennai.
- It will support deep-sea scientific observation, resource assessment and exploration.

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research

NCPOR is India's nodal institution for polar and important ocean-research programmes.

- **Location:** Goa
- **Under:** Ministry of Earth Sciences
- Major responsibilities:
 - Coordinating India's Antarctic expeditions.
 - Coordinating Arctic scientific activities.
 - Conducting Southern Ocean research.
 - Undertaking marine geoscientific surveys.
 - Managing Indian polar research stations.
 - Supporting deep-sea and ocean-resource research.

Research Stations Managed by NCPOR

- **Maitri** – Antarctica
- **Bharati** – Antarctica
- **Himadri** – Arctic
- **Himansh** – Himalaya

Why Polar Research Matters for India

Although India is geographically distant from the polar regions, the **Arctic and Antarctic influence India's climate system**.

Polar research helps understand:

- Global climate change
- Melting glaciers and ice sheets
- Sea-level rise
- Ocean circulation
- Carbon cycling
- Atmospheric processes
- Links between the **cryosphere and Indian monsoon**

International scientific collaboration is particularly important because polar research requires expensive logistics, specialised infrastructure and long-duration observations.

Additional Info

- **BRICS**
 - Originally comprised **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**.
 - It has subsequently expanded to include additional emerging economies.
 - Cooperation now extends beyond economics to areas including **science and technology, health, agriculture, disaster management, climate and innovation**.
- **India's BRICS Presidency 2026**
 - India holds the BRICS chairmanship in 2026.



- The OPST meeting forms part of India's broader scientific and technological engagement during its presidency.
- **Ocean-Climate Link**
 - Oceans absorb large quantities of excess heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
 - Changes in ocean temperature and circulation can affect rainfall, cyclones and long-term climate patterns.
 - Polar ice loss contributes directly to **global sea-level rise**, making coordinated polar observations important for climate-risk assessment.

ONGC Gets US Licence to Resume Full Operations in Venezuela

What's the News?

- State-owned **Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC)** has secured a licence from the **US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)** to resume full-scale operations in **Venezuela**.
- The approval removes major sanctions-related constraints on ONGC's Venezuelan investments and enables it to **invest, expand production, undertake financial transactions and negotiate new agreements**.
- ONGC is also seeking **operatorship of some Venezuelan oil projects** from the country's state-owned oil company **Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)**.
- The development could help India **diversify its overseas crude-oil resources** amid geopolitical and supply risks.

ONGC's Venezuela Assets

ONGC operates in Venezuela through its overseas arm **ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL)**.

- **San Cristóbal Project**
 - ONGC Videsh stake: **40%**
 - PDVSA stake: **60%**
 - Located in the **Orinoco Heavy Oil Belt**.
 - Produced around **0.265 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE)** in FY26.
 - Current output is estimated at only about **one-tenth of its production potential**, providing substantial scope for expansion.
- **Carabobo-1 Project**
 - ONGC Videsh stake: **11%**
 - Other Indian partners:
 - **Indian Oil Corporation (IOC): 3.5%**
 - **Oil India Ltd (OIL): 3.5%**
 - Other partners include **PDVSA and Spain's Repsol**.
 - The project is located in the eastern part of the **Orinoco Oil Belt**.

Why is the OFAC Licence Important?

- US sanctions on Venezuela had restricted:
 - Investment in oil projects.
 - Financial transactions involving Venezuelan entities.
 - Expansion of oil production.
 - Dealings with PDVSA.
- An **OFAC licence** authorises specified activities that would otherwise face restrictions under US sanctions regulations.
- The licence could allow ONGC to:
 - Infuse fresh investment.
 - Increase crude-oil output.
 - Enter new contractual arrangements.
 - Manage project finances more freely.
 - Pursue operatorship of Venezuelan fields.

Pending Dividends

- ONGC Videsh has **more than \$500 million in pending dividends** linked to its Venezuelan projects.
- Sanctions and restrictions on financial transactions had complicated the repatriation of these funds.
- The OFAC approval could facilitate recovery of these dues.

Why Venezuela Matters for India

- Venezuela possesses the **world's largest proven crude-oil reserves**, estimated at around **303 billion barrels**.
- Its production potential has remained underutilised due to:
 - Years of underinvestment.
 - Sanctions.
 - Operational constraints.
- Greater access to Venezuelan resources can support India's strategy of **diversifying crude-oil supply sources and strengthening energy security**.

Additional Info

- **ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL)**
 - Wholly owned overseas investment arm of **ONGC**.
 - Engaged in overseas **exploration and production (E&P)** of oil and natural gas.
- **Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)**
 - Functions under the **US Department of the Treasury**.
 - Administers and enforces US **economic and trade sanctions**.
 - Can issue licences permitting specified transactions otherwise restricted by sanctions.
- **PDVSA**
 - Full form: **Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.**
 - Venezuela's **state-owned petroleum company**.
 - Major partner in ONGC Videsh's Venezuelan assets.



• Venezuela & OPEC

- Venezuela is a **founding member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**.
- **OPEC Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria.
- Venezuela's enormous reserves are concentrated substantially in the **Orinoco Oil Belt**.

210 Indian Peacekeepers Awarded UN Medal in South Sudan

What's the News?

- **210 Indian peacekeepers** serving with the **United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** have been awarded the **United Nations Medal in Juba, South Sudan**, for exceptional service.
- The awardees include **6 women peacekeepers and 7 Staff Officers**.
- The contingent was recognised for its role during **crises, medical emergencies and lifesaving operations**, contributing to civilian protection and peace efforts in South Sudan.
- India remains a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide.

UNMISS

- **Full form:** United Nations Mission in South Sudan.
- Established by the **UN Security Council through Resolution 1996 (2011)** following South Sudan's independence.
- Its current mandate under **UNSC Resolution 2820 (2026)** includes:
 - Preventing a return to civil war
 - **Protection of civilians**
 - Creating conditions conducive to humanitarian assistance
 - Supporting the peace process
 - Monitoring and reporting human-rights violations.
- The mandate has been extended for **one year, until 2027**.

India's Role in UN Peacekeeping

- India is the **second-largest contributor of uniformed personnel** to UN peacekeeping.
- More than **4,200 Indian military and police personnel**, including **155 women**, are deployed in UN peace operations.
- Indian personnel are serving in missions/operations covering **Abyei, Central African Republic, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Middle East, Somalia, South Sudan and Western Sahara**.
- As of April 2026, India was the **largest troop contributor to UNMISS**, with **1,775 military personnel** deployed in the mission.
- More than **275,000 Indian personnel** have served under the UN flag since 1948,

reflecting India's long-standing role in international peacekeeping.

United Nations Medal

- The **UN Medal** recognises personnel serving in UN peacekeeping and related missions.
- It should **not be confused with the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal**:
 - **UN Medal:** Recognises qualifying service in a UN mission.
 - **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal:** Awarded **posthumously** to military, police and civilian personnel who lose their lives while serving in UN peacekeeping operations.

Additional Info

• UN Peacekeeping

- Began in **1948**, when UN military observers were deployed to the Middle East.
- The UN **does not maintain a standing army or police force**; personnel are voluntarily contributed by Member States.
- Three basic principles:
 - **Consent of the parties**
 - **Impartiality**
 - **Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.**

• Blue Helmets

- Common term for UN peacekeepers, derived from the distinctive **UN blue helmets/berets** worn by uniformed personnel.

• South Sudan

- Capital: **Juba**
- Became independent in **2011**.
- UNMISS was created in the same year to support peace and stability in the newly independent country.

India Hosts 8th BRICS Youth Energy Summit Under Its Chairship

What's the News?

India hosted the virtual Eighth BRICS Youth Energy Summit on 17 August 2026 under its BRICS Chairship. The summit brought together over 100 young energy professionals, policymakers, academics, and representatives from BRICS member countries and international organisations. More than 20 youth panellists shared perspectives across three priority areas: Energy Security and Sustainability, Energy Access and Equity, and Technology and Innovation. The event reaffirmed youth participation as central to BRICS energy cooperation and set the stage for follow-up meetings, including the BRICS Youth Council Meeting in Gandhinagar and the Youth Ministers' Meeting in Visakhapatnam.



BRICS Youth Energy Summit?

- **Overview:** The BRICS Youth Energy Summit is a platform under the BRICS youth cooperation framework that engages young professionals in energy policy, innovation, and international collaboration. It is organised by the BRICS Youth Energy Agency (BRICS YEA).
- **India's Chairship Theme:** The overarching theme for India's BRICS Chairship is *"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability (BRICS)"*.
- **Energy Track Theme:** India adopted *"सर्वेषां ऊर्जम्"* (Sarvesham Urgam), meaning *"Energy for All"*, reflecting the focus on universal, affordable, and inclusive energy access.
- **Discussions:**
 - Diversification of the energy mix
 - Resilient energy supply chains
 - Innovative financing mechanisms for clean energy
 - Digitalisation of energy systems
 - Joint research, technology demonstrations, and capacity-building
- **Technology & Digitalisation:** Participants identified technological innovation, reliable energy data, interoperability, cybersecurity, and skilled human resources as key enablers of efficient and resilient energy systems.

India's Energy Initiatives Highlighted?

Indian youth representatives showcased major domestic programmes and reforms during the summit:

- **PM-KUSUM** – Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan; promotes solar energy use in agriculture.
- **PM Surya Ghar** – Rooftop solar scheme for households.
- **SHANTI Act** – Relevant legislation in the power/energy sector context.
- **RDSS** – Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme for strengthening distribution infrastructure.
- **India Energy Stack (IES)** – Digital platform for integrated energy services and data.
- **BRICS Digital Centre of Excellence (DCoE)** – Platform for knowledge exchange on smart grids, energy storage, and grid resilience.

Additional Info

- **BRICS:** Multilateral grouping of major emerging economies – **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**
- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):**
 - Launched in 2015 (initiated by India and France)
 - Headquartered in **Gurugram, Haryana**

- **International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA):**
 - Global intergovernmental organisation supporting renewable energy policy and deployment
- **Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL):**
 - International organisation working to achieve universal energy access and clean energy transitions
- **Follow-up Events:**
 - **BRICS Youth Council Meeting & Youth Summit:** Gandhinagar, Gujarat (19–20 August 2026)
 - **BRICS Youth Ministers' Meeting:** Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh (22 August 2026)

BRICS Tourism Ministers Adopt Jaipur Declaration

What's the News?

