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Performance and Progress Analysis

1. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

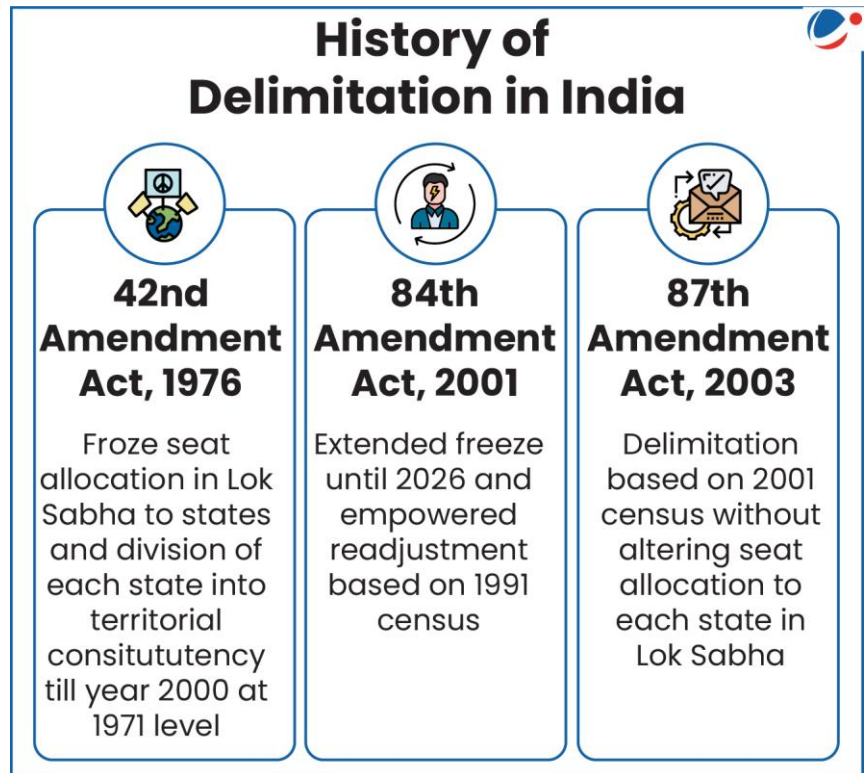
1.1. DELIMITATION

Why in the News?

Southern states have expressed concerns that the population-based delimitation of Lok Sabha seats and the Finance Commission's funding allocations are unfair.

About Delimitation

- Delimitation is the **process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State** for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
- Responsibility of delimitation is assigned to a high-power body known as **Delimitation Commission (Boundary Commission)**.
- In India, such Delimitation Commissions have been constituted **4 times** – in **1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002**.
 - The **Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission, finalized in 2022**, reorganized the UT of Jammu & Kashmir into 90 Assembly Constituencies (43 in Jammu and 47 in Kashmir) and 5 Parliamentary Constituencies under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act, 2002 and the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019.
- Constitutional Provisions for Delimitation**
 - Articles 82 and 170:** Readjustment and **division of each State into territorial constituencies (Parliamentary constituencies and Assembly constituencies)** by such authority and in such manner as Parliament may, by law, determine.
 - Articles 330 and 332:** Re-fixing number of **seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of States.
- Orders of Delimitation Commissions** have the force of law and **cannot be challenged in court**.
 - No modifications are permissible by the House of the People and the State Legislative Assembly.
 - It comes into effect on a date specified by the **President of India**.



Important Judicial Pronouncements related to Delimitation Commission

- Kishorchandra Chhanganlal Rathod vs. UOI, 2024:** SC held that **constitutional courts have power to review orders of Delimitation Commission** if an order is manifestly arbitrary and irreconcilable to constitutional values.
- Meghraj Kothari v. Delimitation Commission & Others, 1966:** **Judicial interference was restricted only to avoid unnecessary delay in election process.** It does not impose an absolute bar on constitutional courts' power to review orders of Delimitation Commission.

Significance of Delimitation

- Constitutional Mandate:** Delimitation is **mandated by Constitution under Article 82 and 170** for periodic realignment of representation with demographic realities.

- **Political equality:** Delimitation operationalizes the **democratic principle of “one man, one vote, one value”**, by periodically readjusting constituencies so that each legislator represents roughly equal numbers of people.
- **Preventing Gerrymandering:** A transparent delimitation process **reduces opportunities for manipulation of boundaries for political gain**, and helps protect the integrity of elections.
- **Federalism:** It shapes the horizontal balance in the federal structure by **determining the number of representatives from each state** in the national and state legislatures.
- **Historical adjustment:** Delimitation has historically adjusted distribution of seats to ensure a **balanced representation relative to population distribution** in Parliament, State Assemblies, and local self-governing institutions.
- **Effective Governance:** Fairly drawn constituencies, aligned with population and demographic patterns, enable representatives to better understand and address constituent needs.

