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MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

May-2026

CBSE's Three-Language Policy Under NEP 2020+
Explained

Women's Reservation & Delimitation
Impact on India's Representation

From Uranium to Thorium
India's Nuclear Turning Point



GLOBAL HEADLINES

- Modern UK-US Tensions Over Diego Garcia Deal: Explained
- Spain Approves Amnesty Programme for Migrants
- Balendra Shah has taken oath as the Prime Minister of Nepal
- Benjamin Netanyahu appoints Roman Gofman as new Mossad chief
- India Withdraws Bid to Host COP33 Climate Summit (2028)
- Olympics Transgender Policy: Ban on Trans Women Explained

NATIONAL HEADLINES

- Why Transgender Act 2026 Triggers Controversy? Explained
- Karnataka HC Directs Strict Enforcement of Menstrual Leave Policy
- Sabarimala Case: SC Allows Review of Superstitious Practices
- Samrat Choudhary Sworn in as Bihar CM
- Allahabad High Court Judge Yashwant Varma Resigns
- Legendary Singer Asha Bhosle Passes Away

AWARDS & RANKS

- Telangana Minister Jupally Krishna Rao Receives **World Peace Award**
- Jindal Stainless Appoints Ranveer Singh as **Brand Ambassador**

**India Appoints P. Kumaran as
Next High Commissioner to the UK**

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Dear Aspirants,

The journey to success in the Civil Services Examination is not merely a test of knowledge, but a test of awareness, discipline, and perspective. For UPSC aspirants, current affairs are not an isolated subject—they are the foundation upon which the entire preparation stands. From Prelims to Mains and even the Personality Test, a consistent and analytical understanding of ongoing events is indispensable.

In a world that is constantly evolving, staying updated is not optional—it is essential. Regular engagement with current affairs sharpens your ability to connect static concepts with dynamic realities, enhances answer writing, and develops the administrative insight expected from future civil servants.

"Excellence is not an act, but a habit."

This reminds us that success in UPSC is built through daily consistency, thoughtful reading, and continuous revision.

This edition has been carefully curated to provide a comprehensive and exam-oriented coverage of the most significant developments of the month. It opens with an in-depth analysis of CBSE's Three-Language Policy under NEP 2020, offering clarity on educational reforms and their broader implications. On the global front, the modern UK-US tensions over the Diego Garcia deal provide valuable insights into strategic geopolitics and international relations.

In the domain of science and technology, India's transition from Uranium to Thorium highlights a critical shift in its nuclear energy strategy, while the successful conclusion of Artemis II marks a major milestone in humanity's journey toward lunar exploration. Social and governance issues have been addressed through discussions on the controversy surrounding the Transgender Act 2026, the implications of Women's Reservation and delimitation, and the Supreme Court's evolving stance in the Sabarimala case.

Key developments such as India withdrawing its bid to host COP33 (2028), Spain's migrant amnesty programme, and the evolving Olympics transgender participation policy reflect important global and societal shifts. Governance and institutional updates have been covered through significant appointments and events, including Samrat Choudhary taking oath as Bihar Chief Minister, Susan Coyle becoming Australia's first female Army Chief, Roman Gofman's appointment as Mossad chief by Benjamin Netanyahu, and Lt Gen Dhiraj Seth assuming office as Vice Chief of Army Staff.

The magazine also brings attention to important judicial and administrative developments such as the Karnataka High Court's direction on menstrual leave policy, the resignation of Allahabad High Court Judge Yashwant Varma, and India appointing P. Kumaran as the next High Commissioner to the UK. Regional and international political developments, including Balendra Shah taking oath as the Prime Minister of Nepal, further add to your understanding of governance beyond borders.

We also pause to acknowledge individuals who have left a lasting impact, remembering Kargil War hero Col Sonam Wangchuk and legendary singer Asha Bhosle. Achievements such as Telangana Minister Jupally Krishna Rao receiving the World Peace Award highlight contributions in public life, while developments like Jindal Stainless appointing Ranveer Singh as its brand ambassador reflect intersections of economy and media.

Each topic in this magazine has been selected with the aim of enabling you to think critically, write effectively, and develop a well-rounded perspective—qualities that define a successful civil servant.

As you engage with this content, remember that every page you read, every issue you understand, and every concept you revise brings you closer to your goal. Stay disciplined, stay curious, and keep building your understanding with patience and determination.

The path to the Civil Services is demanding, but with consistency and the right approach, it is certainly achievable.
Your preparation today is the foundation of tomorrow's leadership.

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SCHOLARSHIP IN FOCUS - INDIA

Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation Scholarship

A Detailed Guide to One of India's Most Inclusive Overseas Education Scholarships

Established in 1976, the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation Scholarship was created with the vision of enabling talented young Indians to access world-class education and training opportunities abroad. Founded by philanthropist Indoo Shivdasani in memory of her husband, the programme was designed to support individuals with exceptional academic, creative, and professional potential at a time when overseas education remained inaccessible to many deserving students. Over the decades, the Foundation has developed into one of India's most respected international scholarship bodies, supporting scholars across disciplines ranging from science and public policy to literature, fine arts, film, architecture, and social sciences.

The scholarship reflects the Foundation's long-standing belief that exposure to global institutions, research environments, and creative ecosystems can play a transformative role not only in an individual's career, but also in broader intellectual and cultural development. Through structured financial support for postgraduate study, doctoral research, and specialised training at leading universities and institutions worldwide, the programme continues to help Indian students pursue advanced education abroad while contributing meaningfully to their respective fields.

Understanding the Inlaks Scholarship

The Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation Scholarship is designed to support Indian citizens pursuing full-time postgraduate programmes, MPhil courses, doctoral research, or specialised professional training abroad.

One of the defining features of the programme is its interdisciplinary openness. While many overseas scholarships prioritise STEM or policy-related subjects, the Inlaks Scholarship has historically supported candidates from fields including:

- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Fine Arts and Visual Arts
- Film, Theatre, and Music
- Architecture and Design
- Public Policy and Development Studies
- Environment and Sustainability
- Science, Engineering, and Mathematics

However, the Foundation periodically updates its eligible and excluded fields list, making it important for applicants to verify the current year's guidelines before applying.

Eligibility requirements

The scholarship maintains highly selective eligibility standards.

According to the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation, applicants must generally:

- Be Indian citizens residing in India
- Hold a degree from a recognised Indian university
- Be below the prescribed upper age limit, which is typically around 30 years for most courses
- Have secured admission to an eligible institution abroad, where required
- Demonstrate exceptional academic, professional, or creative achievement

The Foundation places strong emphasis not only on academic scores, but also on originality, long-term potential, and clarity of purpose.

Importantly, certain fields such as business studies, medicine, public health, fashion design, music performance-focused training, and some executive programmes may not be eligible under recent cycles. Applicants should therefore carefully review the annually updated eligibility list before beginning the application process.

What financial support does the scholarship provide?

The Inlaks Scholarship is widely recognised because of the scale and flexibility of its funding support. The Foundation provides funding of up to USD100,000, depending on the needs of the applicant and the structure of the course.

Coverage may include:

- Tuition fees
- Living expenses
- One-way travel allowance
- Health allowance, where applicable

In some cases, the Foundation may also coordinate additional support arrangements if programme costs exceed the scholarship cap.

Unlike partial-funding schemes, the scholarship is intended to substantially reduce the financial burden associated with overseas education at globally reputed institutions.

University and course preferences

The Foundation gives preference to candidates admitted to highly ranked and academically distinguished institutions abroad.

Applicants are generally expected to secure admission to recognised universities in:

- The United Kingdom
- The United States
- Europe

Programmes at institutions such as University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, and leading arts and research schools have historically featured among scholar destinations.

The Foundation evaluates not only institutional prestige, but also whether the chosen programme meaningfully aligns with the applicant's long-term goals.

The Application Process

The application process is rigorous and highly competitive.

Stage 1: Online application

Applicants must complete the scholarship application through the Foundation's official portal within the announced deadline. (<https://inlaksfoundation.org/opportunities/scholarship/>)

The application typically requires:

- Academic transcripts
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Statement of purpose
- Admission documents
- Portfolio or writing samples, where applicable
- Reference letters

Creative field applicants may also need to submit performance reels, portfolios, publications, or project documentation depending on discipline requirements.

Stage 2: Shortlisting

Applications undergo detailed academic and profile-based review.

Shortlisting considers:

- Academic excellence
- Professional achievement

- Creative distinction
- Quality of proposal or study plan
- Institutional fit

Given the limited number of awards each year, competition is extremely high.

Stage3: Interview round

Shortlisted candidates are invited for interviews conducted by panels comprising academics, professionals, artists, and subject experts.

The interview process typically evaluates:

- Intellectual depth
- Clarity of goals
- Subject understanding
- Communication and originality
- Potential long-term contribution

For applicants in creative disciplines, interviews may also focus heavily on portfolio discussion and artistic intent.

Why the scholarship stands out

The Inlaks Scholarship occupies a unique place in India's overseas education ecosystem because it supports fields often underrepresented in traditional scholarship structures.

While many funding programmes prioritise technical or employability-focused disciplines, Inlaks has consistently invested in:

- Arts and culture
- Research-driven humanities
- Interdisciplinary innovation
- Creative practice

This broader intellectual approach has helped create a scholar network that extends across academia, policy, literature, cinema, architecture, and the arts.

Equally significant is the prestige associated with selection. Being named an Inlaks Scholar carries substantial academic and professional recognition, often strengthening future applications, collaborations, and research opportunities.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the Inlaks Scholarship fully funded?

The scholarship provides funding up to USD 120,000, which can substantially cover tuition and living expenses depending on the programme structure.

Can students apply before receiving admission?

In many cases, applicants are expected to already hold admission offers, though specific requirements may vary by cycle.

Are MBA programmes eligible?

Most standalone MBA and certain business-related programmes are generally excluded.

Does the scholarship support arts and humanities?

Yes. The Foundation is particularly known for supporting applicants in arts, humanities, social sciences, and creative disciplines.

A final word

The Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation Scholarship is not simply a funding programme; it is a recognition of exceptional potential. Its emphasis on intellectual merit, creative ambition, and long-term contribution has made it one of India's most respected international scholarship opportunities.

For students pursuing globally competitive postgraduate education in research, arts, sciences, or interdisciplinary fields, the scholarship offers more than financial support. It provides credibility, institutional confidence, and access to a legacy network of scholars who have shaped conversations across disciplines for decades.

Which, frankly, is considerably more useful than another motivational quote about "following your dreams" pasted over a stock photo of a graduation cap.

SCHOLARSHIP IN FOCUS - GLOBAL

Rhodes Scholarship

A Detailed Guide to One of the World's Most Prestigious International Scholarships

Few international scholarships carry the historical prestige and global recognition associated with the Rhodes Scholarship. Established in 1902 through the will of British businessman and imperialist Cecil Rhodes, the programme was created with the aim of supporting exceptional young individuals from around the world to pursue higher education at the University of Oxford. Over more than a century, the scholarship has evolved into one of the most competitive and influential academic funding programmes globally, producing scholars who have gone on to become heads of government, scientists, judges, writers, activists, entrepreneurs, and Nobel Prize winners.

Today, the Rhodes Scholarship is administered by the Rhodes Trust and continues to focus on identifying students who demonstrate not only academic excellence, but also leadership, public spirit, and the potential to create meaningful impact in their fields and communities. For Indian students, the scholarship represents a fully funded pathway to postgraduate study at Oxford, combined with entry into one of the world's most influential academic and professional networks.

Understanding the Rhodes Scholarship

The Rhodes Scholarship supports outstanding students pursuing postgraduate study at Oxford University. Unlike scholarships restricted to specific academic disciplines, Rhodes Scholars may pursue a wide range of full-time postgraduate programmes offered by the university, including:

- Master's degrees
- MPhil programmes
- Doctoral research (DPhil)
- Certain second undergraduate degrees at Oxford, where applicable
-

The scholarship is intended not simply to reward academic achievement, but to identify individuals with strong character, leadership qualities, commitment to service, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society over the long term.

The Rhodes model places equal emphasis on intellectual ability and broader personal qualities, making the selection process distinct from purely merit-score-based funding schemes.

Eligibility requirements

The scholarship maintains highly selective eligibility standards.

According to the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation, applicants must generally:

- Be Indian citizens residing in India
- Hold a degree from a recognised Indian university
- Be below the prescribed upper age limit, which is typically around 30 years for most courses
- Have secured admission to an eligible institution abroad, where required
- Demonstrate exceptional academic, professional, or creative achievement

The Foundation places strong emphasis not only on academic scores, but also on originality, long-term potential, and clarity of purpose.

Importantly, certain fields such as business studies, medicine, public health, fashion design, music performance-focused training, and some executive programmes may not be eligible under recent cycles. Applicants should therefore carefully review the annually updated eligibility list before beginning the application process.

The history and philosophy behind the scholarship

The programme originated from the vision outlined in Cecil Rhodes' will, which proposed bringing together talented young people from different countries to study at Oxford and develop international understanding and leadership.

While the historical legacy of Cecil Rhodes remains widely debated because of his association with British colonialism and empire, the modern Rhodes Scholarship has significantly evolved in structure and philosophy. Today, the programme positions itself around values such as ethical leadership, global engagement, social impact, and public service.

The scholarship now operates across multiple constituencies worldwide and actively supports diversity in academic background, geography, and lived experience.

Eligibility requirements for Indian applicants

The Rhodes Scholarship for India follows specific eligibility conditions announced annually by the Rhodes Trust. While exact criteria may vary slightly by cycle, applicants generally must:

- Be citizens of India
- Hold an Indian passport or equivalent proof of citizenship
- Have completed formal education at an institution in India for a specified number of years
- Meet Oxford University's academic requirements for the chosen course
- Fall within the prescribed age bracket, typically between 18 and 24 years, with certain variations for postgraduate applicants
- Demonstrate exceptional academic achievement

Academic excellence is essential, and successful candidates typically possess very strong undergraduate records from highly reputed institutions.

However, grades alone are not sufficient. The scholarship also evaluates:

- Leadership potential
- Commitment to service
- Integrity and character
- Communication ability
- Intellectual curiosity and depth

What financial support does the Rhodes Scholarship provide?

The Rhodes Scholarship is a fully funded programme covering nearly all major expenses associated with postgraduate study at Oxford.

Funding generally includes:

- Full Oxford University tuition fees
- Annual living stipend
- Settling-in allowance
- Economy-class airfare to and from the United Kingdom
- Visa and International Health Surcharge support
- Additional academic support in certain cases

The stipend is intended to cover accommodation, food, and basic living expenses during the period of study.

In most cases, the scholarship covers two years of study, with possible extension for longer academic pathways such as doctoral programmes, subject to conditions and approvals.

The application process

The Rhodes application process is highly rigorous and involves multiple stages.

Stage 1: Online application

Applicants must submit an application through the official Rhodes portal within the announced deadline.

The application generally requires:

- Academic transcripts
- Personal statement
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Proof of age and citizenship
- Reference letters
- Details of extracurricular involvement and achievements

The personal statement is considered one of the most important parts of the application and is expected to reflect authenticity, intellectual clarity, leadership, and purpose.

Stage 2: Shortlisting

Applications are reviewed by selection committees based on academic strength, leadership profile, public engagement, and overall distinction.

Given the extremely limited number of scholarships available annually for India, competition is intense.

Stage 3: Social engagement and interviews

Shortlisted candidates are invited for final interviews and interaction sessions.

The interview process is known for being intellectually demanding and conversational rather than formulaic. Candidates may be questioned on:

- Academic interests
- Current affairs
- Ethical issues
- Public policy
- Leadership experiences
- Long-term goals

The process evaluates depth of thinking as much as achievement itself.

Why the Rhodes Scholarship stands out

The Rhodes Scholarship is often regarded as one of the highest forms of international academic recognition because of the ecosystem surrounding it.

Rhodes Scholars gain access not only to Oxford, but also to:

- A global alumni network
- Leadership development opportunities
- Interdisciplinary academic exposure
- Professional and policy circles worldwide

Former Rhodes Scholars include influential public figures, academics, scientists, journalists, and policymakers across countries.

The programme's emphasis on leadership and public contribution distinguishes it from scholarships focused purely on academic funding.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the Rhodes Scholarship fully funded?

Yes. It covers tuition fees, living expenses, travel, visa-related costs, and other major study-related expenses at Oxford.

Can Indian students apply?

Yes. India has a dedicated Rhodes constituency with a limited number of scholarships awarded annually.

Is Oxford admission separate from the scholarship?

Yes. Applicants must also satisfy Oxford University's admission requirements for their chosen programme.

Does the scholarship only support certain subjects?

No. A broad range of postgraduate disciplines at Oxford are eligible.

A final word

The Rhodes Scholarship remains one of the world's most prestigious and competitive international scholarship programmes, not only because of its financial support, but because of the values and expectations attached to it. It seeks individuals who combine academic excellence with initiative, integrity, leadership, and the capacity to contribute meaningfully beyond themselves.

For Indian students aspiring to study at University of Oxford, the scholarship represents far more than funding alone. It is an opportunity to enter a global intellectual community shaped by dialogue, scholarship, public engagement, and long-term impact.

Which is a dramatically more sophisticated selection process than most of the world's hiring systems, where someone glances at a résumé for eleven seconds and decides your future.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Karnataka's Menstrual Leave Policy

The Karnataka High Court has directed the state government to ensure the strict and faithful implementation of its menstrual leave policy across all sectors, including the unorganised sector. The court observed that menstrual health and dignity are intrinsically linked to the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The directive was issued while hearing a petition seeking enforcement of the 2025 policy, pending the enactment of a formal law.

Key Details:

- Court: Karnataka High Court
- Judge: Justice M. Nagaprasanna
- Coverage: Both organised and unorganised sectors
- Policy Status: Applicable until formal legislation is enacted

Key Facts:

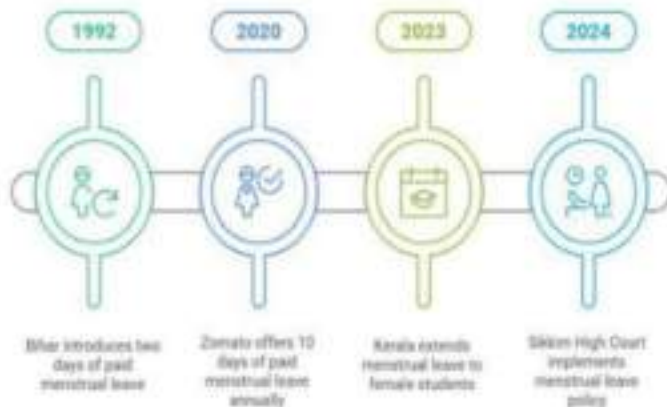
Article 21: Guarantees Right to Life and Personal Liberty

Related Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 14 – Equality before law
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women
- Article 42 – Just and humane working conditions
- Karnataka is among the first Indian states to introduce a menstrual leave policy
- Some countries with menstrual leave policies: Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Zambia
- Proposed Bill provisions may include: Paid leave, Work From Home option, attendance relaxation for students

- enforcement of the policy
- Issue: Lack of implementation, especially in smaller and informal workplaces
- Proposed law: Karnataka Menstrual Leave and Hygiene Bill, 2025 (pending)

Advancing Menstrual Leave in India



Policy Provisions

- 1 day of paid menstrual leave per month for women employees
- Applicable age group: 18–52 years
- Based on Karnataka Government notifications (Nov–Dec 2025)

Court Observations:

Menstrual leave is:

- Not a privilege but a matter of dignity and equality
- Linked to: Article 21 (Right to Life & Dignity)

Court emphasized:

- Need for uniform and consistent implementation through guidelines and circulars
- Administrative challenges cannot be a reason for non-implementation

Background

- Petition filed by a woman worker from Belagavi seeking

Chhattisgarh's Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

The Chhattisgarh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, has approved the formation of a high-level committee to prepare a draft for the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state. The committee

will be headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai and will undertake consultations with citizens, legal experts, and stakeholders before finalising the draft. The move aims to simplify and unify personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, ensuring legal uniformity, gender justice, and social equality. The draft will eventually be presented before the State Assembly for legislative approval.

Legislative Process:

Once the draft of the UCC is prepared, it will be submitted to the state government for approval. After Cabinet clearance, the proposed law will be introduced in the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly for discussion and enactment.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC):

- Refers to a common set of civil laws applicable to all citizens irrespective of religion
- It seeks to replace religion-based personal laws governing areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, and maintenance.

Constitutional Provision:

- Mentioned under Article 44 (Directive Principles of State Policy)
- DPSPs are non-justiciable but guide state policy

Tribal Protection Concern:

- Fifth Schedule areas and PESA Act, 1996 protect tribal customs and traditions

Importance in Governance:

- Reduces legal plurality
- Promotes equality before law (Article 14)
- Linked to debates on secularism and diversity

States & UCC Developments:

- Uttarakhand: First state to implement UCC (2024–25)
- Gujarat: Passed UCC-related legislation
- Goa: Has a common civil code (Portuguese Civil Code legacy)



Constitutional Amendment Bill

What is the Bill about?

The Central Government has proposed a Constitution Amendment Bill. It aims to increase the number of seats in Lok Sabha from 543 to around 850.

Why is this change proposed?

- Lok Sabha seats represent the population of India. Over time, population increases, so representation should also increase.
- The main goal is to implement 33% reservation for women in Parliament.
- More seats are needed so that reservation can be applied without reducing existing representation.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

- Total seats may increase to 850.

Out of these:

- 815 seats for states
- 35 seats for Union Territories
- Changes will be done by amending Article 81 of the Constitution.

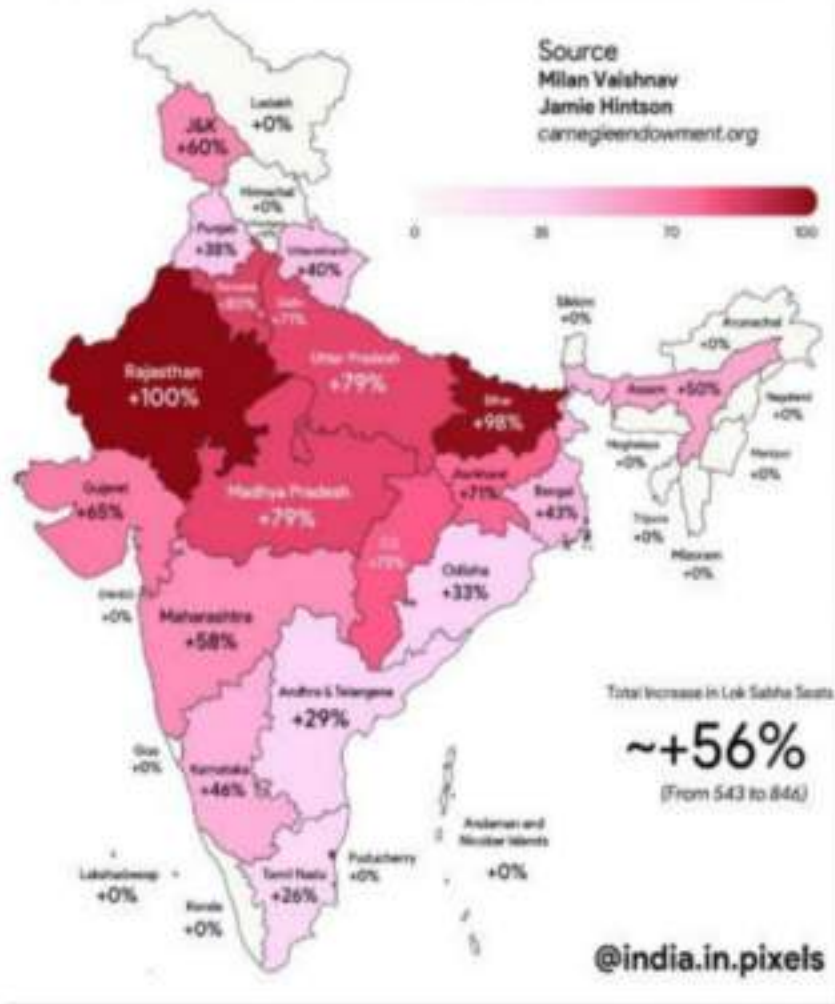
Connection with Delimitation:

- Delimitation = Redrawing constituency boundaries based on population.
- Seats will be distributed based on the latest Census data (likely 2011 or upcoming census).
- A delimitation exercise will decide how seats are divided among states.

In Simple Terms:

- The government wants to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850 so that more people (especially women) can be represented properly.
- However, it is also controversial because it may change the political balance between states.

Probable increase in Lok Sabha Seats after 2026 Delimitation



When will it be implemented?

Expected to be (implemented) by 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

Government's View:

- Better representation of people
- Smooth implementation of women's reservation law (Nari Shakti Vandan Act)

Concerns & Criticism:

Opposition parties have raised issues:

- Fear that southern states may lose representation due to population differences.
- Concern over using old census data (2011) instead of new data.
- Allegation that the bill is being rushed without proper discussion.

Important Constitutional Point:

Any Constitutional Amendment requires:

- Special majority in Parliament (2/3rd)
- Sometimes approval by states as well

How a Bill Becomes a Law in India?

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Parliament (Bill Enactment Process)?

Step 1: Drafting of Bill

- A proposal for a new law is prepared by the concerned ministry.
- It may be:
 - Government Bill (introduced by a minister)
 - Private Member Bill (introduced by any MP who is not a minister)
- Most laws come through Government Bills.



Special Cases:

Money Bill

- Only in Lok Sabha
- Rajya Sabha can only recommend
- Must be returned within 14 days
- Constitutional Amendment Bill
- Special Majority required
- No Joint Sitting
- Sometimes ratification by half of State Legislatures also needed

Step 2: First Reading (Introduction)

The bill is introduced in either:

- Lok Sabha
- Rajya Sabha
- (Except Money Bill, which can be introduced only in Lok Sabha)
- This stage is called First Reading.
- Only introduction happens here.

Step 3: Second Reading (Detailed Discussion)

This is the most important stage.

It has 3 parts:

1. General Discussion
2. Members discuss the principles and purpose of the bill.
3. Committee Stage

The bill may be sent to:

- Departmental Standing Committee
- Select Committee
- Joint Parliamentary Committee
- Detailed clause-by-clause examination happens here.

Consideration Stage

House discusses the bill clause by clause and suggests amendments.

Step 4: Third Reading

- Final discussion happens.
- Members vote for passing the bill.
- If passed, it goes to the other House.

Step 5: Same Process in the Other House

The second House also follows:

- First Reading
- Second Reading
- Third Reading

Then it may:

- pass the bill
- reject the bill
- suggest amendments
- keep it pending

Step 6: If Houses Disagree → Joint Sitting

- If Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha disagree, the President may call a Joint Sitting under Article 108.
- Presided over by the Speaker of Lok Sabha.
- (Not applicable to Money Bills and Constitutional Amendment Bills)

Step 7: President's Assent

- After Parliament passes the bill, it goes to the President of India.

The President may:

- give assent → becomes law
- return the bill (except Money Bill) for reconsideration
- withhold assent (rare)
- After assent, it becomes an Act of Parliament.

Simple Flow for Exams

Drafting → First Reading → Second Reading → Third Reading → Other House → President → Act

Women's Reservation in India

The debate on women's reservation in India began during the making of the Constitution and continues even today. Interestingly, some of the strongest opposition to reservation for women in legislatures came from women leaders themselves, especially Hansa Mehta and Renuka Ray in the Constituent Assembly.

Why They Opposed Reservation

Their main argument was based on equality, not special privilege.

Hansa Mehta's View

She believed women should be treated as equal citizens, not as a separate group needing protection. According to her, asking for reservation meant accepting that women were not equal to men. She felt reservation would make women appear weaker.

Renuka Ray's View

She also opposed reservation and believed women should enter politics on merit, not through reserved seats. She felt reservation could become a sign of inferiority and an obstacle to women's real progress.

Why the Bill Failed

As a Constitutional Amendment Bill, it required a two-thirds special majority.

Out of 528 MPs:

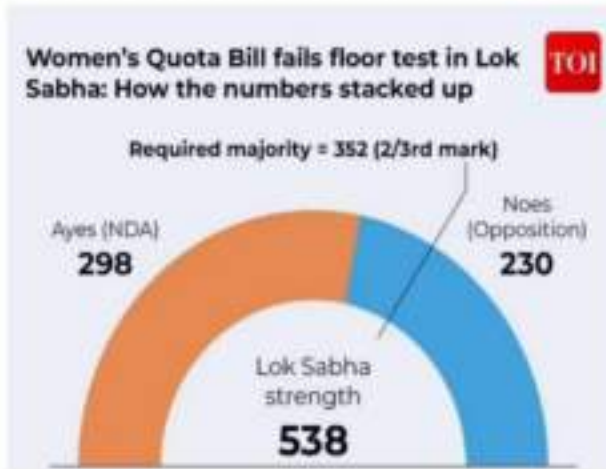
- 298 supported it
- 230 opposed it
- 352 votes were needed
- Since the required majority was not reached, the bill was defeated in Lok Sabha on 17 April 2026.
- This became the first defeat of a government Bill in Parliament since 2014.

Aftermath

- The government also withdrew the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, which were needed for implementing reservation in Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu & Kashmir.
- The Opposition argued that women's reservation should be implemented immediately without linking it to delimitation.

Their Expectation

Both believed that after independence, Indian democracy would naturally ensure fair political representation for women because of their major role in the freedom struggle.



What Happened Later

➤ However, women’s representation in Parliament remained low for decades, around 14–15%. This led to continued demand for reservation.

➤ The Women’s Reservation law aims to provide 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Nari Shakti Amendment Bill, 2026

➤ To implement this before 2029, the government introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, also called the Nari Shakti Amendment Bill.

➤ It proposed increasing Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816 through delimitation based on the 2011 Census.

Conclusion

➤ The journey of women’s reservation shows how India moved from the idea of equality without reservation to the demand for guaranteed political representation.

➤ The debate continues, but the goal remains the same—greater participation of women in politics.

Punjab’s Anti-Sacrilege Bill

The Punjab Government, led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, has forwarded the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Bill, 2026 to Governor Gulab Chand Kataria for assent. The Bill, passed unanimously by the Punjab Legislative Assembly, aims to impose stringent punishments for sacrilege (beadbi) of the Guru Granth Sahib and strengthen communal harmony.

Detailed Points:

- The Bill was passed unanimously by the Punjab Vidhan Sabha during a special session.
- It has now been sent to the Governor for constitutional assent, which is required for it to become law.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

- Minimum punishment: 7–10 years imprisonment
- Maximum punishment: Life imprisonment
- Fine: ₹2 lakh to ₹25 lakh depending on severity
- Equal punishment for abetment (assisting the offence)

Definition of Sacrilege (Beadbi):

- Includes acts such as damaging, burning, tearing, theft, or insulting the scripture
- Covers spoken, written, symbolic, or digital forms of desecration

Special Provision:

- For offences committed as part of a criminal conspiracy to disturb communal harmony, punishment may extend to life imprisonment with higher fines

Earlier Attempts:

- Bills passed in 2016 and 2018 to amend the IPC for sacrilege did not receive Presidential assent.
- Nature of Law: This is a State legislation, and as per CM, it may not require Presidential assent if confined within the State List.
- Custodian Role: The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee is associated with management of the Guru Granth Sahib and plays a key institutional role.
- Objective: To act as a deterrent against religious desecration and maintain law & order and communal harmony

- The Bill amends the 2008 Act, which earlier lacked strict penal provisions for sacrilege.

The Governor has constitutional options to:

- Give assent,
- Return the Bill, or Reserve it for the President's consideration

Background:

- Punjab has witnessed major sacrilege controversies, especially the 2015 Bargari incident, making this a sensitive political and social issue.

Sabarimala Verdict Explained

The case of Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala is one of the most important judgments of the Supreme Court of India dealing with women's rights, religion, and equality.

Key Issue

Whether banning women (10-50 years) from entering the temple is constitutional or not?

- Supreme Court Judgment (2018)
- The Court gave a 4:1 majority judgment.
- It allowed entry of women of all ages into Sabarimala Temple.
- The practice of exclusion was declared unconstitutional.

Background of the Case

- The dispute was about the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, where women aged 10-50 years were not allowed to enter.
- Petitioners challenged this practice by filing a writ petition under Article 32 (right to approach Supreme Court for fundamental rights).
- They argued that the ban was discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Important Legal Articles Explained

Article 14 – Right to Equality

- Ensures equal treatment before law.
- Court said: banning women is arbitrary discrimination.

Article 15 – No Discrimination

- Prohibits discrimination based on sex, religion, caste, etc.
- The exclusion of women was seen as gender-based discrimination.

Article 17 – Abolition of Untouchability

- Traditionally applied to caste, but Court expanded its meaning.

- Said exclusion based on menstruation is a form of social exclusion like untouchability.

Article 25 – Freedom of Religion

- Gives individuals the right to practice religion.
- Court said: women also have equal right to worship.

Article 26 – Religious Denomination Rights

- Allows religious groups to manage their affairs.

- Court held: Ayyappa devotees are not a separate religious denomination, so they cannot deny entry.

Article 13 – Laws inconsistent with Fundamental Rights

- Any custom or law violating fundamental rights is invalid.
- The temple rule was struck down under this article.

A timeline events leading up to the landmark verdict

THE ROAD TO SABARIMALA

1991
Kerala HC upholds tradition, restricts the entry of women of menstruating age group (10-50 yrs)

2006
An astrologer claims to have found signs of a woman's entry into the temple

2008
LDF govt supports PIL filed by women lawyers opposing the ban

2016
India Young Lawyers Association files PIL with SC challenging the ban

2018
SC LIFTS AGE-OLD BAN, allows women of all age groups to enter the temple

1987
Kannada actress Jayamala admits she entered the sanctum-sanctorum during a film shoot in 1987

2017
Kerala govt probes matter through crime branch, later drops case

2017
LDF govt supports entry of women of all age groups

Important Legal Terms Explained

Essential Religious Practice

- A practice that is core to a religion.
- Court said: banning women is NOT essential to the religion.

Constitutional Morality

- Means values like equality, dignity, justice from the Constitution.

- Court emphasized: Constitution > traditions.

Ultra Vires

- Means "beyond legal authority".
- Rule 3(b) banning women was declared ultra vires (invalid).

Writ Petition

- A legal request filed directly in court to protect rights.
- Filed under Article 32 in this case.

Religious Denomination

- A distinct religious group with separate identity.
- Court ruled Sabarimala devotees do not qualify.

Arguments of Both Sides

- Petitioners (Against Ban)
- Violates equality (Art 14, 15)
- Against right to worship (Art 25)
- Not an essential religious practice

Respondents (In Favour of Ban)

- Temple has its own tradition
- Protected under religious freedom (Art 25 & 26)
- Based on deity's celibate nature

Significance of the Judgment

- Strengthened women’s rights in religion
- Established constitutional morality over customs
- Expanded meaning of equality and dignity
- Set precedent for future cases on religion vs fundamental rights

Conclusion

- The Sabarimala judgment is a landmark decision where the Supreme Court made it clear that no religious practice can violate fundamental rights. It highlights a key principle of Indian constitutional law:
- “Equality and dignity are above all traditions.”

Transgender Act 2026

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026 has triggered a major legal and social debate in India. Soon after receiving presidential assent, the law has been challenged in multiple High Courts, with petitioners arguing that it weakens the rights earlier granted to transgender persons.

What the 2026 Law Says



- Definition of transgender persons
- Identity certification process
- Offences & penalties
- Institutional structure

Who Gets Excluded?

Included:

- Hijra, Kinner, Aravani, Jogta
- Persons with congenital variations

Excluded:

- Trans men ■ Trans women
- Non-binary / genderqueer individuals
- Self-identified persons



Key Changes in the 2026 Amendment

- **Removal of self-identification:** The earlier right to identify one’s gender based on personal perception has been removed.
- **Medical certification made mandatory:** A person must now be certified by a medical board and approved by a district magistrate to be legally recognised as transgender.
- **Biological definition of gender:** The law defines transgender identity using biological and medical criteria such as chromosomes and anatomy.
- **Surgery-linked recognition:** In some cases, gender-affirming surgery is required to change gender identity officially.
- **Narrower definition:** Categories like trans-man, trans-woman, and genderqueer are removed, limiting the scope of the law.