- The **BRICS Tourism Ministers' Meeting**, held under **India's BRICS Chairship 2026**, concluded in **Jaipur, Rajasthan**, with the unanimous adoption of the **Jaipur Declaration**.
- The declaration, formally the **BRICS Tourism Ministers' Communiqué 2026**, provides a framework for practical tourism cooperation among BRICS countries.
- The meeting was chaired by **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism**.
- It marked the culmination of the **BRICS Tourism Track 2026**, conducted under the theme **"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability."**

Jaipur Declaration

The declaration identifies **four priority areas** for tourism cooperation:

1. **Artificial Intelligence and Tourism**
2. **Sustainability and Responsible Tourism**
3. **Tourism Skilling and Capacity Building**
4. **Tourism Exchanges and Seamless Travel Facilitation**

Artificial Intelligence & Tourism

- Promotes **responsible, safe and human-centred AI** and digital technologies.
- Cooperation will focus on:
 - Tourism planning
 - Destination management
 - Visitor services
 - Multilingual communication
 - Travel facilitation
- It aims to use technology while maintaining human-centric and responsible tourism practices.

Sustainable & Responsible Tourism

- Focuses on tourism that protects:
 - **Local communities**
 - Environment
 - Natural resources



- Cultural heritage
- Addresses concerns associated with **over-tourism** at major destinations.
- Encourages **community-centred tourism** so that economic benefits reach local populations.
- India is strengthening its **Destination Management Organisation (DMO)** model, drawing on experience from **Ekta Nagar, Gujarat**.

Skilling & Capacity Building

- BRICS countries will strengthen cooperation in training:
 - Tourism professionals
 - Youth
 - Guides and hospitality workers
 - Other tourism-sector stakeholders
- Training will focus on evolving **technology, traveller expectations and new tourism services**.
- The objective is to create a skilled workforce capable of supporting a competitive and sustainable tourism industry.

Seamless Travel Facilitation

- Seeks to make travel among BRICS countries **easier and more convenient**.
- Cooperation may involve:
 - Improved connectivity
 - Digital travel services
 - Simplified travel processes
 - Greater tourism exchanges
- **Visa policies remain the sovereign responsibility of individual member countries**; the declaration does not create a common BRICS visa.
- India's **e-Visa system** was highlighted as an example of technology-based travel facilitation.

Other Areas of Cooperation

The Jaipur Declaration also seeks greater BRICS collaboration in:

- **Tourism investment**
- Development of diversified tourism products
- Exchange of tourism data and best practices
- Cultural cooperation
- Exchange of artists and cultural groups
- Preservation of shared cultural heritage
- Strengthening **people-to-people contacts**.

BRICS Tourism Working Group

- The ministerial declaration was preceded by the **2nd BRICS 2026 Tourism Working Group (TWG) Meeting** in Jaipur.
- The TWG was chaired by **Bhuvnesh Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism**.
- The **1st Tourism Working Group Meeting** had been held virtually.
- The Working Group developed the four thematic priorities that formed the basis of the Jaipur Declaration.

India & BRICS Tourism

- India emphasised tourism as a contributor to **Viksit Bharat @2047**.
- Tourism can spread economic activity beyond major cities to **towns, villages and remote regions**.
- It supports livelihoods across sectors such as:
 - Hotels and homestays
 - Taxi services
 - Tourist guides
 - Artisans and weavers
 - Farmers
 - Local entrepreneurs
- India's **domestic tourist visits have more than tripled over the past decade**.
- India also held bilateral tourism discussions with **Brazil, Iran, South Africa and the UAE** on the sidelines of the meeting.

Additional Info

- **BRICS**
 - Originally formed by **Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC)**.
 - **South Africa joined in 2011**, leading to the name BRICS.
 - Current full membership comprises **11 countries**:
 - Brazil
 - Russia
 - India
 - China
 - South Africa
 - Egypt
 - Ethiopia
 - Iran
 - United Arab Emirates
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Indonesia.
 - **Indonesia** became the newest full member after its entry was formally announced in 2025.
 - BRICS is an **informal intergovernmental grouping**; it has **no constitutive treaty, permanent secretariat or own budget**.
 - Cooperation broadly rests on three pillars:
 - Political and security cooperation
 - Economic and financial cooperation
 - Cultural and **people-to-people cooperation**.
- **India's Chairship**
 - India holds the **BRICS Chairship in 2026**.
 - The Jaipur meeting formed part of India's sectoral agenda for deepening cooperation among BRICS economies.

India-China Reach Eight-Point Consensus on Boundary Question

What's the News?

- India and China reached an **eight-point consensus** during the **25th round of Special Representatives (SR) Talks on the Boundary Question** in Beijing.
- The talks were led by **National Security Adviser Ajit Doval** for India and **Foreign Minister Wang Yi** for China.
- Both sides agreed to accelerate discussions on an **"Early and Substantial Harvest"** of **boundary delimitation**, strengthen border-management mechanisms and prevent misunderstandings or miscalculations along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- They reiterated their objective of achieving a **fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable boundary settlement** while maintaining peace and tranquillity in border areas.

Eight-Point Consensus

1. Peace & Stability

- Maintain peace and tranquillity along the border to support stable bilateral relations.

1. Boundary Settlement

- Advance negotiations under the **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles**.

1. Early Boundary Delimitation

- Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation** to pursue an "Early and Substantial Harvest".
- Working Group on Border Management** to strengthen management of the LAC.
- Both operate under the **WMCC framework**.

1. Faster Crisis Management

- Ground situations to be addressed through:
 - WMCC
 - Local commander-level meetings
 - Other diplomatic and military channels
- Objective: prevent **misunderstanding and miscalculation** along the LAC.

1. New Military Communication Channels

- 2 additional meeting points** for General-Level/Senior Highest Military Commander meetings.
- 2 additional military hotlines** in the **Eastern and Middle Sectors**.

1. Cross-Border Cooperation

- Strengthen cooperation in:
 - Border trade
 - Kailash Manasarovar Yatra**
 - Other cross-border exchanges
- Both sides welcomed reopening of **three designated border trading points**.

1. Trans-Border Rivers

- Continue discussions on:
 - Hydrological data sharing
 - Renewal of relevant MoUs
- The next **Expert-Level Mechanism on Trans-border Rivers** meeting is planned for September 2026.

1. Next SR Talks

- The **26th round of Special Representatives' Talks** will be hosted by **India in 2027**.

"Early and Substantial Harvest"?

- It refers to seeking **early progress on boundary delimitation in areas/sectors where differences may be relatively manageable**, instead of waiting for a settlement of the entire boundary dispute at once.
- The Expert Group will first determine its **Terms of Reference (ToR)**.
- It does **not** mean that the **India-China boundary has already been settled or formally demarcated**.

Border Mechanisms

• Special Representatives Mechanism

- Established in **2003**.
- Principal high-level mechanism for negotiating a political framework for the boundary settlement.
- India is represented by the **National Security Adviser**.

• WMCC

- Full form: **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs**.
- Established in **2012**.
- Diplomatic mechanism for consultation and coordination on border affairs.
- It is distinct from the SR mechanism, which focuses on the broader boundary settlement.

• Military-Level Mechanisms

- Corps/commander and local commander-level meetings help handle operational situations on the ground.
- New hotlines and meeting points are intended to reduce escalation risks.

LAC vs International Boundary

• Line of Actual Control (LAC):

- De facto line separating areas under Indian and Chinese control.
- It is **not a mutually agreed, formally demarcated international boundary**.

- It is generally discussed in three sectors:

- Western Sector:** Ladakh
- Middle Sector:** Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand
- Eastern Sector:** primarily Arunachal Pradesh



- Differing perceptions of the LAC have historically contributed to patrol confrontations and military stand-offs.

Additional Info

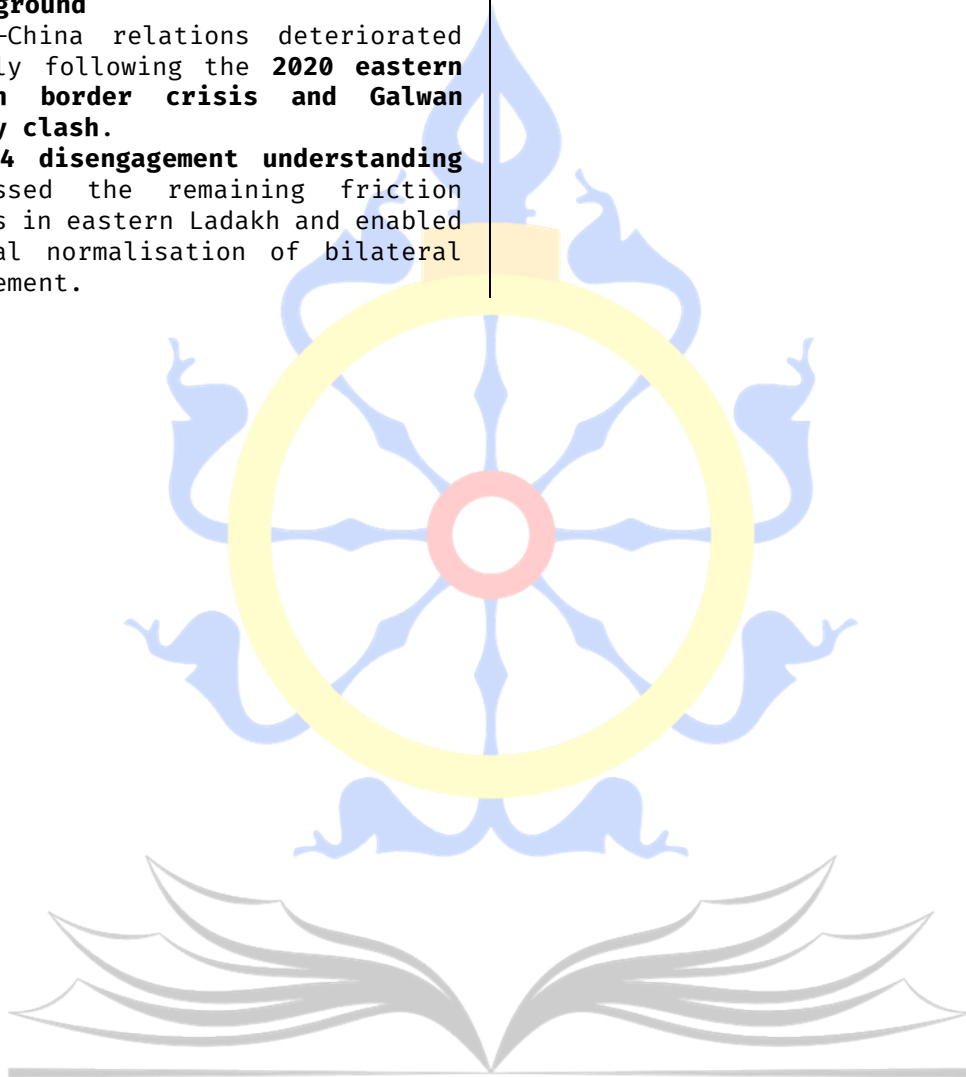
- **2005 Agreement**

- Full name: **Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question.**
- Provides guiding principles for negotiating an eventual boundary settlement.
- The latest consensus explicitly reaffirms this framework.

- **Recent Background**

- India-China relations deteriorated sharply following the **2020 eastern Ladakh border crisis and Galwan Valley clash.**
- A **2024 disengagement understanding** addressed the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh and enabled gradual normalisation of bilateral engagement.