Do you know?

- ▶ **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023**, also known as the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**, shall come into force after first delimitation after the first census taken after commencement of the Act.
- ▶ 106th Amendment seeks to **reserve one-third of seats for women** in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

Issues associated with Delimitation in India

- **Federal Imbalance:** Delimitation process based **only on population** can **benefit high-growth states** (e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) while reducing representation for states that effectively controlled population growth (e.g. Southern states).
 - This could **weaken federal balance** as national policies might be tailored to suit northern states' priorities, leading to **political and regional tensions between states**.
- **Reserved Constituencies:** Current system provides reservations for SCs and STs within Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. However, concerns persist that placement of these constituencies may **not accurately reflect the actual demographic distribution** of these communities.
- **Lack of Public Participation:** The current process lacks transparency and public participation, as decisions are made primarily by Delimitation Commission (composed of political appointees). This may **lead to disconnect between people and the boundaries that are drawn**.
- **Representational imbalance:** Delays in conducting census has led to **distortion in representation compared to present population distributions**, diluting effective political representation and access to elected representatives.

International Practices of Delimitation

- **European Union:** EU Parliament consists of 720 members. The number of seats is divided between 27 member countries based on '**Degressive Proportionality Principle**'.
 - Under this principle, **ratio of population to the number of seats shall increase as the population increases**.
- **The US:** Number of seats in House of Representatives (equivalent of Lok Sabha) has been capped at 435 since 1913.
 - Country's population has increased almost four times from 9.4 crore in 1911 to an estimated 33.4 crore in 2023.
 - The seats among the States are redistributed after every Census through '**method of equal proportion**'.

Way Forward

- **Seat Distribution:** Use a **total fertility rate (TFR)-adjusted formula for seat allocation**, where population-based Lok Sabha seats are moderated by national and State-level TFR, **ensuring fair representation without penalising States** that achieved population stabilisation.
- **Transparent process:** Improving transparency and ensuring **greater public engagement by involving stakeholders** such as political parties, civil society groups, and the general public can **enhance the legitimacy and fairness** of the delimitation process.
- **Periodic Review:** Delimitation should be conducted regularly, **ideally after each census (every ten years)**, to **reflect demographic changes** and maintain equal representation as population growth and shifts occur.

- **Effective representation:** Ensure socially cohesive and administratively practical constituencies by drawing boundaries that preserve cultural and community unity (especially for SCs and STs), while ensuring accessibility, effective representative–voter interaction, and minimal disruption to maintain electoral stability.
- **Fund allocation:** Finance Commissions use **multiple criteria to allocate funds** i.e.,
 - **Income Distance:** States with **lower income receive higher transfers**.
 - **Population Size:** Reflects the expenditure needs of States. FCs has used either 2011 Census population to reflect current needs or the 1971 population to reward population control efforts.
 - **Demographic Performance:** Rewards successful reduction in fertility rates.

Conclusion

Going forward, India must evolve a delimitation and fiscal federal framework that balances democratic representation with cooperative federalism, ensuring that states are not penalized for progressive demographic and social outcomes. A transparent, consultative, and evidence-based approach, drawing upon global best practices and India's constitutional values, can help reconcile population equity with regional fairness.

1.2. PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION ACT, 1988

Why in the News?

Recently, in **Centre for Public Interest Litigation v. Union of India 2026 judgment**, the Supreme Court delivered a **split verdict** on the constitutionality of **Section 17A** of the **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988**.

More on the News

- Section 17A, inserted by Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, mandates that there should be a **prior sanction from the Government to launch an investigation against a public servant** under the Act.
- **Split verdict:**
 - **Justice Viswanathan:** Section 17A is constitutionally valid subject to the condition that the **sanction must be decided by the Lokpal or the Lokayukta of the State**.
 - **Justice BV Nagarathna:** Section 17A is in **violation of Article 14 of the Constitution** as it seeks to protect only a class of public servants.
- In earlier judgments of **Vineet Narain v. Union of India, 1997** and **Dr. Subramaniam Swamy v. Director, CBI, 2014**, Court had **invalidated executive and statutory provisions requiring prior sanction** before investigation against senior public servants.

About Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988

- It was enacted to **prevent corruption in public offices** and was amended by **Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018**.
- It **defines public servant** as
 - **any person in service or pay of Government/local authority** or remunerated by Government by fees or commission for performance of any public duty.
 - **any Judge**, including any person empowered by law to discharge, whether by himself or as a member of any body of persons, any adjudicatory functions.
- **Corruption** is defined as acceptance or **solicitation of gratification** (other than legal remuneration) by a public servant for performing or not performing an official act.