Why the Law is Being Challenged

Multiple petitions have been filed in the Delhi and Kerala High Courts. The main arguments are:

Violation of Fundamental Rights:

Petitioners say the law violates:

- Article 14 (Equality)
- Article 19 (Freedom of expression)
- Article 21 (Life and personal liberty)
- Against Supreme Court judgment: The law goes against the NALSA ruling, which clearly upheld self-determination of gender.

- State control over identity: Critics argue that the law shifts from a rights-based approach to a state-controlled system, where identity depends on approval by authorities.
- Violation of privacy: Requiring medical verification is seen as intrusion into a person's private life, contrary to the right to privacy (Puttaswamy judgment).

Practical Problems Highlighted in Petitions

- Some transgender persons may be unable to undergo surgery due to health risks, making legal recognition impossible.
- Individuals who already had identity certificates under the 2019 law may lose recognition.
- Cases have been reported where lack of recognition affects:
 - Legal protection (e.g., in harassment cases)
 - Access to healthcare and rights

Background of the Law

The 2026 amendment modifies the earlier 2019 Transgender Persons Act, which was based on a progressive idea: self-identification of gender. This principle came from the landmark NALSA v. Union of India, where the Supreme Court recognised transgender persons as a "third gender" and held that gender identity is a matter of personal choice and dignity. The 2026 law, however, introduces major changes in how transgender identity is legally recognised.

Controversial Provisions

- The law introduces penalties (up to 10 years imprisonment) for forcing someone to adopt a transgender identity.
- Critics say this could be misused or vaguely interpreted.

Wider Reaction

The amendment has triggered protests across India.

Activists argue that it:

- "Erases" transgender identities
- Excludes non-binary and gender-fluid persons
- Reverses years of legal progress

Core Legal Issue

- The debate revolves around a key constitutional question:
 - Is gender identity a personal right or something the state can regulate?
- 2014 NALSA Judgment: Identity = personal autonomy
- 2026 Law: Identity = subject to medical and administrative approval
- This conflict is at the heart of the legal challenge.

Conclusion

The Transgender Persons Act 2026 has become a major constitutional issue in India. While the government argues it brings clarity and regulation, critics see it as a rollback of fundamental rights. The final outcome will depend on how courts balance individual freedom, dignity, and state control over identity.

Women's Reservation, Delimitation & North-South Divide: How New Bills Could Reshape India's Political Representation

The Central government has proposed a set of new Bills linking women's reservation, delimitation, and expansion of Lok Sabha seats, which together could significantly change India's political landscape. While the goal is to increase women's representation, the move has also sparked concerns about regional imbalance, especially between northern and southern states.

Background: Women's Reservation Law

- In 2023, Parliament passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which provides 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha & State Assemblies
- However, this reservation was not implemented immediately. It was linked to two conditions:
- A new Census

A delimitation exercise

This means the reservation will likely come into effect only from the 2029 general elections.

What the New Bills Propose

- The government has now introduced Bills to enable implementation:
- Increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to around 850

Allocate:

- 815 seats for states
- 35 seats for Union Territories
- Conduct delimitation based on the latest Census (likely 2011 or upcoming)
- Note: Delimitation means redrawing constituencies based on population, ensuring equal representation.

How It Links to Women's Reservation

- Reservation will apply to the new, expanded Lok Sabha.
- Around one-third of total seats will be reserved for women.
- Seats will be rotated after each delimitation, meaning different constituencies will be reserved in different elections.
- Key Idea: Increasing seats ensures that reservation can be implemented without reducing existing seats of current MPs.

Major Concern: North-South Divide

- The biggest controversy is about regional imbalance.
- Delimitation is expected to be based on population.
- Northern states (like UP, Bihar) have higher population growth.
- Southern states (like Tamil Nadu, Kerala) have controlled population growth.

Result:

- Northern states may get more seats
- Southern states may lose relative representation

This raises concerns about:

- Federal balance
- Fair political power distribution

Why Southern States Are Worried

- They followed population control policies successfully
- But may now be "penalised" with fewer seats

- Critics argue this goes against:
 - The principle of cooperative federalism
 - Equal voice for all regions

Change in Delimitation Rules

Another key change proposed:

- The Constitution currently requires readjustment after every Census
- The new Bills may remove this requirement and alter the delimitation framework

This could:

- Reduce frequent changes
- But also increase concerns about central control over representation

Political Reactions

- Opposition parties support women’s reservation in principle
- But question: Why link it to delimitation?
- Whether it is being used to reshape political power

Some leaders argue the move could:

- Benefit certain regions more
- Change electoral outcomes in future
- Core Constitutional Issue (Theory)

This debate revolves around three key principles:

- Representation (Population-based fairness)
- Federalism (Balance between states)
- Gender Justice (Women’s political participation)
- Balancing all three is the main challenge.

Conclusion

The new Bills aim to finally implement women’s reservation, a long-pending reform. However, by linking it with delimitation and increasing Lok Sabha seats, they also open up a larger debate about regional balance and political power distribution. The final impact will depend on how India balances fair representation, federal equality, and gender inclusion in its democratic system.

Way Forward:

- Decouple reservation from delimitation → Implement women’s quota immediately
- Adopt hybrid formula → Population + development performance
- Limit seat imbalance → Cap drastic changes between states
- Ensure federal consultation → Involve all states in decisions
- Increase seats, not reduce → No state should lose absolute seats
- Stable rotation system → Avoid frequent seat changes
- Support women leaders → Training and political empowerment
- Conduct timely Census → Ensure transparent delimitation

Madhya Pradesh & Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

The Madhya Pradesh government is preparing to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state.

What the government is planning

The state plans to:

- Bring a new law (bill) for UCC
- Prepare the draft within a few months
- Possibly implement it by Diwali 2026
- A committee of experts and officials will help in drafting the law.

How the law will be prepared

- Madhya Pradesh will study models of:
- Uttarakhand (first state to implement UCC in 2025)
- Gujarat (recent developments)
- Based on these, a suitable law will be designed for the state.

What is Uniform Civil Code (UCC)? (Basic idea)

- UCC means one common set of laws for all citizens, irrespective of religion.
- It covers personal matters like: Marriage, Divorce, Inheritance & Adoption
- Aim: Ensure equality and uniformity in laws

Why the government supports it

Promotes: Equal rights for all citizens, Gender equality & National unity ("one nation, one law")

Madhya Pradesh

- Capital: Bhopal
- Nickname: "Heart of India"
- Formation: 1 November 1956
- Governor: Mangubhai C. Patel
- Chief Minister: Mohan Yadav (BJP)
- Literacy (2024): 75.2% (34th)
- Sex ratio (2011): 970♀/1000 ♂ (15th)

Gujarat High Court Bars Use of AI

Gujarat High Court has issued a policy prohibiting the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in judicial decision-making, while allowing limited use in administrative functions.

Key Highlights

AI cannot be used for:

- Judicial reasoning
- Drafting orders/judgments
- Bail and sentencing decisions
- Interpretation of facts or evidence
- Judges remain personally responsible for all decisions and judgments.

Background

The move follows concerns over:

- AI-generated fake or unverifiable case laws in legal proceedings
- The Supreme Court of India has also warned that AI-based judgments may amount to misconduct.
- Kerala High Court was the first HC to introduce an AI policy in 2025.

AI use is permitted only for:

- Administrative work
- Legal research
- Translation and documentation support

Mandatory human oversight for any AI-generated output

Applies to:

- High Court registry
- District judiciary
- Judicial officers, staff, interns, and legal assistants

Objectives of the Policy

Preserve judicial independence and human-centric justice

Prevent risks like:

- AI bias
- Incorrect or fabricated legal citations
- Improve efficiency in non-adjudicatory tasks

Key Restrictions

SUPREME COURT FLAGS "ALARMING" TREND OF AI BEING USED FOR DRAFTING PETITIONS

Bar Bench
17 Feb

CJ Surya Kant: We have been alarmingly told that some lawyers have started using AI for drafting.

Justice BV Nagarathna: There was a case of Mercy vs Mankind which does not exist.

CJ: there was something with Justice Dipankar Datta also. All precedents cited never existed.

Justice Nagarathna: Then some are citing real supreme court cases, but those quoted portions do not even exist in the judgment.

No AI use in:

- Adjudication or decision-making
- Application of law
- Determination of rights and liabilities
- No autonomous AI action without human verification
- Prohibition on sharing confidential case data with public AI tools

About Gujarat High Court (Key Facts)

- Established: 1960
- Location: Ahmedabad
- Jurisdiction: State of Gujarat

Works under:

- Constitution of India (Articles 214–231)

Has power of:

- Judicial review
- Writ jurisdiction under Article 226

Additional Important Points

- AI in Judiciary (India)

Used for:

- Case listing
- Translation (e.g., SUPACE in Supreme Court)

Risks:

- Hallucination (false outputs)
- Bias in algorithms
- Data privacy concerns
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023
- Ensures data privacy and protection
- Relevant in regulating AI usage in governance

Amaravati, the Capital of Andhra Pradesh

Amaravati has been granted statutory status as the sole capital of Andhra Pradesh after the enactment of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Act, 2026.

Background

- After the Andhra Pradesh bifurcation 2014, Hyderabad served as joint capital for 10 years.
- The 10-year period ended on June 2, 2024, necessitating a permanent capital.
- Amaravati was originally planned as a greenfield capital city in 2015.

Key Highlights

- The law came into effect after assent by Droupadi Murmu.
- Parliament passed the Amendment Bill in April 2026.
- A Gazette notification officially declared Amaravati as the sole and permanent capital.
- The law has retrospective effect from June 2, 2024.
- It amends the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014.

Key Provisions of the Amendment

- Section 5(2) of the 2014 Act modified to state:

- "Amaravati shall be the capital."

- Ends the earlier ambiguity over capital location.
- Provides legal and permanent status, preventing frequent policy changes.
- Rejects the earlier three-capital proposal (Executive–Visakhapatnam, Judicial–Kurnool, Legislative–Amaravati).

About Amaravati

- Located on the banks of the Krishna River.
- Planned as a smart, sustainable greenfield city.

AMARAVATI – PERMANENT CAPITAL OF ANDHRA PRADESH

KEY UPDATE

- Amaravati declared sole & permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh
- Approved via Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2026
- Received assent from President Droupadi Murmu

LEGAL PROVISIONS

- Amends AP Reorganisation Act, 2014
- Gives statutory status to Amaravati
- Effective from 2 June 2024 (end of Hyderabad joint capital period)

WHY IN NEWS?

- Ends 12+ years capital uncertainty after state bifurcation (2014)
- Cancels earlier 3-capital proposal (Vizag–Kurnool–Amaravati)

SIGNIFICANCE

- Ensures policy stability & governance clarity
- Boosts infrastructure & investment
- Strengthens administrative setup

QUICK FACTS

- Located on banks of Krishna River
- Planned greenfield capital city
- Land pooling: ~33,000+ acres from farmers
- Part of AP Capital Region (Guntur–Krishna area)

Digital Transformation of Panchayati Raj Institutions

The Government of India has highlighted significant progress in strengthening digital governance at the grassroots level through platforms like eGramSwaraj and the AI-enabled SabhaSaar tool, aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

eGramSwaraj Platform: Enhancing Financial Transparency

The eGramSwaraj portal serves as an integrated digital solution for Panchayats, enabling online planning, budgeting, accounting, and fund tracking. With coverage extending to nearly all 2.6 lakh Panchayats across India, the platform has facilitated transactions worth over ₹3 lakh crore, ensuring real-time monitoring of public funds. This initiative reduces leakages, strengthens audit mechanisms, and aligns with the broader objectives of the Digital India Programme and e-Governance reforms.

SabhaSaar: AI for Participatory Democracy

Key Constitutional and Static Facts

- The Panchayati Raj system was granted constitutional status through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, incorporated under Part IX (Articles 243-243O) of the Constitution.
- The Gram Sabha (Article 243A) forms the foundation of direct democracy in rural India. Additionally, initiatives like the e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project and Public Financial Management System (PFMS) complement digital governance by enabling efficient fund tracking and service delivery.

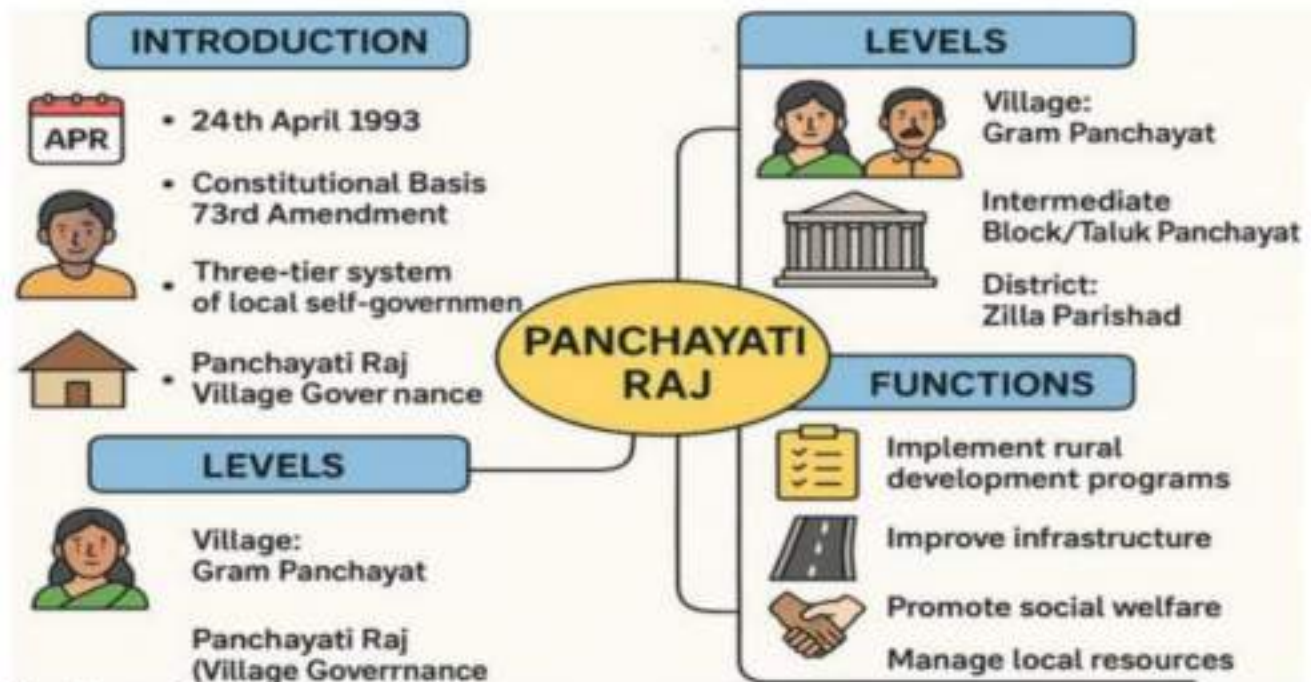
The introduction of SabhaSaar, an AI-powered voice-to-text application, marks a major step towards inclusive governance. It enables automatic generation of Gram Sabha meeting minutes, attendance records, and resolutions. With support expanded to 23 Indian languages, the tool ensures greater accessibility and encourages active participation of rural citizens, thereby strengthening the concept of direct democracy at the village level.

Significance for Governance and Development

These initiatives play a crucial role in deepening grassroots democracy by empowering Panchayats with digital tools. They enhance transparency in fund utilization, improve administrative efficiency, and support the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, they foster citizen engagement and promote accountability in rural governance.

Challenges and Concerns

Despite these advancements, several challenges persist, including the digital divide in rural areas, limited digital literacy among Panchayat officials, and concerns related to cybersecurity and data protection. Additionally, the incomplete devolution of powers to Panchayats, particularly regarding the 3Fs (Funds, Functions, and Functionaries), continues to hinder effective decentralization.



Way Forward

To maximize the impact of these initiatives, there is a need to expand rural internet connectivity under projects like BharatNet, enhance digital training for local officials, and further improve AI tools to support regional dialects. Strengthening data protection frameworks and ensuring full devolution of powers to PRIs will be essential for achieving holistic rural governance.

Telangana's Gig Workers Bill

Key Points:

- Bill Name: Telangana Platform-Based Gig Workers Bill, 2026
- State: Telangana
- Target Group: Gig & platform workers (delivery, cab drivers, etc.)
- Objective: Social security + legal protection
- Coverage: ~4 lakh workers

What is the Bill about?

- A new law to protect gig workers (like delivery agents, ride-hailing drivers).
- These workers usually: Have no job security & Do not get benefits like insurance or pension

Key Features

- Registration system
- All gig workers and platforms must be registered

Welfare Board

- A special board will be created to:
- Monitor workers' rights
- Implement schemes

Social Security Benefits

- Workers may get:
- Insurance
- Health benefits
- Pension support
- Welfare Fund: A fund will be created to finance these benefits
- Grievance Redressal System to handle worker complaints

Why is this Bill important?

- Gig workers face:
- Uncertain income
- Long working hours
- No formal protection

The bill aims to:

- Bring them into the formal economy
- Ensure basic labour rights

Significance

- One of the first major state-level laws for gig workers in India
- May become a model for other states
- Strengthens regulation of the gig economy

Final Takeaway

The Telangana Gig Workers Bill, 2026 aims to provide social security, legal protection, and formal recognition to gig workers in the digital economy.

FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026

The Government of India introduced the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 to strengthen regulation of foreign funding received by NGOs and organisations. The Bill aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and national security by tightening oversight of foreign contributions.

Key Provisions of the Amendment

- Government Control over NGO Assets:



- A statutory mechanism will allow the government to take over and manage assets of organisations whose FCRA licences are cancelled or lapse.
- Timelines for Fund Usage:
- The Centre can prescribe specific timelines for receipt and utilisation of foreign funds to ensure proper monitoring.

Objective of the Bill

The primary objective of the amendment is to prevent misuse of foreign funds and ensure that such funds are used only for legitimate and lawful purposes. It also seeks to safeguard national and public interest by regulating the inflow and utilisation of foreign contributions.

Regulatory Authority:

- A new framework/authority may be established to manage assets and ensure compliance of organisations losing registration.
- Safeguards in Legal Proceedings:
- Criminal investigations under FCRA may require prior approval of the central government, adding procedural safeguards.

Rationalisation of Penalties:

- Some provisions aim to reduce penalties (e.g., imprisonment) for minor violations to make enforcement more balanced.

Background of FCRA

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010 regulates foreign donations to NGOs
- Earlier amended in 2020 to tighten control over:
 - Transfer of foreign funds
 - Administrative expenses (capped)
 - Mandatory FCRA account in SBI, New Delhi
 - It prohibits foreign funding for:
 - Political parties
 - Election candidates
 - Government servants
 - Media organisations (news-related)

Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026

Why in News?

The Rajya Sabha has passed the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 by a voice vote, after its introduction in the Upper House by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- The Bill provides a statutory framework for administration of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), including recruitment, deputation, promotion, and service conditions of officers.
- It seeks to codify the deputation of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers into senior leadership roles within CAPFs, which were earlier governed mainly by executive orders.

A major feature includes reserving:

- 50% of Inspector General (IG) posts
- At least 67% of Additional Director General (ADG) posts
- All Director General (DG) and Special DG posts
- for IPS officers on deputation.

Objective of the Bill

The Bill aims to ensure uniformity, clarity, and efficiency in administration of CAPFs by introducing a single umbrella legislation. It seeks to enhance coordination between Centre and States, strengthen leadership structure, and reduce litigation arising from ambiguity in service rules.

Background

Previously, CAPFs were governed by multiple Acts and executive instructions, leading to inconsistencies in service conditions. The need for a comprehensive law arose after the Supreme Court judgment (2025) granting Organised Group 'A' Service (OGAS) status to CAPF officers and directing reforms in cadre management.

Significance

The Bill is significant as it:

- Creates a unified administrative framework for CAPFs
- Strengthens internal security management
- Improves operational coordination among forces
- Enhances clarity in career progression and leadership roles
- However, it has also sparked debate regarding career opportunities of CAPF cadre officers and IPS deputation dominance.

About CAPFs

Central Armed Police Forces function under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and are responsible for internal security, border guarding, and counter-insurgency operations. Major CAPFs include:

- CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force)
- BSF (Border Security Force)
- CISF (Central Industrial Security Force)
- ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police)
- SSB (Sashastra Seema Bal)

Additional Key Facts

- CAPFs were earlier referred to as paramilitary forces (term discontinued in 2011)
- The Bill aligns with efforts to modernize internal security architecture
- Ministry involved: Ministry of Home Affairs
- Focus: Administrative reforms + leadership restructuring

Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026

Why in News?

The Lok Sabha has passed the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, which aims to further strengthen trust-based governance and improve the ease of doing business in India.

Key Provisions

- The Bill focuses on decriminalising minor offences across various laws by replacing imprisonment with monetary penalties or administrative actions.
- It seeks to reduce unnecessary legal complications for businesses and individuals while ensuring that serious offences continue to attract stricter penalties.
- The legislation promotes a shift from punitive enforcement to a more facilitative and compliance-based approach.

Objectives of the Bill

The main objective is to create a trust-based regulatory environment by reducing compliance burden and simplifying legal processes. It aims to promote Ease of Doing Business (EoDB), enhance the Ease of Living, and encourage voluntary compliance by minimizing fear of criminal prosecution for minor violations.



Background

This Bill is part of the broader Jan Vishwas 2.0 reforms. Earlier, the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023 decriminalised 183 provisions across 42 Central Acts. The current amendment expands the scope of such reforms by targeting additional provisions and laws to streamline governance and improve regulatory efficiency.

Significance

The Bill is significant as it will reduce the burden on the judiciary by lowering the number of minor criminal cases. It will benefit MSMEs and startups by easing regulatory pressure and promoting a business-friendly environment. Overall, it aligns with the government’s vision of “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance”.

Additional Key Facts

- The reform is linked to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It also complements ongoing efforts toward digital compliance systems and simplified adjudication mechanisms, making governance more transparent and efficient.

JAN VISHWAS

(Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026



Delivering

Ease of Living & Ease of Doing Business for Every Citizen

317 provisions Fine converted into civil penalty

158 provisions Fine removed entirely

113 provisions Jail & fine converted into civil penalty

57 provisions Jail & fine removed

63 provisions Warning/notice for first-time default

17 provisions Jail term reduced

17 provisions Compounding of offences introduced

29 provisions Imprisonment removed

2 provisions Imprisonment converted into civil penalty

1 provision Nature of imprisonment rationalised

6 provisions Scope of offence limited

Criminal provisions replaced with smarter, citizen-friendly alternatives

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill

Why in News?

The Lok Sabha has passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2025 to strengthen India’s insolvency resolution framework and address delays and procedural challenges in resolving stressed assets.

Key Provisions of the Amendment

- The amendment introduces several reforms to improve the efficiency of insolvency proceedings. It includes 12 amendments (mostly recommended by a Select Committee) aimed at addressing interpretational issues and procedural delays.
- A major feature is the introduction of a creditor-driven and partly out-of-court insolvency resolution mechanism, allowing financial creditors to initiate the process more quickly and reduce dependency on tribunals.

The Bill also proposes:

- Strict timelines (e.g., faster admission and resolution of cases)
- Reduced litigation delays
- Greater role for creditors in the resolution process
- Flexibility in resolution plans, including sale of assets individually

Need for the Amendment

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016

- Enacted in 2016 to provide a time-bound insolvency resolution framework
- Covers companies, partnership firms, and individuals
- Established the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)
- Resolution timeline: 180 days (extendable)
- Adjudicating authority:
 - NCLT (for companies)
 - DRT (for individuals)

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has faced challenges such as delays due to litigation, backlog of cases, and procedural inefficiencies. Over 30,000 cases were pending before tribunals, causing long resolution timelines.

The amendment aims to:

- Reduce burden on National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)
- Speed up resolution of stressed assets
- Improve ease of doing business in India

Government's Stand

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that the IBC is not merely a debt recovery tool but a mechanism to revive viable businesses, preserve value, and resolve financial stress efficiently.
- She also highlighted that the IBC has significantly improved the health of the banking sector, especially by helping recover non-performing assets (NPAs).

TV Rating Policy 2026 (India)

The Government of India, through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), has introduced the TV Rating Policy 2026, replacing the earlier 2014 guidelines. The policy aims to make the television audience measurement system more transparent, competitive, and reliable, while reducing manipulation and strengthening oversight mechanisms.

TV Ratings Policy 2026:
 Transforming India's Media Landscape
 New Framework for Transparency & Accountability

Registration & Standards • Mandatory Registration • Clear Norms	Audit & Oversight • Regular Audits • Compliance Checks	Independent & Fair • No Bias • Transparent Methods
Industry Impacts		
Advertisers • Reliable Data • Better ROI	Broadcasters • Fair Competition • Accurate Ratings	Digital Era • OTT & Cross-Platform • Modern Measurement

Ensuring Credible & Transparent TV Ratings for India

Key Features of TV Rating Policy 2026:

Lower Entry Barriers

- More companies are now allowed to enter the TV rating sector.
- Ends the near-monopoly of the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC).
- Encourages innovation and competition in audience measurement.

Stronger Governance & Restrictions

- At least 50% of board members must be independent directors.
- Broadcasters and advertisers cannot hold controlling stakes in rating agencies.
- Ensures neutrality and prevents conflict of interest.

Security & Data Integrity

- Key personnel must obtain security clearance.
- Anonymous, aggregated data will be shared with the government.
- Focus on preventing TRP manipulation.

Expansion of Sample Size

- Measurement panel to expand from ~80,000

households to 1.2 lakh households gradually.

- Annual rotation of sampled households, including rural and tribal areas.
- Improves accuracy and representation.

Cross-Platform Measurement

- Ratings will now include:
- Cable TV
- DTH
- OTT platforms
- Connected TV
- Creates a holistic view of content consumption across platforms.

Removal of Landing Page Views

- Automatic channel views (when TV is switched on) are excluded.
- Prevents artificial inflation of TRP (Television Rating Point).

Strict Monitoring & Supervision

- Government can:
- Conduct surprise inspections
- Issue annual and risk-based advisories
- Dedicated audit and compliance teams established.

Penalty Framework

- First violation → Suspension of ratings
- Repeated violations → Fines, cancellation of license
- Much stricter than the earlier system.

Inclusion of OTT & Digital Data

- OTT platforms and DPOs can publish their own viewership data.
- Creates a parallel and competitive data ecosystem alongside TRP.

Background & Context:

- Previous framework: 2014 TV Rating Guidelines
- Current main body: Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC)
- TRP (Television Rating Point): Measures viewership of TV programs/channels
- Crucial for determining advertising revenue

Indian Media Landscape:

- 900+ TV channels
- ₹30,000–40,000 crore advertising market

Conclusion:

The TV Rating Policy 2026 marks a major reform in India's media measurement system by promoting transparency, competition, and technological integration, while addressing long-standing issues like TRP manipulation and limited representation.

Finance Bill 2026 & Appropriation Bill 2026

The Indian Parliament has approved the Finance Bill, 2026 and the Appropriation Bill, 2026, completing the legislative process of the Union Budget 2026–27. The approval came after the Rajya Sabha returned the Finance Bill to the Lok Sabha by a voice vote, marking the final stage of the annual budget process. The Finance Bill gives effect to the government's taxation proposals, while the Appropriation Bill authorizes the withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India to meet government expenditure for the financial year. With this approval, the government is now legally empowered to implement its fiscal policies, including taxation changes and expenditure plans for FY 2026–27.

Parliamentary Process

- Finance Bill passed by Lok Sabha → sent to Rajya Sabha.
- Rajya Sabha cannot amend a Money Bill, only recommend changes.
- Final approval completes the budget cycle.

Important Constitutional Facts:

- Finance Bill is a type of Money Bill (Article 110).
- Introduced only in Lok Sabha with prior recommendation of the President.
- Speaker of Lok Sabha certifies it as a Money Bill.
- Rajya Sabha must return it within 14 days (with recommendations).
- Union Budget = Annual Financial Statement (Article 112).

Budget 2026–27 Key Data

- Total Expenditure: ~₹53.5 lakh crore
- Fiscal Deficit: ~4.3% of GDP
- Capital Expenditure: ~₹12.2 lakh crore

Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026

The Government of India has introduced the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha to amend key provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 and the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008. The Bill, presented by Nirmala Sitharaman, aims to simplify corporate regulations, improve ease of doing business, and align India's corporate framework with global best practices.

Key Provisions of the Bill

The Bill introduces several important reforms:

- Decriminalisation of offences: Minor procedural violations will be shifted from criminal penalties to monetary fines, reducing legal burden on companies.
- Share buyback flexibility: Certain companies may be allowed to undertake two buybacks in a year instead of one, improving capital management.
- Fast-track mergers: Simplified merger procedures for startups, small companies, and group entities with reduced compliance requirements.
- CSR framework changes: Greater flexibility in Corporate Social Responsibility provisions.
- Digitisation & compliance: Increased emphasis on digital filings and simplified regulatory processes.

Key Features & Provisions

Finance Bill, 2026

- Contains provisions related to taxation (direct & indirect taxes).
- Includes amendments to various sections of the Income Tax Act and GST laws.
- Implements policy proposals announced in the Budget.

Appropriation Bill, 2026

- Authorizes government expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Essential for executing government spending programs.

Objectives of the Amendment

The primary objective of the Bill is to promote a business-friendly environment by reducing compliance burden and enhancing transparency. It seeks to encourage entrepreneurship, attract investments, and make India a more competitive global business destination.

Concerns and Criticism

Some experts and stakeholders have raised concerns that excessive decriminalisation may weaken corporate accountability and enforcement. Additionally, the success of these reforms will depend largely on effective implementation and regulatory oversight.

Related Institutional Reforms

The Bill also proposes strengthening regulatory bodies like the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) by expanding their powers to oversee auditors and enforce compliance.

Additional Key Facts:

- Companies Act, 2013: Governs incorporation, regulation, and dissolution of companies in India
- LLP Act, 2008: Governs Limited Liability Partnerships

- Ease of Doing Business: India has been focusing on regulatory reforms to improve global rankings
- Decriminalisation trend: Ongoing reform in corporate laws to shift minor offences to civil penalties

River Basin Governance Reform in India

The Government of India has extended the River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme for the 16th Finance Commission period (2026–27 to 2030–31), reflecting a renewed focus on integrated and sustainable water resource management.

Concept and Approach:

The RBM Scheme is a Central Sector initiative under the Ministry of Jal Shakti that promotes a basin-level approach to water management. Instead of treating water resources separately, it considers the entire river system—including rivers, tributaries, lakes, and groundwater—as a single interconnected ecosystem.

Key Functional Components:

- Flood and erosion control measures (e.g., protection of vulnerable regions like Majuli Island)
- Expansion of irrigation and hydropower capacity
- Preparation of DPRs for water resource projects
- Use of modern technologies such as GIS, LiDAR, and drone surveys
- Community-based water management practices in hilly regions

Core Objectives:

The scheme aims to ensure:

- Integrated planning and sustainable utilisation of water resources
- Conservation of both surface and groundwater
- Reduction of fragmented and project-based water management approaches
- Balance between economic development and ecological sustainability

Institutional Architecture:

- The implementation framework includes key organisations:
- Brahmaputra Board – Focuses on flood control, erosion

management, and basin planning in Northeast India

- Central Water Commission – Conducts surveys and prepares Detailed Project Reports (DPRs)
- National Water Development Agency – Responsible for river interlinking and national water planning

Geographical Focus Areas

- The scheme prioritizes strategically important and water-rich regions, especially:
- Brahmaputra, Barak, Teesta, and Indus basins
- North-East India
- Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh
- These regions are critical for water security, ecological balance, and national security.

Significance for India

The RBM Scheme is crucial for:

- Ensuring long-term water security
- Addressing floods, droughts, and inter-state water disputes
- Supporting agriculture, industry, and energy sectors
- Strengthening climate change resilience and disaster management

Conceptual Understanding: River Basin

A river basin refers to the area drained by a river and its tributaries and is considered the basic hydrological unit for water resource planning in India. India has 20 river basin groups (12 major and 8 composite), covering about 81% of the country's geographical area.

RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT (RBM) SCHEME

Central Sector Scheme under Ministry of Jal Shakti

FOCUS: INTEGRATED BASIN-LEVEL WATER MANAGEMENT

SURFACE WATER, GROUNDWATER, LAKES, ECOSYSTEMS

DURATION & FUNDING

- 2026-27 to 2030-31
- ₹2183 CRORE
- 100% CENTRALLY FUNDED

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

- Brahmaputra Board (Food & erosion control)
- Central Water Commission (CWC) (DPIs, surveys)
- National Water Development Agency (NWDA) (Interlinking of rivers)

KEY OBJECTIVE

SUSTAINABLE, INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES AT RIVER BASIN LEVEL

KEY FEATURES

- BASIN-LEVEL PLANNING APPROACH
- INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (IWRM)
- USE OF GIS, REMOTE SENSING, LIDAR, LIDAR, DRONES

PRIORITY AREAS (VERY IMPORTANT)

- NORTH-EAST RIVER BASINS
- INDUS BASIN

RIVERS:

- BRAHMAPUTRA
- BARAK
- INDUS

IMPORTANCE

- ENSURES WATER SECURITY
- REDUCES FLOOD & EROSION RISK
- BOOSTS IRRIGATION & HYDROPOWER
- MAINTAINS ECOLOGICAL BALANCE
- SUPPORTS CROSS-BORDER RIVER MANAGEMENT

Government Establishes Online Gaming Authority

The Government of India has set up the Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI) under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming framework to regulate the rapidly expanding online gaming sector. The authority will function under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and aims to ensure a safe, transparent, and accountable gaming ecosystem.

Functions and Responsibilities

The authority is responsible for registration and classification of online games, monitoring compliance with regulatory norms, and enforcing rules. It will also issue directions to gaming platforms, oversee data-related safeguards, and take action against violations, especially in cases involving illegal or harmful gaming practices.

Structure and Composition

The OGAI has been constituted as a multi-member body comprising representatives from key ministries including Home Affairs, Finance, Information & Broadcasting, Youth Affairs & Sports, and Law & Justice. It is chaired by a senior official (Additional Secretary level) from MeitY, ensuring inter-ministerial coordination in regulating the sector.

Regulatory Approach

The government has adopted a differentiated regulatory strategy. Non-monetary or casual online games will be

subject to a relatively "light-touch" regulation, while real-money gaming platforms will face stricter scrutiny due to higher risks of addiction, fraud, and money laundering.

User Protection and Safety Measures

A major focus of the framework is user protection. Measures such as age verification, safeguards against financial loss, and mechanisms to prevent psychological harm have been emphasized. The authority will also work to curb illegal betting and offshore gaming platforms.

Significance

The establishment of OGAI reflects the government's effort to balance innovation and regulation in the digital economy. With India being one of the fastest-growing online gaming markets, this move is expected to enhance investor confidence while ensuring responsible gaming practices.

NCB Advisory on Maldives' New Anti-Narcotics Laws

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has issued an advisory for Indian citizens travelling to the Maldives, warning them about the country's newly strengthened anti-narcotics laws that impose stringent penalties including life imprisonment and even the death penalty for drug-related offences.

Background and Context

The Maldives has recently amended its Drugs Act (effective 2026) to adopt a zero-tolerance approach toward narcotics offences, significantly increasing penalties for both trafficking and possession. These stricter provisions have been introduced amid rising concerns over drug trafficking in the region. The advisory follows recent instances of foreign nationals, including Indians, being arrested under these laws.

Key Highlights of the NCB Advisory

- The NCB has urged Indian travellers to exercise extreme caution while visiting the Maldives. Key advisories include:
 - Avoid carrying bags, parcels, or items for others, especially strangers
 - Be cautious at airports, ports, and transit points
 - Ensure complete awareness of contents of personal luggage
 - Strictly avoid possession of any prohibited substances, even in small quantities
 - The advisory emphasizes that individuals may unknowingly become drug couriers, leading to severe legal consequences.