- The latest consensus moves the dialogue beyond immediate disengagement towards **border management and possible boundary delimitation.**





International Events

China Advances Two-Generation Rice Cultivation in Space

What's the News?

- Chinese astronauts aboard the **Tiangong Space Station** have harvested the first batch of rice from a new **multi-generational cultivation experiment**.
- Conducted under the **Shenzhou-23 mission**, the experiment seeks to grow **two consecutive generations of rice entirely in orbit**.
- Scientists are studying how prolonged **microgravity** affects plant growth, reproduction and genetic stability.
- The research could support **self-sustaining food production** during future long-duration missions to the Moon and Mars.

Two-Generation Rice Experiment

- Researchers are using **two types of japonica rice**:
 - Ordinary seeds that had never previously travelled to space.
 - "Space-lineage" seeds descended from rice cultivated aboard Tiangong in **2022** and subsequently propagated on Earth.
- The experiment contains **4 cultivation units**, each with **6 seeds**.
- Two reproduction techniques are being tested:
 - Seed-to-seed reproduction**: conventional sexual reproduction.
 - Ratooning**: new shoots develop from the roots/stubble remaining after the first harvest.
- Rice grains, stems and leaves are being preserved for analysis of physiological and genetic responses to the space environment.

Why is it Significant?

The project aims to determine whether staple food crops can remain productive over **successive generations in microgravity**.

Space farming is important because:

- Long-duration missions cannot rely indefinitely on food transported from Earth.
- Fresh plants can supplement stored food whose nutritional quality may decline over long periods.
- Plants absorb **carbon dioxide** and release **oxygen through photosynthesis**.
- Crop systems could become part of **bioregenerative life-support systems**, recycling resources for astronauts.
- Multi-generational cultivation can reveal whether prolonged space exposure causes harmful or useful genetic and developmental changes.

Previous Rice Milestone

- China conducted an important rice experiment aboard Tiangong in **2022**.
- Rice completed a full **seed-to-seed life cycle lasting about 120 days**.
- 6 initial seeds produced 59 seeds** in orbit.
- Those seeds were returned to Earth and successfully propagated through further generations.

The 2026 experiment is **not the first time China has completed a rice life cycle in space**. Its principal novelty is attempting **two successive rice generations entirely in orbit**.

Tiangong & Shenzhou-23

- Tiangong**
 - China's permanently crewed modular space station.
 - Operates in **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**, roughly **400 km above Earth**.
 - Major modules include the **Tianhe core module** and **Wentian and Mengtian laboratory modules**.
 - Supports experiments in space biology, materials science, medicine and microgravity physics.
- Shenzhou-23**
 - Crewed mission to Tiangong.
 - Astronauts: **Zhu Yangzhu, Zhang Zhiyuan and Lai Ka-ying (Li Jiaying)**.
 - Includes research on long-duration human spaceflight and multi-generational plant cultivation.

Space Farming vs Space Breeding

These concepts should not be confused:

- Space farming**
 - Growing and harvesting plants **in space**.
 - Objective: provide food and life-support resources during space missions.
- Space breeding**
 - Seeds are exposed to **microgravity and space radiation** and generally returned to Earth.
 - Radiation and other environmental stresses can induce genetic mutations.
 - Breeders select useful traits such as higher yield, disease resistance or stress tolerance.

Thus, China's Tiangong experiment primarily concerns **space farming and multi-generational plant biology**, rather than merely exposing seeds to space.

Additional Info

- Japonica Rice**
 - One of the major cultivated groups of **Oryza sativa**.

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- Generally characterised by shorter, rounder grains compared with many indica varieties.
- **Microgravity**
 - Environment in which objects experience extremely low apparent gravitational force while in continuous free fall around Earth.
 - It affects:
 - Root orientation.
 - Water distribution.
 - Pollination.
 - Nutrient transport.
 - Plant morphology.
- **India's CROPS Experiment**
 - ISRO has developed **CROPS – Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies**.
 - Flown aboard **POEM-4** of the PSLV-C60 mission.
 - Used **cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*)**.
 - Seeds successfully germinated and reached the **two-leaf stage in about 5 days** under microgravity.
 - CROPS is intended to develop India's capability to **grow and sustain plants in extraterrestrial environments**.
 - ISRO envisages a subsequent **30–45 day** phase for longer-duration plant growth with active regulation of oxygen, carbon dioxide, humidity, soil moisture and temperature.

Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad Sentenced to Death in Absentia

What's the News?

- A **Syrian court in Damascus** sentenced former President **Bashar al-Assad to death in absentia** for crimes committed during Syria's prolonged civil war.
- His brother **Maher al-Assad**, a former senior military commander, was also sentenced to death in absentia.
- Assad was convicted on charges including **premeditated murder, torture, arbitrary detention and crimes against humanity**.
- Assad has been living in **Russia**, which granted him asylum after his government was overthrown in late 2024.

Who Else Was Sentenced?

- **Atef Najib**
 - Bashar al-Assad's cousin.
 - Former political-security chief in **Daraa**.
 - Was in **Syrian custody and appeared before the court**, unlike Bashar and Maher.
 - Received a death sentence for his role in repression, including the torture of young protesters in Daraa at the beginning of the uprising.

- **Six other former regime officials** were also sentenced to death in absentia.
- Overall, **nine former regime and security figures** received death sentences in the proceedings.

Sentence in Absentia?

- **In absentia** means that a trial or judgment takes place **without the accused being physically present before the court**.
- Bashar and Maher al-Assad were tried in absentia because they are outside Syria.
- Such a sentence does **not itself ensure execution of the punishment**; bringing an accused person before the Syrian authorities would depend on issues such as arrest, extradition and international cooperation.

Syrian Civil War: Background

- Anti-government protests began in **2011**, initially as part of the wider **Arab Spring** uprisings.
- A major early flashpoint occurred in **Daraa**, where teenagers were detained and tortured after writing anti-government slogans.
- Government repression of demonstrations contributed to the escalation into a prolonged civil war.
- The conflict resulted in **around half a million deaths** and displaced millions of people inside and outside Syria.
- Assad, who had ruled Syria since **2000**, was eventually overthrown by a rapid rebel offensive in **late 2024** and fled to Russia.

Transitional Justice?

- **Transitional justice** refers to judicial and non-judicial measures used by societies emerging from conflict or authoritarian rule to address past large-scale human-rights violations.
- It can include:
 - Criminal prosecutions
 - Truth-seeking mechanisms
 - Reparations for victims
 - Institutional reforms
 - Measures to prevent recurrence
- Syria's new authorities have presented prosecutions of former Assad-era officials as part of efforts to establish accountability for abuses committed during the conflict.
- However, observers and rights groups have also raised concerns regarding **due process, legal representation and the use of the death penalty** in such proceedings.

Syria after Assad

- **Ahmad al-Sharaa** is the current **President of Syria** during the country's transitional phase. His position is also recognised in current UN and Syrian official records.
- A **Constitutional Declaration** provides for a **five-year transitional period**, during

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which Syria is expected to rebuild institutions and work towards a permanent constitutional framework.

- The post-Assad government continues to face challenges including:
 - Political reconciliation
 - Sectarian tensions
 - Reconstruction
 - Refugee and internally displaced population issues
 - Accountability for wartime abuses

ICC vs Syrian Court

- The judgment against Assad was delivered by the **Fourth Criminal Court in Damascus**, making it a **domestic Syrian judicial decision**.
- It should **not be confused** with a judgment of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**.
- **Syria is not a State Party to the Rome Statute**, the treaty establishing the ICC.
- The **ICC**:
 - Was established under the **Rome Statute**.
 - Is headquartered at **The Hague, Netherlands**.
 - Prosecutes individuals for **genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression**, subject to its jurisdiction.

Additional Info

- **Bashar al-Assad**
 - President of Syria from **2000 to 2024**.
 - Succeeded his father, **Hafez al-Assad**.
 - His fall ended more than **five decades of Assad family rule** in Syria.
- **Maher al-Assad**
 - Younger brother of Bashar al-Assad.
 - Commanded Syria's powerful **Fourth Armoured Division**.
 - Was regarded as an important figure in the former regime's security apparatus.
- **Syria: Static GK**
 - **Capital:** Damascus
 - **Region:** West Asia/Middle East
 - **Currency:** Syrian Pound
 - **Mediterranean coast:** Yes
 - **Neighbours:** Türkiye, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon
- **Notes**
 - **Person sentenced:** Bashar al-Assad
 - **Position:** Former President of Syria
 - **Sentence:** Death penalty **in absentia**
 - **Court:** Fourth Criminal Court, Damascus
 - **Also sentenced:** Maher al-Assad, Atef Najib and other former officials
 - **Assad's present location:** Russia
 - **Uprising began:** 2011
 - **Major early flashpoint:** Daraa
 - **Assad government fell:** 2024

- **Current Syrian President:** Ahmad al-Sharaa
- **ICC treaty:** Rome Statute
- **Syria and Rome Statute:** Syria is **not a State Party**

Great Barrier Reef Coral Cover Rebounds to 35.1%

What's the News?

- **Hard coral cover in the northern Great Barrier Reef (GBR)** has rebounded from **30.0% to 35.1%**, a **16.7% relative increase**, according to the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) 2025–26 assessment.
- The **central region** also improved from **28.6% to 31.6%**, while the **southern region** remained broadly stable, declining marginally from **26.9% to 26.4%**.
- A **late-summer monsoon** increased cloud cover and lowered sea temperatures, reducing heat stress and limiting the severity of coral bleaching.
- The rebound indicates **initial recovery**, not full restoration; AIMS warns that the reef remains threatened by warming oceans, cyclones and crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks.

Coral Cover

GBR Region	2025	2026	Change
Northern	30.0%	35.1%	+16.7% relative
Central	28.6%	31.6%	+10.2% relative
Southern	26.9%	26.4%	-2.0% relative

- **Northern GBR:** Above its long-term average of **27.0%**.
- **Central GBR:** Above its long-term average of **20.0%**.
- **Southern GBR:** Below its long-term average of **29.3%**.
- Of the reefs surveyed:
 - **56%:** No net change in coral cover.
 - **28%:** Increase.
 - **16%:** Decline.

The official AIMS annual coral-cover assessment used **manta-tow surveys of 121 reefs**. A separate detailed assessment covered permanent sites at **71 reefs**; hence media references to "192 reefs" should not be treated as the sample size of the main coral-cover dataset.

Why Did Coral Cover Recover?

- Sea-surface temperatures remained around **0.7–1.2°C above average**, but heat stress was lower than during the previous two summers.
- A late monsoon:
 - Increased **cloud cover**.
 - Reduced solar heating.
 - Lowered sea temperatures.
 - Limited the intensity and extent of bleaching.