Other Key provisions of PCA, 1988

Aspect	Detail
Punishment for offence relating to public servant being bribed	Any public servant who obtains an undue advantage for dishonest performance of a public duty shall be punishable , with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than 3 years but which may extend to 7 years and shall also be liable to fine.
Punishment for habitual offender	Punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than 5 years but which may extend to 10 years and shall also be liable to fine

Persons authorised to investigate	No police officer below the following rank shall investigate any offence punishable without the order of a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Magistrate of first class, as the case may be, or make any arrest therefor without a warrant. • An Inspector of Police in case of Delhi Special Police Establishment,; • An Assistant Commissioner of Police in metropolitan areas of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Ahmedabad and in any other metropolitan area,; • A Deputy Superintendent of Police or a police officer of equivalent rank elsewhere.
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Reasons for prevailing Corruption in India

- **Centralised control:** In post-independence period, **excessive state control and bureaucratic regulation entrenched corrupt practices** in governance, as evident from **License Raj system** that encouraged bribery for licenses and permits.
 - High-profile cases such as **Bofors scandal** of 1980s **exposed corruption at the highest political levels**, highlighting systemic governance weaknesses.
- **Political-Bureaucratic Nexus:** Close links between political leadership and bureaucracy foster patronage, nepotism, and protection of corrupt networks. E.g., Adarsh Housing Scam (2010, Maharashtra).
- **Socio-Economic:** Corruption in Indian politics is closely linked to socio-economic disparities, as poverty and **economic distress increase vulnerability to bribery and exploitation**, forcing disadvantaged sections to rely on corrupt practices to access basic services.
- **'Sanskritization of Corruption':** Concept coined by **Prof. Kaushik Basu** (former Chief Economic Advisor to the GoI), it implies that instead of being hidden, **corrupt behavior is displayed to gain respect and social prestige**, often leading to a **normalization of unethical behavior to achieve upward mobility**.
- **Lack of Independent Investigative Agencies:** Agencies such as the CBI function under executive control, limiting their autonomy and reducing their effectiveness in independently investigating corruption cases.
 - Further, **overburdened judicial system contributes to delays** in prosecuting corruption cases, diluting deterrent effect.
 - E.g., According to CVC annual report, 7,072 corruption cases investigated by CBI remain pending in courts, including 379 cases that have been unresolved for over 20 years.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Secrecy in administration, weak public oversight, and inadequate implementation of laws like Whistle-blower Protection, Right to Information etc., enabling misuse of power and corrupt practices.
 - Despite improving to rank 91 in Corruption Perception Index 2025, Transparency International still categorizes **India among countries that are "dangerous for journalists" reporting on corruption**, specifically citing risks from local mining and sand mafias.
- **Election Funding:** High election costs and lack of transparency in political funding encourage **quid-pro-quo arrangements between politicians, officials, and businesses**.
 - As per Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report, approximately 60% (₹19,083 crore), of contributions to six political parties in India from 2004-05 to 2022-23 came from undisclosed sources.

Other steps to curb Corruption in India

- **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018:** It covers cases of benami transactions, corporate fraud, evasion of income tax, PCA and PMLA, etc.
- **Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2014:** It provides a framework **to investigate alleged corruption and misuse of power by public servants** and to protect persons who allege any wrongdoings.
- **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:** Inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries including Prime Minister.
- **United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC):** Ratified by India in 2011, it is a legally binding global treaty against corruption.
- **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:** Provides for the smoother and greater access to information to Indian citizens.



- **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act, 2003:** It aims to bring about transparency and responsiveness in public administration.

Way Forward

- **ARC-II Recommendations:**
 - **Anti-Corruption Bureaus** should be brought under the control of the State Vigilance Commission.
 - **Strengthen Economic offences unit of states** to effectively investigate cases and improve coordination amongst existing agencies.
 - **Development of a code of ethics** for public officials and employees to promote ethical behaviour.
- **Transparent public procurement:** Digital e-procurement, **public bid disclosures**, and **independent real-time audits**, possibly using blockchain, can track funds, cut waste, and enhance trust in contracts to **tackle overpricing and favouritism**.
- **Judicial reforms:** **Special courts, time-bound hearings**, Trained judges and **tech-based case tracking** can speed up justice.
- **Whistle-blower Protection:** Strengthening the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act with anonymity, legal safeguards**, and secure reporting channels can boost disclosures and promote accountability.
- **Political funding:** **Mandatory disclosure of donations, caps on spending, banning large anonymous contributions**, and state-funded campaigns can curb the politicians, officials, and businesses nexus.
- **Institutional Measures:** Strengthen law-enforcement and vigilance agencies such as CBI, CVC, and ED by ensuring adequate resources, greater functional autonomy, and continuous capacity building to enhance their effectiveness in combating corruption.