Nature of Stringent Penalties

Under the amended Maldivian drug laws:

- Possession of even small quantities can attract strict punishment
- Life imprisonment is applicable for serious offences
- Death penalty may be imposed in cases of large-scale drug trafficking (subject to judicial confirmation)
- This reflects one of the harshest anti-drug legal regimes globally, with a strong deterrence approach.

About Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB):

- Established: 1986
- Under: Ministry of Home Affairs
- Director General: Anurag Garg
- Objective: Combat drug trafficking and abuse in India
- Works under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985
- Coordinates with international agencies for drug law enforcement

Significance for India and International Travel

- Highlights the need for legal awareness during foreign travel
- Reflects India's proactive approach in protecting citizens abroad
- Strengthens efforts against cross-border drug trafficking networks
- Promotes responsible tourism and compliance with international laws

Challenges and Concerns

- Lack of awareness among travellers about foreign legal systems

Additional Important Facts:

- Maldives is a popular tourist destination for Indians, increasing relevance of such advisories
- The country's laws treat possession and trafficking with equal seriousness in some cases

Linked to global anti-drug efforts under:

- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988
- India's NDPS Act also prescribes strict penalties, including rigorous imprisonment and fines
- Drug trafficking routes in the Indian Ocean region are a growing concern for regional security

- Risk of unintentional involvement in drug trafficking
- Need for stronger international cooperation and information dissemination

Conclusion

The NCB advisory underscores the importance of strict compliance with foreign laws, especially in countries like the Maldives with stringent anti-narcotics regulations. It reflects a broader effort to curb drug trafficking while ensuring the safety and legal protection of Indian citizens abroad.

Recusal of Judges: Meaning, Process and Issues in Indian Judiciary

The concept of judicial recusal came into focus after a Delhi High Court judge refused to step aside from hearing a high-profile case, highlighting debates around judicial impartiality and discretion.

What is Recusal of Judges?

Recusal refers to the voluntary withdrawal of a judge from hearing a case due to a possible conflict of interest or apprehension of bias. It ensures that justice is delivered in a fair and impartial manner and that there is no perception of prejudice in judicial decision-making.

Grounds for Recusal

A judge may recuse in situations such as:

- Financial interest (e.g., holding shares in a company involved in the case)
- Personal relationships with parties or lawyers
- Prior involvement in the same case at a lower court level
- Any circumstance leading to a reasonable apprehension of bias in the mind of litigants

Process of Recusal in India

- There is no codified procedure for recusal in India. The process generally involves:
- Decision taken by the judge’s own conscience and discretion
- Sometimes initiated through a request by parties or lawyers
- If a judge recuses, the case is reassigned by the Chief Justice to another bench
- Judges may or may not record reasons for recusal

Judicial Principles and Case Laws

- In *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India* (1987), the Supreme Court held that the test is the reasonable likelihood of bias, not actual bias.
- The *Restatement of Values of Judicial Life* (1999) provides ethical guidance, such as avoiding cases involving personal interest.

Can a Judge Refuse to Recuse?

- Yes. The decision to recuse or not rests solely with the judge. Even when parties request recusal, judges may refuse if:



- Allegations are baseless or speculative
- No real conflict of interest exists
- This reflects the principle of judicial independence.

Significance of Recusal

- Ensures fair trial and due process
- Maintains public confidence in judiciary
- Upholds judicial integrity and independence
- Prevents bias and conflict of interest

Challenges and Concerns

- Lack of clear guidelines leads to inconsistency
- Possibility of “bench hunting” (seeking favourable judges)
- Non-disclosure of reasons reduces transparency
- Balancing judicial independence vs accountability

Conclusion

Recusal is a vital judicial practice ensuring fairness, impartiality, and trust in the legal system. However, the absence of a formal framework calls for clear guidelines to balance transparency with judicial independence, making it a significant topic for governance and judicial reforms.

Constitutional and Legal Basis

- The concept of recusal is rooted in the principle of natural justice, particularly the maxim:
- “Nemo Judex in Causa Sua” (no one should be a judge in their own cause)
- “Justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done”
- Although the Constitution of India does not explicitly provide rules for recusal, the practice has evolved through judicial precedents and ethical norms.

Frequent Firework Factory Explosions in India: Causes and Concerns

Recent deadly explosions in firework factories in states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala have once again highlighted the recurring issue of industrial safety lapses in the fireworks sector, raising concerns over regulatory enforcement and worker safety.

Background and Context

- India is one of the largest producers of fireworks, with Tamil Nadu’s Virudhunagar (Sivakasi region) accounting for nearly 90% of the country’s production. The industry is labour-intensive and involves handling highly combustible chemicals, making it inherently hazardous.
- Repeated accidents over the years indicate systemic issues in safety compliance, infrastructure, and regulation, rather than isolated incidents.

Why Firework Factory Explosions are Common

Highly Combustible Raw Materials

Fireworks contain chemicals such as aluminium powder, barium nitrate, sulphur, and potassium nitrate, which are extremely reactive and can ignite easily due to friction, heat, or sparks. Even minor mishandling can trigger explosions.

Climatic and Environmental Factors

- High temperatures, especially during summer, increase the risk of spontaneous ignition
- Dry conditions enhance flammability of materials
- Heatwaves in southern India have been linked to recent incidents

Safety Lapses and Poor Compliance

- Violation of licensing norms and safety protocols
- Overcrowding of workers in small production units
- Improper storage of explosive materials
- Lack of adequate fire safety equipment and training
- Industrial accidents are often linked to weak enforcement of safety regulations.

Informal and Unregulated Sector

- Many units operate as small-scale or informal enterprises

- Limited monitoring and inspections
- Use of untrained labour, including women and migrant workers

Production Pressure During Festivals

- Increased demand during festivals like Diwali and local temple events
- Factories often exceed permitted limits of production and storage
- Workers may handle chemicals beyond safe capacity

Lack of Mechanisation

- Heavy reliance on manual mixing of chemicals
- Minimal use of automation increases human exposure to risk
- Legal and Regulatory Framework

Key Laws

- Explosives Act, 1884
- Explosives Rules, 2008
- Regulated by the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)

Provisions

- Licensing of units
- Restrictions on storage and handling
- Safety distance norms
- Worker protection guidelines

Significance for Governance and Economy

- Industrial Safety
- Highlights need for strict enforcement of safety norms
- Raises questions about inspection mechanisms

Labour Welfare

- Workers face high occupational risks
- Lack of insurance and social security in many cases

Regional Economy

- Fireworks industry supports livelihoods in regions like Sivakasi
- Balancing economic benefits vs safety concerns is crucial

Challenges

- Weak enforcement despite existing laws
- Prevalence of illegal or unlicensed units
- Limited awareness and training among workers
- Inadequate disaster preparedness

Way Forward

- Strengthening inspection and compliance mechanisms
- Promoting automation and safer technologies
- Better training and safety awareness programs
- Strict penalties for violations
- Encouraging eco-friendly alternatives to fireworks

Conclusion

Firework factory explosions in India are not isolated events but a result of structural issues such as hazardous materials, weak regulation, and unsafe practices. Addressing these requires a combination of policy enforcement, technological intervention, and labour protection measures.

SAF-Blended Aviation Fuel Brought Under ATF Control Order

The Government of India has amended the Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001 to bring Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)-blended ATF under its regulatory ambit, marking a key step toward cleaner aviation and energy transition.

Background and Context

India’s aviation sector is one of the fastest growing globally and contributes significantly to carbon emissions, with fuel consumption being a major source. In line with global commitments to reduce emissions and promote sustainable fuels, there has been a push to integrate alternative fuels like SAF and ethanol-based blends into aviation. The amendment provides a legal and regulatory framework for such blended fuels, which were earlier not explicitly covered.

Key Provision of the Amendment

- The recent notification expands the definition of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) to include fuel blended with Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and synthetic hydrocarbons. This effectively brings SAF-blended fuel under the ATF Control Order, ensuring that its production, storage, distribution, and marketing are governed by existing regulatory mechanisms.
- The amendment has been issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, which empowers the government to regulate critical commodities in the national interest.

About Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

- SAF is a next-generation biofuel produced from renewable sources such as:
 - Agricultural residues
 - Waste oils and biomass
 - Ethanol (via Alcohol-to-Jet pathway)
- It can be blended with conventional ATF and used in existing aircraft engines without major modifications, making it a viable transitional fuel for decarbonising aviation.

India’s SAF Roadmap and Targets

India is preparing for phased adoption of SAF in line with global commitments. Indicative targets include:

- 1% SAF blending by 2027
- 2% by 2028
- 5% by 2030

These targets are aligned with the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which becomes mandatory from 2027.

Significance for Economy and Environment

This reform has multi-dimensional importance:

- **Energy Security:** Reduces dependence on imported crude oil
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Helps in reducing aviation emissions
- **Industrial Growth:** Boosts biofuel and ethanol industries

Objectives of the Move

The decision aims to:

- Promote cleaner and sustainable aviation fuel alternatives
- Reduce dependence on crude oil imports
- Lower greenhouse gas emissions from the aviation sector
- Provide regulatory clarity and standardisation for blended aviation fuels
- Support India’s transition toward a low-carbon economy

- Farmer Income: Creates demand for agricultural feedstock
- Global Competitiveness: Aligns India with international aviation standards

Legal and Regulatory Framework

- Governed under: Essential Commodities Act, 1955
- Regulated via: ATF (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001
- Amendment ensures SAF-blended fuel is treated as a regulated commodity

Challenges and Concerns:

- Technological limitations in SAF production at scale
- High cost of production compared to conventional fuel
- Need for robust testing and safety standards in aviation
- Lack of immediate mandatory blending targets for domestic flights

Carbon Concern

Centre expects to double blending of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) to **2% by 2028**, **5% by 2030**

Blending can reduce carbon emissions by up to **80%**

ICAO members agreed to net-zero CO2 emissions by 2050

Niti Aayog has suggested **GST at 5%** on SAF and other concession to promote SAF

SAF can be blended with ATF without need to develop new planes or engines

Conclusion:

The inclusion of SAF-blended fuel under the ATF Control Order is a forward-looking policy reform that strengthens India’s regulatory framework for sustainable aviation. It reflects a balanced approach between environmental commitments, energy security, and aviation sector growth, while laying the groundwork for large-scale adoption of cleaner fuels



Book: Baagh Tiger – The Inside Story
Author: Abhishek Ray
About: A wildlife crime thriller focusing on conservation, human-wildlife conflict, and a poacher’s journey toward redemption.

International Relations & Events

West Asia War & Its Impact on Kharif Yields

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has raised concerns about its potential impact on India's Kharif agriculture. While there is no immediate direct effect on crop yields, the conflict can indirectly influence agricultural output through disruptions in fertiliser supply, rising energy prices, and global trade uncertainties.

Fertiliser Supply & Import Dependence:

India is heavily dependent on imports for fertilisers and their raw materials, especially phosphatic and potassic fertilisers. A significant portion of these imports comes from regions affected by the conflict. Disruptions in supply chains, particularly through key routes like the Strait of Hormuz, can lead to shortages and price volatility, affecting timely availability for farmers.

Importance of Kharif Season:

The Kharif season, sown during the southwest monsoon (June–September), contributes nearly 60% of India's total agricultural output. Major crops such as rice, cotton, and maize are cultivated during this period, making it critical for food security, rural livelihoods, and overall economic stability.

Energy Linkages (LNG Dependency):

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is a crucial input for urea production, and India imports a large share of its LNG from West Asia. Any disruption or price rise in LNG can increase fertiliser production costs, thereby raising the overall cost of cultivation and affecting farmers' profitability.

Impact on Farmers & Agricultural Output:

Rising fertiliser prices and supply uncertainties may compel farmers to reduce fertiliser usage or alter cropping patterns. This can potentially lower productivity and impact overall agricultural

output. If such disruptions coincide with adverse monsoon conditions, the effects on Kharif yields could become more pronounced.

Government Preparedness & Mitigation Measures:

The government has taken several steps to mitigate risks, including maintaining adequate fertiliser stocks, increasing subsidies under the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme, and promoting domestic production through initiatives like the New Urea Policy (2015). Additionally, efforts are being made to promote nano fertilisers and diversify import sources to reduce dependency.

Overall Assessment:

In the short term, India appears relatively well-prepared, and Kharif yields are unlikely to be significantly affected. However, prolonged geopolitical instability in West Asia exposes structural vulnerabilities in India's fertiliser and energy dependence. Addressing these through self-reliance, diversification, and sustainable agricultural practices will be crucial for long-term resilience.

Historic Diplomatic Engagement Between India and Austria

The Federal Chancellor of Austria undertook a four-day official visit to India in 2026, marking a significant milestone in bilateral relations. This visit holds particular importance as it is the first such high-level engagement by an Austrian Chancellor in more than four decades, the last visit having taken place in 1984. The visit reflects renewed diplomatic momentum and a shared commitment to strengthening cooperation across multiple sectors in a rapidly evolving global order.

Expansion of Strategic and Defence Cooperation:

A key outcome of the visit was the strengthening of defence and security ties.

- Both countries signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) to enhance military cooperation, particularly in defence technology and industrial collaboration.
- Additionally, they agreed to establish a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, aimed at improving coordination and addressing global security challenges.
- This initiative complements the broader India–EU defence partnership framework of 2026, highlighting Austria's growing strategic relevance for India in Europe.

Boost to Trade, Investment, and Economic Cooperation:

The two nations took steps to improve economic engagement by introducing a Fast-Track Mechanism to resolve issues faced by investors. This initiative is expected to enhance the ease of doing business and attract greater bilateral investments. Trade relations have shown significant growth, with bilateral trade doubling from USD 1.08 billion in 2019-20 to USD 2.06 billion in 2023-24, reflecting a strong upward trajectory. Notably, India recorded a trade surplus of USD 214 million with Austria in 2023-24. Key Indian exports include electronics, textiles, and machinery, while imports primarily consist of heavy machinery and steel. Austrian Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India has reached USD 663 million between 2000 and 2024.

Advancements in Space and Global Peacekeeping:

- The two sides agreed to expand cooperation in the space sector, including the organization of a bilateral space industry seminar in Vienna in 2026.
- This builds on earlier cooperation, such as the launch of Austrian satellites from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre.
- Additionally, a strategic partnership was established between India's Centre for UN Peacekeeping and the Austrian Armed Forces International Centre (AUTINT), enhancing collaboration in global peacekeeping operations.

Strengthening Food Safety, Cybersecurity, and Infrastructure:

- An MoU was signed between the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and Austria's AGES to harmonize food safety standards and promote agricultural trade.
- Both countries also launched an Institutional Cybersecurity Dialogue to address emerging digital threats.
- Furthermore, cooperation in infrastructure development was reinforced, particularly in Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), aimed at improving road safety and efficiency.

Focus on Skill Development, Mobility, and Academic Exchange:

- The visit emphasized people-to-people connections through the operationalization of the Working Holiday Programme, enabling youth mobility between the two countries.
- Both sides also promoted dual vocational training systems and mutual recognition of educational qualifications. Academic collaboration was strengthened through initiatives such as the "Focus India" programme by Austrian universities and an MoU between Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and Montanuniversität Leoben, showcasing growing cooperation in higher education and research.

Institutional Framework and Migration Partnership:

- India–Austria economic relations are supported by key agreements such as the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (1999, amended in 2017) and the Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement (1999).

Collaboration in Science, Technology, and Innovation:

- Technology emerged as a central pillar of the partnership, with both countries agreeing to deepen cooperation in advanced sectors such as quantum technology, machine learning, laser technology, and material science.
- These initiatives aim to strengthen joint research and development capabilities and promote innovation-driven growth. The collaboration aligns with India's focus on emerging technologies and Austria's expertise in high-tech industrial sectors.

- A significant development in recent years is the Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership (2023), which facilitates the legal movement of skilled professionals, students, and researchers while addressing concerns related to illegal migration.

Geopolitical and Strategic Profile of Austria

- Austria is a landlocked country in Central Europe, strategically located at the crossroads of major European trade routes.
- It shares borders with Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Austria follows a policy of permanent neutrality, adopted in 1955 after World War II, and is a member of the European Union since 1995.
- Along with Switzerland, it is often considered part of the “neutral core of Europe.”

India’s Historical Role and Geographic Features of Austria

- Jawaharlal Nehru played a significant role in supporting Austria’s neutrality during the Cold War, contributing diplomatically to the Austrian State Treaty of 1955.
- He was also the first foreign leader to visit Austria after its independence. Geographically, Austria is dominated by the Alps, with the Grossglockner as its highest peak.
- Most of its rivers drain into the Danube River, which flows into the Black Sea, making it a vital component of European trade and connectivity.

Spain’s Amnesty Programme for Undocumented Immigrants

The government of Spain, led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, has approved a major amnesty programme to grant legal status to undocumented immigrants. The scheme is expected to benefit around 500,000 migrants, allowing them to apply for temporary residency and work permits. The move, passed via a royal decree bypassing parliament, aims to address labour shortages and support the country’s ageing population, while also ensuring better working and living conditions for migrants. However, it has sparked political opposition and administrative concerns.

Key eligibility criteria:

- Must have arrived before 1 January 2026
- Must have lived in Spain for at least 5 months
- Must have no criminal record
- Provides temporary residency (around 1 year), after which migrants can apply for long-term permits.
- Approved via government decree, bypassing parliament due to lack of majority.
- Applications to open in April 2026 for a limited period.

Programme aims to:

- Integrate migrants into the formal economy
- Increase tax revenues
- Address labour shortages
- Faces criticism from opposition parties citing:
 - Administrative burden
 - Risk of encouraging illegal migration

Spain:

- Capital: Madrid
- Currency: Euro (€)
- Government: Parliamentary monarchy
- Prime Minister: Pedro Sánchez

Immigration in Spain:

- Foreign-born population: ~20% of total population
- Spain is among the top immigrant-receiving countries in Europe

Major migrant origins:

- Latin America
- Africa

➤ Asia

Additional Important Points:

Spain's policy is contrary to stricter immigration policies adopted by many European countries.

The move is linked to:

- Ageing population problem
- Need for workforce in sectors like agriculture, tourism, and caregiving
- Spain has a history of periodic regularisation programmes, including a major one in 2005.

Amnesty helps migrants:

- Access healthcare and legal employment
- Contribute to formal economy (tax system)

Critics warn of:

- Pressure on public services
- Political backlash from anti-immigration groups



Pipelines as Alternatives to Strait of Hormuz

Why Strait of Hormuz is Important:

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical oil transit chokepoints, through which nearly 20% of global oil supply passes. Recent geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, including threats of blockade, have highlighted the vulnerability of global energy supply chains.

Why Alternatives are Being Discussed:

With rising conflict risks, countries are exploring alternative routes (especially pipelines) to bypass the Strait and ensure uninterrupted oil exports. However, experts note that these alternatives have limited capacity and cannot fully replace the Strait.

Key Pipelines that Can Bypass the Strait:

Saudi Arabia's East-West Pipeline (Petroline)

Saudi Arabia operates a major pipeline connecting its oil fields in the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, allowing exports without passing through Hormuz. This pipeline has been heavily utilized during crises to maintain oil flow.

UAE's Habshan-Fujairah Pipeline:

The UAE has developed a pipeline from Habshan oil fields to Fujairah port (Gulf of Oman), which bypasses the Strait. It enables direct access to international markets without entering the chokepoint.

Iran's Goreh-Jask Pipeline:

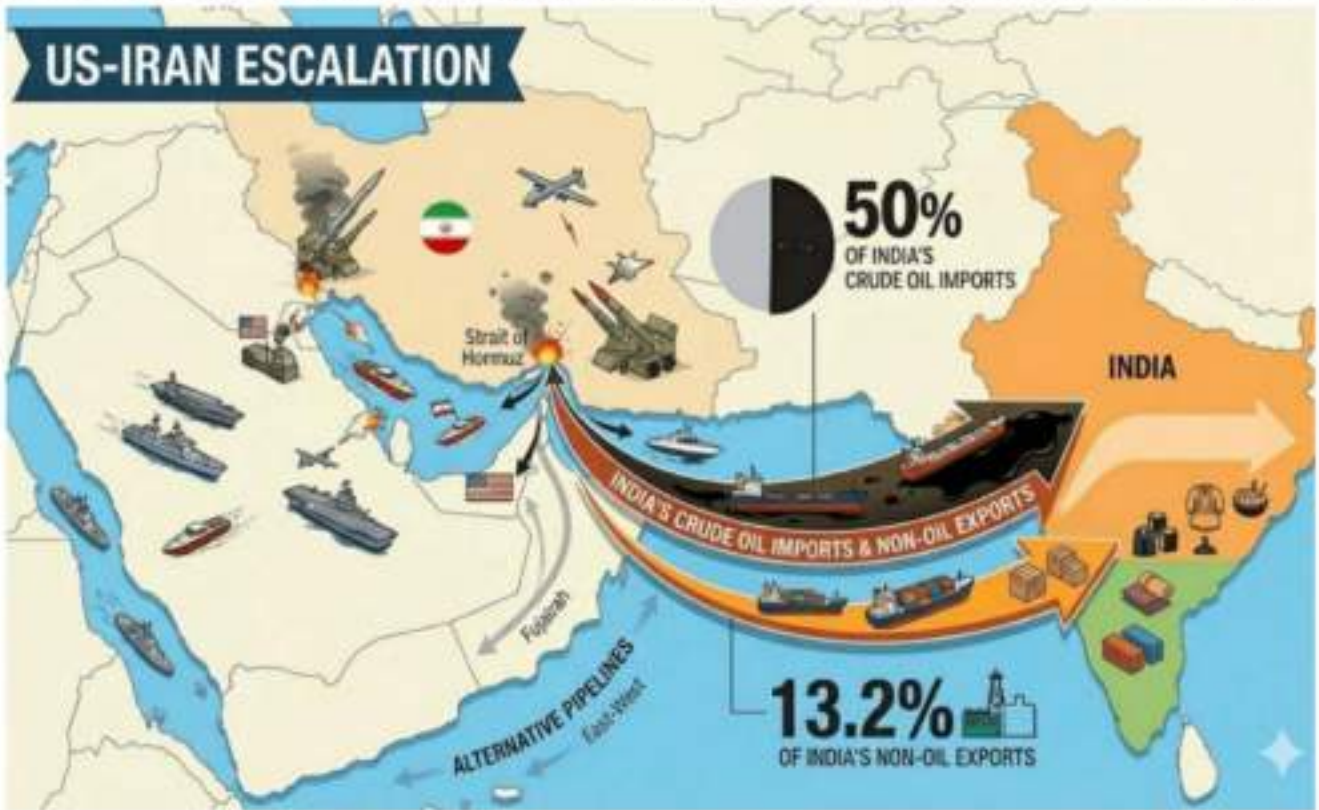
Iran has also built the Goreh-Jask pipeline leading to the Gulf of Oman, reducing dependence on Hormuz. This route allows Iran to export oil even if the Strait is disrupted.

Limitations of These Pipelines:

- Combined capacity is much lower than Hormuz traffic
- Vulnerable to attacks during conflicts
- Require significant infrastructure and maintenance
- Cannot handle full global oil demand
- Even with these pipelines, a prolonged closure of Hormuz would still cause major global energy disruption.

Strait of Hormuz connects:

- Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman → Arabian Sea
- Major exporters using this route: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait
- Around 20 million barrels/day oil passes through it
- Alternative pipeline capacity: ~3.5-5.5 million barrels/day



US-Led Pax Silica Initiative

The Philippines has joined the US-led Pax Silica initiative, a strategic coalition of 14 countries created to build a secure supply chain for semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. It signed the declaration on April 17, officially making the Philippines the 13th signatory of the initiative. As part of this partnership, the Philippines and the United States will establish a 4,000-acre industrial zone in the Luzon Economic Corridor (LEC). This zone will serve as the first "AI-native industrial acceleration hub" under Pax Silica. The industrial hub will support allied manufacturing, investment acceleration, and advanced technology production based on market demand.

The US said the Philippines was chosen because of:

- its strategic location in the Indo-Pacific
- a young and technically skilled workforce
- a strengthening alliance with the United States

What is Pax Silica?

Pax Silica is a US-led international initiative launched in December 2025 to build a secure and trusted supply chain for semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), critical minerals, advanced manufacturing, and data infrastructure.

The word:

- Pax means peace, stability, and long-term prosperity
- Silica refers to silicon, the base material used in semiconductor chips
- So, Pax Silica means creating a stable and secure "silicon economy" for the AI era.

Philippines

- Capital: Manila
- Currency: Philippine peso
- President: Bongbong Marcos

Main Objective

- Its goal is to reduce dependence on risky or unreliable supply chains and ensure that trusted partner countries control important sectors like:
 - semiconductor chips, AI infrastructure, rare earth and critical minerals, energy supply, logistics and ports & advanced manufacturing
- It aims to protect the full technology chain—from mining minerals to making chips and running AI systems
- The US describes Pax Silica as a "positive-sum partnership" that helps countries strengthen AI development and supply chain security.
- Other members include: India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Israel, Qatar, Finland, Sweden, UAE, UK, US and others
- This move is expected to improve the Philippines' role in global semiconductor manufacturing and strengthen regional economic security.

Russia & China Veto UN Resolution on Strait of Hormuz

Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution aimed at reopening the Strait of Hormuz and ensuring safe maritime navigation. The resolution was proposed by Bahrain and supported by the United States and Gulf countries.

Voting pattern:

- In favour: 11 members
- Against (veto): Russia & China
- Abstained: 2 members
- Due to veto by permanent members, the resolution failed to pass.

Reason for Veto:

- Russia and China argued that the resolution was:
 - Biased against Iran

United Nations Security Council



The 5 permanent members have a veto power.

- A veto power allows to block any proposed resolution.

The 10 non-permanent members are elected for 2 years by the General Assembly, following fixed regional quotas.



- Could escalate conflict and justify military action
- The draft had already been weakened (removed authorization of force) to gain support.

Background of the Crisis:

- The crisis is linked to the 2026 Iran-US-Israel conflict.
- Iran has effectively blocked/restricted the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting global shipping.
- The conflict began after US-Israel strikes on Iran (Feb 2026).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- Total members: 15
- Permanent (P5): USA, UK, France, Russia, China
- Veto power: Only P5 members can block any resolution.

Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Iran and Oman
- One of the world's most critical oil transit chokepoints

Why is the Strait of Hormuz Important?

- It is a strategic chokepoint connecting: Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman → Arabian Sea
- Around 20% (one-fifth) of global oil trade passes through it.

Any disruption leads to:

- Global oil price rise
- Energy supply shocks
- Impact on global trade

Global Impact:

- Oil and gas supplies have been severely affected due to restricted movement.
- The situation reflects deep divisions within UNSC on Middle East policy.
- Highlights limitations of the UN in resolving conflicts when P5 members disagree.

Cuba crisis explained

What is happening in Cuba?

- Cuba is facing a serious economic and energy crisis.
- There are: Fuel shortages, Frequent electricity cuts, Food and medicine shortages
- The crisis has worsened due to U.S. sanctions and oil blockade.

Who actually holds power in Cuba?

- Communist Party is the real power centre
- Cuba is a one-party system controlled by the Communist Party.
- The top position is Party leader, not just the President.
- Military has strong control
- The system is heavily influenced by the military and security agencies.
- Many important sectors (like economy and businesses) are linked to military control.
- Role of Raúl Castro
- Even after stepping down, he still has significant influence.
- He is considered a key power figure behind the scenes.

Who is the current leader?

- The President of Cuba is Miguel Diaz-Canel
- He has been in power since 2018 and also leads the Communist Party.

Can Diaz-Canel be replaced?

- Yes, but it may not change much. Experts say the President can be replaced easily.
- But the system will remain the same, Power will still stay with the same ruling group
- This is because the President's role is not the most powerful position.

Who could replace him?

- Any new leader will likely come from: Communist Party, Military leadership, Possible figures include: Senior government officials & People close to the Castro system

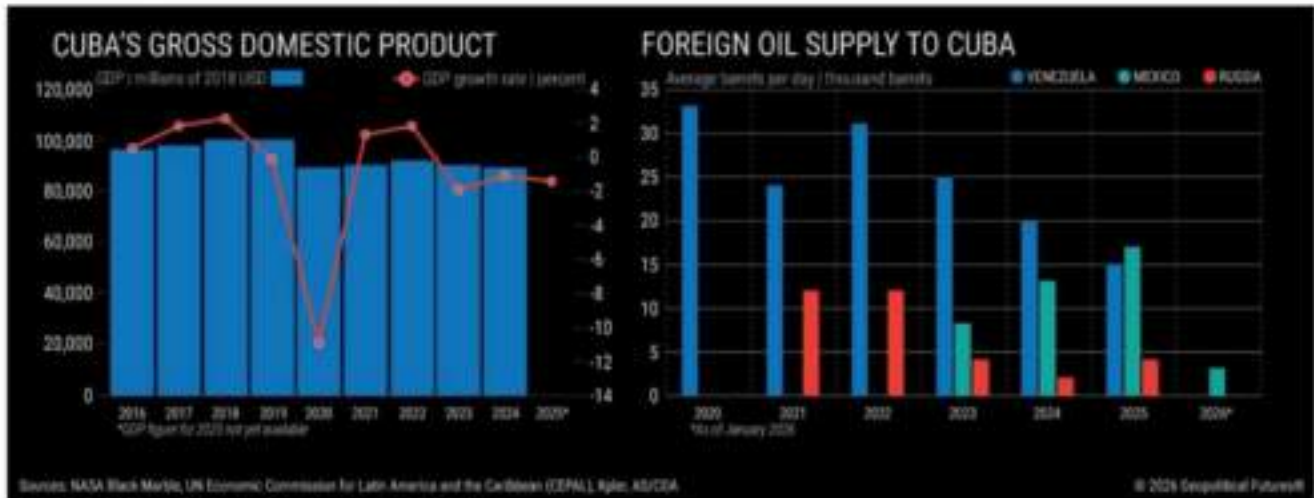
Why is leadership change being discussed?

Economic crisis

- Severe shortages and blackouts are causing public dissatisfaction

U.S. pressure

- The U.S. wants political change in Cuba
- It has imposed sanctions and pushed for reforms



Public unrest: People are unhappy due to:

- Poor living conditions
- Lack of basic services

Final Understanding

- Cuba is not just run by one person
- It is a system controlled by party + military + old leadership network
- So even if the President changes, real power structure will likely remain unchanged

Cuba

- Capital: Havana
- Currency: Cuban Peso
- President: Miguel Diaz-Canel
- Prime minister: Manuel Marrero Cruz

New Zealand's Dependent Child Visa Rules

The government of New Zealand has updated and clarified its dependent child visa rules, focusing on eligibility criteria such as age limits, financial dependency, and legal requirements. The move aims to streamline family immigration and ensure clarity for applicants.

Eligibility Criteria

Under the revised norms, children applying as dependents must be single and financially reliant on their parents. For resident visas, children aged up to 24 years can qualify, while for temporary visas (such as visitor or student visas), the age limit is generally 19 years. Additionally, children aged 21–24 years must provide strong proof of financial dependency to be eligible.

Legal & Documentation Requirements

Applicants must furnish proof of relationship, financial support, and in some cases, legal custody documents. For children aged 16 years and above, English language requirements may also apply. These rules ensure that only genuinely dependent children are included under family visas.

Policy Significance

The updated guidelines reflect New Zealand’s emphasis on regulated immigration and family reunification. By clearly distinguishing between resident and temporary visa categories, the policy reduces ambiguity and prevents misuse of dependent visa provisions.

New Zealand:

- Capital: Wellington
- Governor-General: Cindy Kiro
- Prime Minister: Christopher Luxon
- Currency: New Zealand dollar

Additional Facts:

- Dependent child visa holders under resident categories can live, study, and work in New Zealand. However, children above 18 must generally not have children of their own to qualify as dependents.
- The policy also includes provisions for adopted children, subject to strict documentation and legal verification, highlighting the country’s structured approach to immigration management.

‘Greater Israel’ Debate

The concept of “Greater Israel” has come back into focus amid the ongoing 2026 Iran war, as regional tensions rise and Israel expands military operations in neighbouring areas.

Key Highlights

- The term “Greater Israel” refers to an ideological and historical concept envisioning Israel’s borders extending beyond its current territory.
- In its broadest interpretation, it includes regions from the Nile (Egypt) to the Euphrates (Iraq).
- The idea has gained attention again due to:
- Israel’s ongoing military actions
- Expansion of operations into neighbouring regions like Lebanon
- Analysts and critics link current geopolitical developments with long-standing territorial debates in the Middle East.

Why is it in News Now?

- The ongoing Iran–Israel conflict has:
- Increased regional instability
- Raised concerns about territorial ambitions and security strategies
- Military actions against Iran and proxy groups (like Hezbollah) have revived discussions on Israel’s long-term regional goals

Background of the Concept

- The idea of “Greater Israel” is rooted in:
- Biblical references and historical narratives
- Political interpretations by some groups advocating expanded borders
- It is not an official policy of the Israeli government, but rather an ideological concept debated in political and academic circles

- The concept remains highly controversial internationally

Geopolitical Context

- The Iran–Israel conflict has existed since 1979

The 2026 Iran war began after:

- Rising tensions over Iran’s nuclear program
- Failed diplomatic negotiations
- Military strikes by the US and Israel

The conflict has:

- Disrupted global oil supply routes

- Increased instability across the Middle East
- Involved multiple actors like Hezbollah and Gulf nations

Additional Key Facts:

Greater Israel Concept: Based on interpretations of ancient territorial boundaries

Includes areas in modern-day:

- Palestine
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Syria
- Iraq

Strategic Importance of Region

Middle East is crucial for:

- Global energy supply (oil & gas)
- Geopolitical influence

Strait of Hormuz

Key global oil transit route affected during the conflict

The debate highlights:

- Territorial sovereignty issues
- Security concerns vs expansion narratives



6-Month Free Tourist Visa Programme

Sri Lanka has announced a six-month pilot programme to grant free tourist visas to passport holders from 39 countries, including India, to boost tourism and economic recovery.

Key Highlights

- The scheme will provide free tourist visas (no visa fee) to travellers from 39 countries.
- It will be implemented as a 6-month pilot project.
- The initiative aims to increase international tourist arrivals and revive the tourism sector.
- Countries included cover major global tourism markets such as India, USA, UK, and others.
- Tourists will generally be allowed short-term stays (around 30 days) under this scheme.

Objective of the Initiative

- To revive the tourism industry affected by economic crisis and pandemic
- To attract higher foreign tourist inflow
- To boost foreign exchange earnings and economic recovery
- To position Sri Lanka as a tourist-friendly destination

Background

- Earlier, Sri Lanka had launched a pilot visa-free scheme for 7 countries (including India, China, Japan).
- Due to positive results, the scheme has been expanded to 39-40 countries.
- The country is targeting millions of tourist arrivals annually to strengthen its economy.

Tourism in Sri Lanka

- Major contributor to GDP and foreign exchange earnings

- Key attractions: beaches, tea plantations, heritage sites

Visa System

- Sri Lanka uses Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) for short visits
- Even under free visa schemes, ETA approval may still be required

Economic Context

- Sri Lanka faced a severe economic crisis in 2022, impacting tourism
- Tourism revival is a key part of economic recovery strategy

India–Iran–Pakistan Pipeline (IPI)

Background (What was the project?)

- The Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) pipeline was a proposed gas pipeline from Iran → Pakistan → India.
- Length: about 2,700+ km

Why India was interested

India needed:

- Cheap and steady energy supply
- Diversification from West Asia imports
- Pipeline could supply large volumes of gas daily for industries and power sector.

Aim:

- Supply cheap natural gas to India and Pakistan
- Reduce dependence on expensive LNG imports
- It was also called the “Peace Pipeline” because it could improve regional cooperation.