- Many surviving corals consequently had favourable conditions for regrowth.
- Recovery was particularly associated with fast-growing corals, although such communities can also be highly vulnerable to future bleaching events.

Coral Bleaching

- **Coral bleaching** occurs when environmental stress—particularly unusually high ocean temperatures—causes corals to lose the symbiotic microscopic algae living within their tissues.
- These algae provide corals with much of their energy and colour.
- Bleached corals are **not necessarily dead**; they can recover if stressful conditions decline sufficiently quickly.
- Prolonged or intense thermal stress can, however, lead to coral mortality.
- AIMS has recorded **six mass bleaching events between 2016 and 2025**, showing the increasing frequency of thermal stress on the GBR.

Great Barrier Reef

- **Location:** Coral Sea, off the **north-eastern coast of Queensland, Australia**.
- It is the **world's most extensive coral reef ecosystem**.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** Inscribed in **1981**.
- World Heritage Area: approximately **348,000 sq km**.
- It contains exceptional marine biodiversity, including hundreds of coral types and large numbers of fish and mollusc species.

Crown-of-Thorns Starfish

- **Crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS)** is a coral-eating marine predator capable of causing substantial coral mortality during population outbreaks.
- COTS were detected on **27 surveyed reefs**, while feeding scars were found on **77 reefs**.
- A **fifth wave of COTS outbreaks** is emerging in the northern Great Barrier Reef—the fifth such wave recorded since the 1960s.
- Along with bleaching and tropical cyclones, COTS represents a major recurring disturbance to coral ecosystems.

AIMS Long-Term Monitoring Program

- **AIMS:** Australian Institute of Marine Science.
- Its **Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTMP)** tracks changes in Great Barrier Reef coral communities.
- The 2026 assessment represents the **40th year of LTMP data**.
- Major indicators include:
 - Percentage hard coral cover.
 - Coral community composition.
 - Coral bleaching.
 - Crown-of-thorns starfish abundance.

- Effects of cyclones and other disturbances.

India Connect: Coral Reefs

Major coral reef ecosystems in India occur in:

- **Gulf of Kachchh – Gujarat**
- **Gulf of Mannar – Tamil Nadu**
- **Lakshadweep**
- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**
- **Malvan – Maharashtra** also contains coral reefs.

Coral Bleaching Alert System

- **INCOIS** undertakes coral reef mapping and reef-health monitoring in India.
- It operates a **Coral Bleaching Alert System (CBAS)** to provide early warning of conditions conducive to bleaching.
- **INCOIS:** Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.

Additional Info

- **Hard Coral Cover**
 - Percentage of the reef surface occupied by living reef-building hard corals.
 - Used as an important indicator of coral abundance and changes in reef condition.
- **Major Threats to Coral Reefs**
 - Marine heatwaves and climate change.
 - Ocean acidification.
 - Tropical cyclones.
 - Crown-of-thorns starfish.
 - Pollution and sedimentation.
 - Destructive fishing and poorly managed coastal development.
- **Takeaway**
 - The **35.1% figure represents a regional rebound in northern GBR coral cover**, not 35.1% coral cover across the entire Great Barrier Reef.
 - The recovery demonstrates ecological resilience but **does not mean the threat from repeated marine heatwaves and bleaching has disappeared**.

CENTCOM Launches Multinational Drone Task Force “Falcon Strike”

What's the News?

- **United States Central Command (CENTCOM)** has initiated **Task Force Falcon Strike**, described as its **first multi-domain, multinational attack-drone task force**.
- The task force will integrate **one-way attack drones and other unmanned systems operating above, on and below the sea** with personnel from the United States and regional partners.

- **U.S. Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT)** personnel will lead its multinational staff.
- CENTCOM has begun consulting and formally inviting regional partners; **participating partner countries have not yet been publicly named.**
- The objective is to develop an integrated **multi-domain, multinational deterrent** across West Asia/Middle East.

Task Force Falcon Strike

- **Established by:** U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).
- **Nature:** Multinational + multi-domain attack-drone formation.
- **Operational region:** CENTCOM Area of Responsibility, particularly the Middle East.
- **Command/Staff leadership:** SOCCENT.
- **Participants:** United States + regional military partners.
- **Systems envisaged:**
 - **Air:** One-way attack unmanned aerial systems.
 - **Surface:** Unmanned surface attack vessels.
 - **Subsurface:** Unmanned systems operating below the sea.
- The task force is intended to integrate these capabilities into a common operational framework rather than relying solely on conventional aircraft or individual drone units.

What are One-Way Attack Drones?

- **One-Way Attack (OWA) drones** are unmanned systems designed primarily to strike a target rather than return for recovery.
- They are also commonly described as:
 - Loitering/attack drones in some configurations.
 - Expendable attack UAVs.
 - "Kamikaze drones" in non-technical usage.
- Their military advantages can include:
 - Lower unit cost compared with many crewed strike platforms or sophisticated missiles.
 - Reduced risk to pilots.
 - Ability to attack from multiple directions.
 - Potential for mass or saturation attacks.
- However, their increasing use also raises challenges relating to **air defence, electronic warfare, counter-drone systems and escalation management.**

Task Force Scorpion Strike

Falcon Strike builds directly on **Task Force Scorpion Strike**, which CENTCOM established around nine months earlier as the U.S. military's **first dedicated one-way attack-drone squadron in the Middle East.**

Milestones

- Conducted the **first launch of an aerial attack drone from a U.S. Navy warship.**
- One of the systems associated with Scorpion Strike operations was the **Low-Cost Unmanned Combat Attack System (LUCAS).**
- Its one-way aerial systems were subsequently employed during **Operation Epic Fury.**
- Unmanned attack vessels were also used during strikes on **Iranian port facilities.**

Scorpion Strike vs Falcon Strike

Feature	Scorpion Strike	Falcon Strike
Character	U.S. dedicated attack-drone squadron	Multinational task force
Scope	Primarily U.S. capability	U.S. + regional partners
Domains	Developed operational OWA capabilities	Air + surface + subsurface
Objective	Field attack drones rapidly	Integrate regional drone capabilities
Significance	First dedicated U.S. OWA squadron in Middle East	First multinational, multi-domain attack-drone task force

CENTCOM

- **Full Form:** United States Central Command.
- It is one of the U.S. military's **geographic combatant commands.**
- Its area of responsibility covers **21 countries across the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia.**
- **Headquarters:** MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida.
- **Current Commander mentioned in the announcement:** Admiral Brad Cooper.

SOCCENT

- **Full Form:** United States Special Operations Command Central.
- It is the special-operations component of CENTCOM.
- SOCCENT personnel will lead the staff of Falcon Strike, comprising both **U.S. and regional representatives.**
- It plans and conducts U.S. special operations across CENTCOM's **21-country Area of Responsibility.**

Why Falcon Strike Matters

- **Drone-centric Warfare:** Reflects the growing battlefield importance of expendable and autonomous/uncrewed strike systems.

- **Multi-domain Operations:** Integrates attacks from the **air, sea surface and subsurface** rather than restricting drone warfare to UAVs.
- **Regional Integration:** Seeks interoperability between American and partner-country unmanned systems.
- **Cost Considerations:** Lower-cost unmanned weapons can complement inventories of expensive precision-guided weapons.
- **Deterrence:** CENTCOM explicitly envisages Falcon Strike developing into a **unified multi-domain, multinational deterrent** as regional states join.

Additional Info

- **MQ-9 Reaper Context**
 - Some media coverage has linked Falcon Strike with recent losses of expensive **MQ-9 Reaper** remotely piloted aircraft.
 - However, **CENTCOM's official announcement does not state that MQ-9 losses caused the creation of Falcon Strike.**
 - Officially, Falcon Strike is presented as an expansion of **Task Force Scorpion Strike's operational experience** and as a means of integrating capabilities developed by U.S. regional allies and partners.
- **Multi-domain**
 - In Falcon Strike's specific context, it refers to unmanned systems operating:
 - **Above the sea – aerial systems**
 - **On the sea – surface systems**
 - **Below the sea – subsurface systems**
 - Therefore, describing the announced configuration simply as “**air, land and sea**” would be imprecise.

Ukraine Mounts One of War's Largest Drone Attacks on Russia

What's the News?

- Ukraine carried out **one of the largest aerial attacks of the Russia-Ukraine war**, targeting Moscow and other regions deep inside Russia with hundreds of drones.
- **Russia's Defence Ministry claimed that 822 Ukrainian drones were destroyed or neutralised overnight.** The figure is a Russian official claim rather than an independently verified count of drones launched.
- Moscow authorities reported that around **600 drones were directed towards the Russian capital**, while attacks in the **Moscow and Rostov regions killed at least six people.**
- Russia simultaneously conducted missile and drone attacks across Ukraine, causing

casualties and damage in **Kryvyi Rih, Kyiv, Sumy and Zaporizhzhia.**

- The conflict also spilled towards NATO territory when a **Spanish F-18 fighter operating under NATO Air Policing shot down a drone that entered Romanian airspace.**

Scale of Ukraine's Drone Attack

- **822 drones:** Number Russia claimed to have intercepted or neutralised.
- **Around 600:** Reportedly detected heading towards Moscow.
- **150+ drones:** Reportedly targeted three towns in the **Rostov region.**
- **At least 6 deaths in Russia:**
 - **1** in the Moscow region.
 - **5** in the Rostov region.
- A major **Wildberries distribution warehouse at Podolsk**, near Moscow, caught fire during the attacks.
- The attack demonstrates Ukraine's expanding ability to conduct **long-range strikes deep inside Russian territory** using domestically developed drones and missiles.

Russian Strikes on Ukraine

- Russia launched another wave of **missile and drone attacks** against Ukrainian cities.
- Major impacts included:
 - **Kryvyi Rih:** A strike damaged facilities of **ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih**, Ukraine's largest steel producer, disrupting production.
 - **Kyiv:** Strikes caused fires and injuries.
 - **Sumy and Zaporizhzhia:** Civilian deaths were also reported.
- Russia stated that its targets included **military-industrial and metallurgical facilities**, while Ukraine accused Russia of striking civilian infrastructure.

Drone Enters NATO Airspace

- An unidentified drone entered **Romanian airspace near Galați**, close to the Moldovan border.
- A **Spanish Air and Space Force F-18**, deployed for NATO Air Policing, intercepted and destroyed it.
- Romanian authorities stated that the aerial target had entered from the direction of **Moldova** but did not initially identify its origin.
- The incident highlights the risk of the Russia-Ukraine conflict **spilling across neighbouring states and NATO's eastern flank.**

NATO Air Policing

- **NATO Air Policing** is a permanent **peacetime mission** aimed at safeguarding the integrity and security of Allied airspace.



- Fighter aircraft and crews remain available **24x7x365** to respond to unidentified aircraft and airspace violations.
- Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, NATO strengthened air-policing capabilities along its **eastern flank**, including Romania.