Conclusion

Judicial clarity on provisions like Section 17A of the PCA, 1988, alongside sustained reforms in political funding, investigative autonomy, and ethical governance, can reinforce accountability. Only through coordinated institutional action and societal commitment can India move towards a corruption-free, transparent, and inclusive public administration.

1.3. URBAN WATER GOVERNANCE

Why in the News?

The recent health crisis in Indore caused by contaminated municipal tap water have exposed the vulnerability of urban governance particularly, urban water systems.

More on the News

- National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken **suo motu cognizance** of the incident in Indore.
 - NHRC has noted that the main pipeline supplying drinking water to the area is found to be passing beneath a 'public toilet' thereby deteriorating the quality of the water.
- Contaminated tap water contained multiple harmful pathogens—including **E coli, Salmonella and Vibrio cholerae bacteria, along with viruses, fungi and protozoa** — that **caused polymicrobial infections** leading to multi-organ failure and sepsis among patients.

About Urban Water Governance

- **Water supply** is a **state subject** under **Seventh Schedule**.
 - **State Government/Urban Local Bodies** is responsible to plan, design, fund, execute, operate and maintain the water supply systems.
 - **74th Constitutional Amendment** gave an expansive mandate to municipalities - from land regulation to water supply, sanitation, and environmental protection.



**Read our Weekly
Focus coverage
on India's Water
Governance**

- **At national level**, Union **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** oversees **urban water infrastructure** through programmes such as AMRUT and AMRUT 2.0.
- **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** has specified **drinking water quality standards (IS- 10500-2012)** in India.
 - **IS 10500** outlines the **acceptable limit of various substances in drinking water**, including heavy metals such as arsenic, and other parameters like pH value of water, its turbidity, total dissolved solids (TDS) in it, and colour and odour.
 - As per BIS, **water is defined as unfit for drinking if it is -**
 - ✓ **bacteriologically contaminated** (presence of indicator bacteria particularly E-coli, viruses etc.) or if
 - ✓ **chemical contamination exceeds maximum permissible limits** (e.g., excess fluoride [$>1.5\text{mg/l}$], TDS [$>2,000\text{mg/l}$], iron [$>0.3\text{ mg/l}$], manganese [$>0.3\text{ mg/l}$], arsenic [$>0.05\text{mg/l}$], nitrates [$>45\text{mg/l}$] etc.).

Challenges associated with Urban Water Governance

Significance of Urban Water Governance				
Sustainable Urban Development	Improved Health	Building Water Infrastructure	Right to Water for Life	Water Security
Integral to achieving SDG 11 (inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities)	Reduces water-borne diseases like cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A and improves sanitation	Enables stronger investment in water infrastructure by reducing risks for investors	Access to safe drinking water is integral to Right to Life under Article 21	Ensures reliable water access for growing urban population amid rising demand and water scarcity

- **Demand-Supply Gap:** Rapid urbanisation and **industrial growth are outpacing available water resources**, leading to severe stress on urban water governance and sustainability.
 - 21 major cities, including Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, were projected to run out of groundwater by 2020, potentially affecting around 100 million people. (NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index, 2018)
- **Fragmented Institutional Framework:** Multiple agencies, **overlapping jurisdictions and poor coordination** hamper coherent urban water governance in cities.
 - E.g., In Gurugram, PWD, Municipal Corporation, Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority, etc. are responsible for service provisioning in different parts of the city depending on their respective jurisdictions.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Ageing pipelines, **leakages, and non-revenue water (often 30–50%) reduce effective supply and increase operational costs.**
 - It's estimated that around 38% of India's water supply is lost due to Non- Revenue Water (NRW).
 - **NRW refers to treated water** that is fed into the distribution system but is lost before it reaches the consumer, either through physical losses (leaks and distribution losses) or apparent losses (theft, unmetered usage, or inaccurate billing).
- **Climate Resilience:** Urban water governance often **fails to integrate climate impacts** (like erratic rainfall and droughts), leading to **fragile systems, flooding** and unable to withstand stress especially during lean season.
 - E.g. Chennai water crisis in 2019, where all four main reservoirs dried up, and Bengaluru water crisis in 2024.
- **Wastewater Treatment:** Most wastewater in urban India is not treated before discharge, **increasing pollution loads and reducing availability of safe water.** E.g. High level of pollutants in river Yamuna (New Delhi).
- **Over-reliance on groundwater:** Indian cities increasingly depend on over-extracted groundwater due to **inadequate and intermittent piped water supply, leading to aquifer depletion** and forcing households to rely on sources such as tankers and bore-wells, thereby deepening urban water insecurity and inequitable access.