Why the project collapsed (Key Reasons)

Security concerns (Major reason)

- Pipeline had to pass through Pakistan (especially Balochistan)
- Issues:
 - Terrorism
 - Political instability
- India feared supply disruption or sabotage

India–Pakistan tensions

- Relations were not stable (e.g., Kargil conflict)
- Lack of trust made long-term cooperation risky

US pressure and sanctions on Iran

US opposed the project due to Iran’s nuclear program

Risk:

- Sanctions on countries investing in Iran
- This discouraged India from continuing the project

Pricing disputes

- India and Iran could not agree on:
 - Gas pricing
 - Transit fees via Pakistan
- This made the project economically uncertain

Strategic shift by India**India later moved towards:**

TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India)

Reason:

- More international support
- Less political risk compared to Iran

What is TAPI pipeline? (Alternative)

Route: Turkmenistan → Afghanistan → Pakistan → India

Goal:

- Bring gas from Central Asia

However:

Still facing delays due to security issues in Afghanistan

Current relevance (Why in news?)**Ongoing West Asia crisis has:**

- Highlighted India's heavy dependence on imported energy
- Revived debate: Whether India should have continued with IPI

Final takeaway

IPI pipeline failed mainly due to security risks, geopolitical tensions, US sanctions, and pricing disputes, leading India to shift towards alternative energy routes like TAPI.

Global Leader in Issuing IRCCs**Why in News**

India has emerged as the global leader in issuing Internationally Recognised Certificates of Compliance (IRCCs) under the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS).

Key Highlights

- India has issued 3,561 IRCCs out of 6,311 globally, accounting for over 56% share.
- Only 34 out of 142 countries registered on the ABS Clearing-House have issued IRCCs.

India is followed by:

- France (964)
- Spain
- Argentina
- Panama
- Kenya

What are IRCCs?

- IRCCs are official certificates issued under the Nagoya Protocol.

They confirm:

- Prior Informed Consent (PIC) has been obtained
- Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT) are established

They ensure:

- Transparency
- Legal access to genetic resources
- Fair sharing of benefits

Nagoya Protocol – Key Facts

- Adopted in 2010 at Nagoya (Japan)
- Came into force in 2014
- Supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Objective:

- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources
- Promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use
- India's Institutional Framework (ABS Mechanism)

India's strong performance is due to effective implementation under:

- Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- Three-tier structure:
- National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)
- State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)
- Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)

Additional Facts:

- Over 2.76 lakh BMCs established for grassroots participation
- India issued the world's first IRCC in 2015
- Significance of India's Achievement
- Shows global leadership in biodiversity governance
- Strengthens compliance and transparency mechanisms
- Ensures benefit sharing with local communities
- Supports traditional knowledge protection
- Enhances India's role in international environmental agreements

Olympics Transgender Policy

What is the new policy?

- The International Olympic Committee has decided that only biological females can compete in women's events.
- This rule will be apply from the 2028 Olympics (Los Angeles).

Why is this issue controversial?

- It is a global debate between fairness vs inclusion:
- Some support it → to protect women's sports
- Others oppose it → say it is discriminatory and not fully scientific

Who is affected?

Transgender women and some intersex (DSD) athletes are not allowed in the female category.

Why was this decision taken?

IOC says the aim is to ensure:

- Fairness in competition
- Safety and integrity of women's sports
- Reason: Men (biologically) generally have physical advantages over women.

What is the new rule for eligibility?

- Female athletes must undergo a one-time SRY gene test (sex test).
- This test checks biological sex based on chromosomes (XX/XY).

Background of the issue

- Earlier (2021), IOC allowed each sport to decide its own rules.
- But controversies (like Paris Olympics debates) led to a stricter uniform policy.

Final Understanding:

The Olympics policy now bans transgender women from female events to ensure fair competition, but it has triggered a major global debate on gender identity, science, and equality in sports.

Jones Act Waiver

What is the Jones Act?

- The Jones Act (1920) is a US shipping law.
- It says goods moved between US ports must be on US-built, US-owned, and US-crewed ships.

Why is it important?

- It was made to protect US shipping industry and national security.
- But critics say it increases transport costs due to limited ships.

What did Trump do?

- He suspended (waived) the Jones Act for 60 days.
- This allows foreign ships to transport goods within the US.



Why was it suspended now?

- Due to the US-Israel war with Iran, oil supply got disrupted.
- Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz was affected.
- This caused global oil shortages and rising fuel prices.

What is the aim of the waiver?

- To increase supply of oil, gas, and fertilisers
- To reduce transportation costs
- To ease rising fuel prices in the US

Will fuel prices fall significantly?

- Experts say impact will be limited (only small reduction)
- It may just slow down further price increases, not reduce them sharply

What are the concerns?

- US shipping companies fear:
- Loss of jobs and business
- Some experts say it is only a short-term solution

Final Understanding:

Trump suspended the Jones Act to allow more ships (including foreign ones) to move fuel inside the US, aiming to control rising oil prices caused by the Iran war, but its impact is likely limited and temporary.

India-Poland Bilateral Talks

India and Poland held discussions to deepen political exchanges and strengthen economic ties during a high-level meeting in Warsaw. The talks were led by Pooja Kapur, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, and senior Polish officials. The meeting reaffirmed the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries and emphasized expanding cooperation in multiple sectors.

Focus Areas of Cooperation

Both sides discussed enhancing collaboration in key sectors such as electric vehicles, mining, shipping, and emerging technologies. They also emphasized strengthening trade, investment, and industrial cooperation, along with boosting educational, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges.

Strategic Partnership and Diplomatic Engagement

India and Poland elevated their bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership during the visit of Narendra Modi to Poland in 2024. The two countries are also implementing a Joint Action Plan (2024–2028) aimed at enhancing cooperation in political, economic, and technological domains.

Additional Key Facts:

- Poland Capital: Warsaw
- Currency of Poland: Polish Zloty
- Poland President: Karol Nawrocki
- Poland Prime Minister: Donald Tusk
- Poland is a member of: European Union (EU) and NATO
- India–Poland Trade: ~USD 7 billion (recent estimate)
- Strategic Importance: Poland acts as a gateway for India to the European market

Economic and Trade Relations

Poland is one of India’s important partners in Central Europe. Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown significantly over the years, supported by increasing investments and collaboration in sectors like IT, manufacturing, and clean technologies. Indian companies such as Wipro and other IT firms have established a presence in Poland, contributing to economic engagement.

Cultural and Historical Links

The relationship between India and Poland is also strengthened by cultural and historical ties, including the legacy of Jamsaheb Digvijaysinhji, who sheltered Polish refugees during World War II. Educational exchanges, youth programs, and cultural interactions continue to play an important role in bilateral relations.

Pakistan’s Peacemaker Role in West Asia Conflict

According to The Indian Express (Explained), Pakistan is attempting to play a mediator (peacemaker) role in the ongoing West Asia conflict, particularly involving tensions between Iran, Israel, and the United States. However, this role is highly complex and constrained by geopolitical, economic, and diplomatic challenges.

Key Highlights

- Pakistan has tried to position itself as a neutral mediator in the conflict
- It has engaged in diplomatic outreach with Iran, Gulf countries, and global powers
- The mediation efforts aim to de-escalate tensions and ensure regional stability
- Pakistan’s role is complicated due to its internal challenges and external alliances

Major Challenges for Pakistan

- Close ties with China and the United States create diplomatic balancing issues
- Strong relations with Saudi Arabia and Gulf nations, which may conflict with Iran’s interests
- Domestic economic crisis limits its global diplomatic leverage
- Security concerns and internal instability reduce its credibility as a mediator
- Historical tensions with India also affect its regional positioning

Geopolitical Context

West Asia (Middle East) is a strategically important region due to vast oil reserves

The ongoing conflict has implications for:

- Global energy security
- Oil prices and trade routes
- Countries like Turkey, Egypt, and Qatar are also involved in mediation efforts

Significance

- Pakistan’s role reflects its attempt to enhance diplomatic relevance globally
- Successful mediation could improve its international image and regional influence
- However, failure could further expose its limited strategic autonomy

Additional Facts:

- Pakistan shares a border with Iran (Balochistan region)
- It is a member of organizations like:
 - Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
 - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
- China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a key project under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
- West Asia conflict impacts India’s energy imports and diaspora in the region

US Introduces MATCH Act

The United States has introduced the MATCH Act (Multilateral Alignment of Technology Controls on Hardware Act) to restrict China’s access to critical semiconductor manufacturing equipment, especially tools required for producing advanced AI chips.

Objective of the Act

- To limit China’s capability to produce advanced semiconductors
- To maintain the US technological dominance in AI and chip manufacturing
- To prevent use of such technologies for military and strategic purposes
- To ensure coordination with allies like Japan and the Netherlands

Key Provisions

- Ban on export of “chokepoint” semiconductor manufacturing tools
- Expansion of restrictions to services and upgrades of existing machines
- Inclusion of all facilities of targeted Chinese companies under restrictions
- Push for uniform export controls among allied countries

Background & Context

- Semiconductor technology is central to AI, defence systems, and modern electronics
- Only a few countries—USA, Japan, and the Netherlands—dominate advanced chipmaking tools.
- The US has already imposed restrictions on advanced AI chips, and this Act targets the production equipment itself
- China is actively working towards self-reliance in semiconductor manufacturing

Key Highlights

- The MATCH Act aims to impose strict export controls on chipmaking tools supplied to China.
- It targets advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment, including lithography machines.
- The bill proposes country-wide restrictions, not just company-specific bans.
- It also restricts maintenance, servicing, and technical support for such equipment.
- Major Chinese firms like Huawei, SMIC, and YMTC are specifically targeted.

Additional Key Facts:

- Semiconductors (Chips)
- Core components in devices like smartphones, computers, and defence systems
- Crucial for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and high-performance computing

Lithography Technology

- Used to print circuits on silicon wafers
- Types: EUV (Extreme Ultraviolet) and DUV (Deep Ultraviolet)

Geopolitical Importance

- Chip supply chains are a major part of US–China strategic competition
- Export controls are used as a tool of economic and technological diplomacy

UK Introduces Lifetime Ban on Cigarette Purchase for Youth

The United Kingdom has passed a landmark legislation, the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which imposes a lifetime ban on purchasing cigarettes for individuals currently aged 17 years and below (i.e., those born on or after 1 January 2009). The move aims to create a “smoke-free generation” and significantly reduce long-term public health risks.

Objectives and Rationale

The primary objectives of the legislation are:

- To reduce smoking prevalence among future generations
- To prevent early nicotine addiction
- To reduce the burden on the National Health Service (NHS)
- Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the UK, causing tens of thousands of deaths annually and significant healthcare costs.

- Ban on sale of vapes and nicotine products to minors
- Restrictions on advertising, branding, and packaging
- Expansion of smoke-free zones (schools, hospitals, playgrounds, etc.)
- These measures aim to prevent youth addiction to nicotine in all forms.

Significance

This is one of the strictest anti-tobacco policies globally and marks a shift from regulating age limits to phasing out smoking entirely over time. The UK’s approach may serve as a model for other countries aiming to curb tobacco consumption.

Illiberal Democracy: Concept and Contemporary Debate

The concept of illiberal democracy has gained renewed attention following political developments in countries like Hungary, particularly associated with Viktor Orbán. It highlights a growing global trend where elected governments function in ways that weaken liberal democratic principles.

Meaning of Illiberal Democracy:

Illiberal democracy refers to a system where elections are held regularly, but key democratic values such as civil liberties, rule of law, and institutional independence are undermined. The term was popularised by Fareed Zakaria, who argued that democracy without constitutional liberalism can lead to concentration of power and erosion of rights.

Key Characteristics:

- Such systems maintain the outward structure of democracy but often exhibit centralisation of power in the executive, limited protection of fundamental rights, reduced independence of the judiciary and media, and the rise of majoritarian politics.
- While citizens vote, the space for dissent and opposition tends to shrink.

Key Provision of the Law

- The law introduces a “generational ban” by gradually increasing the legal age for purchasing tobacco products every year. As a result, the affected cohort will never legally be able to buy cigarettes throughout their lifetime, even after becoming adults.
- The legislation applies across the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and will come into force after receiving royal assent.

Regulation of Vaping and Nicotine Products

- Alongside tobacco restrictions, the bill introduces stricter controls on vaping products, including:

Democracy vs Liberalism:

- A crucial distinction lies between democracy and liberalism. Democracy focuses on the process of electing governments, whereas liberalism ensures limits on power through constitutional safeguards and protection of individual freedoms.
- Illiberal democracies emerge when electoral processes exist without strong institutional checks.

Global Trends and Examples:

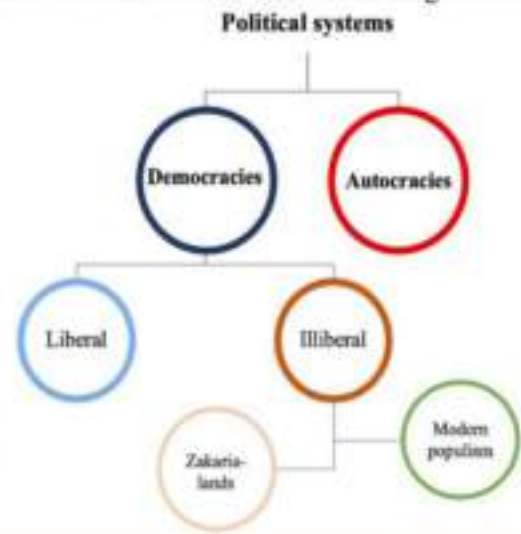
Countries like Hungary are often cited as examples where democratic elections coexist with weakening liberal institutions. Such trends reflect a broader global shift toward nationalism, strong leadership, and reduced emphasis on pluralism and minority rights.

Implications for Governance:

The rise of illiberal democracy can lead to weakening of checks and balances, decline in press freedom, erosion of judicial independence, and potential drift toward authoritarian governance. It raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of democratic systems.

Conclusion:

The concept of illiberal democracy underscores that free and fair elections alone are not sufficient for a healthy democracy; protection of rights, institutional autonomy, and adherence to constitutional principles are equally essential.



India Extends OCI Card Eligibility

During his official visit to Sri Lanka, Vice-President C. P. Radhakrishnan announced that India has extended Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card eligibility for persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka up to the sixth generation. Earlier, eligibility was limited to the fourth generation. The move aims to strengthen diaspora engagement and bilateral ties between the two countries.

Key Points:

- OCI eligibility extended from 4th generation to 6th generation of Indian-origin people in Sri Lanka.
- Announcement made during the Vice-President’s 2-day visit to Sri Lanka.
- Decision will particularly benefit Indian-origin Tamil community in Sri Lanka.
- OCI cards may now be issued based on documents provided by the Sri Lankan government, simplifying the process.

- Parity with NRIs in economic/educational fields

Not full citizenship:

- No voting rights
- Cannot hold constitutional posts
- PIO-OCI Merger: Person of Indian Origin (PIO) scheme merged with OCI in 2015 to simplify diaspora policies.

India-Sri Lanka Relations Based on:

- Historical & cultural ties
- Tamil community linkage

Key cooperation areas:

Housing projects, Economic assistance (e.g., during Sri Lanka’s 2022 crisis) & Fisheries management

Discussions during the visit included:

- Economic cooperation
- Housing projects
- Fishermen issues (sensitive bilateral concern)
- Move aligns with India’s “Neighbourhood First” policy.

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Scheme:

Introduced in 2005 under the Citizenship Act 1955 amendment.

Provides:

- Lifelong visa to visit India
- Exemption from police registration

Economy & Trade

India Use Yuan for Iranian Oil Payments

Indian oil refiners have reportedly used the Chinese yuan instead of the US dollar to pay for limited imports of Iranian crude oil, routing transactions through ICICI Bank's Shanghai branch. This arrangement emerged under a temporary sanctions waiver granted by the United States, allowing restricted oil trade with Iran. The shift away from dollar-based payments reflects evolving global trade practices influenced by geopolitical tensions, sanctions, and currency dynamics.

Reason for Using Yuan Instead of Dollar:

The use of the Chinese yuan is primarily due to US sanctions on Iran, which restrict transactions in US dollars and through Western financial systems. By using yuan and routing payments through offshore banking channels, refiners can bypass restrictions and ensure continuity of energy imports. This also reflects a broader trend of de-dollarisation in global energy trade, especially involving sanctioned countries.

Key Facts:

Sanctions and Oil Trade:

- US sanctions restrict Iran's access to global financial systems
- Countries use alternative currencies (yuan, euro) to bypass restrictions

De-dollarisation Trend:

- Increasing use of non-dollar currencies in global trade
- Prominent in oil trade involving Russia, Iran, and China

India's Energy Profile:

- Imports ~85-90% of its crude oil requirement
- Major suppliers: Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia

recently resumed limited imports under special permissions, reflecting pragmatic energy diplomacy.

Implications for India:

This payment mechanism highlights India's efforts to balance energy security with international diplomatic constraints. While it ensures access to cheaper crude oil, it also exposes India to risks associated with sanctions compliance and geopolitical pressures. The use of alternative currencies may also influence India's foreign exchange management and trade policies in the long run.

Global FSA 3.0 Certification

Top 20 Highest Currencies in the World

(Approximate Value in USD as of early 2026)

1	Kuwaiti Dinar (KWD)	~\$3.20 USD
2	Bahraini Dinar (BHD)	~\$2.65 USD
3	Omani Rial (OMR)	~\$2.60 USD
4	Jordanian Dinar (JOD)	~\$1.40 USD
5	British Pound Sterling (GBP)	~\$1.20 - \$1.30 USD
6	Gibraltar Pound (GIP)	~\$1.20 - \$1.30 USD
7	Falkland Islands Pound (FKP)	~\$1.20 - \$1.30 USD
8	Swiss Franc (CHF)	~\$1.10 - \$1.20 USD
9	Cayman Islands Dollar (KYD)	~\$1.20 USD
10	Euro (EUR)	~\$1.05 - \$1.15 USD
11	United States Dollar (USD)	\$1.00
12	Singapore Dollar (SGD)	\$0.75 USD
13	Brunei Dollar (BND)	\$0.75 USD
14	Canadian Dollar (CAD)	~\$0.70 - \$0.75 USD
15	Australian Dollar (AUD)	~\$0.65 - \$0.70 USD
16	Bosnia & Herzegovina (BAM)	~\$0.55 USD
17	New Zealand Dollar (NZD)	~\$0.55 - \$0.60 USD
18	Bulgarian Lev (BGN)	~\$0.55 USD
19	Azerbaijani Manat (AZN)	~\$0.55 USD
20	Aruban Florin (AWG)	~\$0.55 USD

Geopolitical and Economic Context:

➤ The development comes amid global energy instability caused by conflicts in West Asia, particularly the 2026 Iran war fuel crisis, which disrupted oil supplies and increased prices. India, being heavily dependent on imported crude oil, has adopted flexible sourcing strategies, including purchases from Russia and Iran under temporary waivers.

➤ Additionally, India had halted Iranian oil imports in 2019 due to US sanctions but has

ITC Limited has become the first company in India to receive the globally recognised Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) 3.0 certification for its wheat and paddy sourcing operations. The certification, developed by the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform, validates ITC's adherence to international standards of sustainable, traceable, and responsible agricultural practices. This milestone reflects India's growing alignment with global sustainability benchmarks and enhances the credibility of Indian agricultural supply chains in international markets.

About FSA 3.0 Certification:

The Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) is a globally accepted tool used to evaluate farm-level sustainability across environmental, social, and economic parameters. It assesses factors such as soil health, water usage, biodiversity conservation, labour conditions, and ethical farming practices. Widely adopted by global agri-food companies, the FSA framework ensures transparency, traceability, and compliance with international sustainability norms.

Key facts:

- FSA 3.0: Global benchmark for farm sustainability assessment
- Developed by: Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Platform

Key Focus Areas:

- Environmental protection
- Social responsibility (labour standards)
- Economic viability of farming

Implementation and Coverage:

ITC has implemented FSA 3.0 standards across more than 22,000 acres of farmland involving over 3,500 farmers through 70+ Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This initiative is part of ITC's Crop Development Programme, which integrates sustainability with farmer empowerment and supply chain transparency.

Significance for Agriculture and Economy:

The certification enhances India's agricultural competitiveness in global markets, particularly in regions with strict sustainability norms such as the European Union. It helps farmers achieve better yields, improved price realisation, and stronger market linkages. Environmentally, it promotes efficient use of resources, reduces emissions, and improves soil health. Overall, it strengthens resilient and climate-smart agricultural practices in India.



Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs):

- Collective of farmers for better bargaining power and market access
- Supported under schemes like SFAC (Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium)

Relevance for India:

- Boosts agri-exports
- Aligns with climate-resilient agriculture goals
- Supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG-2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG-12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)

Japan's \$10 Billion for Secure Oil Supplies

Japan has announced a \$10 billion financial framework to support Asian countries in securing energy resources such as crude oil amid rising global supply disruptions due to Middle East tensions. The initiative, led by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, aims to strengthen regional energy security and protect supply chains critical to Japan's economy. The support will be channelled through state-backed institutions and is expected to significantly assist Southeast Asian nations with limited oil reserves.

Funds to be routed through:

- Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)
- Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI)
- The support is equivalent to 1.2 billion barrels of oil (approx. one year of ASEAN imports).

Announcement made during:

Meeting of Asia Zero-Emission Community (AZEC) initiative

Participating countries include:

Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

Focus on:

- Addressing funding gaps for oil procurement
- Supporting industries dependent on Asian supply chains (e.g., healthcare equipment)

Japan:

- Capital: Tokyo
- Currency: Japanese Yen
- Prime Minister: Sanae Takaichi
- Imports over 90% of its oil from the Middle East

Additional Important Points:

Energy Security Context:

- Global oil supply disrupted due to Middle East geopolitical tensions
- Asia is highly dependent on oil imports passing through the Strait of Hormuz (~90% flows to Asia)



ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations):

- Members: 10 countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.)
- Headquarters: Jakarta, Indonesia
- Chairman: Bongbong Marcos
- Secretary-General: Kao Kim Hourn
- Plays a key role in Asia-Pacific economic integration

Japan's Energy Strategy:

- Diversifying oil sources beyond the Middle East
- Increasing strategic petroleum reserves usage
- Promoting clean energy transition via AZEC initiative

Important Term:

Naphtha: Petroleum product used as raw material in plastics and chemicals industry

Kill Switch

The Reserve Bank of India has proposed a set of new measures to enhance the safety of digital payments amid a sharp rise in online frauds. These proposals were outlined in a discussion paper released in April 2026, inviting public feedback.

What is the 'Kill Switch'?

One of the key proposals is the introduction of a "kill switch", a feature that would allow users to instantly disable all digital payment services (such as UPI, net banking, cards) in case of suspected fraud. This would help users prevent further unauthorized transactions in real time.

Other Key Proposals:**Apart from the kill switch, RBI has suggested multiple safeguards:**

- One-hour delay (cooling period) for high-value transactions above ₹10,000 to allow users to review or cancel suspicious payments
- Additional authentication for vulnerable groups (senior citizens, disabled persons) for large transactions
- Transaction limits and monitoring to curb mule accounts used in frauds
- Option to enable/disable digital payment modes and set transaction limits
- Whitelisting trusted beneficiaries to avoid delays in genuine payments

Reason for the Move:

The proposals come in response to a rapid increase in digital payment frauds in India, driven by scams such as phishing, impersonation, and deepfake-based fraud. The instant nature of systems like Unified Payments Interface makes recovery of funds difficult once transferred.

Significance:

These measures aim to shift digital payments towards a "customer-controlled security model", empowering users to act quickly during fraud incidents. If implemented, they will strengthen trust in India's rapidly growing digital payment ecosystem.

SEBI-FIU India MoU

In response to rising complexities in financial crimes such as money laundering, insider trading, and market manipulation, regulatory coordination has become essential. Strengthening surveillance and intelligence-sharing mechanisms is a key priority for ensuring transparency and investor protection in India's capital markets.

MoU Between Regulators:

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-India) on 15 April 2026. The agreement aims to enhance cooperation in tackling fraud and money laundering in the securities market.

Key Features of the Agreement:

- The MoU establishes a framework for regular exchange of data and information between SEBI and FIU-India. This will improve market surveillance, enable early detection of suspicious transactions, and strengthen enforcement against fraudulent activities.
- The agreement aligns with global standards such as the Egmont Principles for information sharing and supports effective implementation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

About SEBI:

- Established in 1992 as a statutory body
- Regulates securities markets, stock exchanges, and intermediaries
- Functions under the SEBI Act, 1992
- Chairperson: Tuhin Kanta Pandey,
- Objective: Protect investor interests and ensure market integrity

About FIU-India:

- Established in 2004 under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance
- Acts as the nodal agency for receiving and analysing financial intelligence related to suspicious transactions
- Plays a key role in implementation of the PMLA, 2002
- Director: Amit Govil

Egmont Group :

- Global network of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs)
- Facilitates secure exchange of financial intelligence to combat money laundering and terror financing

Related Developments:

Securities and Exchange Board of India recently signed multiple MoUs to strengthen technology-based market surveillance

With Department of Telecommunications (2026):

- Real-time data sharing via Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)
- Use of Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)
- Tracks telecom-linked frauds, fake mobile numbers, mule accounts

With National Forensic Sciences University (2025):

- Enhances digital forensics & cyber investigation
- Training + research support for SEBI officials

With digital platforms (under IT Rules, 2021):

- Removal of misleading financial content
- Action against online investment scams
- Increasing focus on inter-agency coordination in financial regulation

India-Cyprus Bilateral Ties

India and Cyprus held high-level discussions focusing on strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing institutional cooperation.

Areas of Cooperation Discussed:

- The discussions covered multiple domains of institutional and bilateral cooperation, including:

Significance of the Move:

- The collaboration marks a shift toward a more integrated and data-driven regulatory framework. It is expected to:
- Strengthen anti-money laundering (AML) enforcement
- Enhance investor protection mechanisms
- Improve detection of complex financial crimes
- Boost confidence in India's securities markets
- It also reflects a broader trend of inter-agency coordination to address emerging risks in digital and global financial systems.

- Legal and judicial cooperation (extradition, criminal cases)
- Exchange of prisoners between the two countries
- Consular issues related to Indian diaspora
- Strengthening coordination between justice and law enforcement systems
- These measures aim to enhance mutual trust and facilitate smoother governance coordination between the two nations.

Broader Bilateral Engagement

- India and Cyprus have been actively expanding cooperation across sectors such as trade, investment, defence, digital transformation, renewable energy, fintech, and maritime security. Both countries are working under the India–Cyprus Joint Action Plan (2025–2029), which provides a roadmap for deepening strategic ties.
- Additionally, Cyprus is expected to assume the Presidency of the European Union Council in 2026, making it an important partner for India in strengthening India–EU relations.

Strategic Importance of Cyprus for India

Cyprus holds strategic importance for India due to:

- Its location in the Eastern Mediterranean region (gateway to Europe and West Asia)
- Membership in the European Union
- Role as an investment hub and financial services centre
- Support for India’s position on international issues, including UN Security Council reforms
- Cyprus also serves as a platform for enhancing India’s connectivity with Europe through initiatives like the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

India–Cyprus Relations:

- Diplomatic ties established in 1962
- Cyprus is a significant source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India

Cyprus:

- Capital of Cyprus: Nicosia
- Political System: Presidential Republic
- EU Membership: Since 2004
- Currency: Euro (€)

Recent Developments:

- Joint Action Plan (2025–2029)
- Increasing defence and security cooperation
- Focus on digital economy and green energy

India–Sweden Ties

India and Sweden agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in trade, defence, innovation, and sustainability during the 8th Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) held in New Delhi.

Areas of cooperation:

- Trade and investment
- Defence and security
- Innovation and technology
- Sustainability and climate action
- People-to-people ties
- Both sides also discussed regional and global issues of mutual interest

Sweden:

- Capital: Stockholm
- Prime Minister: Ulf Kristersson
- Currency: Swedish krona

Defence & Innovation Cooperation:

- Defence cooperation includes joint working groups and industrial partnerships
- Swedish companies like SAAB involved in defence manufacturing in India
- Collaboration in AI, digital infrastructure, and emerging technologies

India–Sweden Relations: Key Facts

- Diplomatic relations established in 1949
- Sweden recognized India’s independence in 1947
- India has an embassy in Stockholm; Sweden in New Delhi

Trade & Economic Cooperation

- Bilateral trade has grown significantly, reaching around USD 6.96 billion (2024)
- Sweden is among India’s important partners in the EU and Nordic region
- Key sectors: Green technology, Renewable energy, Smart infrastructure & Defence manufacturing

Link with India–EU Relations

- Recently concluded India–European Union Free Trade Agreement (2026) is expected to boost India–Sweden trade and investment ties
- The 8th India–Sweden FOC highlights deepening bilateral ties in strategic sectors like defence, innovation, and sustainability, reinforcing India’s engagement with Europe and the Nordic region.

RBI’s New Policy Measures (2026)

The Reserve Bank of India has announced a comprehensive set of developmental and regulatory policy measures covering four key areas—regulations, supervision, payment systems, and financial markets—to improve efficiency, ease of doing business, and strengthen the financial system.

Aim:

- Simplify compliance
- Improve transparency
- Ensure uniform regulatory framework across institutions

Regulatory Reforms:

Under regulations, RBI proposed:

- Easing capital adequacy norms (CRAR) by removing restrictions on inclusion of quarterly profits
- Removal of Investment Fluctuation Reserve (IFR) requirement for commercial banks
- Review of bank board governance to enhance focus on strategy and risk management instead of routine operations

Concept: CRAR (Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio): Measures a bank’s financial strength and ability to absorb losses

Supervisory Measures: RBI has consolidated supervisory instructions into 64 Master Directions

Payment Systems Reforms:

- Simplification of onboarding of MSMEs on TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System)
- Removal of certain due diligence requirements to:
- Improve access to working capital
- Enhance ease of doing business for small enterprises

Financial Market Measures:

- Expansion of term money market participation to:
- Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)
- Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)
- Increase in borrowing limits for primary dealers

Objective:

- Improve market liquidity
- Strengthen monetary policy transmission

RBI Monetary Policy (April 2026)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), under Governor Sanjay Malhotra, kept the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% in the April 2026 Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting. The decision was taken unanimously, maintaining the “neutral” policy stance. This marks the second consecutive policy review where rates have been kept unchanged after earlier rate cuts in 2025.

Key Policy Rates:

- Repo Rate: 5.25% (unchanged)
- Standing Deposit Facility (SDF): 5.00%
- Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) & Bank Rate: 5.50%

External Factors Impacting Policy:

- India imports ~90% of crude oil, making it vulnerable to global shocks
- Ongoing conflicts (e.g., US–Iran tensions) →
- Higher oil prices
- Rupee depreciation
- Capital outflows (~\$19 billion)

Reasons for Status Quo:

- Rising global uncertainties, especially due to West Asia geopolitical tensions
- Crude oil price volatility, increasing inflation risks
- Need to assess impact of earlier rate cuts (~125 bps since Feb 2025)
- Maintaining balance between inflation control and economic growth

Economic Outlook:

- GDP Growth (FY27): ~6.9% (revised downward)
- Inflation Projection: ~4.6%
- Core Inflation: ~4.4%
- Inflation currently near/within RBI’s target of 4% ($\pm 2\%$) band

Policy Stance & Strategy:

- RBI adopted a “wait and watch” approach

Focus on:

- Liquidity management
- Keeping inflation under control
- Supporting growth without premature rate changes

Impact on Economy:

- Loan EMIs: Likely to remain stable
- Borrowing costs: No immediate change
- Real estate sector: Gains stability
- Bank lending rates: Expected to remain unchanged in short term

Important Concepts:

- Repo Rate: Rate at which RBI lends to commercial banks
- Neutral Stance: RBI can either increase or decrease rates depending on future conditions
- MPC Composition: 6 members (3 RBI + 3 external), decisions by majority

India’s Forex Reserves

Why in News?

India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves witnessed a sharp decline of about \$30.5 billion in March, marking one of the steepest monthly falls in recent times, as per recent data.



Key Highlights

- India's forex reserves dropped significantly due to multiple factors, including valuation losses, RBI intervention in currency markets, and fluctuations in global financial conditions. The fall reflects pressure on the Indian Rupee amid global uncertainties.
- The decline was mainly attributed to a reduction in:
 - Foreign Currency Assets (FCA) – the largest component of reserves
 - Changes in gold reserves valuation
 - Movements in global currencies like the US dollar

Reasons Behind the Decline

- RBI Intervention: RBI sells dollars to stabilize the rupee during volatility
- Dollar Appreciation: Strengthening of US dollar reduces value of other currencies held in reserves
- Global Financial Uncertainty: Capital outflows from emerging markets
- Import Bills: High crude oil prices increase dollar demand
- Significance of Forex Reserves

Forex reserves are crucial for:

- Maintaining currency stability
- Meeting import obligations
- Boosting investor confidence
- Acting as a buffer during external shocks
- India still maintains a comfortable level of reserves, sufficient to cover several months of imports.

Global Context

- Countries worldwide manage forex reserves to tackle economic shocks. India is among the top countries globally in forex reserves, along with:
 - China (largest reserves)
 - Japan
 - Switzerland

Key Facts

- RBI → Custodian of India's forex reserves
- Largest component → Foreign Currency Assets (FCA)
- SDR → Issued by International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- Forex reserves used for → Currency stability & import financing

What are Forex Reserves?

- Foreign exchange reserves are assets held by a country's central bank (in India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)) in foreign currencies. These include:
 - Foreign Currency Assets (FCA)
 - Gold reserves

₹1 lakh crore threshold for Upper Layer NBFCs

RBI has suggested replacing the existing complex scoring system for identifying large NBFCs with a simple, transparent asset-based threshold. NBFCs with assets of ₹1 lakh crore and above will automatically be categorized as Upper Layer NBFCs, which are subject to stricter regulation due to their systemic importance.

NBFC-UL are:

- Systemically important institutions
- Subject to stricter regulatory oversight
- RBI may still retain discretion to include other NBFCs if needed
- Proposal to include government-owned NBFCs (PSUs) in upper layer classification
- Threshold and classification may be reviewed periodically (e.g., every 5 years)
- Public/stakeholder comments invited by RBI before finalization

About NBFCs:

- Full form: Non-Banking Financial Company
- Regulated by: Reserve Bank of India
- Provide services like: Loans & advances, Asset financing, Investment in securities, Cannot accept demand deposits like banks, Scale-Based Regulation (SBR) Framework (RBI)

NBFCs are classified into 4 layers:

1. Base Layer (NBFC-BL) – Small NBFCs
2. Middle Layer (NBFC-ML) – Medium-sized NBFCs
3. Upper Layer (NBFC-UL) – Large, systemically important NBFCs
4. Top Layer (NBFC-TL) – (Empty by default; activated if risk increases)



Shipping Liberties Clause

What is the Liberties (Deviation) Clause?

- It is a rule in shipping contracts (bill of lading).

It allows shipping companies to:

- Change route
- Delay journey
- Deliver cargo at a different port
- Key idea: If the original route becomes unsafe or impractical, ships are legally allowed to deviate.

Where does this rule come from?

- It dates back to the 19th century
- At that time:
 - Ships faced piracy, war, and bad weather
 - So captains needed flexibility without breaking contracts

Why is this rule in news now?

- Due to the Iran war and tensions near the Strait of Hormuz
- Problems:

- Attacks on ships
- Military threats
- Insurance risks
- As a result:
- Shipping routes have become dangerous and uncertain

How does the clause work in practice?

When invoked, shipping companies can:

- Change route
- Avoid risky areas like war zones
- Delay shipment
- Wait until conditions improve
- Deliver at another port
- Instead of original destination
- This is considered legal fulfilment of contract

What happens to the cargo then?

- Once cargo is unloaded at a different port:
- Responsibility shifts to the cargo owner (importer)

They must arrange:

- Transport to final destination
- Storage and handling
- Customs clearance
- Important: These costs were not included in the original price

What is the impact on businesses?

- Increased costs (extra logistics, storage)
- Delivery delays
- Supply chain disruptions

- In some cases:
- Costs rise significantly per container

Why companies are using it more now?

- War risk in Gulf region
- Insurance becoming expensive or unavailable
- Routes like Hormuz becoming unsafe
- So: Companies use this clause to reduce risk and liability

Bigger global impact

- About 90% of global trade moves by sea
- So disruptions:
- Affect global prices
- Delay goods worldwide
- Create supply chain instability

Final takeaway

The liberties clause lets shipping firms legally change routes or ports during crises, shifting extra costs and risks from companies to cargo owners.