Additional Info

- **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)**
 - An aircraft operating **without an onboard human pilot**.
 - Can be remotely controlled or operate with varying degrees of autonomy.
 - Military uses include:
 - Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (**ISR**)
 - Target acquisition
 - Precision strikes
 - Electronic warfare
 - Logistics
 - The Russia-Ukraine conflict has demonstrated the increasing role of **low-cost drones and mass-drone attacks in modern warfare**.
- **Romania**
 - Capital: **Bucharest**
 - Located on the **Black Sea**.
 - Shares borders with both **Ukraine and Moldova**.
 - Joined **NATO in 2004**.
 - Joined the **European Union in 2007**.
- **NATO**
 - Full form: **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**
 - Established: **1949**
 - Headquarters: **Brussels, Belgium**
 - **Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty**: An armed attack against one or more NATO members is considered an attack against all.
 - **Important**: An airspace violation does **not automatically mean Article 5 has been invoked**; invocation involves a political assessment by the Alliance.
- **Moldova**
 - Landlocked Eastern European country located between **Romania and Ukraine**.
 - It is **not a NATO member**.
 - Its geographical position has made it particularly relevant to cross-border drone incidents arising from the Russia-Ukraine war.

Iran Parliament Advances Bill Restricting Contact with 'Hostile' Foreign Media

What's the News?

- Iran's **Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament)** has approved the **general**

principles of a bill aimed at restricting foreign influence and communications with media considered hostile to the Islamic Republic.

- The proposed law covers **US and Israeli media organisations**, as well as outlets financed by either country.
- Giving interviews or participating in discussions with such outlets could attract **6 months to 2 years of imprisonment**.
- **Important**: The bill is **not yet law**. Its individual provisions still require parliamentary approval, after which the final text must be reviewed by Iran's **Guardian Council**.

Provisions

- **Hostile Foreign Media**
 - Interviews and other communications with media classified as hostile would be prohibited.
 - Proposed punishment: **6 months–2 years imprisonment**.
- **Other Foreign Media**
 - Interviews with foreign media not classified as hostile would require **prior notification to the Ministry of Intelligence**.
- **Foreign Embassies & Organisations**
 - Contact with foreign embassies, foreign organisations or other non-Iranian institutions without required notification and **written permission from the Foreign Ministry** could result in:
 - Financial penalties.
 - Deprivation of certain social rights.
- The proposal would also tighten controls on:
 - Providing information to foreigners without intelligence approval.
 - Scientific cooperation with foreign institutions outside an approved list.
 - Certain economic activities conducted under foreign direction.

Up to 30-Year Prison Provision

- The widely reported **"up to 30 years"** punishment does **not apply simply to giving an interview**.
- It applies to proposed **policy or legislative initiatives prepared under the direction of foreign intelligence services** where such actions are judged to harm Iran's **security or independence**.
- Such cases would be handled by Iran's **Revolutionary Courts**.

Why Has Iran Proposed the Bill?

- Iranian authorities describe the measure as part of efforts to counter **foreign intelligence influence and cooperation with hostile states**. Download Our App



- Iran had already enacted tougher legislation against cooperation with hostile foreign entities following its **2025 conflict with Israel**.
- The new proposal extends this approach more explicitly to **media interactions, foreign organisations and information-sharing**.

Additional Info

- **Islamic Consultative Assembly**
 - Iran's national legislature, commonly known as the **Majlis**.
 - Bills passed by the legislature are subject to review by the **Guardian Council**.
- **Guardian Council**
 - A **12-member constitutional body**.
 - Under **Article 91 of Iran's Constitution**:
 - **6 Islamic jurists (faqih)** are selected by the Supreme Leader.
 - **6 legal jurists** are elected by Parliament from nominees proposed by the Head of the Judiciary.
 - Under **Article 94**, legislation passed by Parliament is reviewed by the Guardian Council for conformity with **Islamic principles and the Constitution**.
- **Revolutionary Courts**
 - Established following Iran's **1979 Islamic Revolution**.
 - Handle sensitive cases including several **national-security and political offences**.
 - The proposed foreign-influence offences carrying the heaviest penalties would fall under these courts.

NASA Abandons Swift Telescope Rescue Mission After Rescue Craft Fails

What's the News?

NASA and Katalyst Space Technologies have called off the primary capture and reboost mission for the Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory after the rescue spacecraft, LINK, suffered repeated attitude-control failures that made safe docking impossible. The 21-year-old gamma-ray burst telescope is now expected to make an uncontrolled atmospheric re-entry and burn up later in 2026, with no further rescue options available.

Swift Rescue Mission Failure?

- **Overview:** The Swift Boost mission was a \$30 million commercial contract awarded by NASA in 2025 to Katalyst Space Technologies, an Arizona-based startup, to extend the life of the ageing Swift

Observatory. The mission aimed to dock the LINK spacecraft with Swift and use its propulsion to raise the telescope into a higher, stable orbit.

- **Launch & Timeline:** LINK was launched on 3 July 2026 aboard a Northrop Grumman Pegasus XL rocket from Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean.
- **Technical Failures:**
 - On 28 July 2026, LINK entered a multi-axis spin after a critical attitude-control failure.
 - A hard power bus reset caused temperature spikes in control electronics, disabling two of LINK's three reaction wheels.
 - On 11 August 2026, engineers uploaded new attitude controllers to slow the spin, but pointing and positioning problems persisted.
 - On 19 August 2026, NASA and Katalyst officially called off the primary capture and reboost operation as safe docking was no longer possible.
- **Current Status:** LINK will still attempt rendezvous and proximity operations near Swift to collect technical data and demonstrate technologies for future satellite-servicing missions.

Swift Observatory & Orbital Decay?

- **Overview:** The Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory is a \$500 million NASA space telescope launched on 20 November 2004 to study gamma-ray bursts, black holes, and other high-energy cosmic events. It has observed about 1,800 cosmic explosions over more than two decades.
- **Orbital Decline:** Atmospheric drag has gradually lowered Swift's orbit to approximately 216 miles (347 kilometres). Heightened solar activity during the solar maximum expanded Earth's upper atmosphere, significantly increasing orbital drag and accelerating the telescope's descent.
- **Re-entry:** With no further intervention, Swift is expected to burn up in Earth's atmosphere later in 2026, likely no earlier than October. Operators have oriented the spacecraft into a low-drag configuration to slow its descent as much as possible.

Additional Info

- **Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory:**
 - Named after astrophysicist Neil Gehrels; launched 20 November 2004.
 - Equipped with three instruments: Burst Alert Telescope (BAT), X-ray Telescope (XRT), and Ultraviolet/Optical Telescope (UVOT).
 - Designed for rapid detection and follow-up of gamma-ray bursts – brief, intense flashes of high-

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energy radiation from distant cosmic explosions.

- **Technical Terms:**

- **Attitude Control:** The orientation control of a spacecraft in space, typically managed by reaction wheels, gyroscopes, and thrusters.
- **Reaction Wheels:** Motorised flywheels used to change or maintain a spacecraft's orientation without using fuel.
- **Digital Twins:** Virtual models of physical assets used in monitoring and planning (relevant to space asset management).
- **Solar Maximum:** The period of greatest solar activity during the Sun's 11-year cycle, during which increased solar radiation expands Earth's upper atmosphere and raises drag on low-Earth-orbit satellites.

- **Commercial Space Servicing Context:**

- The Swift Boost mission was described by NASA as a "high-risk, high-reward" effort, developed on an unprecedented timeline driven by solar activity.
- It represents a first-of-its-kind attempt at commercial in-orbit servicing for a NASA astrophysics mission.
- Lessons from LINK's rendezvous attempt will inform future satellite-servicing concepts, including proposed servicing missions for the Hubble Space Telescope.

- **Kwajalein Atoll:**

- A coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean, part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.
- Used as a launch site for some rocket missions, including Pegasus XL air-launched vehicles.

- **NASA Leadership:**

- Jared Isaacman – NASA Administrator (as of the current period).
- Shawn Domagal-Goldman – Director, NASA Astrophysics Division.

World's Oceans Hit Record Sea Surface Temperature in August 2026

What's the News?

The daily global average sea surface temperature for extra-polar oceans (waters between 60°S and 60°N) reached **21.10°C** on 21 and 22 August 2026, setting a new all-time record since satellite monitoring began in 1979. The previous record of **21.09°C** was set on 1 March 2024. The milestone was confirmed by the European Union's **Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)**. Scientists attribute

the record to a combination of a rapidly strengthening **El Niño** event and long-term human-driven global warming from greenhouse gas emissions.

Why Is the Timing Unusual?

- Global sea surface temperatures typically peak in **March or April**, after the Southern Hemisphere summer, when the majority of the world's oceans experience maximum solar heating
- An **August record** breaks this seasonal pattern, indicating the oceans are retaining and accumulating heat beyond normal cycles
- On 22 August 1979, the same ocean area averaged **20.15°C** – nearly a full degree cooler than the 2026 reading, underscoring the scale of long-term warming

What Are the Drivers?

- **El Niño:** A strong El Niño event is developing in the tropical Pacific, expected to peak between November and January at potentially unprecedented levels. It is responsible for a significant portion of the current ocean heat anomaly
- **Human-Driven Climate Change:** Decades of fossil fuel burning have raised baseline ocean temperatures by approximately **0.8°C**, creating the underlying conditions for new records
- **Marine Heatwaves:** Currently cover **42%** of the planet's oceans. The number of marine heatwave days globally has more than **tripled** since the early 1990s

What Are the Impacts?

- **Marine Ecosystems:** Warmer oceans damage coral reefs (coral bleaching), reduce oxygen levels, increase acidity, and shift the distribution of fish and marine species
- **Fisheries & Food Security:** Threatens fisheries such as the Peruvian anchovy fishery – the world's largest – which typically collapses during El Niño events. This disrupts the food web affecting larger fish, marine mammals, seabirds, and human populations dependent on seafood
- **Weather & Storms:** Hotter oceans transfer more heat and moisture to the atmosphere, intensifying rainfall, tropical storms, and storm surges. Warmer coastal waters also amplify land-based heatwaves by reducing nighttime cooling from sea breezes
- **Sea-Level Rise:** Thermal expansion of warming seawater contributes to rising sea levels, threatening coastal infrastructure
- **Carbon Absorption:** Warmer oceans become less efficient at absorbing atmospheric CO₂, weakening one of the planet's natural climate buffers



- **Human Health:** Increased toxic algal blooms in warmer waters can contaminate seafood and pose health risks

Additional Info

- **Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S):** The European Union's flagship climate monitoring programme, implemented by the **European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF)**. It uses the **ERA5** reanalysis dataset for global climate monitoring
- **El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO):** A periodic climate pattern involving warming of the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. El Niño is the warm phase; La Niña is the cool phase. It affects global weather patterns, monsoons, and cyclone activity
- **Marine Heatwave:** Prolonged periods of unusually high ocean temperatures that can persist for weeks to months, causing severe ecological and economic damage
- **India-Specific Relevance:**
 - **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):** Often co-occurs with El Niño and can amplify or modify its impacts on the Indian monsoon
 - **Monsoon Impact:** El Niño events are historically associated with **deficient monsoon rainfall** in India, affecting agriculture and water security
 - **Coral Reefs:** India has significant coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kachchh, Lakshadweep, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, all vulnerable to bleaching from elevated sea temperatures
 - **Fisheries Sector:** India is the **third-largest fish producer** globally; marine warming poses risks to coastal livelihoods and food security
- **Global Climate Framework:**
 - **UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change):** Parent treaty for international climate action
 - **Paris Agreement (2015):** Aims to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, preferably 1.5°C
 - **IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change):** The leading international body assessing climate science

US Removes Syria from State Sponsors of Terrorism List, Delists HTS

What's the News?