Initiatives taken for management of Urban Water Resources

- **Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban):** It provides universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with SDG Goal- 6.
- **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0:** It includes provisions for harvesting rainwater through storm-water drains into the water bodies, and strategies groundwater recharge through preparation of 'Aquifer Management Plan'.
 - Under this, **Pey Jal Survekshan** was introduced as a competitive assessment to evaluate cities on water quality, quantity and coverage.
- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain (JSA: CTR) campaign:** Launched in 2019 for water conservation through people's participation.
- **National Water Policy (2012):** Advocates rainwater harvesting, conservation of water and the need for augmenting the availability of water through direct use of rainfall.
- **Namami Gange Programme:** Integrated conservation mission with the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.



Read our previous coverage on AMRUT

Way Forward

- **Bridging Demand-Supply Gap:** Adopt **Integrated Urban Water Management** by combining demand management (metering, rational pricing), and supply through rainwater harvesting, reuse of treated wastewater, rejuvenation of local water bodies to reduce pressure on limited freshwater sources.
- **Institutional Framework:** Create a **single city-level water authority with clearly defined roles** for supply, sewerage and storm-water management to improve coordination, accountability and integrated planning across jurisdictions.
- **Upgrading Infrastructure:** Modernise ageing pipelines, leak detection technologies (pressure testing, acoustic leak detection, ground-penetrating radars) etc. and **conduct regular water audits to reduce non-revenue water** and improve efficiency and financial sustainability.
- **Climate Resilience System:** Integrate climate risks into urban water planning and **promote nature-based solutions** such as lake restoration, floodplain protection and decentralised storage to enhance resilience to droughts and floods.
- **Wastewater Treatment and Reuse:** Ensure full utilisation of sewage treatment capacity and mandate reuse of treated wastewater for non-potable purposes to augment urban water availability.
- **Reducing Over-Reliance on Groundwater:** Regulate groundwater extraction, promote recharge and storage, and ensure reliable piped water supply to reduce dependence on bore-wells and tankers.
- **Strengthening 3Ps (Policy, People, Place) Framework:** Urban water governance can be strengthened by aligning policies across sectors, encouraging active participation of people, and promoting cooperation across places (between cities and their surrounding water sources) to ensure sustainable and equitable water management.



Read our previous coverage on Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

Conclusion

Strengthening urban water governance is critical to ensuring public health, environmental sustainability and inclusive urban development. By aligning institutional reforms, infrastructure modernisation, and community participation, India can transform its urban water systems from fragile service providers into robust enablers of sustainable and equitable urban living.

1.4. SPORTS ADMINISTRATION

Why in the news?

The government constituted the **Task Force on Capacity Building of Sports Administrators** under **Khelo Bharat NITI 2025**, and submitted its report to the Department of Sports.

More on the news

- It was chaired by the Olympic gold medallist **Abhinav Bindra**.
- It aims to reform sports governance and support India's ambitions of becoming **Top 10 sporting nation by 2036** and hosting the **2036 Olympics**.

Key Findings

- Lack of a **professional cadre of sports administrators** and weak institutional continuity.
- **Fragmented, outdated training opportunities** for sports administrators with limited focus on competencies or continuous professional development.
- Gaps in **current sports education** in developing administrative capabilities, leaving graduates with limited ecosystem awareness and little exposure to how national, state, and institutional structures interact.
- **Inadequate athlete pathways into governance**, with most athletes currently ill-equipped with the skills needed to transition from their sporting careers into administrative roles.
- Minimal use of **digital tools and analytics in governance**.

Way Ahead: Recommendations for Transformation

- **Establishment of Statutory Governance Bodies**
 - **National Council for Sports Education & Capacity Building:** As an autonomous statutory body under the Ministry of Sports to regulate, accredit, and certify all sports administration training.
 - **National Training & Development Cell:** As the operational arm for **India-specific curriculum** delivery, managing administrator's registry, overseeing **e-Khel Pathshala digital platform**, monitoring outcomes and partnering with global institutions
 - **E-Khel Pathshala digital platform** by SAI to provide online training courses to Teachers and Community Coaches/ learners at grassroot level.
- **Implementing a National Competency Framework**
 - **The Five-Level Capability Maturity Model:** For administrators from district to state to national and institutional to global level as a pathway for career progression.
- **Professionalizing the Administrative Pipeline**
 - **Unique Administrator ID (UAID):** A national registry linked to a UAID to track Professional Development, ensuring that promotions are based on measurable skill acquisition
 - **Dual Athlete Career Pathway:** Introduce a framework for athletes to combine performance with leadership education during active careers with certification of "Sportsman of Merit"
 - E.g., Zimbabwean swimmer **Kirsty Coventry**, who also became the 1st woman president of the International Olympic Committee
- **Performance Management and Monitoring System:** To evaluate administrators with the same rigor as athletes, linking performance to incentives and career growth
- **International Partnerships:** Forge collaborations with global bodies like the International Olympics Committee, FIFA, for curriculum co-design and exposure for senior leaders
- **Use of technology:** Integration of digital tools and sports science will usher in an era of transparency and efficiency.