US announces 100% tariff on patented pharma

The United States has announced a 100% tariff (import tax) on patented (branded) medicines coming from other countries. This rule will start from July 2026.

How does the tariff system work?

- Up to 100% tax on imported patented drugs
- But there are exceptions:

0% tariff if companies:

- Reduce prices (pricing deals)
- Set up manufacturing in the US

- 20% tariff if they only invest in US manufacturing
- Companies have 120–180 days to comply

Why has the US taken this step?

- The US says it depends too much on imported medicines, which is risky during crises.
- The aim is to:
- Increase domestic production of drugs
- Reduce dependence on other countries
- Push companies to manufacture in the US

Important exemption

- Generic medicines are NOT included (for now)
- This is very important for India

Impact on India

- Why impact is limited (short-term)
- India mainly exports generic drugs, not patented ones

Since generics are exempt:

- India's exports will not be affected much immediately

Possible long-term risks

- The US may review and

US Tariffs Impact on the Indian Pharma Industry

US announced a 100% tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical products effective October 1, 2025



- include generic drugs in future
- US focus on domestic production may:
- Reduce imports from India
- Affect India's pharma exports in the long run
- Bigger global impact

The policy may:

- Change global supply chains
- Force pharma companies to shift factories to the US
- It is part of a broader economic and trade strategy

Final understanding

- The US move targets expensive patented drugs, not generics
- So India is safe in the short term, but faces uncertainty in the future due to policy changes

2FA for UPI & Card Payments

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has made Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) mandatory for all digital payment transactions (UPI, debit/credit cards, wallets) from 1 April 2026 to enhance payment security.

Key Highlights

- 2FA mandatory for all transactions – every payment must use at least two authentication factors.
- OTP alone will not be sufficient anymore.

Authentication methods may include:

- OTP + PIN/password
- Biometric (fingerprint/face ID)
- Token/device-based verification

Risk-based authentication introduced:

- Low-risk/small payments → smoother
- High-value/new device → stricter checks

Additional Key Facts

- Based on RBI framework: "Authentication Mechanisms for Digital Payment Transactions Directions, 2025".
- At least one authentication factor must be dynamic (e.g., OTP).
- Cross-border (international) transactions will also follow similar rules by October 2026.
- India has one of the fastest-growing digital payment ecosystems (UPI-led).

Applies to:

- UPI payments
- Card payments
- Mobile wallets

Reason Behind the Move

Rising cases of:

- Phishing attacks
- SIM swap frauds
- OTP-only systems were found vulnerable to cyber fraud.

Impact on Users

- Transactions may become slightly slower due to extra verification.
- Improved security and trust in digital payments.
- Familiar devices may still allow smooth transactions.

Bank & Platform Responsibility

- Banks/payment apps must comply with security norms.
- In case of fraud due to system failure, banks may compensate customers.

Excise Duty Cut on Petrol and Diesel

The Government of India has recently reduced excise duty on petrol and diesel to ease the burden of rising fuel prices. This move aims to control inflation and provide relief to consumers amid increasing global crude oil prices.

Impact on Fuel Prices

Although the excise duty cut is expected to lower fuel prices, the actual benefit to consumers may be limited. This is because global crude oil prices remain high, which can offset the reduction in taxes. As a result, the price relief at petrol pumps may not be significant or immediate.

Impact on Oil Marketing Companies

The reduction in excise duty is likely to benefit Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) such as HPCL, BPCL, and IOCL. It can improve their financial position by reducing the burden of absorbing price fluctuations, thereby stabilizing their margins.

Impact on Government Revenue

Excise duty is a major source of revenue for the central government. Therefore, the reduction in duty will lead to a significant loss of revenue. To balance this, the government may rely on other measures such as windfall taxes or adjustments in fiscal policy.

Additional Key Facts:

- Petrol and diesel are not included under GST in India.
- Fuel prices in India are determined by global crude oil prices + taxes (Excise + VAT).
- India is the third-largest consumer of crude oil in the world.
- Excise duty is a form of indirect tax levied by the central government.

Global Context

The decision comes against the backdrop of rising global crude oil prices due to geopolitical tensions and supply uncertainties. India, being one of the largest importers of crude oil, is highly sensitive to global price fluctuations.

Excise Cut on Petrol, Diesel

Govt reduced special additional excise duty by ₹10



3-Year Tax Break on Cooperative Dividends

The Government of India has announced a 3-year tax exemption on dividends received from cooperative societies, aimed at boosting the cooperative sector and increasing members' income. The move is expected to strengthen rural economies and financial inclusion by encouraging greater participation in cooperatives.

Key Highlights

- Tax exemption on cooperative dividends for a period of three years
- Applicable to members receiving dividends from cooperative societies
- Intended to provide relief to small investors, farmers, and rural stakeholders
- Expected to enhance returns from cooperative participation

Objectives and Significance

- Promote the growth of the cooperative movement in India
- Increase income of members, especially in rural areas
- Encourage investment and participation in cooperative institutions

Support sectors like:

- Agriculture
- Dairy
- Credit and banking
- Aligns with the government's vision of "Sahkar se Samridhi" (Prosperity through Cooperation)

Additional Facts:

Cooperative Societies in India:

- Governed by the Cooperative Societies Act, 1912 (and state laws)
- Work on principles of voluntary membership and democratic control

Ministry of Cooperation:

- Established in 2021 to strengthen the cooperative sector
- Current Union Minister: Amit Shah

Major Cooperative Institutions:

- Amul (Gujarat)
- IFFCO

Economic Role:

- Cooperatives contribute significantly to agriculture, dairy, banking, and rural credit systems
- This measure complements schemes like:

PM-KISAN

- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) initiatives

India-Malta cooperation

India and Malta held the 4th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) in Valletta (Malta) on 27 March 2026, where both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in key sectors like ICT, healthcare, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and education.

Key Highlights

Consultations co-chaired by:

- Sibi George (Secretary West, MEA)
- Christopher Cutajar

Both countries reviewed:

- Entire spectrum of bilateral relations

Agreed to expand cooperation in:

- Information & Communication Technology (ICT)
- Healthcare
- Renewable Energy
- Pharmaceuticals & Education

Focus on:

- Trade & investment
- Tourism
- Technology & innovation
- Maritime cooperation

Also discussed:

- Regional and global issues
- Cooperation in multilateral forums

Economic & Strategic Context

Talks held in light of:

- India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) progress

Aim to:

- Boost economic and commercial relations

Additional Key Facts

India and Malta:

- Established diplomatic relations in 1965
- Celebrated 60 years of diplomatic ties in 2025

Malta:

- Capital: Valletta
- President: Myriam Spiteri Debono
- Prime Minister: Robert Abela
- Currency: Euro (€)
- Located in the Mediterranean Sea
- Member of the European Union (EU)

- Defence & security cooperation also discussed with Malta's armed forces

Both countries are:

- Members of the Commonwealth

Malta hosted:

- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2005 & 2015
- Maritime cooperation is important due to Malta's;
- Strategic location in global sea routes

Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool

The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of the Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool (BMIP) with a sovereign guarantee of ₹12,980 crore to safeguard India's shipping sector amid global uncertainties. At the same time, discussions around delimitation of constituencies have resurfaced ahead of the post-2026 Census scenario. Additionally, the government has extended the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-III) to boost rural connectivity and infrastructure development.

Detailed Analysis:

Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool (BMIP):

- The government has approved a sovereign-backed maritime insurance pool worth ₹12,980 crore to provide comprehensive insurance coverage to Indian-linked vessels. This decision comes in response to disruptions in global shipping routes due to geopolitical tensions, especially in West Asia.
- The pool will cover multiple risks including hull, machinery, cargo, Protection & Indemnity (P&I), and war risks, ensuring uninterrupted maritime trade operations.

Significance:

- Reduces dependence on foreign insurers
- Ensures continuity of oil and trade supply chains
- Strengthens India's maritime security and logistics

Delimitation of Constituencies

- The issue of delimitation (redrawing of electoral boundaries) is gaining attention as the current freeze on delimitation is expected to end after the 2026 Census.
- This process will redistribute Lok Sabha seats based on updated population data, potentially altering political representation across states.

Key Concern:

- Southern states fear reduced representation due to better population control
- Northern states may gain more seats due to higher population growth

PMGSY-III Extension

- The government has extended the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana Phase III (PMGSY-III) to 2028-29, with an increased financial outlay of around ₹83,977 crore.
- The scheme focuses on upgrading rural roads and connecting villages to economic centers such as markets, schools, and hospitals.

Objective:

Additional Key Facts:

Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool:

- Approved by Union Cabinet (2026)
- Backed by sovereign guarantee
- Covers Indian-flagged, controlled, and India-bound vessels
- Important for energy security (oil transport routes)

Delimitation:

- Conducted by Delimitation Commission (appointed by President)
- Constitutional basis: Article 82 & Article 170
- Last delimitation based on 2001 Census (implemented in 2008)
- Freeze based on 1971 Census extended till 2026 (42nd & 84th Amendments)

- Improve rural connectivity
- Boost rural economy and access to services
- Support inclusive development

PMGSY:

- Launched in 2000
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development
- PMGSY-III focuses on through routes and major rural links
- Connects villages to GrAMs (Gramin Agricultural Markets)

India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand, announced that India and New Zealand are set to sign a long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The agreement marks a major step toward strengthening bilateral economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Significance of the Agreement

- The FTA is being projected as a major economic breakthrough, especially for New Zealand, as it will provide access to India’s vast market of around 1.4 billion consumers.
- For a trade-dependent economy like New Zealand, the agreement is expected to boost exports, create jobs, and increase incomes by enhancing global competitiveness.

Key Features of the FTA

The agreement is expected to:

- Reduce or eliminate tariffs on a large share of traded goods
- Provide duty-free or concessional access to multiple sectors
- Enhance cooperation in trade, services, and investment
- Earlier negotiations indicate that about 95% of New Zealand exports to India may see tariff reduction, while Indian goods will gain wider access to the New Zealand market.

Economic Context and Trade Potential

- India is currently one of the fastest-growing major economies, making it an attractive market for global trade partners.
- The bilateral trade between India and New Zealand is relatively modest (around \$2–2.4 billion), but the FTA aims to significantly expand trade and investment flows.

Strategic Importance

- The agreement is part of India’s broader strategy to:
- Expand global trade partnerships
- Diversify export markets
- Strengthen economic ties in the Indo-Pacific region
- For New Zealand, the deal fulfills a long-standing policy commitment and enhances engagement with one of the world’s largest economies.

Additional Key Facts:

FTA (Free Trade Agreement):

An agreement between countries to reduce or eliminate trade barriers like tariffs and quotas

India–New Zealand Trade Relations:

- Merchandise trade: ~ \$1.3 billion
- Total trade (goods + services): ~ \$2.4 billion (2024)

Major Export Items:

- India → Textiles, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods
- New Zealand → Agricultural products, forestry, wool, meat

Sensitive Sectors:

India has protected sectors like dairy and agriculture in negotiations

Investment Commitment:

New Zealand may invest around \$20 billion in India over time

Part of India’s FTA Strategy:

India is simultaneously negotiating FTAs with UK, EU, Oman, and others

EU Divided Over Suspending Trade Agreement with Israel

Several European Union (EU) countries are demanding the suspension of the EU–Israel Association Agreement, a major trade and cooperation pact with Israel, over concerns related to Gaza and the West Bank.

Why is pressure increasing?

- Spain, Ireland, and Slovenia have urged the EU to suspend or review the agreement.
- They argue that Israel's actions in Gaza and the occupied West Bank involve serious human rights violations and breaches of international law.
- These countries say such actions violate Article 2 of the agreement, which makes respect for human rights an essential condition.

Which countries are opposing suspension?

- Germany and Italy opposed suspending the pact.
- They support continued dialogue with Israel instead of trade restrictions.
- Because of this lack of consensus, the proposal could not move forward.

What is the EU–Israel Association Agreement?

- It is a trade and political cooperation agreement between the EU and Israel in force since 2000.
- It gives Israel preferential access to European markets, including easier trade and tariff benefits.
- The EU is Israel's largest trading partner, with trade worth around 42.6 billion euros in 2024.

Other developments:

- France and Sweden supported stricter action on goods coming from Israeli settlements in occupied territories.
- UN experts also called for immediate suspension of the agreement, saying it is the “minimum requirement” under international law.

Final outcome:

- EU foreign ministers discussed the issue in Luxembourg, but no final agreement was reached to suspend the pact.
- The matter may continue to be debated in future meetings.

In simple terms:

Spain, Ireland, and Slovenia want the EU to suspend its trade agreement with Israel over alleged human rights violations in Gaza and the West Bank, but Germany and Italy blocked the move, leaving the EU divided on the issue.

India and South Korea Strategic Partnership

India and South Korea signed four Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to expand cooperation in key sectors during South Korean President Lee Jae Myung's visit to India.

The 4 agreements were signed in the fields of:

- Sports
- Cultural and Creative Industries
- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)
- Establishment of the Industrial Cooperation Committee

Both countries also exchanged:

- Joint Declaration to resume negotiations for upgrading the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)
- Framework for the India-Korea Digital Bridge to boost cooperation in AI, semiconductors, digital business, and technology sectors

Why This is Important?

The visit aims to strengthen the India–ROK (Republic of Korea) Special Strategic Partnership and increase bilateral trade from the current level toward 50 billion dollars by 2030.

Major Focus Areas:

Both leaders discussed cooperation in:

Trade and investment, Shipbuilding and maritime logistics, Steel and supply chains, Semiconductors and AI, Energy security, Defence and security, Critical and emerging technologies & People-to-people and cultural exchanges

Bigger Objective:

The main goal is to deepen economic ties, improve supply chain resilience, strengthen Indo-Pacific cooperation, and make India–South Korea relations stronger in trade, technology, and strategic security.

(renewed cooperation framework) → Research, innovation, and industrial technology

India–South Korea Relations:

Trade & Economic Cooperation:

- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) – 2009 → Trade, investment, and market access
- CEPA Upgrade Negotiations – resumed in 2026 → Expansion of bilateral trade and economic cooperation

Strategic & Defence Cooperation:

- Special Strategic Partnership – 2015 → Overall defence, security, and strategic cooperation
- Defence Industry Cooperation Framework – 2019 → Defence production, shipbuilding, and maritime security

Technology & Digital Cooperation:

- India–Korea Digital Bridge – 2026 → Cooperation in AI, semiconductors, digital business, and emerging technologies
- Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement – 2014

Energy & Infrastructure:

- Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement – 2011 → Peaceful use of nuclear energy
- Green Growth and Clean Energy Cooperation Framework – ongoing cooperation strengthened after 2021 → Renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainability

Cultural & People-to-People Relations:

- Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) – various renewals, major framework strengthened in 2015 → Cultural cooperation, tourism, and education
- MoUs on Sports and Creative Industries – 2026 → Sports diplomacy and cultural collaboration

Structured Pulse Procurement Launched

The Government of India has launched the first-ever structured pulse procurement system in Bihar under the Atmanirbhar Pulses Mission, marking a major step toward strengthening Minimum Support Price (MSP)-based procurement and achieving self-reliance in pulse production.

Objectives of the Initiative

- Ensure remunerative prices to farmers through MSP
- Promote self-sufficiency (Atmanirbharta) in pulses production
- Strengthen procurement infrastructure and storage systems
- Integrate farmers into formal agricultural markets
- Reduce dependence on pulse imports

Background and Context

India is the largest producer and consumer of pulses, yet continues to rely on imports due to a mismatch between demand and domestic production. To address this gap and ensure nutritional security and farmer income stability, the government launched the Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–31). The Bihar initiative represents a ground-level implementation of this mission, focusing on organised procurement and improved supply chain mechanisms.

Key Features of the Initiative

- Under this initiative, the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF) has started organised procurement of masoor (lentil) in Bihar for the first time. The programme is supported by:
 - Scientific storage facilities through WDRA-approved warehouses
 - Collaboration with the Central Warehousing Corporation
 - Participation of PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Societies) and FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations)
 - The initiative introduces a structured and institutionalised procurement mechanism, unlike earlier fragmented approaches.

Key Achievements (Data-Based)

- Procurement target: 32,000 metric tonnes (Masoor)
- Procurement achieved: 100.4 metric tonnes
- 59 farmers onboarded
- 16 PACS/FPOs registered
- Institutional Framework
 - NCCF (National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India) and
 - NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India)
 - play a central role in procurement operations under the Price Support Scheme (PSS) of PM-AASHA.
 - NAFED is also expected to expand procurement operations through its cooperative network in Bihar.

About Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses

- Launched: 2025
- Duration: 2025–26 to 2030–31
- Outlay: ₹11,440 crore
- Type: Centrally Sponsored Scheme
- Focus Crops: Tur (Arhar), Urad, Masoor

The mission aims to:

- Increase domestic production
- Promote climate-resilient seeds
- Expand cultivation area
- Strengthen post-harvest infrastructure and procurement

Link with PM-AASHA Scheme

The procurement is carried out under the Price Support Scheme (PSS) component of PM-AASHA (Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan), which ensures MSP-based procurement of agricultural produce to protect farmers from price fluctuations.

Significance for Agriculture and Economy

- Farmer Welfare: Assured MSP improves income stability
- Food Security: Ensures availability of protein-rich pulses
- Import Reduction: Helps reduce dependency on imported pulses
- Cooperative Strengthening: Enhances role of PACS, FPOs, NCCF, and NAFED
- Digital Agriculture: Integration with digital platforms improves transparency and efficiency

Challenges and Way Forward

- Limited awareness among farmers about procurement mechanisms
- Need for expansion of procurement centres and infrastructure
- Ensuring timely payments and logistics efficiency
- Scaling the model to other pulse-producing states

Conclusion

The launch of structured pulse procurement in Bihar marks a significant reform in agricultural marketing, aligning procurement systems with the broader goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat. It strengthens MSP operations, enhances farmer participation, and contributes to India's long-term goal of self-sufficiency in pulses.

Designer Rice vs Fortified Rice & GI Economy

Scientists at CSIR–National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (CSIR–NIIST), Thiruvananthapuram, have developed a “designer rice”, a nutritionally enhanced innovation aimed at addressing malnutrition and lifestyle diseases, sparking discussion on its comparison with fortified rice and glycaemic index (GI) concepts.

What is Designer Rice? (New Innovation)

Designer rice is a functional food developed using food-processing technology (not genetic modification), where broken rice is re-engineered into nutritionally superior grains.

Key Features

- High Protein Content: ~20% (vs 6–8% in normal rice)
- Low Glycaemic Index (<55): Releases glucose slowly
- Micronutrient Enrichment: Helps combat anaemia
- Circular Economy: Uses rice milling by-products (broken rice)

It is produced by:

- Converting broken rice into flour
- Mixing with protein and micronutrients (iron, folic acid, Vitamin B12)
- Reforming into rice-like grains

What is Fortified Rice? (Policy Tool)

- Fortified rice refers to regular rice enriched with essential micronutrients to improve public health.
- Defined by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India as adding nutrients to improve food quality

Typically contains:

- Iron
- Folic acid
- Vitamin B12

Process

- Production of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRKs) via extrusion
- Mixing FRKs with normal rice (1:100 ratio)

Policy Linkages

Distributed via schemes like:

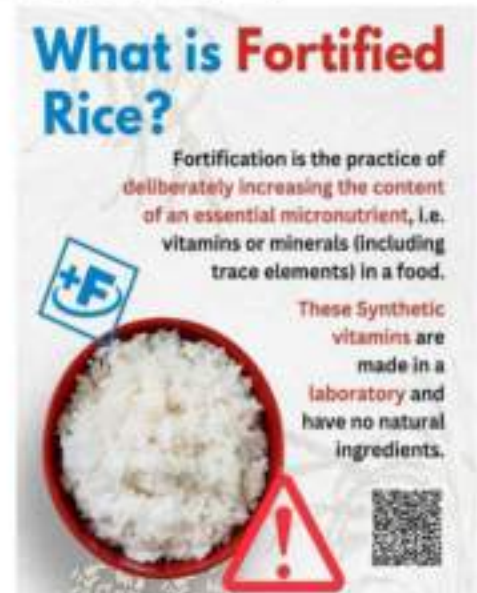
- Public Distribution System (PDS)
- PMGKAY
- Mid-Day Meal
- Aimed at tackling hidden hunger and anaemia

Designer Rice vs Fortified Rice:

Designer rice is a re-engineered product made from broken rice using food restructuring technology, offering high protein and low glycaemic index, and targeting both nutrition and lifestyle diseases. In contrast, fortified rice is regular rice enriched with micronutrients through extrusion and blending, mainly aimed at addressing public health issues like micronutrient deficiencies.

Glycaemic Index (GI) and Glycaemic Load (GL):

Glycaemic Index (GI):



- Measures how quickly food raises blood glucose (scale 0–100)
- Low GI (<55): Slow release of glucose (healthier)
- High GI (>70): Rapid spikes (linked to diabetes risk)

Glycaemic Load (GL):

- Combines GI + quantity of carbohydrates consumed
- More accurate measure of real-life impact of food on blood sugar
- Concept of GI Economy (Emerging Idea)

The concept of a “GI-based food economy” emphasizes:

- Production and consumption of low-GI foods
- Addressing non-communicable diseases (diabetes, obesity)
- Shifting agriculture toward nutrition-sensitive crops
- Designer rice fits into this model by offering a diabetes-friendly staple food alternative.

Significance for India

- Nutritional Security
- India faces high levels of anaemia and protein deficiency
- Designer rice + fortified rice can complement each other

Health Transition

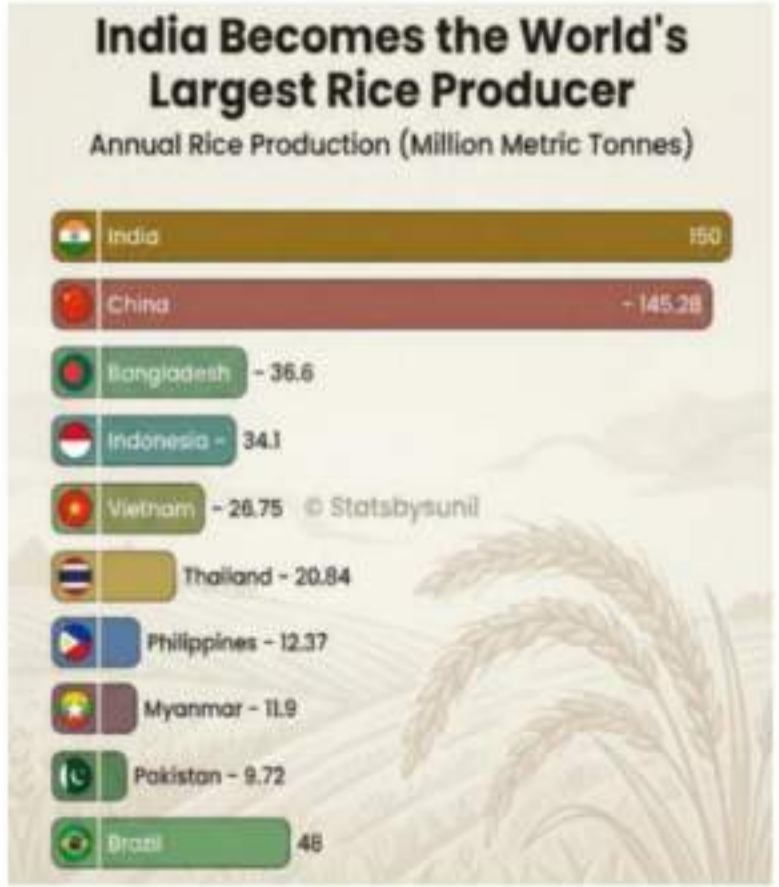
- Rising burden of lifestyle diseases (diabetes)
- Low-GI foods support preventive healthcare

Agricultural & Economic Impact

- Value addition to broken rice (waste utilization)
- Promotes food processing industry and innovation

Conclusion

The emergence of designer rice marks a shift from calorie-centric to nutrition-centric food systems. While fortified rice addresses micronutrient deficiencies at scale, designer rice represents a next-generation innovation targeting both nutrition and lifestyle diseases, aligning with India’s goals of nutrition security and sustainable food systems.



Defence & Security

US-Indonesia Defence Cooperation

The United States and Indonesia have signed a Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) to deepen military and strategic ties. The agreement was finalized after high-level discussions between defence officials of both countries, reflecting a growing alignment in the Indo-Pacific region.



Key Features of the Partnership

- The agreement focuses on strengthening defence cooperation through enhanced military training, joint exercises, and capacity building.
- It also includes support for defence modernization and professional military education. Both countries emphasized cooperation while respecting sovereignty and maintaining regional peace and stability.

Strategic Importance

Indonesia holds a crucial geopolitical position as it lies along important sea routes connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Strengthening ties with Indonesia helps the United States reinforce its vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, especially amid rising geopolitical competition in the region.

Related Developments and Concerns

The agreement comes amid discussions about potential US military access, such as overflight rights in Indonesian airspace. However, Indonesia has clarified that such proposals are not finalized, underlining its commitment to strategic autonomy and sovereignty.

Indonesia:

- Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago and a key member of regional groupings like ASEAN and G20. The two countries also conduct joint military exercises such as Super Garuda Shield, aimed at improving interoperability and regional security.
- Capital: Jakarta
- Currency: Indonesian rupiah
- President: Prabowo Subianto

Geography:

World's largest archipelago (17,000+ islands)

Located between:

- Indian Ocean
- Pacific Ocean
- Lies on the Ring of Fire → prone to earthquakes & volcanoes
- Major Islands: Java, Sumatra, Borneo (shared), Sulawesi, Papua

Economy:

- Largest economy in Southeast Asia
- Member of: G20
- Major sectors: Agriculture (palm oil, rice), Mining (coal, nickel), Manufacturing & services

International Organizations:

Indonesia is a member of: ASEAN, United Nations, World Trade Organization, APEC

NATO Fallback Plan

European countries are preparing two major strategic plans:

- A NATO fallback plan in case the United States reduces or withdraws support.
- A separate mission in the Strait of Hormuz without US involvement.

Why This Is Happening?

- NATO is a military alliance where the US has traditionally played the leading role in Europe's defence.
- Now, doubts about US commitment are forcing Europe to become more self-reliant.
- US President Donald Trump has criticised NATO and even hinted at reducing support.
- This has created uncertainty about Europe's security.

Key features:

- Use existing NATO structure but with European leadership
- Increase military coordination, production, and command systems
- Reduce dependence on US troops and intelligence
- Countries involved: Germany, France, UK, Poland, Nordic nations
- Challenge: Europe still depends on the US for nuclear protection and intelligence, which is hard to replace.

NATO Fallback Plan (Europe's Defence Strategy):

Europe is preparing a backup plan to defend itself without US support.

Strait of Hormuz Mission (Without US):

Europe is planning a naval mission to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

This mission will:

- Be independent of the US, Israel, and Iran
- Focus on mine-clearing and safe passage for ships
- Start after the ongoing conflict ends

Objective:

- Ensure global oil and trade routes remain open
- Restore confidence in shipping through the region

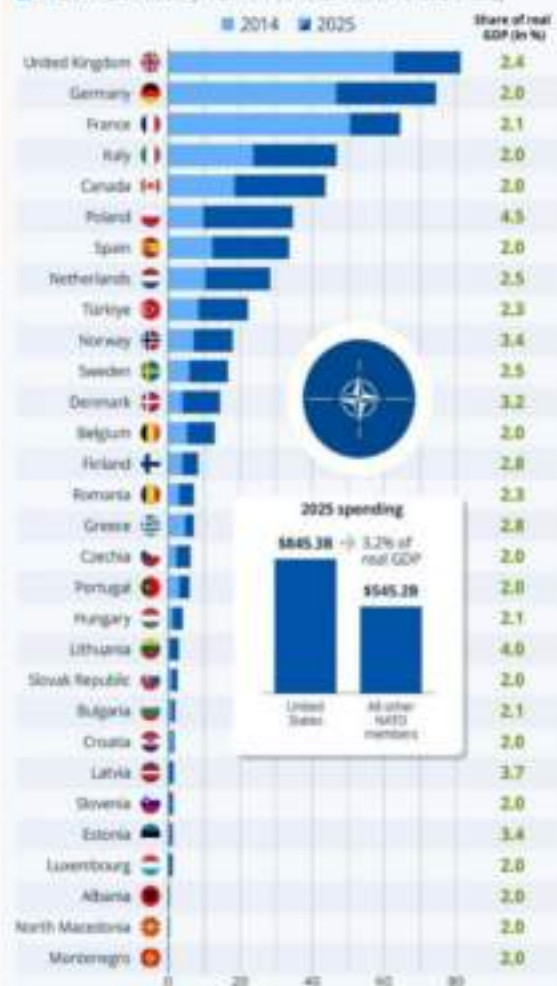
Background: Why Hormuz is Important

- Around 20–25% of global oil trade passes through it.
- The ongoing conflict led to:
- Closure of the route by Iran
- Major disruption in global energy supply and prices

In Simple Terms:

All NATO Members To Reach 2-Percent Goal in 2025

Estimated military spending of NATO countries in 2014 and 2025 (in billion constant 2021 U.S. dollars)



Europe is preparing to defend itself and manage global security issues without depending on the US, showing a major shift in global power dynamics and NATO relations.

Ukraine–Germany Drone Production Deal

Ukraine and Germany have signed a major defence cooperation agreement during Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s visit to Berlin. The deal focuses on joint drone production, air defence strengthening, and long-range strike capabilities, aiming to enhance Ukraine’s military capacity amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

Key Details / Developments:

- Ukraine and Germany agreed on joint production of advanced drones and defence systems.
- The agreement includes a €4 billion defence cooperation package.
- The deal may lead to mass production of thousands of drones for Ukraine.
- Germany will also invest hundreds of millions of euros in Ukraine’s defence industry.

Germany:

- Capital: Berlin
- Currency: Euro (€)
- Chancellor: Friedrich Merz
- President: Frank-Walter Steinmeier
- One of Ukraine’s largest military supporters since 2022

Ukraine:

- Capital: Kyiv
- Currency: Hryvnia
- President: Volodymyr Zelenskyy
- Prime Minister: Yulia Svyrydenko
- Known for advanced drone warfare innovations during the Russia-Ukraine conflict

Additional Important Points:

- Ukraine has emerged as a global leader in low-cost, high-efficiency drone technology.
- European countries are increasingly collaborating with Ukraine to learn from battlefield innovations.
- The deal reflects a broader trend of “defence industrial integration” in Europe.
- Germany is also supporting Ukraine with systems like:
- Patriot air defence missiles
- IRIS-T air defence systems

Italy Suspends Defence Deal with Israel

What Happened?

Italy has suspended its defence cooperation agreement with Israel. The decision was taken by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on 14 April 2026.

What Was This Agreement?

The deal was signed in 2003 and renewed every 5 years.

It included:

- Joint military training and exercises
- Exchange of weapons and equipment
- Research and technology cooperation
- Such agreements help countries strengthen defence ties and share military technology.

Why Did Italy Suspend the Deal?

Rising tensions due to:

Why This Move is Important

- Italy was earlier a strong supporter of Israel in Europe.
- So, this decision is seen as a strong political signal against Israel’s policies.
- It may:
- Encourage other European countries to take stricter actions
- Increase calls to review the EU–Israel cooperation agreement

- Israel’s military actions in Gaza and Lebanon
- High civilian casualties and humanitarian concerns

A major trigger:

Israeli forces allegedly fired warning shots at Italian UN peacekeepers in Lebanon

Italy also:

- Summoned Israel’s ambassador in protest
- Faced domestic political pressure to review ties

Europe’s Stand on Israel:

Several European countries like:

- Spain, France, UK, Ireland
- Have already criticised Israel’s actions.

The EU–Israel Association Agreement (2000):

- Governs trade and political relations
- Is based on human rights and democratic principles

Economic Angle:

The European Union is:

- Israel’s biggest trading partner
- Accounts for about 32% of Israel’s total trade

Overall Impact:

It may affect:

- Defence cooperation
- Diplomatic relations
- Future EU policies toward Israel

In Simple Terms

Italy stopped its defence deal with Israel because of concerns over its military actions, and this reflects a larger shift in Europe’s attitude—becoming more critical of Israel.

Chagos Islands Dispute

Introduction

The Chagos Islands dispute is a complex issue involving colonial history, strategic military interests, and international law. Recently, the United Kingdom’s plan to transfer these islands to Mauritius has come under threat due to lack of support from the United States, bringing the issue back into global focus.

Geographical and Strategic Importance

The Chagos Islands are located in the Indian Ocean, south of India. The most important island is Diego Garcia, which hosts a major US-UK military base.

This base is strategically crucial for:

- Military operations in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific

Key Issues Involved

The Chagos dispute reflects three major global themes:

- **Colonial Legacy:** Decisions taken during colonial rule still affect modern geopolitics
- **Strategic Military Importance:** Control of Diego Garcia is vital for global military operations
- **Human Rights Concerns:** Displacement of Chagossians remains unresolved

- Surveillance and intelligence gathering
- Securing sea routes in the Indian Ocean

Colonial History: How the UK Took Control

- Initially uninhabited, the islands were colonised by France in the 18th century.
- After the Treaty of Paris (1814), control passed to the United Kingdom.
- The islands were administered as part of Mauritius, then a British colony.

Creation of British Indian Ocean Territory (1965)

A major turning point came in 1965:

- The UK separated the Chagos Islands from Mauritius, just before Mauritius gained independence.
- It created a new territory called the British Indian Ocean Territory.
- Reason: To facilitate a defence agreement with the United States during the Cold War.

US-UK Military Agreement (1966)

- The UK allowed the US to build a military base on Diego Garcia.
- In return, the UK received strategic and financial benefits.
- Diego Garcia later became one of the most important US military bases globally, used in multiple international conflicts.

Forced Displacement of Chagossians

Between 1967 and 1973:

- Around 1,500-2,000 islanders (Chagossians) were forcibly removed.
- They were relocated to Mauritius and Seychelles.
- This created a long-standing human rights issue, as:
 - They were not allowed to return
 - Many continue to demand resettlement and compensation

Legal Dispute and International Pressure

- Mauritius has consistently claimed that the separation of Chagos was illegal.

In 2019:

- The International Court of Justice ruled that the UK should return the islands to Mauritius.
- The United Nations also supported this position.
- Despite this, the UK has continued to control the islands.

Recent UK-Mauritius Deal

To resolve the dispute:

- The UK agreed to transfer sovereignty of the islands to Mauritius.
- However: The UK would lease Diego Garcia back for 99 years to maintain the military base.



Conceptual Understanding:

This type of arrangement balances:

- Legal sovereignty (Mauritius)
- Strategic control (UK-US military interests)

Why the Deal is Under Threat

- The agreement is now facing problems due to the stance of the United States:
- The deal requires changes to a 1966 UK-US defence treaty.
- This cannot happen without US approval.
- Initially supported, the US later withdrew backing, raising concerns over:
- Security of the military base
- Strategic control in the Indian Ocean

Strategic and Political Implications

- The issue highlights growing differences between the US and UK, traditionally close allies.
- The UK has been forced to pause legislative steps due to lack of US support.
- For the US: Diego Garcia remains too critical to risk changes in control.
- For Mauritius: Delay may lead to further legal action.

Conclusion

The Chagos Islands issue is not just a territorial dispute—it is a mix of history, geopolitics, and human rights. While the UK’s plan to return the islands to Mauritius seemed like a solution, US opposition has complicated matters. The future of the islands now depends on how these competing interests—legal justice, strategic security, and diplomatic relations—are balanced.

INS Taragiri

- India has added a new warship called INS Taragiri to its navy.
- It is a stealth frigate equipped with powerful BrahMos missiles.

Basic details

- Weight: Around 6,670–7,000 tonnes
- Type: Stealth guided missile frigate
- Built in India under Project 17A
- Builder: Indian shipyard (Mazagon Dock)
- Mostly indigenously made (about 75%)

What does “stealth frigate” mean?