- The **United States** removed Syria from its **"State Sponsors of Terrorism" (SST)** list, ending a designation that had remained in force since **1979**.
- The US also revoked the **Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)** designation of **al-Nusrah Front**, also known as **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**, while the US Treasury's **Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)** removed HTS from its **Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (SDN) List**.
- The move removes major legal barriers affecting **foreign assistance, defence-related exports, financial transactions and private investment**, facilitating Syria's economic reconstruction and reintegration into the international financial system.
- It marks a major change in US policy towards Syria following the fall of **Bashar al-Assad's government** and the emergence of a new government led by President **Ahmed al-Sharaa**, a former HTS leader.

State Sponsors of Terrorism List

- It is a **US Department of State** designation for countries determined to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.
- Major consequences of the designation include:
 - Restrictions on **US foreign assistance**.
 - Ban on certain **defence exports and sales**.
 - Controls on exports of **dual-use items**.
 - Financial and other economic restrictions.
- Following Syria's removal, the remaining countries on the US SST list are:
 - **Cuba**
 - **Iran**
 - **North Korea**

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

- **HTS** developed from the **al-Nusrah Front**, which had been associated with **al-Qaeda in Syria**.
- The organisation formally broke ties with al-Qaeda in **2016** and subsequently evolved into HTS.
- HTS-led rebel forces played the central role in overthrowing the **Bashar al-Assad government in 2024**.
- Its former leader **Ahmed al-Sharaa** subsequently became Syria's President.
- The US had already revoked HTS's separate designation as a **Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)** in **2025**; the latest

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action removes its remaining **SDGT designation** and its entry on OFAC's SDN List.

Sanctions Relief for Syria

- The latest delisting is part of a broader US policy of easing restrictions on post-Assad Syria.
- The US had earlier terminated its broad **Syria sanctions programme**, while continuing targeted sanctions against:
 - Bashar al-Assad and associates.
 - Human-rights abusers.
 - **Captagon** traffickers.
 - Actors linked to chemical weapons and proliferation.
 - ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked entities.
 - Iran and Iran-backed groups.
- With the SST and HTS-SDGT designations removed, **Syria General License 25**, which had permitted certain otherwise restricted transactions involving Syria, became unnecessary and was revoked by OFAC.

Additional Info

- **US Department of State**
 - Handles the **State Sponsors of Terrorism** designation.
 - Also administers the **Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)** framework.
- **Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)**
 - Functions under the **US Department of the Treasury**.
 - Administers and enforces US economic and trade sanctions.
 - Maintains the **SDN List**, covering sanctioned individuals, groups and entities.
- **Important Facts**
 - **SST** → designation of a **country**.
 - **FTO** → designation of a **foreign organisation** under US counter-terrorism law.
 - **SDGT** → designation targeting persons/entities connected with global terrorism.
 - **SDN List** → OFAC sanctions list under which designated persons/entities can face asset-blocking and transaction restrictions.

Nepal Flash Floods Devastate Bhote Koshi-Trishuli River Basin

What's the News?

- A catastrophic **flash flood** originating near the **Nepal-Tibet border** swept through the **Bhote Koshi-Trishuli river system**, severely affecting Nepal's **Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading and downstream districts**.
- More than **160 deaths** have been confirmed, while hundreds of residents, tourists and pilgrims remain unaccounted for; casualty

figures remain provisional as search operations continue.

- Indian nationals, including **Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims**, are among those reported missing.
- The disaster destroyed settlements, roads and bridges and damaged multiple hydropower installations.
- India has provided humanitarian assistance, while **Bihar and Uttar Pradesh** have strengthened monitoring of downstream river systems and placed disaster-response teams on alert.

What Triggered the Flood?

- Preliminary satellite and hydrological assessments indicate that an **ice-rock avalanche/glacier collapse** occurred in the high-altitude region upstream of Nepal.
- The avalanche appears to have blocked the **Lhende River**, creating a temporary **debris-dammed lake**.
- Failure of this natural dam released a sudden mass of water, mud, rock and ice into the **Bhote Koshi**, producing a high-velocity flash flood downstream.
- A seismic signal initially interpreted as an earthquake was subsequently identified by the **US Geological Survey (USGS)** as energy generated by the collapse/landslide rather than a conventional tectonic earthquake.
- Therefore, the event resembles a **cascading cryospheric hazard**—ice/rock collapse → river blockage → temporary lake formation → dam breach → flash flood.
- Investigations into the precise trigger and the contribution of glacier instability and climatic factors are continuing.

River Geography & India Link

The flood is important for Indian examinations because the affected rivers form part of the **Ganga river system**:

- **Lhende/Bhote Koshi → Trishuli River**
- **Trishuli + Kali Gandaki at Devghat → Narayani River**
- **The Narayani enters India as the Gandak River.**
- The Gandak flows through **Bihar** and ultimately joins the **Ganga near Patna**.

This hydrological connectivity explains why authorities in Bihar monitored the **Gandak and Valmikinagar Barrage** after the Nepal floods.

Infrastructure Impact

- Floodwaters damaged settlements and the strategically important road corridor connecting Nepal with the **Rasuwagadhi-Gyirong border crossing with China**.
- Around **42 km of the Betrawati-Rasuwagadhi road** was reported damaged at multiple locations.

- Hydropower infrastructure was severely affected; initial estimates indicated disruption of around **430 MW of electricity supply**, roughly one-eighth of Nepal's installed capacity.
- Bridges, communication networks and flood-monitoring equipment were also damaged, complicating rescue operations.

India's Response

- India offered Nepal comprehensive **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)** support.
- The Indian Air Force deployed a **C-130J aircraft carrying about 10 tonnes of emergency relief and medical supplies**, with additional air assets and helicopters earmarked for assistance.
- Indian authorities coordinated with Nepal for the rescue and tracing of Indian nationals.
- The Union government placed administrations and **NDRF units in vulnerable border areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh on high alert** because of possible downstream effects.

Additional Info

- Flash Flood**
 - A rapidly developing flood characterised by a sharp rise in water level and high flow velocity.
 - Himalayan flash floods may be triggered by intense rainfall, **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**, landslide-dam failures, avalanches or combinations of these processes.
- Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)**
 - Sudden release of water stored in or behind a glacial lake.
 - Particularly hazardous in the Himalayas because steep gradients allow floodwaters and debris to travel downstream at very high velocities.
 - A separate major flood in the same border region in **2025** was linked to rapid drainage of a glacier-fed lake, illustrating the recurring cryospheric risk in the region.
- Why the Himalayas are Vulnerable**
 - Young and geologically fragile fold mountains.
 - Very steep slopes and narrow valleys.
 - Extensive glaciers and glacial lakes.
 - High seismicity.
 - Landslides and unstable rock/ice masses.
 - Climate-driven glacier retreat and permafrost degradation can increase slope and glacial instability, although attribution of an

individual disaster requires specific scientific assessment.

US-Venezuela Oil Deal Gives US Majority Control Over 65 Billion Barrels

What's the News?

- US President **Donald Trump** announced an energy agreement under which the United States would obtain **majority control over more than 65 billion barrels of Venezuela's proven oil reserves** through a public-private partnership.
- The agreement seeks to revive Venezuela's underinvested oil industry by bringing in US capital, technology and energy companies.
- The Trump administration expects the arrangement to increase oil supplies and potentially ease domestic fuel prices, while Venezuela expects large-scale investment, higher production and government revenues.
- However, **"majority control" does not mean transfer of Venezuelan sovereignty over the reserves**. Venezuela maintains that ownership of its natural resources remains with the Venezuelan state.

US-Venezuela Oil Agreement

- The agreement covers **more than 65 billion barrels of proven reserves**.
- It is expected to mobilise **nearly \$100 billion in private investment** for Venezuela's oil sector.
- Venezuela subsequently stated that the energy arrangement would run for **25 years**.
- Development plans include:
 - 17 strategic existing oilfields.**
 - 8 new greenfield oil blocks.**
 - Initial production target of around **1.5 million barrels per day (bpd)**, compared with roughly **1.25 million bpd** currently.
- Venezuela estimates that the projects could generate around **\$209 billion in revenue for the state** over the agreement period.

Why Venezuela's Oil Matters

- Venezuela possesses the **world's largest proven crude-oil reserves**.
- Its proven reserves are approximately **303 billion barrels**, representing about **17% of global proven crude reserves**.
- Most reserves consist of **extra-heavy crude oil**, particularly in the **Orinoco Oil Belt**.
- Despite its enormous reserves, Venezuela has historically produced far below its potential because of:
 - Chronic underinvestment.
 - Deteriorating infrastructure.
 - Shortage of technical expertise.

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- Economic and political instability.
- International sanctions.
- Operational problems at state-owned **Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)**.

Significance of the Deal

- **For the US**
 - Provides access to a large long-term crude-oil resource base.
 - Could improve crude supplies to US refineries designed to process Venezuelan heavy crude.
 - Expands US strategic influence over the Western Hemisphere's largest petroleum resource base.
 - Encourages American energy companies to return to Venezuela.
- **For Venezuela**
 - Provides foreign capital and technical expertise required to rehabilitate ageing oil infrastructure.
 - Could substantially increase crude production and exports.
 - Generates additional fiscal revenue and employment.
 - Helps reconnect Venezuela's energy sector with international investment.
- **For Global Oil Markets**
 - Higher Venezuelan output could expand non-Middle Eastern crude availability.
 - It could contribute to diversification of global supplies during geopolitical disruptions affecting major Middle Eastern producers.
 - Venezuela's actual ability to rapidly raise production will depend on infrastructure rehabilitation and investment because much of its crude is technically difficult **extra-heavy oil**.

Additional Info

- **Venezuela & OPEC**
 - Venezuela is a **founding member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**.
 - OPEC was established in **1960 at the Baghdad Conference**.
 - Other founding members were **Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia**.
 - Venezuela holds approximately **303.2 billion barrels of proven crude reserves**.
- **Orinoco Oil Belt**
 - Located in eastern Venezuela along the **Orinoco River basin**.
 - Contains one of the world's largest concentrations of hydrocarbons.