Related News

National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026

Recently, Government notified **National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026**, under the **National Sports Governance Act, 2025**.

- National sports bodies include **National Olympic committee**, Regional Sports Federations, etc.

About the Rules

- Each body to have a General body and an executive committee.
 - Composition of General Body:** At least **4 sportspersons of outstanding merit (SOMs)**, not less than 25 years in age, with **50% being women**.
 - Women's representation in Executive Committee:** specific posts to be reserved for women to ensure at least 4 women members.
- National Sports Election Panel** to oversee elections of national sports bodies must consist of **at least 20 members** at all times.
- Disqualification criteria:** persons **convicted by a court** followed by a **sentence of imprisonment**.

National Sports Board (NSB)

Union Government notified **National Sports Board (Search-cum Selection Committee) Rules, 2026** under **National Sports Governance Act, 2025**.

Key Highlights of the Rule

- Search-cum-Selection Committee:** Chaired by Cabinet Secretary and comprising the **Secretary (Sports)**, one person with experience in sports administration, and two recipients of national sports awards.



Read our previous coverage on National Sports Governance Act, 2025

NATIONAL SPORTS BOARD (NSB) INDIA KEY FACTS & PURPOSE



COMPOSITION
Chairperson +
Two Other
Members



PURPOSE
Central authority
for: Granting
board
recognition to
National Sports
Bodies, Ensuring
compliance



TERM
3 Years OR
Till the age of
65 years
(which ever is
earlier)

1.5. NEWS IN SHORTS

1.5.1. 50TH MEETING OF PRAGATI

Launched in **2015**, **PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation)** integrates **accountability, transparency and timely decision-making** into the **administrative process**.

Key Features of PRAGATI

- About:** Multi-purpose and multi-modal platform offering comprehensive, **technology-enabled governance mechanism spanning all tiers of government**.
- Team India Spirit:** **PRAGATI** review meetings are Chaired by **Prime Minister** having direct engagement with **state and central ministries**.

Objectives of PRAGATI



Fast-tracking critical infrastructure projects facing bottlenecks.



Improving outcomes of flagship welfare schemes showing sub-optimal performance



Resolving citizen grievances across sectors.

- **Hosts Key Governance Tools:** Like PM Gati Shakti, PARIVESH and PM Reference Portal.
- **Global Recognition:** An external study by Oxford University's Saïd Business School, termed PRAGATI a **global benchmark** and a **"single source of truth"** for real-time project monitoring.

Key Transformative Role Played by PRAGATI

- **Exemplified Cooperative Federalism:** It offered **Centre and States to work as a team** with ministries and departments **looking beyond silos to solve problems**.
 - Since its inception, around **500 Secretaries of Government of India** and **Chief Secretaries of States** have participated in PRAGATI meetings.
- **High Project Resolution Rate:** Around 94% issues identified across various projects been resolved resulting in **reducing time delays, cost overruns and coordination failures**.
- **Unlocking Long-Pending Projects:** Notable Examples include **Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link** (approved in 1994 was commissioned in 2025); **Navi Mumbai International Airport** and **Bogibeel rail-cum-road bridge** over the Brahmaputra, etc.

1.5.2. CENSUS 2027

House listing operations (first phase of Census) will be conducted between April and September 2026 across all States and Union Territories.

- **Population Enumeration (second phase of Census)** is scheduled for February 2027.
 - For the Union Territory of Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the population enumeration will be conducted in September 2026.

Key Features in the 16th Census (2027):

- **India's First Digital Census:** Enumerators will primarily use mobile apps for data collection.
- **Historic Caste Enumeration:** This Census will include the first nationwide caste enumeration in independent India (last done in 1931) for all communities (beyond just Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).
- **Digital Features:**
 - **Self-Enumeration Portal:** A secure platform where citizens can independently complete questionnaires;
 - **Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS):** Digital portal allowing supervisors and district officers to track enumeration progress.
 - **Houselisting Block (HLB) Creator:** A satellite-based web mapping application that enables Charge Officers to create precise digital enumeration blocks.



Read our previous coverage on Caste Census

CENSUS IN INDIA

CONDUCTED BY	LEGAL FRAMEWORK	UPCOMING CENSUS	HISTORICAL MILESTONE
▶ Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs ▶ Decennially (Every 10 Years)	▶ Census Act, 1948 ▶ Census Rules, 1990	▶ Census 2027 ▶ 16th Census in the country & 8th After Independence	▶ 1st Synchronous Census: 1881 ▶ By W.C. Plowden

- **Census as a Service (CaaS):** Provides ministries with a clean, machine-readable and queryable database to facilitate evidence-based policy planning.

1.5.3. "ROMEO-JULIET" CLAUSE IN POCSO ACT

Supreme Court highlighted the misuse of the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act** in consensual adolescent relationships, and has urged the Centre to consider a "**Romeo-Juliet clause**" to balance child protection with personal liberty.