- It is designed to be hard to detect by radar
- This helps it: Avoid enemy detection & Survive longer in combat

Main weapons and systems

BrahMos missiles

- Supersonic cruise missiles Can hit: Enemy ships, Land targets & Very fast and accurate
- Air defence system: Has missiles to shoot down enemy aircraft or missiles

Guns and close-range defence

- Includes: 76 mm main gun, Close-in weapon systems (CIWS) & Used for short-range attacks and defence

Anti-submarine capability

- Can detect and destroy submarines using: Torpedoes, Rocket launchers, Also carries helicopters for surveillance

Advanced features

- Modern radar and sensors to track enemies

- Combat management system for coordination
- Uses integrated construction technology (faster and efficient shipbuilding)

Why is INS Taragiri important?

Boost to naval power

- Improves India's ability to: Protect sea borders & Monitor enemy movement

Multi-role capability

- Can perform: Attack missions, Defence operations, Anti-submarine warfare & Humanitarian missions

Self-reliance (Aatmanirbhar Bharat)

- Built mostly in India which Shows India's growing strength in defence manufacturing

Final understanding

- INS Taragiri is a modern, powerful, and stealthy warship
- It combines: Speed (BrahMos missiles), Stealth (low radar visibility) & Multi-role capability
- It is a major step in strengthening India's naval power



INS Aridhaman

INS Aridhaman

Bigger, quieter and deadlier

DEFENCEHQ
—THE TRIAD OF INDIA

INS Aridhaman is India's third indigenously developed nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine

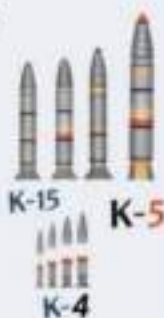


It features an upgraded design compared to INS Arihant and INS Arighaat.



The submarine is built with a larger hull, enhancing endurance and stealth

It can carry a greater number of long-range nuclear-capable K-4 missiles, along with 24 K-15 Sagarika missiles and K-5 missiles



India has inducted INS Aridhaman, its third indigenously developed nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), into the Indian Navy. This marks a significant advancement in India's maritime defence and strategic capabilities.

Strategic Importance

The induction of INS Aridhaman enhances India's nuclear triad, which includes land, air, and sea-based nuclear delivery systems. It strengthens the country's second-strike capability, ensuring credible nuclear deterrence. The submarine operates under the Strategic Forces Command, responsible for managing India's nuclear arsenal.

Global Context

With this induction, India joins a select group of nations possessing nuclear-powered submarines, including the United States, Russia,

Key Features

- INS Aridhaman belongs to the Arihant-class submarines and is more advanced than its predecessor INS Arihant.
- It has an approximate displacement of 7,000 tonnes and can carry K-15 (Sagarika) and K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).
- Built under the Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) Project, it reflects India's growing indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities.

United Kingdom, France, and China.

Additional Facts

- SSBNs (Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear) are crucial for strategic deterrence, as they can remain underwater for extended periods and launch nuclear missiles from sea.
- India is also working towards achieving Continuous At-Sea Deterrence (CASD), ensuring at least one nuclear submarine is always on patrol.
- Earlier submarines in this class include INS Arihant (2016) and INS Arighaat (2024), highlighting India's steady progress in strengthening its naval nuclear capabilities.

US's 2,000 pound 'bunker buster' bomb

What is a bunker buster bomb?

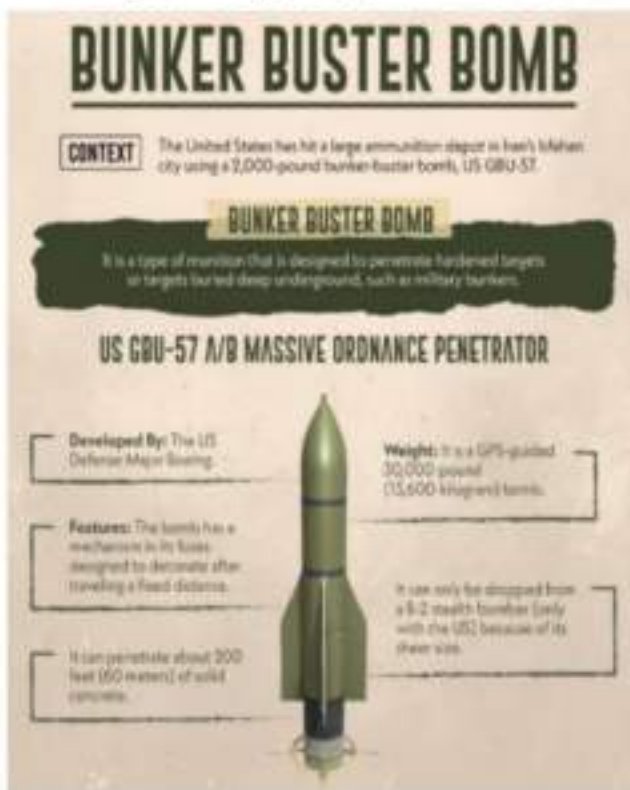
- A special type of bomb designed to:
- Penetrate deep underground before exploding
- It can go through: Soil, Rock & Reinforced concrete
- Simple idea: Unlike normal bombs, it does not explode on the surface — it explodes inside the target.

How does it work?

- Bomb is dropped from aircraft
- It pierces deep into the ground or bunker
- A delayed fuse triggers explosion inside the structure

Key Points:

- Weapon: Bunker buster bomb
- Used by: United States
- Target: Underground military/nuclear sites
- Recent use: Strike in Isfahan, Iran
- Purpose: Destroy deep, protected structures



This increases destruction of:

- Underground bunkers
- Weapon storage sites

Why was it used in Isfahan?

The strike targeted: Underground ammunition or military facilities

These sites are:

- Strongly protected
- Hidden below ground
- Normal bombs cannot destroy such targets effectively

Types of bunker busters

- Small (e.g., ~2,000-pound bombs used in Isfahan)
- Very large (like GBU-57):
- Can penetrate deep concrete (up to ~60 meters)

Why are they important?

Used in modern warfare to:

- Destroy hidden military bases
- Target nuclear facilities

- Especially useful against countries with:
- Underground tunnels and bunkers

Final Takeaway

A bunker buster bomb is a deep-penetrating weapon designed to destroy underground targets, making it crucial in modern high-tech warfare.

MiG-29 Fighter Jets with ASRAAM Missiles

Why in News?

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is set to equip its MiG-29 fighter jets with the advanced ASRAAM to enhance its close-combat air capabilities.

Key Highlights

- The integration of ASRAAM missiles will significantly improve the air-to-air combat capability of MiG-29 aircraft.
- The upgrade focuses on enhancing short-range combat effectiveness in modern warfare scenarios.
- It is part of India's broader efforts to modernise its ageing fighter fleet.

About ASRAAM Missile

- Full form: Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM)
- Developed by: MBDA
- Type: Infrared-guided, short-range air-to-air missile
- Range: Approximately 25 km+

Features:

- High speed (supersonic)
- "Fire-and-forget" capability
- Advanced imaging infrared seeker for high accuracy targeting

About MiG-29 Fighter Aircraft

- Origin: Developed by Mikoyan (Russia)
- Role: Air superiority fighter
- Inducted into IAF: 1980s

Known for:

- High manoeuvrability
- Twin-engine design
- Capability to operate in diverse combat conditions

Need for the Upgrade

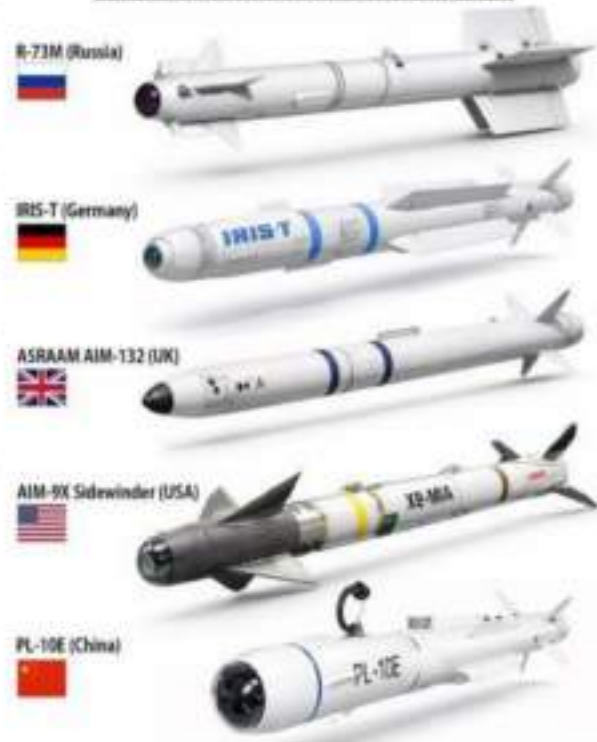
- Changing nature of aerial warfare requires:
- Faster reaction times
- High-precision weapons
- Existing missile systems on MiG-29 are relatively outdated
- Enhances India's preparedness against regional security threats

Mountain Radar systems

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed a ₹1,950 crore contract with Bharat Electronics Limited for the procurement of two Mountain Radar systems for the Indian Air Force (IAF). The deal was signed in New Delhi under the 'Buy (Indian-IDDMM)' (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category, promoting indigenous defence production.

Air-to-Air Missiles

5th Generation Short-Range Missiles



Additional Key Facts:

- ASRAAM is already integrated with:
- SEPECAT Jaguar (IAF fleet)
- India is also upgrading its air fleet with:
- Rafale jets equipped with Meteor and SCALP missiles
- India focuses on Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence, but also uses strategic imports for advanced tech
- IAF operates under the Ministry of Defence, Government of India



Objective of the Deal

The contract aims to strengthen India’s air defence and surveillance capabilities, especially in mountainous regions. These radars will enhance early warning systems and improve monitoring of aerial threats in difficult terrains.

Indigenous Technology & Manufacturing

The Mountain Radars are indigenously designed and developed by DRDO and will be manufactured by BEL. This reflects India’s growing capability in defence electronics and reduces dependence on foreign imports.

Strategic Significance

The deal aligns with key government initiatives such as Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India, aimed at boosting domestic defence manufacturing and achieving strategic autonomy. It will also support the domestic defence industry and generate employment.

BEL specializes in:

- Radars
- Communication systems
- Electronic warfare systems
- DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) develops indigenous defence technologies
- Buy (Indian-IDDMM) is the highest priority category in defence procurement policy
- India is focusing on indigenisation of defence equipment to reduce import dependency
- Similar past deals include radar systems like “Ashwini” Low-Level Transportable Radar for the IAF

Additional Facts

- Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) is a Navratna Defence PSU under the Ministry of Defence
- Founded: 1954
- Headquarters: Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
- Chairman & Managing Director: Manoj Jain

Iran’s Cluster Munitions

What are cluster munitions?

- Cluster munitions are weapons that break open in the air and release many small bombs (submunitions).
- Instead of hitting one target, they spread damage over a wide area.

Why Iran is using them (strategy)

- To overwhelm Israel’s defence systems by increasing the number of targets.
- To cause wider impact rather than precise strikes
- To increase pressure on civilians and defence resources

How Iran is using them

- Iran is firing ballistic missiles carrying cluster warheads at Israel.
- Each missile can release 20–80 small bombs mid-air.
- Many recent attacks include these types of weapons.

Why they are hard to stop

- Israeli systems like Iron Dome must destroy the missile before it opens.
- Once it breaks mid-air, dozens of small bombs spread out, making interception almost impossible.

- This is why some attacks bypass advanced air defences.

What makes them dangerous

- They cover a large area, increasing chances of civilian damage.

- Some bomblets may not explode immediately, creating long-term danger.

Legal and global concerns

- Cluster munitions are banned by many countries due to their indiscriminate nature.
- However, Iran and Israel are not part of the ban treaty.

Final Understanding:

Iran’s cluster munitions are effective because they split into many small bombs mid-air, making them very difficult to intercept and allowing them to penetrate even advanced defence systems like Iron Dome.

Helium Crisis: Why Iran War May Delay MRI Scans

War disrupting helium supply

- The US–Israel conflict with Iran has disrupted global helium supply.
- Around one-third of the world’s helium comes from the Gulf region, especially Qatar.

Strait of Hormuz disruption

- The conflict has affected shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a key global trade route.
- Many ships are delayed or restricted, reducing helium exports.

Why helium is important

- Helium is used to cool MRI machines so they can function properly.
- Without helium, MRI scanners cannot operate efficiently.

Impact on healthcare (main concern)

Shortage of helium can lead to:

- Delays in MRI scans
- Reduced availability of diagnostic services
- Healthcare is highly dependent on helium and has fewer alternatives.

Wider impact

Helium is also used in:

- Semiconductor (chip) manufacturing
- Technology industries
- So the shortage can affect multiple sectors, not just healthcare.

Final Understanding:

The Iran war is not just a military issue—it is disrupting global supply chains, especially helium. Since helium is critical for MRI machines, this can directly lead to delays in medical diagnosis worldwide.

Japan Lifts Ban on Lethal Weapons Exports

Japan has officially removed its long-standing ban on the export of lethal weapons such as missiles, fighter jets, destroyers, warships, and combat drones. This marks one of the biggest changes in Japan’s post-World War II pacifist policy. The decision was approved by the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

What Has Changed Now?

Under the new rules:

- Japan can export lethal weapons like missiles, destroyers, warships, and advanced defence systems
- Arms sales will be approved on a case-by-case basis
- Exports are mainly allowed to trusted partner countries with defence agreements
- Sales to active conflict zones will still remain restricted
- National Security Council approval will be required for major deals

What Was the Old Policy?

- After World War II, Japan followed a pacifist approach under Article 9 of its Constitution, which limits war and military expansion.
- For decades, Japan had strict restrictions on arms exports and mainly allowed only non-lethal defence equipment exports. Even when rules were eased in 2014 and 2023, exports of major lethal weapons remained highly restricted.

Why This is Important?

Japan wants to:

- Strengthen its domestic defence industry
- Reduce dependence on the US security umbrella
- Improve military cooperation with allies like Australia, the Philippines, Europe, and NATO partners
- Respond to rising security threats from China, North Korea, and Russia
- Support Indo-Pacific security and strategic balance

Reactions:

- Countries like Australia and some Southeast Asian

partners welcomed the move

- China criticised the decision
- Critics inside Japan say this weakens Japan’s pacifist identity and may increase regional tensions

Overall Significance:

- This decision shows Japan moving from a purely pacifist defence posture toward a more active military and strategic role globally.
- It is seen as a major turning point in Japan’s foreign policy, defence exports, and Indo-Pacific security strategy.

Japan:

- Capital: Tokyo
- Emperor: Naruhito
- Prime Minister: Sanae Takaichi
- Currency: Japanese yen (¥)

India-UK Defence Ties

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan is on a three-day official visit to the United Kingdom. This is the first-ever official UK visit by an Indian CDS.

Why This Visit is Important:

This is the fifth high-level military engagement between India and the UK in 2026, showing that both countries are increasing defence and strategic cooperation.

Main Discussions:

- General Chauhan will meet UK Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin and other senior military and government officials.
- The focus areas include: Cyber security, Intelligence sharing, Defence industry cooperation, Defence co-production, Joint military exercises, Training and operational collaboration & Defence Industry Focus
- He will also meet representatives of the British defence industry to promote joint defence manufacturing and co-production between India and the UK.

Main Reasons:

- **Indo-Pacific Security:** The Indo-Pacific is now a major centre of global trade and security competition. The UK wants to maintain stability in this region, and India is a key power there.
- **Countering Global Security Challenges:** Issues like terrorism, cyber threats, maritime security, and growing influence of countries like China make India an important security partner for the UK.
- **Defence Industry and Co-production:** India is one of the world’s largest defence markets. The UK wants defence partnerships, joint production, and technology cooperation with India instead of only selling weapons.

- Overall Objective: The visit aims to strengthen India-UK defence relations, improve regional and global security, and enhance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Why the UK Wants Stronger Defence Ties with India?

The United Kingdom wants closer defence ties with India because India is becoming one of the most important strategic powers in the world, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.

India-UK Relations So far:

- Trade & Investment – The UK is an important trade and investment partner of India; both are working on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).
- Defence – Joint military exercises, cyber security, intelligence sharing, and defence co-production are increasing.
- Education – Many Indian students study in the UK, and universities cooperate in research and innovation.
- Global Cooperation – Both work together in United Nations, G20, and Commonwealth of Nations.
- Indo-Pacific Security – The UK sees India as a key strategic partner for regional stability.

TRAWL Assembly systems

The Ministry of Defence has signed contracts worth around ₹975 crore to improve the capabilities of the Indian Army’s T-72 and T-90 battle tanks. The deal is for procurement of TRAWL Assembly systems for T-72 and T-90 tanks.

Contracts have been signed with:

- Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML)
- Electro Pneumatics and Hydraulics (India) Pvt. Ltd.

What is the TRAWL system?

- It is a special minefield-clearing equipment mounted on tanks.
- Developed by DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation).
- Its main job is to help tanks clear or pass through areas planted with anti-tank mines.

Other key points

- The project follows the “Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)” model.
- It supports indigenous defence production and MSME involvement.
- It is expected to generate employment opportunities and boost self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

Why is it important?

- It allows tanks to create safe lanes in minefields during combat.
- This improves the mobility and safety of armoured units in war-like situations.
- It strengthens the Army’s offensive and defensive battlefield capability.

In simple terms:

- India has signed a nearly ₹975 crore deal to equip its T-72 and T-90 tanks with special DRDO-made systems that help them safely cross minefields, making the Army stronger and more mobile in battlefield conditions.
- BEML CMD: Shantanu Roy
- Defence Minister: Rajnath Singh

Defence Exercise

DUSTLIK

Indian Army has sent a 60-member contingent to Uzbekistan. They are participating in Exercise DUSTLIK (7th edition) from 12-25 April 2026

What is Exercise DUSTLIK?

- It is a joint military exercise between India and Uzbekistan
- Focus: counter-terrorism operations in semi-urban and mountainous areas
- Conducted alternatively in both countries

History of Exercise DUSTLIK:

- First started in 2019
- It is held annually

Hosted alternately:

- India hosts in places like Ranikhet / Pithoragarh
- Uzbekistan hosts at its military training bases
- Over the years, it has become an important defence cooperation platform

Name Significance of "DUSTLIK":

- The word "DUSTLIK" comes from the Uzbek language
- Meaning: "Friendship"

Why this name?

Symbolizes:

- Strong India-Uzbekistan relations
- Trust and cooperation between armed forces
- Shared goal of peace and security

Origin & Strategic Context:

The exercise originated as part of growing India-Central Asia defence ties

Uzbekistan is important because:

- It is located in a strategic region near Afghanistan
- Faces similar terrorism and security challenges

India aims to:

- Strengthen regional security cooperation
- Expand its strategic presence in Central Asia

What Happens in the Exercise?

- Joint combat drills
- Counter-terrorism simulations
- Special operations practice
- Final 48-hour joint mission exercise

Why It Matters:

- Improves interoperability (working together smoothly)
- Builds military trust and coordination
- Enhances readiness for real-world threats

Dweep Shakti

Why in news?

India's Army, Navy, and Air Force teamed up for Dweep Shakti, a major joint exercise. It tested quick responses for coastal and island defense using combined skills.

What Was the Exercise About?

- Main Goal: Check how well the three forces work together for fast action in sea and island areas.
- Focus Areas: Build skills for amphibious attacks, sea control, and beach landings.
- Key Skills Tested: Precision, teamwork, and readiness for real threats.

Why It Matters:

- Modernization Push: Added new tech to boost multi-domain power.
- Teamwork Boost: Better communication between branches for today's security needs.
- Defense Strength: Protects India's sea borders and islands from threats.

Big Takeaways

- Readiness Shown: Proves forces are pro, united, and ready for challenges.
- Future Prep: Helps handle changing regional risks with quick, smart responses.
- Ongoing Need: More such drills keep defense strong and flexible.

Activities and Drills:

- Joint Operations: Army, Navy, and Air Force did synced assaults on beaches and seas.
- Advanced Tech Used: Drones and modern gear for landing drills.
- Training Focus: Improve tactics, methods, and standard rules for multi-force ops.

IMEX TTX 2026

India recently hosted a key maritime exercise under the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) at the Maritime Warfare Centre, Southern Naval Command in Kochi, highlighting its growing role in maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

About the Exercise (IMEX TTX 2026)

- The exercise, known as the IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX) Table-Top Exercise (TTX) 2026, was conducted by the Indian Navy. It is a simulated multinational exercise aimed at discussing and addressing evolving maritime security challenges without actual deployment of forces.
- It brought together delegates and naval representatives from multiple IONS member countries, enhancing coordination and cooperation among participating navies.

Objectives of the Exercise

The primary objective of the exercise was to address non-traditional maritime security threats in the Indian Ocean Region, such as:

- Piracy
- Maritime terrorism
- Human trafficking
- Illegal fishing
- Disaster response and humanitarian assistance
- The exercise also focused on improving information sharing, interoperability, and coordinated response mechanisms among navies.

About Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

- Launched in 2008 by India
- A voluntary initiative for maritime cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states
- Comprises 25 member nations grouped into sub-regions

Aims to enhance:

Additional Key Facts

- India has assumed IONS Chairmanship for 2026-2028, after a gap of 16 years.
- The exercise aligns with India's maritime vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- The Indian Ocean Region is strategically important as it carries:
 - A major share of global trade
 - Critical energy supply routes (Sea Lines of Communication – SLOCs)

- Maritime security cooperation
- Mutual trust and understanding
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)

Balikatan 2026

Japan has joined the large-scale Balikatan 2026 military exercise with the Philippines and the United States as a full participant for the first time. Earlier, Japan mainly joined only as an observer or for disaster response activities.

About Balikatan Exercise:

- “Balikatan” means shoulder-to-shoulder
- It is the annual joint military exercise of the Philippines and the US
- The 2026 exercise runs from 20 April to 8 May
- More than 17,000 troops are taking part
- Countries involved include Japan, Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand along with the US and the Philippines

Japan’s Role:

Japan has deployed around 1,400 personnel from its Self-Defense Forces. It will also participate in live-fire drills, including the use of Type 88 anti-ship missiles, showing a major expansion of its defence role.

List of Similar Important Military Exercises:

India Related:

- Malabar Exercise → India, US, Japan, Australia (Naval exercise)
- Yudh Abhyas → India and US (Army exercise)
- Tiger Triumph → India and US (Tri-services exercise)
- Varuna → India and France (Naval exercise)
- Milan Exercise → Multinational naval exercise hosted by India
- SIMBEX → India and Singapore (Naval exercise)
- JIMEX → India and Japan (Naval exercise)
- INDRA → India and Russia (Joint military exercise)

US and Allies Related:

- Balikatan → US and Philippines (with allies like Japan, Australia)
- RIMPAC → Rim of the Pacific Exercise; world’s largest naval exercise led by the US
- Cobra Gold → Thailand and US-led multinational exercise
- Talisman Sabre → Australia and US joint military exercise
- Keen Sword → Japan and US bilateral military exercise
- Red Flag → US-led advanced air combat exercise

Japan Related:

- Keen Edge → Japan and US command-post exercise
- Dharma Guardian → India and Japan army exercise
- Orient Shield → Japan and US ground force exercise

Why This is Important?

- The exercise aims to improve: Defence interoperability, Joint operational capability, Maritime security & Regional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific
- It also sends a strong message against any unilateral attempt to change the regional status quo by force, especially amid rising tensions in the South China Sea and around Taiwan.
- Background: Japan’s larger role became possible after the Japan–Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which came into effect in 2025 and allows easier deployment of forces between both countries.
- Overall Significance: This marks stronger defence cooperation among Japan, the Philippines, and the US, and reflects growing strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific region amid China-related security concerns.

DIVEX 2026

The Indian Navy's INS Nireekshak has reached Colombo to participate in the 4th edition of the India-Sri Lanka Diving Exercise (DIVEX 2026), reflecting growing bilateral maritime cooperation, interoperability, and humanitarian coordination in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

About DIVEX 2026

- DIVEX 2026 is a specialised bilateral naval exercise between India and Sri Lanka focused on diving and underwater operations, including submarine rescue, salvage operations, and search-and-rescue missions. The exercise is hosted by Sri Lanka and involves elite diving teams from both navies conducting joint training to improve operational synergy and underwater mission capability.
- The exercise is conducted under India's broader maritime vision of MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions), which aims to enhance regional stability and maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Key Features of DIVEX 2026

- The exercise includes specialised underwater drills such as deep-sea diving operations, underwater search and rescue, and salvage training exercises. It also emphasises interoperability between naval diving teams to respond effectively to maritime contingencies.
- In addition to operational training, the exercise incorporates humanitarian and diplomatic dimensions, including exchange of BHISM (Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog Hita & Maitri) medical cubes, participation in joint sports activities, yoga sessions, and professional interactions to strengthen camaraderie between personnel.
- India has also extended defence assistance support, including provision of ammunition and logistical cooperation to enhance Sri Lanka's maritime operational readiness.

Additional Key Facts:

- India and Sri Lanka share a neighbourhood maritime boundary in the Indian Ocean
- India plays a key role as a "first responder" in the region during maritime disasters
- Exercises like DIVEX contribute to anti-submarine warfare preparedness and underwater rescue capability
- The Indian Navy's increasing focus on HADR and non-traditional security threats reflects evolving maritime strategy
- DIVEX complements other major Indian Navy exercises like Milan (multilateral) and SLINEX (bilateral)

About INS Nireekshak

INS Nireekshak is a Diving Support and Submarine Rescue Vessel (DSRV) of the Indian Navy, designed for deep-sea diving operations, underwater engineering, and submarine rescue missions. It plays a crucial role in specialised maritime operations and humanitarian rescue efforts, making it a key asset in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises.



Environment & Ecology

COP33 Climate Summit (2028)

India has decided to withdraw its bid to host the COP33 (Conference of the Parties) climate summit in 2028, citing strategic and logistical considerations. The summit is part of the annual global climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Key Highlights of the Decision:

- India had earlier shown interest in hosting COP33 (2028)
- The withdrawal opens the possibility for other countries/regions to host the summit
- The decision may be linked to:
 - Logistical challenges
 - Strategic prioritisation of resources
 - Diplomatic considerations

India's Climate Commitments:

- Despite withdrawing the bid, India remains committed to global climate goals:
- Achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070
- Target of 50% cumulative electric power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030
- Reduction in emissions intensity of GDP

India is also a key member of initiatives like:

- International Solar Alliance
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

About COP (Conference of the Parties)

- COP is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC
- Brings together countries to discuss climate change mitigation, adaptation, and finance
- Held annually with participation from 190+ countries
- Example: COP21 led to the Paris Agreement, a landmark global climate treaty.

Additional Facts:

- UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit
- Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris Agreement (2015) are key climate agreements under UNFCCC
- COP summits rotate among five UN regional groups
- India belongs to the Asia-Pacific Group
- Climate finance and Loss & Damage Fund are key current topics in COP discussions

India became 3rd Largest Renewable Energy Market

According to the latest report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), India has emerged as the third-largest renewable energy market globally in 2025, after China and the United States.

Key Drivers of Growth

- Government initiatives like National Solar Mission
- Increased FDI in renewable sector
- Competitive tariffs making renewables cheaper
- Expansion of solar parks and wind corridors
- Focus on green hydrogen mission

Key Highlights

- India recorded a major milestone by adding around 45 GW of renewable energy capacity in 2025, driven primarily by rapid expansion in solar and wind energy.
- The country's total installed renewable energy capacity reached approximately 250.5 GW in 2025, rising significantly from about 175.9 GW in 2023, indicating strong growth momentum.
- Solar energy played a dominant role, contributing nearly 37 GW of new capacity, making India one of the top contributors globally after China.
- Wind energy also witnessed growth, with about 6.3 GW addition, while hydropower capacity increased steadily along with pumped storage projects.

Global Context

Globally, renewable energy capacity witnessed record expansion, with solar energy leading the transition. Countries with higher renewable capacity are better insulated from fossil fuel price shocks and geopolitical uncertainties, highlighting the importance of clean energy.

Significance for India

India’s rise to the third position reflects:

- Progress towards energy security and reduced import dependence
- Commitment to climate change mitigation
- Advancement towards sustainable development goals (SDGs)
- Strengthening of India’s position in global clean energy leadership
- It also aligns with India’s long-term goal of achieving 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.

Challenges

- Land acquisition issues
- Grid integration and storage limitations
- Dependence on imports for solar modules
- Financing constraints for large-scale projects

Way Forward

- Strengthen battery storage and grid infrastructure
- Promote domestic manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat
- Enhance policy support for hybrid (solar + wind) projects
- Increase investment in green hydrogen and offshore wind

Key Facts

- IRENA HQ → Abu Dhabi, UAE
- India → 3rd largest renewable energy market (2025)
- Top countries → China (1st), USA (2nd), India (3rd)
- Largest contributor → Solar energy
- India target → 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030

India’s Climate Target

The Union Cabinet has approved India’s updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the period 2031–2035, reaffirming the country’s commitment to global climate action under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. India has pledged to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 47% by 2035 (from 2005 levels), marking a significant enhancement of its earlier climate targets.

India’s Progress So Far

- Emissions intensity already reduced by 36% (2005–2020)
- 52%+ non-fossil fuel capacity achieved (as of 2026), meeting earlier targets ahead of schedule
- Around 2.29 billion tonnes of carbon sink created through afforestation by 2021

Objectives and Significance:

- Aligns India’s growth with sustainable development and climate justice

New Targets

- 47% reduction in emissions intensity of GDP by 2035
- 60% of installed power capacity to come from non-fossil fuel sources by 2035
- Creation of a carbon sink of 3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through forest and tree cover
- These targets represent India’s third NDC submission, reflecting increased ambition in tackling climate change.

- Supports the long-term goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070
- Balances economic development with environmental protection
- Strengthens India’s position as a leader among developing countries in climate action

Additional Facts:

- NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions): Climate action plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement
- Emissions Intensity: Amount of greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GDP
- India contributes only about 3–4% of global historical emissions, yet is enhancing commitments
- Guided by principle of CBDR-RC (Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities)

Key initiatives supporting targets:

- National Solar Mission
- Green Hydrogen Mission
- LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) Movement

2026 Goldman Environmental Prize

For the first time in history, all six winners of the 2026 Goldman Environmental Prize are women. The award is considered the world’s top honour for grassroots environmental activists and is often called the “Green Nobel.”

About the Goldman Environmental Prize:

- Started in 1990 by philanthropists Richard and Rhoda Goldman
- Given every year to environmental activists from the world’s six inhabited continental regions
- Recognises grassroots leadership in protecting nature, climate justice, and environmental rights
- Each winner receives major international recognition and a cash prize of 200,000 US dollars (about ₹1.7 crore approx.)

2026 Winners:

- Iroko Tanshi – Nigeria
- Borim Kim – South Korea
- Sarah Finch – United Kingdom
- Theonila Roka Matbob – Papua New Guinea
- Alannah Acaq Hurley – United States
- Yuvelis Morales Blanco – Colombia

Why They Were Honoured?

These women were recognised for:

- Protecting forests and biodiversity
- Fighting illegal mining and pollution
- Climate litigation and legal action against harmful projects
- Protecting Indigenous rights
- Wildlife conservation

- Opposing fossil fuel and extractive industries

Why This is Important?

- This is the first all-women cohort in the prize’s history, showing the growing role of women in global environmental leadership.
- It highlights how local grassroots action can create major global environmental change.

Overall Significance:

The 2026 Goldman Prize sends a strong message that women-led environmental movements are playing a major role in climate action, biodiversity protection, and environmental justice across the world.

Social Issues & Schemes

CBSE's Three-Language Policy Under NEP 2020

The recent decision by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to implement the three-language formula under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has sparked a nationwide debate. While the policy aims to promote multilingualism and holistic learning, it has also raised concerns about linguistic imposition and increased academic pressure on students.

What the New Policy Says

Under the revised CBSE curriculum aligned with NEP 2020:

- Students must learn three languages (R1, R2, R3) from Class 6 to Class 10.
- The third language (R3) has now been made compulsory starting from Class 6 (2026–27 session).
- Earlier, the third language was only taught till Class 8, but now it may continue till Class 10.
- At least two of the three languages must be Indian languages.
- The policy also outlines specific learning outcomes, such as communication skills, reading comprehension, and writing abilities in all three languages.

Background: What is the Three-Language Formula?

The three-language formula was first introduced in 1968 to promote:

- Multilingualism
- National integration
- Better communication across states

Under NEP 2020:

- Students are encouraged to learn two Indian languages and one additional language (often English).
- The policy claims that no language is compulsory, and states have flexibility in choosing languages.

Why Has It Become Controversial?

- The biggest opposition has come from Tamil Nadu, where political leaders have strongly criticised the move.
- Tamil Nadu follows a two-language policy (Tamil + English).
- Chief Minister M.K. Stalin called the new policy an "attempt at linguistic imposition".

Critics argue that:

- It may indirectly force Hindi learning in non-Hindi states
- It threatens regional language identity
- Both ruling and opposition parties in Tamil Nadu have opposed the move, making it a major political issue.

Academic and Practical Concerns

CBSE NEW RULES 2026

3-Language Policy from Class 6

1 3 Languages Mandatory
Class 6 onwards

2 From Class 6 (2026–27)
Academic implementation date

3 Minimum 2 Indian Languages
Choose among recognized Indian languages

4 R1 • R2 • R3 Structure
• R1: First Language
• R2: Second Language
• R3: Third Language (often regional)

Class 9–10: Pass All Languages

➤ Apart from politics, several educational concerns have also been raised:

Government’s Stand

The central government has defended the policy:

It says the aim is to promote all Indian languages equally, not impose any one language.

The policy is meant to:

- Improve cognitive skills and communication abilities
- Encourage cultural understanding and national unity
- Officials also highlight that students and schools can choose languages, keeping flexibility intact.

- Increased academic burden on students due to an additional compulsory subject
- Shortage of trained language teachers, especially for less common languages
- Difficulty in implementation across states with different linguistic priorities
- Some experts also argue that the policy may create uneven learning outcomes due to varying infrastructure and resources.

Wider Implications

The controversy reflects a deeper issue in India:

- Balancing national integration vs regional identity
- Ensuring uniform education policy vs state autonomy
- Since education is a Concurrent List subject, both the Centre and states have a role, leading to conflicts in implementation.

Conclusion

The CBSE three-language policy under NEP 2020 is a significant reform aimed at promoting multilingual education. However, it has also reopened long-standing debates around language politics, federalism, and educational practicality. Its success will depend on how effectively the government balances flexibility, inclusivity, and regional sensitivities.

Bauxite Mining & Tribal Protest in Odisha

Why in News?

Violent clashes occurred between tribal communities and police in Rayagada district, Odisha over the construction of a road to the Sijimali bauxite mining project, leaving several injured.

Summary:

The conflict highlights tensions between mineral resource exploitation and tribal rights. Odisha, which holds the largest share of India’s bauxite reserves, has witnessed repeated protests due to concerns over displacement, environmental damage, and lack of consent under forest laws.

Important Case: Niyamgiri Hills

- Inhabited by Dongria Kondh tribe (PVTG)
- Mining project rejected after Gram Sabha opposition (2013)
- Landmark case in tribal rights & environmental governance

Key Data & Facts:

- Bauxite – Distribution (India)
- Odisha – 41% of total reserves
- Chhattisgarh – 20%
- Andhra Pradesh – 12%
- Gujarat – 8%
- Odisha accounts for ~73% of India’s production (2022–23)

Global Scenario:

- Largest reserves: Guinea
- Top producers:
- Guinea (26%)
- Australia (25%)
- China (19%)

- India (~6%)

About Bauxite:

- Sedimentary rock rich in aluminium
- Primary ore of aluminium
- Found mainly in tropical and subtropical regions
- Formed by lateritic weathering
- India ranks among top 10 countries in reserves

Processing of Bauxite:

- Bayer Process → Converts bauxite into alumina
- Hall-Héroult Process → Converts alumina into aluminium
- By-product: Red mud (environmentally hazardous)

Uses of Aluminium:

- Transportation (aircraft, automobiles)
- Electrical industry (conductivity)
- Packaging (cans, foils)
- Construction & defence sectors
- Issue: Tribal Protest in Odisha

Reasons for Opposition:

- Fear of displacement and livelihood loss
- Dependence on forests and hills for survival
- Concerns over environmental degradation
- Allegations of improper Gram Sabha consent

Legal & Governance Issues:

- Forest Rights Act (2006) → Requires consent of Gram Sabha
- Supreme Court (2013 – Niyamgiri case) → Empowered Gram Sabhas to decide mining projects
- Conflict reflects issues in implementation of PESA & FRA

Environmental Concerns:

- Deforestation and biodiversity loss
- Water source depletion (hill ecosystems)
- Pollution from red mud waste
- Impact on tribal cultural identity

RELIEF Scheme

Amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, disruptions in global shipping routes, rising freight charges, and increased insurance premiums have adversely affected Indian exporters. To address these challenges, the Government of India has expanded the Resilience and Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) Scheme, adding Egypt and Jordan to the list of eligible export destinations. This expansion widens the scope of assistance for exporters facing logistical and financial constraints due to the crisis.