- Crude is predominantly **extra-heavy**, requiring specialised extraction, upgrading and refining technology.

• PDVSA

- Full form: **Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.**
- Venezuela's state-owned oil and natural-gas company.
- Created following nationalisation of Venezuela's petroleum industry in the **1970s**.
- Historically one of the Venezuelan government's principal sources of revenue.

NASA Launches Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope to Study the Dark Universe

What's the News?

- **NASA has launched the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope**, its next-generation flagship astrophysics observatory, aboard a **SpaceX Falcon Heavy** rocket from Kennedy Space Center, Florida.
- Roman is travelling to the **Sun-Earth Lagrange Point 2 (L2)**, about **1.5 million km from Earth**, where it will operate in an orbit around L2.
- Its principal scientific goals are to investigate **dark energy, dark matter and exoplanets**, while conducting wide-field infrared surveys of the universe.
- The observatory has a planned **five-year primary mission** and is expected to begin releasing its first scientific images after commissioning.

Roman Space Telescope

- **Agency:** National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**)
- **Launch vehicle:** SpaceX **Falcon Heavy**
- **Destination:** Sun-Earth **L2**
- **Primary mirror:** **2.4 metres** in diameter – approximately the same size as Hubble's primary mirror.
- **Observation:** Primarily **near-infrared** wavelengths.
- Its field of view is at least **100 times larger than Hubble's**, enabling it to survey large regions of the sky much faster.
- Roman could measure light from around **1 billion galaxies** during its mission.

Major Instruments

Wide Field Instrument (WFI)

- Roman's primary scientific instrument.
- A **300-megapixel near-infrared camera**.
- Contains **18 detectors**.
- Supports:
 - Wide-field imaging
 - Slitless spectroscopy
 - Dark-energy studies

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- Exoplanet microlensing surveys
- Roman is designed to survey the universe around **1,000 times faster than Hubble** for suitable wide-field observations.

Coronagraph Instrument

- A **technology-demonstration instrument**.
- Designed to block the overwhelming light of stars, allowing much fainter nearby objects to be observed.
- Will demonstrate technologies for **direct imaging and spectroscopy of exoplanets**, particularly Jupiter-like planets.
- The technologies could contribute to future missions seeking to directly image potentially Earth-like planets.

Major Scientific Objectives

Dark Energy

- Roman will map the distribution and evolution of galaxies across cosmic history.
- It will use techniques including:
 - **Weak gravitational lensing**
 - Galaxy clustering
 - Observations of **Type Ia supernovae**
- These observations can help determine how the **expansion of the universe has changed over time**.

Dark Matter

- Dark matter does not emit, absorb or reflect electromagnetic radiation.
- Its presence is inferred mainly through its **gravitational effects**.
- Roman will map matter distribution using gravitational lensing, improving understanding of the role of dark matter in galaxy and large-scale structure formation.

Exoplanets

- Roman will conduct a major statistical survey of planetary systems in the Milky Way.
- It will use **gravitational microlensing** to discover planets, including planets located relatively far from their host stars and possible free-floating planets.
- NASA estimates its surveys could discover roughly **100,000 new exoplanets**.

Why Lagrange Point 2?

- **Lagrange points** are locations where the gravitational effects of two large bodies and the orbital motion of a smaller object combine to allow relatively stable positioning.
- The Sun-Earth system has **five Lagrange points: L1 to L5**.
- **L2 lies beyond Earth on the side away from the Sun**.
- It offers:
 - A relatively stable thermal environment
 - Uninterrupted views of deep space
 - Efficient shielding from sunlight

- The **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)** also operates around Sun-Earth L2.

Additional Info

Who Was Nancy Grace Roman?

- **Nancy Grace Roman (1925–2018)** was **NASA's first Chief of Astronomy**.
- She played a major role in advancing the concept of space-based observatories.
- She is widely known as the **"Mother of Hubble"** for her contribution to making the Hubble Space Telescope possible.
- Roman was originally developed under the name **Wide Field Infrared Survey Telescope (WFIRST)** before being renamed in her honour.

Roman vs Hubble vs James Webb

Feature	Roman	Hubble	James Webb
Primary mirror	2.4 m	2.4 m	6.5 m
Main strength	Wide-field surveys	High-resolution observations	Deep infrared observations
Roman field of view	≥100× Hubble	Relatively narrow	Relatively narrow
Operating region	Sun-Earth L2	Low Earth Orbit	Sun-Earth L2
Major focus	Dark energy, dark matter, exoplanets	General astrophysics	Early universe, galaxies, stars, exoplanets

High-Yield Facts

- Roman will transmit around **1.4 terabytes of scientific data per day**, the highest daily data volume yet for a NASA astrophysics mission at launch.
- Its combination of a **Hubble-sized mirror and very wide field of view** makes it particularly suited to large astronomical surveys.
- Roman complements rather than replaces **Hubble and JWST**: Roman surveys large areas to find scientifically interesting targets that other observatories can subsequently study in greater detail.

Ecuador Declares Nationwide El Niño Emergency

What's the News?

- **Ecuador has declared a nationwide red alert over El Niño** as warming in the equatorial Pacific raises the risk of severe weather.
- The **National Secretariat for Risk Management (SNGR)** activated provincial and cantonal emergency committees to coordinate preparedness, preventive

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evacuations, resource mobilisation and disaster response.

- Authorities have warned particularly of **drought and wildfires in Ecuador's Amazon region**, alongside broader risks to agriculture, water availability, infrastructure and livelihoods.
- The developing El Niño could become **one of the strongest on record**, with effects already being observed across parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia.

El Niño?

- **El Niño** is the warm phase of the **El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**.
- It involves abnormal warming of the **central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean**.
- During El Niño:
 - Pacific **trade winds weaken**.
 - Warm surface water spreads eastwards.
 - The **Walker Circulation weakens**.
 - Rainfall and atmospheric-pressure patterns shift across the tropics.
- El Niño events generally recur irregularly at intervals of about **2–7 years**.

Impact on Ecuador

- Ecuador lies on the **Pacific coast of South America**, making it particularly sensitive to changes in eastern Pacific sea-surface temperatures.
- Expected risks include:
 - **Drought and water stress**
 - **Forest and vegetation fires**
 - Agricultural losses
 - Disruption of fisheries
 - Extreme rainfall and flooding in vulnerable regions
 - Damage to roads and other infrastructure
- The red alert enables authorities to activate evacuation protocols and strengthen coordination between national and local disaster-management agencies.

Regional Impact

- Other Latin American countries, including **Panama, Honduras and El Salvador**, have also declared emergency measures linked to El Niño.
- **Peru** has introduced emergency measures in hundreds of districts because of risks from flooding, heat, drought and water shortages.
- Central America is experiencing severe drought conditions, while El Niño-related dryness has aggravated **wildfires in Indonesia**.

El Niño & Indian Monsoon

- El Niño is important for Indian geography and climatology because it can influence the **Southwest Monsoon**.
- In general:

- El Niño weakens the tropical **Walker Circulation**.
- This can suppress convection over the western Pacific and Indian region.
- Many El Niño years have therefore been associated with **below-normal Indian monsoon rainfall**.
- However, the relationship is **not one-to-one**; factors such as the **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)**, Eurasian snow conditions and intra-seasonal monsoon variability can modify its impact.

Additional Info

ENSO

ENSO = El Niño–Southern Oscillation, an interacting ocean-atmosphere phenomenon in the tropical Pacific.

It has three phases:

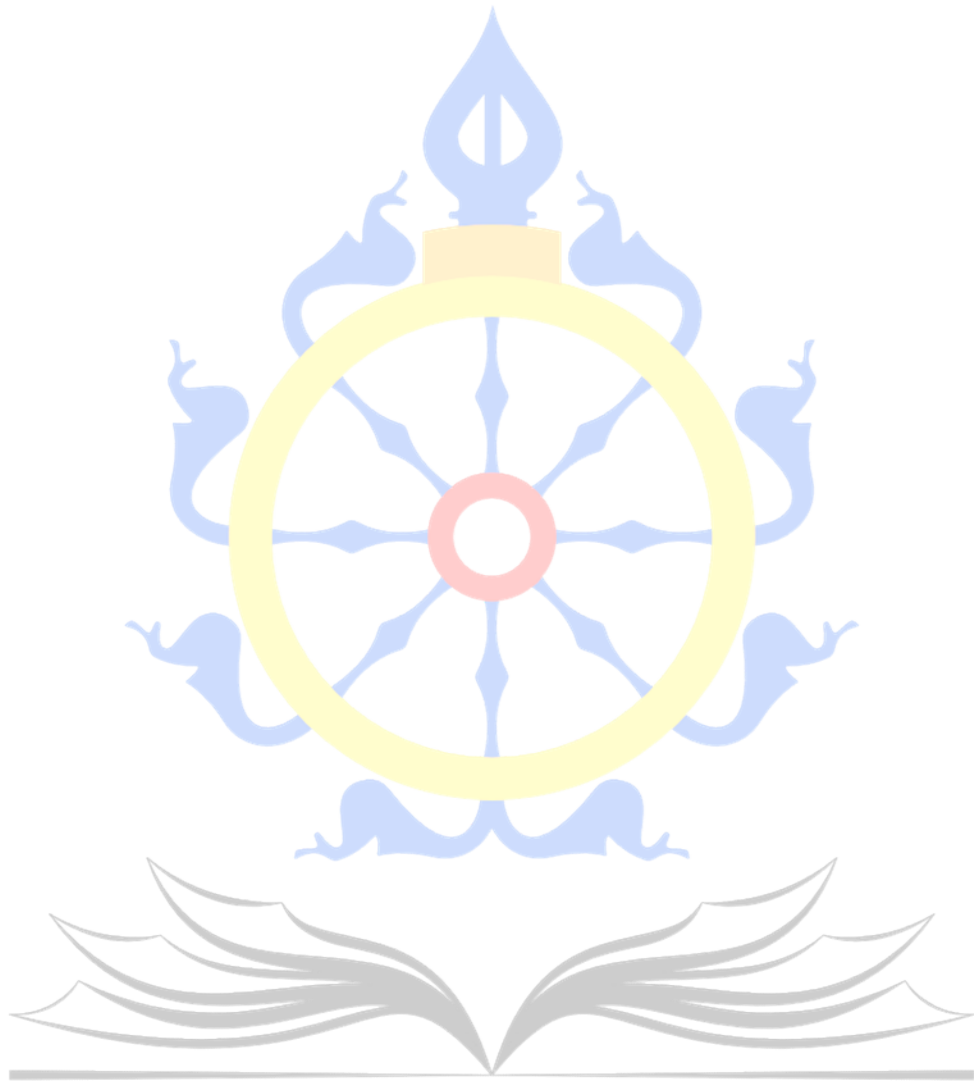
- **El Niño:** Warmer-than-normal central/eastern equatorial Pacific.
- **La Niña:** Cooler-than-normal central/eastern equatorial Pacific.
- **ENSO Neutral:** Sea-surface temperatures and atmospheric circulation remain near long-term averages.