Key Highlights of Judgement

- **Misuse of Law:** Court highlighted the instances where the **age of the victim is misrepresented** to make the incident fall under the stringent provisions of POCSO and where **law has been used by families in opposition to relationships** between young people.
- **Introducing Romeo-Juliet Clause:** To exempt **genuine consensual adolescent relationships**, where age difference between parties between parties is minimal, from the harsh application of POCSO.
 - Ignoring consensual nature of relationship can lead to **wrongful imprisonment**.

POCSO Act, 2012 – Child Protection Framework



Purpose

Protects children (<18 years) from sexual assault, harassment, and pornography.



Gender-Neutral

Applies to all children irrespective of gender of child or offender



Categorisation of Offences

Classifies offences into penetrative & non-penetrative assault, aggravated forms; stringent punishments up to life imprisonment



Special Courts

Speedy in-camera trials (within 1 year), child-friendly procedures, compensation & rehabilitation.

1.5.4. LAND STACK

Land Stack & Glossary of Revenue Terms (GoRT) launched under Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme (DILRMP).

About Land Stack

- It is an integrated GIS-based digital platform for land and property records, inspired by global best practices from countries such as Singapore, the UK, and Finland.

Key features and Benefits



Single-Window Access

Access land data from all departments through one interface



Informed Decision-Making

Empowers citizens with the information needed to make sound choices.



Risk Reduction

Minimizes risks associated with unauthorized or non-compliant properties.



Improved Coordination

Enhances collaboration and communication between different government



Read our previous coverage on Land Registration System in India

1.5.5. PANKHUDI PORTAL

The Ministry of Women and Child Development launched PANKHUDI Portal.

About PANKHUDI Portal

- It is an **integrated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and partnership facilitation** single-window digital platform.
 - It **brings together** individuals, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), corporate entities, and government agencies.

- The portal **streamlines and unifies voluntary and institutional contributions** across key thematic areas including **nutrition, health, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), child welfare, etc.**
- Aim:** Strengthening coordination, transparency, and structured stakeholder participation in initiatives for women and child development.

1.5.6. ECINET

Election Commission of India (ECI) launched **ECINET Digital Platform** at **International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026**.

- Its beta version was successfully **piloted during 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections**.

ECINET Platform: India's Digital Electoral Ecosystem

KEY FEATURES & SERVICES



WHAT IS IT?

Integrated digital ecosystem of ECI, enabling end-end management of electoral processes through a single unified platform.



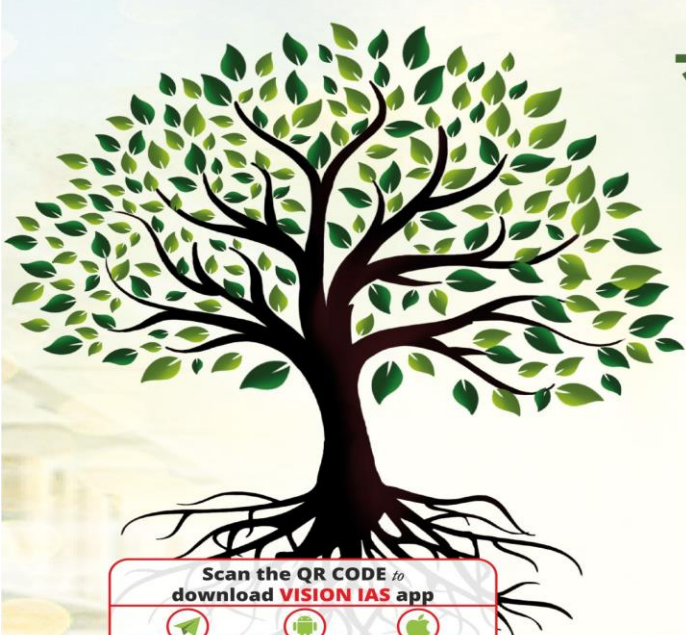
GLOBAL SCALE

World's largest service platform



KEY SERVICES OFFERED

- ➔ Voter registration
- ➔ Electoral roll search
- ➔ Track Your Application
- ➔ Know Your Candidate
- ➔ Connect with Election e-EPIC download
- ➔ Grievance redressal