Key Points:

- The RELIEF Scheme was launched on 19 March 2026 with an outlay of ₹497 crore to assist exporters affected by geopolitical disruptions.
- New Additions: Egypt and Jordan have been added to the list of eligible export destinations.
- The scheme covers: Shipments meant for delivery or transshipment to eligible countries.

- Eligibility Expansion: Exporters holding ECGC (Export Credit Guarantee Corporation) policies after 16 March 2026 are now eligible for benefits.



Key Benefits Under Scheme:

- Enhanced insurance coverage for export shipments
- Support for higher freight and insurance costs
- Assistance for both ongoing and future exports
- Implementation Agency: The scheme is implemented through the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC).
- Additional Reforms: Measures introduced to speed up approvals under export-related schemes like Advance Authorisation.

Reason for Scheme:

West Asia crisis has led to:

- Sharp rise in freight charges
- Increase in insurance premiums
- Disruption of shipping routes, especially via key maritime corridors
- Strategic Importance of West Asia: Major destination for India's exports (oil-importing region and key trade partner).

Complementary Measures:

- RBI has extended export credit timelines to ease liquidity pressure on exporters.
- Indian ports are offering fee waivers and logistics support to exporters.

Focus on MSMEs:

Scheme particularly benefits small and medium exporters, who are more vulnerable to global disruptions.

ECGC:

ECGC Limited (formerly Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India), established in 1957, is a government-owned company under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry that provides export credit insurance services to protect Indian exporters against payment risks, such as buyer insolvency or political instability.

Key Functions and Services of ECGC:

- Risk Protection: Covers commercial risks (e.g., buyer default) and political risks (e.g., war, currency restrictions).
- Export Credit Insurance: Offers policies that protect against non-payment, allowing up to 90% reimbursement of invoice value.
- Banking Support: Offers Export Credit Insurance for Banks (ECIB) to cover pre-shipment and post-shipment financing.
- Information Services: Provides credit reports on foreign buyers and information on countries.
- Headquarters: Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Trade Facilitation Role:

Helps maintain India’s export competitiveness and global supply chain participation

Supreme Court on Illegal Mining in Chambal

The Supreme Court of India took suo motu cognisance of rampant illegal sand mining in the Chambal region, which has severely impacted the fragile river ecosystem and endangered wildlife. The issue spans across three states—Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—highlighting inter-state governance challenges.

Key Directions by Supreme Court:

The Court issued a series of strict measures to curb illegal mining activities:

- Installation of high-resolution, Wi-Fi-enabled CCTV cameras in vulnerable areas and transport routes
- Introduction of GPS tracking systems in mining vehicles (pilot in Morena and Dholpur)
- Deployment of round-the-clock patrolling teams with modern equipment
- Use of preventive detention laws and confiscation of assets of mining mafias
- Directions for strict prosecution and accountability of officials
- The Court warned that failure by states may lead to complete ban on sand mining and even deployment of paramilitary forces

Key Facts:

- Type of Case: Suo motu action by Supreme Court
- States Involved: Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
- Monitoring Body: Central Empowered Committee (CEC) assists the Court

Legal Tools Suggested:

- Preventive detention laws
- Seizure & confiscation of property
- Possible Action: Ban on mining +

Observations of the Court:

- Illegal mining has created an “environmental crisis” and threatens biodiversity
- The Court termed state responses as “shocking unpreparedness”
- Emphasised that environmental protection is a constitutional imperative
- Ecological Importance of Chambal Region
- The National Chambal Sanctuary is a critical habitat for endangered species such as:
 - Gharial
 - Gangetic Dolphin
 - Indian Skimmer
- Illegal mining disrupts river flow, destroys breeding grounds, and accelerates ecological degradation.

Additional Value Points:

- Illegal sand mining is often linked to organized crime (“sand mafia”)
- It impacts river morphology, groundwater levels, and flood risks

Related regulatory bodies:

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- National Green Tribunal

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC):

- Established as Ministry of Environment & Forests (1985) → renamed in 2014
- Cabinet Minister: Bhupender Yadav
- Secretary EF&CC: Tanmay Kumar
- Director General of Forests and Special Secretary: Jitender Kumar

Responsible for:

- Environmental policies & laws

- Forest conservation & biodiversity protection
- Climate change negotiations (UNFCCC)



Implements major Acts:

- Environment Protection Act, 1986
- Forest Conservation Act, 1980
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

Key Bodies under it:

- CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board)
- National Biodiversity Authority

National Green Tribunal (NGT):

- Established in 2010 under NGT Act, 2010
- Chairperson: Justice Prakash Shrivastava
- Specialized environmental court for speedy disposal of cases

Deals with cases related to:

- Environment protection
- Forest conservation
- Pollution control
- Time limit: Aims to dispose cases within 6 months
- Principal Bench: New Delhi

Works on principle of:

- Sustainable Development
- Precautionary Principle
- Polluter Pays Principle

Majha Gaon, Arogyasampann Gaon Initiative

The Government of Maharashtra launched a ₹65.25 crore rural healthcare initiative named “Majha Gaon, Arogyasampann Gaon” on the occasion of World Health Day. The scheme was inaugurated by Devendra Fadnavis.

Objective: To strengthen rural healthcare systems and ensure quality healthcare at doorstep.

Implementation Mechanism:

- Multi-level committees formed:
- State → District → Village level
- Villages will be evaluated on health indicators.
- Best-performing villages will be awarded the title:
- "Arogyasampann Gaon" (Healthy Village)

Key Features of the Scheme:

- Focus on preventive healthcare rather than curative care.
- Major focus areas:
 - Sanitation and hygiene
 - Safe drinking water
 - Nutrition
 - Disease prevention (communicable & non-communicable)
 - Maternal & child health
 - Mental health and lifestyle diseases

Incentive Structure:

- Financial incentives and recognition will be given to top-performing Gram Panchayats.
- The initiative aims to create a competitive and participatory health model in rural areas.

World Health Day:

- Celebrated annually on 7 April
- Organized by: World Health Organization
- Marks the founding of WHO in 1948

Key national schemes:

Ayushman Bharat:

- Launched: 2018
- 2 Components: HWCs + PM-JAY
- Insurance: ₹5 lakh/family/year
- Target: Poor & vulnerable families (~50 crore people)
- Implemented by: National Health Authority
- Feature: Cashless treatment (public + private hospitals)

National Health Mission:

- Launched: 2013
- Sub-missions: NRHM (2005) + NUHM (2013)
- Aim: Affordable & accessible healthcare
- Focus: IMR, MMR reduction
- Key worker: ASHA
- Funding: Centre-State (60:40)

IVFRT Scheme

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) Scheme, aimed at strengthening India's immigration system through digital integration and real-time monitoring of foreigners entering and staying in the country.

Key Highlights

- The IVFRT Scheme will continue to modernise and integrate immigration, visa issuance, and foreigner registration processes
- It enables real-time tracking of foreign nationals across India
- The scheme promotes paperless and faceless services for visa and immigration procedures
- It connects various stakeholders including:
 - Immigration Check Posts (ICPs)
 - Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRROs)
 - Indian missions abroad

Objectives and Significance

- Strengthen national security and border management
- Ensure efficient monitoring of foreign visitors
- Enhance ease of travel and business for foreigners
- Improve transparency, efficiency, and data sharing among agencies
- Support India's vision of Digital Governance

Additional Facts:

IVFRT Scheme:

- Launched under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

Integrates systems like:

- Visa issuance
- Immigration clearance
- Foreigner registration
- FRRO (Foreigners Regional Registration Office):
- Responsible for registration and monitoring of foreign nationals in India

IMMIGRATION, VISA, FOREIGNERS REGISTRATION & TRACKING (IVFRT) SCHEME

Integrated system for secure and efficient management of international travelers & residents



Goal: Enhanced national security, streamlined processes, and improved traveler experience through technology integration.

Immigration Check Posts (ICPs):

- Official entry/exit points such as airports, seaports, and land borders

Related initiatives:

- e-Visa system (online visa facility for tourists and business travelers)
- Bureau of Immigration under MHA manages immigration functions

The scheme plays a crucial role in:

- Preventing illegal stay and overstaying of visas
- Enhancing internal security and surveillance mechanisms

Modified UDAN Scheme

The Union Cabinet has approved the revamped Regional Connectivity Scheme – UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) with a total outlay of ₹28,840 crore for a period of 10 years (2026–27 to 2035–36). The scheme aims to enhance regional air connectivity by linking unserved and underserved areas across India and making air travel affordable for the common citizen.

Key Features of Modified UDAN

- Development of 100 new airports/airstrips in underserved regions
- Construction of 200 helipads, especially in hilly, remote, and island areas
- Provision of Viability Gap Funding (VGF) of about ₹10,000+ crore to support airlines
- Financial support for operation and maintenance of regional airports
- Promotion of indigenous aircraft manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat

Objectives and Significance

- Improve connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities
- Boost economic growth, trade, and tourism in remote regions
- Ensure affordable air travel for citizens
- Enhance emergency response and healthcare access in difficult terrains
- Contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047

Background of UDAN Scheme

- Originally launched in 2016 under the National Civil Aviation Policy
- Objective: “Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik” (Let the common citizen fly)
- Over 663 routes operationalised across 95 airports/heliports
- More than 1.6 crore passengers have benefited since inception



Additional Facts:

- Viability Gap Funding (VGF): Financial support to make unprofitable routes viable
- UDAN integrates with major initiatives like Bharatmala, Sagarmala, and Digital India
- Focus on North-East, hilly, and aspirational districts
- Helps in balanced regional development and reduces pressure on metro cities
- Supports growth of regional airlines and aviation infrastructure

Madman Theory

Recent developments highlight three important themes: India continues to face a high burden of tobacco consumption, impacting both health and poverty; the concept of the Madman Theory is being discussed in the context of global politics and leadership strategies; and India is advancing sustainable ocean governance through the implementation of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in Odisha.

Tobacco Consumption in India

- India has one of the highest tobacco burdens globally, with over 267 million users (about one-fourth of adults). Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death, responsible for more than 1 million deaths annually.
- A recent study shows that poorer households spend a higher share of income (around 6.4%) on tobacco, making it not just a health issue but also a poverty trap.

Key Insight:

Tobacco cessation can act as a poverty alleviation tool, as millions of households could move to higher income categories by quitting.

Madman Theory (International Relations)

- The Madman Theory is a foreign policy strategy where a leader appears irrational or unpredictable to intimidate adversaries and force concessions.
- Origin: Cold War era (associated with Richard Nixon)
- Core idea: Create fear of extreme actions to influence opponent behavior

Modern Context:

The theory is being discussed in relation to leadership styles like that of Donald Trump, where unpredictability and extreme rhetoric may alter global strategic calculations.

Limitations:

- May reduce credibility of a country
- Can harm long-term diplomatic trust

Significance:

- Promotes Blue Economy
- Ensures ecological balance
- Enhances climate resilience

Background Initiative:

- Part of India-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative (2019)
- Earlier implemented in Puducherry and Lakshadweep

Additional Key Facts:

Tobacco (India):

- India is the 2nd largest producer and consumer of tobacco globally
- Accounts for 70% of global smokeless tobacco use
- Linked to cancers, heart disease, and stroke

Government Measures:

- COTPA Act, 2003 (regulation of tobacco)
- National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP)
- GST and sin taxes on tobacco products

Madman Theory

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in India

Odisha has become the first Indian state to implement Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) under collaboration with the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR).

What is MSP?

A tool for scientific and sustainable management of ocean resources, involving zoning of marine areas for different uses such as:

- Fisheries
- Ports and shipping
- Tourism
- Conservation

- Related to deterrence theory in international relations
- Used as a crisis bargaining strategy
- Can increase short-term gains but risks long-term instability

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)

- Implemented by National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) under Ministry of Earth Sciences
- Aligns with India’s Blue Economy Policy
- Supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 – Life Below Water

Supreme Court Order on Bengal’s Deleted Voters

Background:

- Before the 2026 West Bengal Assembly Elections, the Election Commission carried out a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls.
- Its centralised software flagged around 60 lakh voters for “logical discrepancies” in their submitted documents. Around 700 judicial officers were deployed to check these cases. They declared nearly 27.10 lakh voters ineligible, and their names were deleted from the electoral rolls.

Why This Matters?

- The order gives lakhs of deleted voters a final chance to restore their voting rights before polling.
- At the same time, it highlights a major debate over voter verification, electoral fairness, and possible disenfranchisement in West Bengal.
- This issue has become one of the biggest legal and political controversies before the 2026 Assembly elections.

The Problem:

- Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, once the last date for filing nominations is over, the voter list gets frozen until election results are declared.
- This meant deleted voters could not be added back before polling on 23 April and 29 April 2026, even if their cases were genuine.

What the Supreme Court Ordered?

- Using its special power under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court allowed voters whose names are restored by appellate tribunals to vote in the election.

The Court directed:

- Creation of 19 Appellate Tribunals headed by retired High Court

judges

- If a voter is cleared by the tribunal, their name will be added through a supplementary voter list
- For Phase 1 polling (23 April) → list by 21 April
- For Phase 2 polling (29 April) → list by 27 April

Important Clarification:

- Only those voters whose deletion is reversed by the tribunal can vote.
- People whose names are still under challenge or whose appeals are pending will not be allowed to vote.

How Appeals Can Be Filed?

- Affected voters can file appeals:
- Online through the ECINET portal
- Offline at District Magistrate (DM), Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), or Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) offices

India’s fiscal federalism must be reimagined to ensure every vote carries equal weight: Explained

What is Delimitation?

- Delimitation means:

- Fixing the total number of Lok Sabha seats
- Deciding how many seats each state gets
- Redrawing constituency boundaries
- It is done by a Delimitation Commission based on Census data to ensure the principle of "One Person, One Vote, One Value." Articles 81 and 82 of the Constitution support this system.

Main Reason Behind the Freeze:

- The main reason was that southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala had better success in family planning and population control.
- They feared that if seats were reallocated based on new population figures, they would lose Lok Sabha seats, while high-population-growth northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would gain more seats.
- So, the freeze was done to avoid "punishing" states for successful population control.

Vote value differences between states

Example:

- In Bihar, 1 MP represents about 31 lakh people
- In Kerala, 1 MP represents about 17.5 lakh people
- This means a vote in Kerala carries more political weight than a vote in Bihar.

Why Southern States Are Concerned?

- If fresh delimitation happens based on new population data:
- Tamil Nadu may lose around 10 seats
- Kerala may lose around 7 seats
- Uttar Pradesh may gain around 12 seats
- Bihar may gain around 9 seats
- Southern states fear losing political influence in Parliament.

Overall Significance:

- Delimitation is not just about redrawing seats—it affects:
- Federal balance
- Political power of states
- Tax revenue influence
- North-South political debate
- Women's Reservation implementation
- That is why delimitation has become one of India's most important constitutional and political debates.

NAMASTE Scheme

Why Were Seats Frozen on 1971 Census?

In 1976, during the Emergency, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment froze the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to each state based on the 1971 Census until 2001.

What Happened Later?

- In 2001, the 84th Constitutional Amendment extended this freeze further till the first Census after 2026.
- This means seat allocation among states still remains based on the 1971 Census, though constituency boundaries inside states were later adjusted using the 2001 Census.

Current Problem:

- India's population has grown from about 55 crore in 1971 to over 140 crore today, but Lok Sabha seat distribution among states is still based on old population data.
- This creates: Very large constituencies, Unequal representation

The National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) Scheme has achieved a significant milestone in ensuring the dignity, safety, and social security of sanitation workers, marking progress toward the elimination of hazardous manual cleaning practices in India.

Background and Context

Sanitation workers, particularly those engaged in cleaning sewers and septic tanks, have historically faced unsafe working conditions, social stigma, and lack of institutional protection. Despite legal prohibition under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, instances of hazardous manual cleaning persist. In this context, the NAMASTE Scheme represents a systemic shift from manual to mechanised sanitation, aligning with India’s broader social justice and public health goals.

Objectives of the Scheme

- The primary objective of the NAMASTE Scheme is to eliminate manual scavenging and hazardous sanitation practices by promoting full mechanisation.
- It seeks to ensure zero fatalities during sanitation work, provide dignified livelihoods, and enhance social security and financial inclusion of sanitation workers.
- The scheme also emphasizes skill development, entrepreneurship (Sanipreneurship), and capacity building, enabling workers to transition into safer and more sustainable occupations.

About the NAMASTE Scheme

The NAMASTE Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme launched in 2023, jointly implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It is executed through the National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC). The scheme aims to profile, train, and rehabilitate sanitation workers, while promoting the use of mechanised equipment to eliminate human involvement in hazardous cleaning tasks.

Key Achievements and Progress

- The scheme has recorded notable achievements in a short span of time. Over 90,000 sanitation workers engaged in sewer and septic tank cleaning have been identified, out of which around 89,000 have been validated through digital profiling.
- A large number of workers have been provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring safer working conditions. Additionally, more than 76,000 workers have been brought under health insurance coverage, particularly under schemes like Ayushman Bharat.

- The deployment of Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) has been strengthened with the provision of safety devices and mechanised tools, enabling quicker and safer responses to sanitation-related emergencies.

Key Components and Features

- The scheme includes digital profiling and database creation of sanitation workers to ensure targeted intervention.
- It provides PPE kits, safety training, and mechanised equipment, reducing dependence on manual labour.
- Workers are linked with health insurance schemes and financial assistance, while skill development programs are conducted to facilitate alternative livelihood opportunities. The strengthening of Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) ensures preparedness and safety during high-risk operations. Recently, the scheme has also expanded its scope to include waste pickers, further broadening its social impact.



Significance for Social Justice and Governance

The NAMASTE Scheme is a crucial step toward addressing the historical marginalisation of sanitation workers, who largely belong to vulnerable socio-economic groups. It promotes inclusive development, dignity of labour, and human rights, aligning with constitutional values under Articles 14, 17, and 21. By reducing occupational hazards and promoting mechanisation, the scheme contributes to public health, urban governance, and labour welfare reforms.

Linkages with National and Global Goals

- The scheme complements flagship initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 and contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:
 - SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
 - SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)
 - SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

Challenges and Way Forward

Despite progress, challenges remain in terms of complete mechanisation, behavioural change, and enforcement of legal provisions. There is also a need to ensure last-mile implementation in smaller urban local bodies and improve access to advanced sanitation technologies. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms, increasing budgetary support, and enhancing awareness can further accelerate the scheme’s impact.

Privilege Notice and Parliamentary Privileges in India

A recent privilege notice moved in Parliament against high-level political statements/actions has brought renewed focus on the concept of parliamentary privileges and breach of privilege proceedings, highlighting issues of legislative ethics, accountability, and executive-legislature relations.

What are Parliamentary Privileges?

- Parliamentary privileges refer to the special rights, immunities, and exemptions enjoyed by Members of Parliament (MPs) and state legislators to ensure the independent and effective functioning of the legislature. These privileges enable lawmakers to perform their duties without external interference or fear of legal action for actions taken within the House.
- These are primarily derived from Article 105 (Parliament) and Article 194 (State Legislatures) of the Constitution, which guarantee freedom of speech in the House and immunity from legal proceedings for legislative actions.

Concept of Privilege Motion and Breach of Privilege

- A privilege motion is a procedural tool used by MPs to draw attention to a breach of parliamentary privilege, which occurs when any individual or authority disregards or undermines the rights of Parliament or its members. Such breaches may include defamatory remarks, obstruction of parliamentary functioning, or violation of the dignity of the House. Once admitted, the matter is referred to the Committee of Privileges, which investigates and recommends appropriate action.
- A breach of privilege is considered a serious offence as it amounts to contempt of Parliament, and the House has the authority to impose punishments such as censure, reprimand, suspension, or imprisonment for the duration of the session.

Constitutional and Legal Basis

- The Constitution does not provide an exhaustive list of parliamentary privileges. Instead, they are based on constitutional provisions, parliamentary rules, and conventions derived from the British parliamentary system.
- Article 105: Grants MPs freedom of speech and immunity from legal proceedings for anything said or voted in Parliament
- Article 122: Bars courts from questioning parliamentary proceedings on procedural grounds
- Article 194: Extends similar privileges to state legislatures
- Additionally, Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha govern the process of raising and deciding privilege matters.

Classification of Parliamentary Privileges

Individual Privileges

These are enjoyed by MPs personally and include:

- Freedom of speech in Parliament
- Immunity from court proceedings for legislative acts
- Protection from arrest in civil cases during session and 40 days before and after session
- Immunity for publishing parliamentary proceedings (with conditions)

Collective Privileges

- These are enjoyed by Parliament as an institution:
- Right to regulate its own procedures
- Authority to exclude strangers and hold secret sittings
- Power to punish for breach of privilege or contempt
- Right to demand attendance and documents

Significance of Parliamentary Privileges

Parliamentary privileges ensure:

- Independence of the legislature
- Effective functioning of democratic institutions
- Protection from external interference
- Free and fearless expression of members
- Maintenance of dignity and authority of Parliament
- These are essential for upholding constitutional democracy and separation of powers.

Issues and Concerns

- Despite their importance, parliamentary privileges face several challenges:
- Lack of codification, leading to ambiguity and inconsistency
- Potential misuse for political purposes
- Conflict with fundamental rights like equality and freedom of speech
- Limited transparency in privilege proceedings
- Risk of undermining public accountability and democratic scrutiny

Judicial Interpretation and Case Laws

The Supreme Court has clarified the scope of parliamentary privileges:

- In *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India* (1987), the Court emphasized the test of reasonable apprehension of bias in related judicial fairness contexts
- In *P.V. Narasimha Rao case* (1998), immunity was extended for voting in Parliament (later revisited)
- In recent judgments, the Court has held that privileges do not provide blanket immunity from criminal law or corruption offences, reinforcing accountability

Global Practices

In countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia, parliamentary privileges are either codified in statutes or constitutional provisions, ensuring greater clarity and reduced ambiguity compared to India's convention-based system.

Conclusion

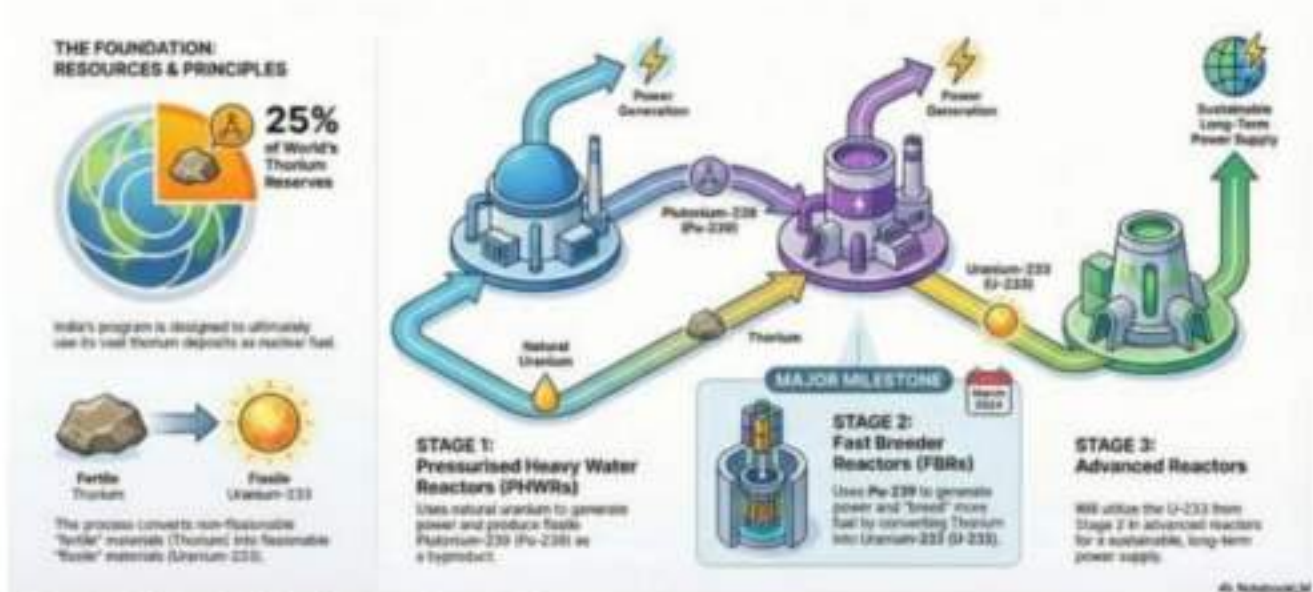
Parliamentary privileges are a cornerstone of India's democratic framework, ensuring legislative independence and dignity. However, the absence of codification and rising political misuse highlight the need for clearer guidelines and balanced reforms to ensure harmony between legislative autonomy and constitutional accountability.

Science & Technology

From Uranium to Thorium: India's Nuclear Turning Point

India has achieved a major milestone with the successful "criticality" of its Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam. This marks a crucial transition in India's long-term nuclear energy strategy and strengthens its push toward energy security and sustainability.

India's 3-Stage Path to Nuclear Energy Security



What is "Criticality" in a Nuclear Reactor?

- In nuclear physics, criticality refers to the state where a nuclear reactor achieves a self-sustaining chain reaction.
- When a neutron splits an atom (fission), it releases more neutrons.
- If each fission causes exactly one more fission, the reaction becomes stable—this is criticality.
- If more reactions occur, it becomes supercritical (increasing power).
- If fewer occur, it is subcritical (reaction dies out).

In simple terms:

- Criticality = stable, continuous energy generation without external support.
- This stage is essential before a reactor can begin producing electricity safely and consistently.

What is a Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR)?

- A Fast Breeder Reactor is an advanced nuclear reactor that:
- Uses fast neutrons (no moderator like water)
- Produces more fuel than it consumes
- Converts non-fissile materials (like Uranium-238) into usable fuel (Plutonium-239)
- India's PFBR is a 500 MWe sodium-cooled reactor, developed indigenously, placing India among a few countries with such advanced technology.

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

India's nuclear strategy, designed by Homi Jehangir Bhabha, is a long-term plan to utilize limited uranium and abundant thorium resources.

Stage 1: Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)

- Fuel: Natural Uranium
- Output: Energy + Plutonium (by-product)
- Purpose: Build initial nuclear capacity
- India has already operationalized this stage successfully.

Stage 2: Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)

- Fuel: Plutonium (from Stage 1)
- Function: Produce more fuel than consumed
- Output: Plutonium + Uranium-233
- The PFBR at Kalpakkam marks India's entry into this stage, which is critical for fuel multiplication.

Stage 3: Thorium-Based Reactors

- Fuel: Thorium (abundant in India)
- Output: Uranium-233 (usable nuclear fuel)
- Goal: Long-term, sustainable energy independence
- This stage is still under development but is key to India's future energy security.

Challenges Ahead

- High cost and complex technology
- Safety concerns (especially sodium coolant)
- Delays in scaling thorium-based reactors

Conclusion

India's achievement of criticality in its fast breeder reactor is not just a technical success—it is a strategic turning point. It moves India closer to a future where its vast thorium reserves can power the nation sustainably for generations.

Why This Achievement Matters

- **Energy Security:** India has limited uranium but vast thorium reserves. Breeder reactors help bridge this gap and reduce import dependence.
- **Sustainable Fuel Cycle:** FBRs generate more fuel, enabling a closed fuel cycle—a major advantage over conventional reactors.
- **Clean Energy Push:** Nuclear energy produces very low carbon emissions, supporting India's climate commitments.
- **Technological Self-Reliance:** The PFBR is largely indigenous, aligning with India's push for self-reliance in strategic technologies.

NASA's Artemis II Mission: Humanity's Return to Deep Space

NASA's Artemis II Mission marks a historic step in human space exploration as it becomes the first crewed mission beyond Low Earth Orbit (LEO) since Apollo 17 in 1972. As part of NASA's ambitious Artemis Programme, the mission aims to prepare humanity for a sustainable return to the Moon and future human missions to Mars. Unlike the Apollo missions that focused on short-term lunar visits, Artemis emphasizes long-term lunar presence, advanced technology, and deeper space exploration.

What is Artemis II?

Artemis II is NASA's first crewed mission of the Artemis Programme and the first mission to send astronauts around the Moon in more than five decades. It is a crewed lunar flyby mission, meaning astronauts travel around the Moon and return safely to Earth without landing on its surface. The mission was launched on 1 April 2026 using NASA's powerful Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and the Orion spacecraft, specially designed for deep-space human travel. The mission lasted nearly 10 days and followed a free-return trajectory, which uses the Moon's gravity to bring the spacecraft safely back to Earth without requiring major propulsion adjustments.

Crew Members of Artemis II

The mission carried four astronauts:

1. Reid Wiseman – Commander
2. Victor Glover
3. Christina Koch
4. Jeremy Hansen (Canada)

This crew is historically significant because:

- Christina Koch became the first woman to travel to lunar vicinity
- Jeremy Hansen became the first non-American astronaut to participate in a deep-space mission.

The mission also highlighted international cooperation in space exploration.

Historic Ship-to-Ship Communication with ISS

One of the most remarkable moments of Artemis II was the first-ever “ship-to-ship” communication between astronauts traveling near the Moon and astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS). The Orion crew interacted with ISS astronauts, including Jessica Meir, while orbiting deep space. This communication marked a major advancement in deep-space communication technology. It was also symbolically important because Christina Koch and Jessica Meir had previously conducted the first all-female spacewalk in 2019, making this interaction historically meaningful. This successful communication demonstrated real-time coordination between deep-space missions and Low Earth Orbit missions—an essential requirement for future lunar and Mars missions.



Record-Breaking Distance in Human Spaceflight

The Artemis II crew set a new record for the farthest distance traveled by humans from Earth, surpassing the previous record held by Apollo 13.

Key Records:

- Previous Apollo 13 record: 248,655 miles
- Artemis II maximum distance: 252,700+ miles (about 406,000 km)
- This made Artemis II the farthest human spaceflight ever achieved.

The astronauts also:

- Traveled about 4,700 miles beyond the Moon
- Passed approximately 4,000 miles above the Moon’s surface
- Observed and photographed the far side of the Moon

This achievement marked the first time humans crossed Apollo-era distance limits in over 50 years.

Mission Journey: Step-by-Step

1. Launch: The mission launched from Kennedy Space Center, USA, aboard the Space Launch System (SLS)—the most powerful rocket built by NASA.

2. Earth Orbit Testing

After entering Earth orbit, astronauts checked:

- Life-support systems
- Navigation systems
- Communication systems
- Onboard equipment

3. Journey to the Moon: A powerful Trans-Lunar Injection (TLI) burn pushed Orion toward the Moon.

4. **Moon Flyby:** The spacecraft traveled around the Moon, including its far side, and used the Moon's gravity to return—this is called a free-return trajectory.

5. **Return Journey:** During return, astronauts performed experiments and tested spacecraft systems in deep space.

6. **Re-entry and Splashdown**

The Orion spacecraft re-entered Earth's atmosphere at extremely high speed, facing:

- Intense heat
- Temporary communication blackout
- It successfully deployed parachutes and made a precise splashdown in the Pacific Ocean, where it was recovered by the U.S. Navy.
- This successful recovery confirmed the reliability of NASA's re-entry and human recovery systems.

Successful Splashdown and Mission Conclusion

NASA successfully concluded Artemis II with a safe splashdown, making it the first crewed lunar mission completed since Apollo 17. The Orion spacecraft performed exactly as planned, proving its readiness for future lunar missions. This was not just a technical success—it was a major psychological and strategic milestone for global space exploration.



Significance of Artemis II

The mission is important because it tested critical systems needed for future long-duration human space missions:

- Deep-space communication
- Life-support reliability
- Navigation systems
- Human survival beyond Low Earth Orbit
- Safe re-entry and recovery systems

It also strengthens preparation for:

- Artemis III: The next major mission that aims to achieve a human Moon landing
- Lunar Gateway: NASA's planned space station orbiting the Moon, which will support sustainable lunar missions
- Mars Missions: Artemis II also supports long-term plans for sending humans to Mars.

About the Artemis Programme

The Artemis Programme is NASA's successor to the Apollo Programme.

Main Objectives:

- Return humans to the Moon
- Establish a sustainable human presence on the Moon
- Prepare for future Mars exploration

Key Missions:

- Artemis I (2022)
- Uncrewed test flight
- Artemis II (2026)
- Crewed lunar flyby mission
- Artemis III (Planned)
- Human Moon landing mission

Conclusion

- Artemis II represents far more than a mission around the Moon—it signals the beginning of humanity's next era in deep-space exploration.
- From record-breaking distance and historic space communication to safe splashdown and future Moon landing preparation, Artemis II proves that humanity is once again ready to go farther than ever before.
- The Moon is no longer the destination—it is the beginning.

Keytruda: A Breakthrough in India's Cancer Treatment

What is Keytruda?

Keytruda is an advanced cancer drug (generic name: pembrolizumab) used in immunotherapy, a modern approach to treating cancer. Developed by Merck & Co., it works differently from traditional treatments by helping the body's immune system recognize and attack cancer cells. It has been approved for treating multiple cancers such as lung, breast, cervical, and melanoma.

How Does It Work?

Keytruda is a checkpoint inhibitor that blocks the PD-1 protein pathway. Normally, cancer cells use this pathway to hide from immune cells. By blocking PD-1, Keytruda allows T-cells to identify and destroy cancer cells more effectively. This makes it a targeted and innovative treatment compared to conventional methods.



Key Facts:

- Keytruda is included in the WHO Essential Medicines List
- First approved in 2014 (USA)
- Belongs to the class of monoclonal antibodies
- Used in multiple cancer types (multi-indication drug)

Why is it in News?

Keytruda is gaining attention in India as a potential game-changer in cancer care, especially due to its effectiveness across various cancer types. However, the high cost of treatment—running into lakhs of rupees per dose—has raised concerns about affordability and accessibility for patients in India.

Advantages over Traditional Treatments:

Unlike chemotherapy, which directly kills both cancerous and healthy cells, immunotherapy like Keytruda is more target-specific and generally has fewer side effects. It represents a shift toward precision medicine, where treatment is tailored to the patient’s immune response.

Challenges in India:

- Despite its benefits, the major challenges include:
- High treatment cost
- Limited access in public healthcare systems
- Need for advanced diagnostic infrastructure
- These factors make widespread adoption difficult in a country with a large population and diverse healthcare access.

First Hydro Power Project in Lohit Basin (Arunachal Pradesh)

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Narendra Modi, has approved the first hydroelectric project in the Lohit Basin of Arunachal Pradesh with an estimated cost of ₹14,105 crore. This marks a significant step towards harnessing the hydropower potential of Northeast India.

Key Features of the Project

- Location: Lohit River Basin, Arunachal Pradesh
- Type: Hydroelectric Power Project
- Estimated Cost: ₹14,105 crore
- This is the first major hydropower project in the Lohit Basin, indicating the beginning of large-scale energy development in the region.

About Lohit River:

- Lohit River is a tributary of the Brahmaputra River
- Originates in eastern Tibet (China)
- Flows through Arunachal Pradesh before joining Brahmaputra in Assam
- Known for its high hydropower potential due to steep gradients

Additional Key Facts

- India has a total hydropower potential of ~145 GW, but only partially utilized
- Arunachal Pradesh holds ~40% of India’s hydropower potential
- Hydropower is classified as renewable energy

Key benefits of hydropower:

- Low carbon emissions
- Long project life
- Grid stability support

Related initiatives:

- National Hydropower Policy (2019)

- Push for small and large hydro projects in Northeast

Tidal Locking

NASA explained the concept of tidal locking, which is the reason why the same side of the Moon is always visible from Earth.