Southern Oscillation

- Refers to the see-saw variation in atmospheric pressure between the **western and eastern tropical Pacific**.
- During El Niño:
 - Pressure tends to be **higher over Indonesia/western Pacific**.
 - Pressure tends to be **lower over the eastern tropical Pacific**.

Ecuador

- **Capital:** Quito
- **Continent:** South America
- **Ocean:** Pacific Ocean
- **Currency:** US Dollar
- The **Equator passes through Ecuador**, from which the country derives its name.
- The **Galápagos Islands**, located in the Pacific Ocean, are part of Ecuador and are strongly associated with Charles Darwin's studies on evolution.





Miscellaneous

India Finishes Fourth at Glasgow Commonwealth Games with 39 Medals What's the News?

India concluded the **2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland**, in fourth position with **39 medals—13 gold, 17 silver and 9 bronze**. India ranked ahead of host Scotland because, despite both winning 13 gold medals, India secured more silver medals. Australia topped the standings, followed by England and Canada.

India achieved the result despite the exclusion of several traditional medal-winning sports, including shooting, wrestling, badminton, hockey, cricket and table tennis.

India's Medal Performance

- **Overall rank:** 4th
- **Gold:** 13
- **Silver:** 17
- **Bronze:** 9
- **Total:** 39
- **Indian contingent:** 122 athletes
- **Birmingham 2022 contingent:** 210 athletes
- **Birmingham 2022 medal tally:** 61 medals

Although India's aggregate tally fell from 61 to 39, direct comparison is limited because Glasgow conducted a substantially smaller sports programme. India reportedly improved from **30 medals in comparable sports at Birmingham to 39 at Glasgow**.

Boxing Leads India's Campaign

Boxing was India's most successful discipline:

- **Gold:** 7
- **Silver:** 3
- **Total:** 10 medals
- India topped the boxing medal table.
- The tally improved from seven boxing medals at Birmingham 2022.

India's boxing gold medallists included:

- Preeti Pawar
- Jaismine Lamboria
- Sakshi Chaudhary
- Priya Ghanghas
- Arundhati Choudhary
- Sachin Siwach
- Ankush Panghal

Other Major Performances

- **Athletics and Para Athletics:** 16 medals, double the eight medals won in the previous edition.
- **Weightlifting:** Eight medals, led by **Mirabai Chanu's third consecutive Commonwealth Games gold**.
- **Judo:** Four medals, including India's first Commonwealth Games judo gold medals, won by **Asmita Dey and Harsh Singh**.
- **Para Powerlifting:** One bronze medal.

- **Gulveer Singh:** India's only multiple medallist, winning silver in the men's 10,000 metres and bronze in the men's 5,000 metres.

Glasgow 2026 Games

The 23rd Commonwealth Games followed a compact model after the Australian state of Victoria withdrew as host. Glasgow used four existing venues and conducted:

- Around **3,000 athletes and Para athletes**
- **74 nations and territories**
- **215 medal events**
- **10 sports**
- A record **47 medal events across six integrated Para sports**

The reduced programme aimed to lower hosting costs, improve sustainability and make the Games more accessible to future host countries.

Ahmedabad 2030

Glasgow formally handed the Commonwealth Games flag and ceremonial baton to **Ahmedabad—officially referred to as Amdavad by Commonwealth Sport—which will host the centenary edition in 2030**.

Points:

- The 2030 edition will mark **100 years** since the first Commonwealth Games in Hamilton, Canada.
- The programme is expected to include **15–17 sports**.
- Confirmed disciplines include athletics, swimming, table tennis, bowls, weightlifting, artistic gymnastics, netball and boxing, along with specified Para events.
- Hosting the Games is also linked to India's ambition to host the **2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games**.

Additional Info

- **Commonwealth Games**
 - First conducted in Hamilton, Canada, in 1930.
 - Held generally once every four years.
 - India's best performance remains the **2010 New Delhi Games**, where it won 101 medals.
 - India has hosted the Games once—in New Delhi.
- **Governing body**
 - The Games are governed by **Commonwealth Sport**, formerly known as the Commonwealth Games Federation.
 - Each participating country or territory is represented by a **Commonwealth Games Association**.
- **Notes**
 - Host city, 2026: **Glasgow, Scotland**

- India's rank: **Fourth**
- India's tally: **13 gold, 17 silver and 9 bronze**
- India's leading sport: **Boxing**
- Only Indian double medallist: **Gulveer Singh**
- Next host: **Ahmedabad, India**
- Next edition: **Centenary Commonwealth Games, 2030**

India Wins Three Golds at Commonwealth Fencing Championship 2026

What's the News?

- India won **5 medals – 3 Gold, 1 Silver and 1 Bronze** – in senior individual events at the **Commonwealth Fencing Championship 2026** in **Lagos, Nigeria**.
- The latest performance took India's combined medal tally to **29 medals – 8 Gold, 7 Silver and 14 Bronze**.
- India won gold medals in **Senior Women's Foil, Senior Men's Epee and Senior Men's Sabre**.

India's Medal Winners

Event	Indian Fencer	Medal
Senior Women's Foil	Kanaglakshmi	Gold
Senior Women's Foil	Joys Ashitha	Silver
Senior Men's Epee	Rajendran Shanthimol Sherjin	Gold
Senior Men's Sabre	Singh Karan Singh	Gold
Senior Men's Sabre	Kumaresan Padma Gisho Nidhi	Bronze

- **Kanaglakshmi** and **Joys Ashitha** secured a **gold-silver finish** in Women's Foil.
- **Rajendran Shanthimol Sherjin** defeated **Pieter Kruger** of South Africa to win the Men's Epee gold.
- **Singh Karan Singh** defeated **Shim Yoongi** of **Australia** in the Men's Sabre final, while fellow Indian **Kumaresan Padma Gisho Nidhi** won bronze.

India's Medal Tally

- **Total:** 29 medals
 - **Gold:** 8
 - **Silver:** 7
 - **Bronze:** 14
- India had won **17 medals** on the opening day itself, comprising **4 Gold, 4 Silver and 9 Bronze** across foil, epee and sabre events.

Commonwealth Fencing Championship?

- It is an international fencing competition involving athletes from **Commonwealth nations**.
- The Lagos edition includes **U-23, Senior and Veteran** competitions and is being staged at **Rugby School, Eko Atlantic, Victoria Island, Lagos**.

- Competitions are organised across the three standard fencing disciplines:
 - **Foil**
 - **Epee (Épée)**
 - **Sabre**

Fencing

- **Fencing** is a combat sport in which competitors score touches on an opponent using specialised swords.
- Its international governing body is the **Fédération Internationale d'Escrime (FIE)**.

Three Weapons

- **Foil**
 - A **thrusting weapon**; touches are scored with the tip.
 - The principal valid target is the **torso**.
- **Epee**
 - A **thrusting weapon**.
 - The **entire body** is a valid target.
 - Unlike foil and sabre, epee does **not** use right-of-way/priority rules.
- **Sabre**
 - Allows scoring with both the **tip and edge of the blade**.
 - The valid target broadly covers the **upper body**.

Additional Info

- **Commonwealth Fencing Federation (CFF)**
 - Governs Commonwealth-level fencing competitions.
 - The **Nigerian Fencing Federation** was awarded hosting rights for the 2026 Senior and Veteran Championships.
- **Notes**
 - **Host city:** Lagos
 - **Host country:** Nigeria
 - **Venue:** Rugby School, Eko Atlantic
 - **India's reported tally:** **29 – 8 Gold, 7 Silver, 14 Bronze**
 - **Three gold events:** Women's Foil, Men's Epee and Men's Sabre
 - **International governing body:** Fédération Internationale d'Escrime (FIE)
 - **Three fencing weapons:** Foil, Epee and Sabre

National Sports Awards 2025

Announced: 17 Sportspersons Selected for Arjuna Award

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports** has announced the **National Sports Awards 2025**, recognising outstanding sportspersons, coaches and organisations.
- **17 sportspersons** have been selected for the **Arjuna Award**, while former footballer **I. Arumainayagam** will receive the **Arjuna Award (Lifetime)**.



- **Five coaches** have been selected for the **Dronacharya Award**—three in the Regular category and two in the Lifetime category.
- **Army Paralympic Node, Pune** has been selected for the **Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar**.
- **No sportsperson has been selected for the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2025.**

Arjuna Award 2025

The **Arjuna Award** recognises consistent outstanding performance during the preceding four years, along with qualities of leadership, sportsmanship and discipline.

- **Athletics:** Tejaswin Shankar, Muhammed Ajmal V., Priyanka Goswami
- **Badminton:** Treesa Jolly, Pullela Gayatri Gopichand
- **Boxing:** Narender
- **Chess:** Vidit Santosh Gujrathi, Divya Jitendra Deshmukh
- **Deaf Shooting:** Dhanush Srikanth
- **Hockey:** Lalremsiami, Rajkumar Pal
- **Kabaddi:** Surjeet, Pooja
- **Para-shooting:** Rudransh Khandelwal
- **Para-athletics:** Ekta Bhyan
- **Rowing:** Arvind Singh
- **Shooting:** Akhil Sheoran.

Arjuna Award (Lifetime)

- **I. Arumainayagam – Football**
- The Lifetime award recognises retired sportspersons who made significant sporting contributions and continue to contribute to the **promotion of sports after retirement.**

Dronacharya Award 2025

The **Dronacharya Award** recognises coaches for outstanding and meritorious work and for enabling athletes to excel at international events.

- **Regular Category**
 - Parveer Singh – Athletics
 - Chhote Lal Yadav – Boxing
 - Neha Nandkumar Chavan – Shooting
- **Lifetime Category**
 - Dharmendra Singh Yadav – Boxing
 - Virender Kumar – Wrestling.

Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar

- **Awardee:** Army Paralympic Node, Pune.
- The award recognises **corporate entities and NGOs** that have played a significant role in promoting and developing sports in India.

Prize Money

- **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna:** ₹25 lakh
- **Arjuna Award:** ₹15 lakh
- **Dronacharya Award – Regular:** ₹10 lakh
- **Dronacharya Award – Lifetime:** ₹15 lakh
- Awardees also receive a **statuette/trophy and certificate.**

Additional Info

- **National Sports Awards**
 - Administered by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.**
 - Awarded annually to recognise excellence and contribution to Indian sports.
- **Selection Process**
 - Applications were invited through a dedicated **online portal**, including self-applications.
 - The Selection Committee for the 2025 awards was chaired by former Supreme Court judge **Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra.**
 - The committee included eminent sportspersons, sports administrators and persons with experience in sports journalism.
- **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award**
 - India's **highest sporting honour.**
 - No recipient was selected under this category for the 2025 awards.