The Moon is tidally locked with Earth, meaning:

- It takes the same time to rotate on its axis as it does to orbit Earth.
- As a result, only one hemisphere (near side) of the Moon is visible from Earth.
- The far side remained unknown until 1959 (Luna 3 mission).
- Tidal locking occurs due to gravitational interaction between two bodies over long periods.

What is Tidal Locking?

A phenomenon where:

Orbital period = Rotational period of a celestial body.

Also known as:

- Synchronous rotation
- Spin-orbit locking

Example:

Moon-Earth system

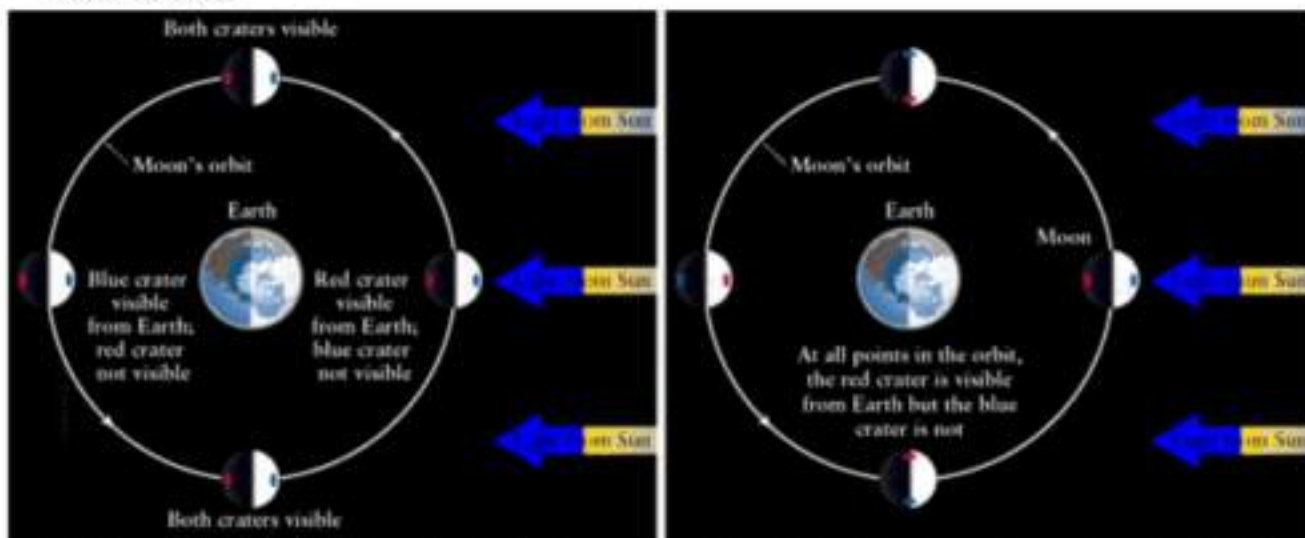
due to libration.

How Does Tidal Locking Occur?

- Due to tidal forces (gravitational pull differences) acting on a body.
- These forces create tidal bulges, causing:
 - Internal friction
 - Gradual slowing of rotation
 - Over millions of years, rotation synchronizes with orbit → tidal lock achieved.

Important Facts About the Moon

- Rotation period ≈ 27.3 days
- Orbital period ≈ 27.3 days
- About 59% of the Moon's surface is visible from Earth



a. If the Moon did not rotate, we could see all sides of the Moon.

b. In fact the Moon does rotate and we see only one face of the Moon.

Occurrence in the Solar System

Most large moons are tidally locked with their planets.

Examples:

- Moons of Jupiter and Saturn
- Special case:
 - Pluto-Charon system (mutually tidally locked)

Significance

Explains:

- Why we always see the same face of the Moon
- Helps in:
- Understanding orbital mechanics and planetary evolution

Important for:

Study of exoplanets (many may be tidally locked)

Related Concepts

- Tidal Forces → Cause ocean tides on Earth
- Tidal Heating → Internal heating due to friction
- Tidal Acceleration → Gradual change in orbit and rotation

Future Scenario

Earth may also become tidally locked with the Moon after billions of years (theoretical).

Mission MITRA for Gaganyaan

Why in News:

ISRO has launched Mission MITRA in Leh (Ladakh) from April 2–9, a first-of-its-kind team behavioural study to support human spaceflight missions like Gaganyaan.

Background:

- Mission MITRA is designed jointly by ISRO and the IAF Institute of Aerospace Medicine.
- It focuses on crew safety and performance, which are critical for human space missions.
- Leh (~3,500 m altitude) provides space-like extreme conditions.

Context:

Key Features / Objectives:

- Behavioural Study Focus:
- Crew (Gaganyatris) & ground team coordination
- Decision-making under stress
- Communication effectiveness

Human space missions require:

- Strong team coordination
- Psychological resilience
- Effective decision-making under stress
- Such analogue missions simulate real space conditions on Earth.

Environmental Conditions:

- High altitude (~3,500 m)

- Hypoxia (low oxygen)
- Extreme cold & isolation

Performance Analysis:

- Physiological response
- Psychological resilience
- Operational efficiency

Purpose:

- Improve team interoperability
- Enhance mission safety & success rate

Significance:

- First such team behavioural study by India in space context
- Crucial step towards Gaganyaan mission readiness
- Helps simulate real space challenges on Earth
- Strengthens India's human spaceflight capability

Final Takeaway:

Mission MITRA is a critical preparatory step for Gaganyaan, focusing on human behaviour, teamwork, and stress management, essential for safe and successful space missions.

Integrated Air Drop Test for Gaganyaan Mission

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully conducted the second Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-02) for the Gaganyaan Mission at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. This test marks a significant milestone in validating critical safety systems for India's first human spaceflight mission.

About the Test:

The IADT-02 involved dropping a crew module weighing around 5.7 tonnes from an altitude of approximately 3 km using an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter. After release, the module descended safely using a sequence of parachutes before making a controlled splashdown in the sea. The test successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the parachute-based deceleration system.

Parachute and Recovery System:

The test deployed a series of 10 parachutes, including apex cover, drogue, pilot, and main parachutes, in a predefined sequence to slow down the module. After splashdown, the module was successfully recovered by the Indian Navy, demonstrating coordination between multiple agencies.

Agencies Involved:

The operation was carried out with the joint efforts of ISRO, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Navy, and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), highlighting strong inter-agency collaboration for India's human spaceflight programme.

Significance for Gaganyaan Mission:

The Gaganyaan mission aims to send Indian astronauts (Gaganyatris) to Low Earth Orbit, making India the fourth country after the United States, Russia, and China to achieve independent human spaceflight capability. The success of IADT-02 strengthens mission readiness, with multiple uncrewed missions planned before the final human flight, expected around 2027.

Previous Test

The first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) was conducted in August 2025, and IADT-02 represents continued progress in validating the crew escape and recovery systems.

Objective of the Test:

- The primary objective of the test was to validate the crew module's safe landing capabilities under simulated conditions.
- It aimed to ensure the reliability of deceleration systems, assess stability during descent, and test recovery procedures in real-life scenarios.
- These tests are crucial to ensuring astronaut safety during mission abort or re-entry situations.

1st Celeste Satellites From New Zealand

Why in News?

The European Space Agency (ESA) launched its first two Celeste satellites from New Zealand. This mission tests Low Earth Orbit (LEO) navigation to boost Europe's Galileo system with stronger signals and new capabilities.

- Launch: Rocket Lab's Electron rocket from Māhia Launch Complex; satellites separated successfully after ~1 hour.
- Design: GMV & Alén Space (Spain) for IOD-1; Thales Alenia Space (France) for IOD-2.
- Future Plan: Total 11 satellites, with more launches in 2027 to form full LEO layer.

Strategic Importance:

- Flying at ~510 km altitude, Celeste satellites enable robust PNT (Positioning, Navigation, Timing) in challenging environments. This "New Space" approach speeds up Europe's satnav evolution amid global competition.

About ESA:

- Headquarters: Paris, France
- Founders: Germany, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark
- CEO: Josef Aschbacher (1 Mar 2021-)
- Founded: 30 May 1975, Europe
- Abbreviation: ESA; ASE; EW

Key Objectives

- Celeste demonstrates LEO navigation advantages over medium Earth orbit systems like Galileo:
- Stronger signals (L- and S-bands) for urban/polar areas, autonomous vehicles, aviation, maritime.
- Improved resilience, indoor navigation, disaster response.
- New frequencies and autonomous orbit tech without ground support.

Semiconductor Manufacturing Boost in India

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kaynes Semicon Plant at Sanand in Gujarat, marking a significant step in strengthening India's semiconductor ecosystem and advancing self-reliance in critical technologies.
- The facility enables India to become a reliable player in the global semiconductor supply chain and supports sectors like electric vehicles, AI, defence, and electronics.
- The initiative is part of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) (2021), under which multiple projects worth over ₹1.6 lakh crore are being implemented across several states.

Key Highlights

- Semiconductor plant inaugurated at Sanand (Gujarat)
- Strengthens Make in India, Make for the World initiative
- Focus on Intelligent Power Modules (used in EVs & industry)
- Part of India Semiconductor Mission (2021)
- India aims to become a global semiconductor hub
- Semiconductor market expected to grow from \$50 billion to \$100 billion by decade-end

Additional Facts:

India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) launched in 2021 to promote chip manufacturing and design ecosystem

Semiconductors are essential for:

- Electronics (mobiles, laptops)
- Defence systems
- Artificial Intelligence
- Electric vehicles

India is working on Semiconductor Mission 2.0 to develop:

- Semiconductor equipment manufacturing
- Raw material ecosystem
- Indigenous chip development: "Dhruv-64 microprocessor" for secure applications

AI Tokens

Key idea:

- AI does not understand full sentences directly — it works using tokens.

Why tokens are important

- Tokens are not just technical, they are also economic units.
- AI companies charge users based on number of tokens used.

So:

- More input (prompt) = more tokens
- More output (response) = more tokens
- → More cost

Conclusion:

Tokens act like a "currency of AI".

How AI pricing works

- AI services (like chatbots, APIs) are priced as:
- Cost per 1,000 or 1 million tokens



What are AI tokens?

AI tokens = smallest units of data that an AI reads and writes.

They can be:

- Words
- Parts of words
- Characters or code

Example:

- Sentence → "AI is powerful"
- Tokens → "AI" | "is" | "powerful"

This makes:

- Every question measurable
- Every response billable

Analogy:

- Electricity → units
- Internet → data usage
- AI → tokens

Why tokens matter in global competition

- Earlier competition = who has the best AI model
- Now competition = who provides

Because:

- AI usage is increasing rapidly
- Businesses use AI at large scale (agents, automation, coding)

So:

- Lower token cost = more users + more adoption

Why China is winning the pricing race

- Much cheaper token pricing

Chinese AI models are:

- 10-20 times cheaper than US models in some cases

Efficient technology

- Use advanced architectures like:
- "Mixture-of-Experts"
- These reduce computing cost

Lower infrastructure cost



Cheaper:

- Electricity
- Data centers
- Strong government support

Forced innovation

- Due to US restrictions on chips:

China focused on efficiency instead of brute power

- Rise of AI agents increases token demand
- New trend: AI agents (autonomous systems)
- They:
 - Perform multi-step tasks
 - Run continuously

Result:

- Massive increase in token consumption
- Cost becomes even more critical
- China's strategic advantage

China is focusing on:

- High-volume usage
- Low-cost AI access

This helps:

- Developers
- Startups
- Global adoption
- Chinese models are now:
 - Leading in token usage globally
 - Big shift in AI industry

Earlier:

- Quality and performance mattered most

Now:

- Cost efficiency (per token) is becoming key
- → The race is shifting from:
 - "Best AI" → "Most affordable AI"

Final takeaway

AI tokens are the basic unit of AI usage and pricing, and China is gaining global advantage by making these tokens much cheaper.

IOC SRY Gene Test Policy**What is the new rule?**

The International Olympic Committee has made it mandatory that only biological females can compete in women's events.

How is the test done?

- Through simple methods like:
- Saliva sample
- Cheek swab
- Blood test

What is the SRY gene test?

- Athletes must undergo a one-time SRY gene screening (sex test).
- This test checks for the SRY gene, which is linked to the Y chromosome (male biology).

What does the result mean?

- SRY gene present → considered male biology → not allowed in women's category
- SRY gene absent → eligible for women's category

Who is affected?

- Transgender women
- DSD (Differences in Sex Development) athletes

Why did IOC introduce this rule?

To ensure:

- Fairness in competition
- Safety in sports
- Reason: Biological males have performance advantages in strength, speed, and endurance.

What does science say about advantage?

IOC data suggests:

- ~10–12% advantage in running/swimming
- 20%+ in jumping/throwing
- Even higher in power-based sports

Background of the issue

- Earlier (2021), IOC allowed each sport to decide rules.
- But controversies (like Paris Olympics debates) led to a uniform global policy.

Criticism and concerns

Some experts say:

- SRY test may not be fully accurate in all cases
- It raises issues of privacy and discrimination

Final Understanding:

The IOC has introduced a mandatory SRY gene test to decide eligibility in women's sports, aiming for fair competition, but it has also sparked a global debate on science, fairness, and inclusion.



Book: Stories the Fire Could Not Burn
Author: Hoihnu Hauzel
About: Narrates Manipur's violence, institutional failures, and human suffering, presenting a deeply emotional and balanced account of conflict and loss.

Culture & History

International Film Festival (IFFD 2026)

- Delhi hosted its first-ever International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026 from 25–31 March 2026, marking a major step in positioning the national capital as a global cultural and cinematic hub.
- The festival showcased over 130 films from across the world, including Indian, regional, and international cinema, along with gala premieres, workshops, and masterclasses.
- Organised by the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC) under the Delhi Government, the event aimed to promote film tourism, cultural exchange, and creative industries.

Lifetime Achievement Awards

IFFD 2026 honoured several legendary personalities for their lifetime contribution to cinema:

Dharmendra

- Veteran Bollywood actor
- Award received on his behalf by Hema Malini

Sharmila Tagore

- Renowned actress known for both Hindi and Bengali cinema
- Recognised for her versatility and contribution to parallel cinema

Nandamuri Balakrishna

- Leading Telugu film actor
- Honoured for 50+ years of contribution to Indian cinema

Delhi Film Policy

Provides:

- Single-window clearance for film shooting
- Financial and logistical support
- Aims to attract domestic and international productions

International Film Festival of India (IFFI):

- Established: 1952
- Venue: Goa (since 2004)
- Film festivals act as platforms for:
 - Cultural diplomacy
 - Global collaboration

Opening & Closing Films

- The International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026 began with the screening of SIRAT, an Academy Award–nominated film, setting a prestigious tone for the festival.
- The festival will conclude with AMOEBA, showcasing a complete cinematic journey from opening to closing.
- Such curated opening and closing films are a common practice in international film festivals to highlight globally acclaimed cinema.

- Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra has been appointed as the Festival Director, responsible for overall artistic vision and execution.

Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards 2026

- The Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards 2026 were announced by The Indian Express Group, recognising outstanding contributions of journalists across print, broadcast, and digital media.
- The awards honoured journalists for courageous reporting, investigative journalism, and impactful storytelling on key national and international issues. These awards are considered among the most prestigious journalism honours in India.
- Multiple journalists were awarded across diverse categories such as investigative reporting, political reporting, feature writing, business journalism, and regional reporting, reflecting the diversity of media coverage in India.

Purpose:

- To honour excellence, integrity, and courage in journalism

Covers:

About the Award

- Instituted by: The Indian Express Group
- Named after: Ramnath Goenka
- Established: 2005
- Ramnath Goenka was a freedom fighter and media baron who played a major role during the Emergency (1975–77) in defending press freedom
- Awards highlight journalism that:
- Serves public interest
- Holds power accountable
- Considered equivalent to top journalism honours in India

- Print
- Broadcast
- Digital journalism

Key Highlights (2026 Edition)

Recognises journalists for:

- Investigative reporting
- Public interest journalism
- Coverage of social, economic, and political issues
- Awards presented across multiple categories (around 20+)
- Winners selected by an independent jury of eminent personalities

Includes:

- Trophy
- Citation
- Cash prize (generally around ₹1 lakh)

World Peace Award

- Telangana’s Tourism and Culture Minister Jupally Krishna Rao has been honoured with the “Grand Prize for Contribution to World Peace” at the International Buddhist Conference on World Peace – 2026 held in Hyderabad.
- The award was presented in recognition of his efforts in promoting Buddhist heritage, cultural exchange, and values of peace and non-violence. The conference witnessed participation of around 150 delegates and monks from 22 countries, highlighting its global significance.
- During the event, the Minister emphasized Telangana’s rich Buddhist legacy and announced plans to develop Buddhavanam as a global World Peace Centre.

Key Highlights

- Award: Grand Prize for Contribution to World Peace
- Event: International Buddhist Conference on World Peace – 2026
- Location: Hyderabad
- Organizer/Presenter: International Interchange Development Association
- Participation: Delegates from 22 countries

Important Initiatives Announced

- Development of Buddhavanam (274 acres) as a global peace centre

Proposal for:

- Digital Experience Centre
- Global Buddhist Centre
- Promotion of Buddhist tourism among youth and international visitors

Important Facts:

Buddhavanam Project

- Located near Nagarjuna Sagar (Telangana)

- Developed to showcase life and teachings of Gautama Buddha
- Promotes Buddhist tourism circuit in India

Significance

- Enhances India’s soft power diplomacy through culture
- Promotes Buddhist tourism and heritage conservation
- Strengthens international cultural cooperation
- Supports India’s role in spreading peace and non-violence globally

Person in News

Appointments of the Month

Sr. No	Person Name	Appointed For / Post	Department / Organisation	Brief Description
1	Sanjay Khanna	Chairman & MD	BPCL	Ex-Director (Refineries); to strengthen refining & energy transition
2	Preeti Saran	Member (Re-elected)	UN CESC	Re-elected to monitor ICESCR implementation globally
3	Vibhor Jain	MD & CEO	ONDC	Leads expansion of open digital commerce network
4	Hung Cao	Acting Secretary	US Navy	Former US Navy officer; leads Navy administration
5	Vibha Padalkar	Reappointed MD & CEO	HDFC Life	Continued leadership in India's insurance sector
6	Tim Cook	Executive Chairman (future)	Apple Inc.	Steps down as CEO after 15 years; succession to John Ternus
7	John Ternus	CEO (Designated)	Apple Inc.	New CEO from 2026; former hardware chief
8	Ajit Agarkar	Chairman (Renewed)	BCCI Selection Committee	Continued for 2027 ODI World Cup preparations
9	Samrat Choudhary	Chief Minister	Government of Bihar	First BJP CM of Bihar; replaces Nitish Kumar
10	Susan Coyle	Chief of Army	Australian Army	First woman Army Chief of Australia
11	Nadir Godrej	Chairman (Retiring)	Godrej Industries Group	Transition to Chairman Emeritus in 2026
12	Pirojsha Godrej	Chairman (Designated)	Godrej Industries Group	Successor to Nadir Godrej
13	Sharon Pais	Head/ CEO	Myntra (Flipkart)	Leads fashion e-commerce business
14	Roman Gofman	Mossad Chief	Israel Intelligence Agency	Military officer appointed as intelligence head

15	Ismail Omar Guelleh	President (Re-elected)	Djibouti	Re-elected for 6th term amid political dominance
16	Nizar Amedi	President	Iraq	Kurdish leader elected by Parliament
17	Tim White	Head Coach	Hockey India (Junior Women)	Australian coach with international experience
18	Yashwant Varma	Judge (Resigned)	Allahabad High Court	Resigned amid impeachment proceedings
19	Nitish Kumar	Rajya Sabha MP	Parliament of India	Shift from Bihar CM role creates political speculation
20	Pranay Verma	Ambassador	India-Belgium & EU	Senior IFS officer strengthening India-EU ties
21	Deep Jariwala	Governor's Chair Scientist	Tennessee University (USA)	Indian-origin researcher in nanotechnology
22	Pham Gia Tuc & others (6 DPMs)	Deputy Prime Ministers	Vietnam Government	Key executive leadership in Vietnam (2026-31)
23	Varun Sanghi	Non-Executive Chairman	OLX India	Leads post-integration digital classifieds strategy
24	Ranveer Singh	Brand Ambassador	Jindal Stainless	First-ever brand ambassador for company
25	To Lam	President	Vietnam	Also Party Chief; consolidates executive power
26	Vinay Tonse	MD & CEO	YES Bank	Former SBI executive; bank consolidation focus
27	Campbell Wilson	Former CEO (Resigned)	Air India	Led post-privatization transformation
28	Gurjant Singh	Retired Player	Indian Hockey Team	Olympic medal-winning forward
29	Brad Lightcap	COO (Role Change)	OpenAI	Shifted from operations to special projects
30	Min Aung Hlaing	President	Myanmar	Military-backed leader formalising control
31	Gianluigi Buffon	Resigned Role Head	Italy Football Federation	Resigned after World Cup qualification failure
32	Ashwini Bhide	Municipal Commissioner	BMC Mumbai	First woman BMC Commissioner

33	William Walsh	CEO (Designated)	IndiGo	Former IATA DG; global aviation leader
34	Lt Gen Dhiraj Seth	Vice Chief of Army Staff	Indian Army	Senior armoured corps officer
35	Vir Vikram Yadav	Director General	DGCA India	Oversees civil aviation safety regulation
36	Uchral Nyam-Osor	Prime Minister	Mongolia	Former Parliament Speaker; economic reform focus
37	Chanchal Kumar & others	Secretaries	Government of India	Bureaucratic reshuffle under ACC
38	Balendra Shah	Prime Minister	Nepal	Young leader, former Mayor of Kathmandu
39	P. Kumaran	High Commissioner	India to UK	Senior IFS officer strengthening UK ties
40	Stuti Pradhan	Youth Delegate	World Youth Parliament	Represents India in global youth forum

Obituaries of the Month

Sr. No.	Person Name	Field Related	Description
1	Nadendra Bhaskar Rao	Politics	Former CM of undivided Andhra Pradesh; shortest-serving CM (31 days in 1984); co-founder of TDP; associated with 1984 constitutional crisis and "Save Democracy Movement".
2	Col Sonam Wangchuk	Military	Kargil War hero (1999); Maha Vir Chakra awardee; led operations in Batalik sector; known as "Lion of Ladakh".
3	Dr. Gopalrao Patil	Politics / Healthcare	Former Rajya Sabha MP (1994-2000); noted paediatrician; founder of Latur education model ("Latur Pattern"); known as "Devmanus".
4	Balbir Punj	Journalism / Politics	Senior BJP leader, ex-Rajya Sabha MP; former journalist with Indian Express; writer and columnist on national issues.
5	Asha Bhosle	Music	Legendary playback singer; career spanning 8+ decades; recipient of Padma Vibhushan (2008) and Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2000).
6	C. D. Gopinath	Sports (Cricket)	Former Indian Test cricketer; part of India's first Test win (1952 vs England); national selector and team manager.

7	Kamal Kharrazi	Foreign Affairs	Former Iranian Foreign Minister (1997–2005); UN ambassador; key figure in Iran’s diplomatic and strategic policy.
8	Mohsina Kidwai	Politics	Senior Congress leader; former Union Minister; served in Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha; handled Health, Urban Development, Tourism portfolios.
9	Alexander Leonov	Defence Technology	Russian missile designer; key contributor to Zircon hypersonic missile; linked to BrahMos and NPOMASH; major figure in hypersonic weapons development.
10	Vijaypat Singhania	Business / Aviation	Former Raymond Chairman; Padma Bhushan awardee; transformed Raymond brand; record-breaking aviator and hot air balloonist.
11	Chandrikapersad Santokhi	Politics (Foreign)	Former President of Suriname (2020–2025); strengthened India–Suriname ties; known for reforms and anti-corruption drive.
12	E. A. Rajendran	Arts / Cinema	Malayalam actor-director; worked in films, theatre, TV; NSD and FTII alumnus; also served in state horticulture corporation.
13	Datta Meghe	Politics	Veteran BJP leader; multiple-time MP; served in Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Maharashtra politics; major contributor to education & healthcare institutions.



Book: On the Future of Species

Author: Adrian Woolfson

About: Explores how humans may design future lifeforms and examines the ethical and scientific implications of controlling evolution.



Book: Vishwaguru Srila Prabhupada

Author: Dr Usha Upadhyay

About: The book highlights how Srila Prabhupada carried Indian spirituality and Vedic wisdom to the global stage and spread the message of Lord Krishna across continents.

Sports

IOC Bans Transgender Women from Female Events

The International Olympic Committee has announced a major policy change, banning transgender women and certain athletes with differences in sex development (DSD) from competing in female categories at the Olympic Games. This rule will be implemented from the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and will apply to future editions as well.

Reason Behind the Decision

The IOC stated that the decision is based on ensuring fairness, safety, and integrity in women's sports. According to the committee, individuals who have undergone male puberty may retain physical advantages, which could impact fair competition in elite sports.

New Eligibility Criteria

Under the new policy, athletes wishing to compete in the female category must undergo a one-time SRY gene test, which determines biological sex through non-invasive methods like saliva or cheek swabs. This marks a return to genetic-based eligibility checks in Olympic sports.

Shift from Earlier Policy

This decision represents a significant shift from earlier IOC guidelines, which allowed individual sports federations to set their own rules regarding transgender participation. Previously, transgender athletes like Laurel Hubbard were allowed to compete in the Olympics under certain conditions.

Reactions and Global Debate

The policy has triggered mixed reactions globally. While some groups have supported the move as necessary for fairness in women's sports, others have criticized it for potentially discriminating against transgender and intersex athletes. The issue continues to be a subject of intense debate in international sports governance.

Additional Key Facts:

- The IOC is headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland.
- The Olympics are held every 4 years (Summer & Winter Games).
- The 2028 Summer Olympics will be hosted in Los Angeles, USA.
- The IOC President associated with this decision is Kirsty Coventry.
- The policy applies only to elite-level competitions, not grassroots or recreational sports.

L	G	B	T	Q	Q	I	A	A	P	2S
Lesbian	Gay	Bisexual	Transgender	Queer	Questioning	Intersex	Asexual	Ally	Pansexual	Two Spirit
A woman who is sexually attracted to women	A person who is sexually attracted to member of the same sex, most often a man who is attracted to men	A person who is sexually attracted to men and women	A person whose gender identity is different from their assigned gender at birth	An umbrella term that includes all identities within the LGBTQ+ community	A person who is discovering their gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual orientation	A person whose sexual anatomy or chromosomal sex do not fit with the traditional markers of "female" and "male"	A person who does not feel sexual attraction towards any gender	A person who supports the LGBTQ+ community without identifying as queer or LGBTQ+ themselves	A person who is sexually attracted to people of all gender identities	A person who exhibits male and female qualities in their personality, sexuality or gender identity

Gout Gout Surpasses Usain Bolt's Teenage Mark

Australian teenage sprinter Gout Gout delivered a historic performance at the Australian Athletics Championships by winning the men's 200m final in 19.67 seconds. He became the first Australian to run sub-20 seconds under legal wind conditions and set a new national as well as Under-20 world record. His timing is faster than that of Usain Bolt at the same age, drawing global comparisons and attention.

Major Achievements:

- First Australian to break 20-second barrier legally

Set:

- Australian national record
- Under-20 world record
- Faster than Usain Bolt's time at same age (~19.93 sec)
- Ranked among fastest 200m times globally
- 2nd Place: Aidan Murphy – 19.88 sec

US Open Pickleball Championship

Indian players Arjun Singh and Aditya Singh won India's first-ever gold medal at the US Open Pickleball Championship 2026. The event was held in Naples, Florida (USA)

Key Highlights

- They won the gold in U-18 boys' doubles category
- Defeated top-seeded American pair Ryder Brown and Soli Messiri

Historic Achievement

- This is India's first gold medal in this prestigious tournament
- It was also India's first participation under the Indian Pickleball Association
- The win shows the growing strength of India in pickleball

2026 Masters Tournament

Rory McIlroy has won the 2026 Masters Tournament, making it his second consecutive (back-to-back) title. The tournament was held at Augusta National Golf Club (USA)

Key Highlights

- He finished with a score of 12-under par
- Won by just 1 stroke
- Defeated Scottie Scheffler, who finished second

Historic Achievement

- This is McIlroy's 6th major title
- He became one of the few golfers in history to win back-to-back Masters titles
- Joined legends like: Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus & Nick Faldo
- He is also the first player since Tiger Woods (2001–02) to achieve this feat

Basic Concept

- The Masters Tournament is one of the four major championships in golf
- Winning it consecutively (back-to-back) is rare and considered a major achievement in sports history

2026 Masters Tournament

- This was the 90th edition of the Masters Tournament and the first of the four major men's golf championships held in 2026.
- The tournament was played from April 9 to 12 at the Augusta National Golf Club, located in the city of Augusta, in the U.S. state of Georgia.
- Prize Fund: US\$22,500,000
- Winner's Share: \$4,500,000

Monte Carlo Masters

Jannik Sinner defeated Carlos Alcaraz to win the Monte Carlo Masters 2026. This is Sinner’s first Monte Carlo Masters title. The tournament is part of the ATP Masters 1000 series

Big Achievement

- With this win, Sinner regained World No. 1 ranking
- He became one of the few players to win multiple Masters titles consecutively

Basic Concept

- The Monte Carlo Masters is one of the ATP Masters 1000 tournaments, which are among the most important events in men’s tennis after Grand Slams
- Winning such tournaments helps players earn ranking points and improve world ranking

2026 Monte-Carlo Masters

- Edition: 119th
- Category: Masters 1000
- Venue: Monte Carlo Country Club

Champions:

- Singles: Jannik Sinner (Italy)
- Doubles: Kevin Krawietz / Tim Pütz (Germany)

World Archery Para Series, Bangkok

India delivered an outstanding performance at the World Archery Para Series held in Bangkok, Thailand, winning a total of 16 medals, including 7 gold, showcasing its growing dominance in para-archery.

Key Highlights

- India finished the tournament with 7 gold, 5 silver, and 4 bronze medals, marking one of its best performances in international para archery events.
- A major highlight was Payal Nag, a teenage quadruple amputee archer, who defeated world No. 1 Sheetal Devi to win gold in the compound women’s final, demonstrating emerging talent in Indian para sports.
- In the men’s category, Toman Kumar secured gold in the compound event, while Bhawna clinched the recurve women’s title with a dominant performance.
- India also secured podium finishes through experienced athletes like Harvinder Singh, a Paralympic medallist, who won silver, highlighting a strong mix of youth and experience in the team.

Global Doping List in Athletics

According to the latest data released by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), India has surpassed Kenya to record the highest number of ineligible athletes due to doping violations, raising serious concerns about integrity in Indian athletics.

Key Highlights

- India currently has 148 track and field athletes declared ineligible, the highest globally, overtaking Kenya and placing Russia third in the list. This data reflects the increasing prevalence of doping violations in Indian athletics and highlights weaknesses in monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.
- The list includes athletes serving bans not only for doping but also for related offences such as tampering with samples, evading tests, trafficking banned substances, and whereabouts failures, all of which attract similar penalties under anti-doping rules.



About Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)

- The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) is an independent body established by World Athletics to ensure fair play in global athletics. It is responsible for:
 - Detecting doping violations
 - Conducting investigations
 - Enforcing bans and sanctions
 - Monitoring athletes and their support personnel

- Pressure to perform in competitive sports

Global Context

Doping remains a global issue affecting multiple countries. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) oversees international anti-doping efforts and sets the World Anti-Doping Code, which governs penalties and testing standards worldwide.

Key Facts

- AIU → Anti-doping body under World Athletics
- India → Highest number of ineligible athletes (148)
- Kenya → Second position
- Russia → Third position
- Doping violations include → Sample tampering, evasion, trafficking
- WADA HQ → Montreal, Canada

Major Concerns for India

The development indicates a systemic issue in Indian sports, as India has also previously ranked high in doping cases globally. According to reports, India recorded around 260 positive doping cases in a recent year, with a high positivity rate (~3.6%), among the highest worldwide.

This raises concerns about:

- Lack of awareness among athletes
- Poor regulation of supplements
- Inadequate testing infrastructure



Book: Plastic Inc.

Author: Beth Gardiner

About: A gripping investigation into the global plastic industry, exposing environmental damage, corporate influence, and health consequences.



Book: A Guardian and a Thief

Author: Megha Majumdar

About: Set in a climate-ravaged future Kolkata, it follows a mother whose stolen visa triggers a moral conflict involving survival and desperation.

Important Days of the Month

Day	Observed/Celebrated As	Motto/Importance
1 May	International Labour Day	To honour the contributions of the labourers or working class people.
3 May	World Press Freedom Day	Shaping a Future at Peace
4 May	Coal Miners Day	To highlight the toughest profession and the people working in coal mines.
5 May	World Asthma Day	It aims to educate people on how best to get control over this respiratory problem and other allergic diseases.
7 May	World Athletics Day	To popularize sports among the youth
8 May	World Red Cross Day	To mark the birth anniversary of Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross and International Committee
8 May	World Thalassemia Day	Hidden No More: Finding the Undiagnosed. Supporting the Unseen
12 May	International Nurses Day	Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives.
15 May	International Day of Families	Families, Inequalities and Child Wellbeing
17 May	World Telecommunication and Information Society Day	Strengthening digital lifelines for a resilient and connected world
18 May	World AIDS Vaccine Day	To alarm the world against the HIV infections
21 May	National Anti-Terrorism Day	To mark the death anniversary of former PM, Rajiv Gandhi
22 May	International Day for Biological Diversity	Acting locally for global impact
31 May	World No Tobacco Day	Unmasking the appeal – countering nicotine and tobacco addiction

Books & Authors



Book: Tides of Time: Bharat's History through Murals in Parliament
Author: Sudha Murty
About: This book depicts India's civilizational journey through Parliament murals, offering unique visual and historical insights.



Book: From Guerrilla Fighter to Chief Minister: A Memoir
Author: Zoramthanga
About: Memoir tracing Mizoram's journey from insurgency to peace, highlighting political struggle, conflict, and transformation through author's personal experiences.



Book: Here Where We Live Is Our Country: The Story of the Jewish Bund
Author: Molly Crabapple
About: Explores the Jewish Labour Bund's history, ideology, and resistance, presenting an alternative vision of Jewish identity beyond Zionism.



Book: Great Power Games: From Western Decline to Eastern Ascent
Author: Vikram Sood
About: Examines shifting global power from West to East, analysing geopolitics, conflicts, and emerging multipolar world order dynamics.



Book: The Future Is Peace: Finding Common Ground in the Israel-Palestine Journey
Editor: Scilla Elworthy
About: Explores Israel-Palestine conflict through dialogue and peace-building efforts, highlighting shared experiences and pathways toward mutual understanding and coexistence

Books & Authors



Book: Crimson Spring
Author: Navtej Sarna
About: A historical novel set during 1857 uprising, exploring love, loyalty, and personal struggles amid rebellion and colonial conflict.



Book: Jeete Jee Allahabad
Author: Mamta Kalia
About: A reflective memoir capturing Allahabad's cultural life, personal memories, literary circles, and evolving social landscape through the author's experiences.



Book: Safar Jaari Hai
Author: Pritpal Singh Betab
About: A poetry collection reflecting life's journey, emotions, struggles, and hope, capturing human experiences through simple yet expressive verses.



Book: Chanakya and Sun Tzu: A Business Lens on Trade, Thought and Travel
Author: R. Gopalakrishnan & Nirmala Isaac
About: Examines India-China relations through history, trade, and strategy, advocating pragmatic engagement to build cooperation and a stable global order.



Book: Running Behind Lakshmi: The Search for Wealth in India's Stock Market
Author: Adil Rustomjee
About: Traces two centuries of India's stock market evolution, highlighting speculation, reforms, and its transformation into a modern financial system

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