फाउंडेशन कोर्स सामान्य अध्ययन

प्रारंभिक एवं मुख्य परीक्षा 2027

इनोवेटिव क्लासरूम प्रोग्राम

- प्रारंभिक परीक्षा, मुख्य परीक्षा और निबंध के लिए महत्वपूर्ण सभी टॉपिक का विस्तृत कवरेज
- मौलिक अवधारणाओं की समझ के विकास एवं विश्लेषणात्मक क्षमता निर्माण पर विशेष ध्यान
- एनीमेशन, पॉवर प्वाइंट, वीडियो जैसी तकनीकी सुविधाओं का प्रयोग
- अंतर - विषयक समझ विकसित करने का प्रयास
- योजनाबद्ध तैयारी हेतु करेंट ओरिएंटेड अप्रोच
- नियमित क्लास टेस्ट एवं व्यक्तिगत मूल्यांकन
- प्री फाउंडेशन कक्षाएं
- सीसेट कक्षाएं
- PT 365 कक्षाएं
- MAINS 365 कक्षाएं
- PT टेस्ट सीरीज
- मुख्य परीक्षा टेस्ट सीरीज
- निबंध टेस्ट सीरीज
- सीसेट टेस्ट सीरीज
- निबंध लेखन - शैली की कक्षाएं
- करेंट अफेयर्स मैगजीन

नोट: ऑनलाइन छात्र हमारे पाठ्यक्रम की लाइव वीडियो कक्षाएं अपने घर पर ऑनलाइन प्लेटफॉर्म पर देख सकते हैं। छात्र लाइव चैट विकल्प के माध्यम से कक्षा के दौरान अपने संदेह और विषय संबंधी प्रश्न पूछ सकते हैं। वे अपने संदेह और प्रश्न नोट भी कर सकते हैं और दिल्ली केंद्र में हमारे कक्षा सलाहकार को बता सकते हैं और हम फोन/मेल के माध्यम से प्रश्नों का उत्तर देंगे।

DELHI : 16 मार्च, 11 AM | 17 फरवरी, 11 AM

JAIPUR : 16 मार्च

JODHPUR : 2 दिसंबर

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2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. RESPONSIBLE NATIONS INDEX (RNI)

Why in News?

Recently, the **RNI** was launched in New Delhi by the **World Intellectual Foundation (WIF)**.

About Responsible Nations Index (RNI)

- **Core Philosophy:** It aims to shift the global discourse from **Power to Responsibility**, arguing that true national strength lies in how responsibly a nation acts towards its **people**, the **planet**, and the **international community**.
- **Developing Body:** World Intellectual Foundation (WIF), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and IIM Mumbai.
- **Scope:** It evaluates **154 countries**.
- **Framework:** RNI aggregates **58 specific indicators** into **13 sub-themes** and **7 themes** to form the **3 main dimensions**. (see infographic)

Key Findings of the Report

- **Top Performers:**
 - **Singapore** ranked **1st**, followed by **Switzerland (2nd)** and **Denmark (3rd)**.
 - **European nations** dominated the top 10, reflecting strong institutional frameworks for social welfare and environmental protection.
- **India's Performance: Rank: 16th globally.**
 - India emerged as the **highest-ranked country among major Asian nations** (excluding Singapore).
 - **Strengths:** The high rank reflects India's progress in **healthcare accessibility**, **social equity programs**, **environmental initiatives** (like the International Solar Alliance), and **people-centric governance models**.
- **Performance of Major Powers:**
 - The index revealed a **disconnect between economic/military power and responsibility**.
 - > **USA:** Ranked **66th**, **China:** Ranked **68th**.
 - > This underscores that **economic size does not automatically translate into ethical leadership** or global responsibility.

Significance of the Index

- **Alternative to Western-centric Indices:** RNI challenges traditional indices and offers a **perspective** on what constitutes **development**.
- **Promotion of Ethical Governance:** By quantifying **responsibility**, the index encourages nations to adopt policies that are **ethically sound and socially inclusive**.
 - Aligning with the principles of **Dharma** and **Ram Rajya**.

KEY DIMENSIONS & PARAMETERS OF RESPONSIBLE NATIONS INDEX (RNI)



The Limitations of Existing Frameworks

- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Measures economic output but **ignores** ecological destruction, social inequality, and the **cost** of growth.
- **Hard Power Indices (Global Firepower, etc.):** Rank nations based on military arsenal, incentivizing arms races rather than peace-building.
- **Western-Normative Indices (V-Dem, Freedom House, etc.):** These have been **criticized by the Global South** for bias, opaque methodologies, and a failure to appreciate the cultural and developmental contexts of non-Western democracies.
 - They **tend to privilege** a specific form of **liberal individualism over collective welfare and responsibility**.

- **Alignment with Indian Values:** The index reinforces India's civilizational ethos of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (The World is One Family), prioritizing **shared global destiny over narrow national interests**.
- **Policy Tool:** It serves as a **diagnostic** tool for governments to identify gaps in their governance and sustainability frameworks.

Conclusion

The RNI is a **crucial case study in India's rise** as a **Norm Entrepreneur**; a nation that is actively reshaping the intellectual and ethical architecture of the world order. It **decouples** the notion of a **Great Power** from a **Good Power** and declares that in the 21st century, **power without responsibility is a liability, not an asset**.

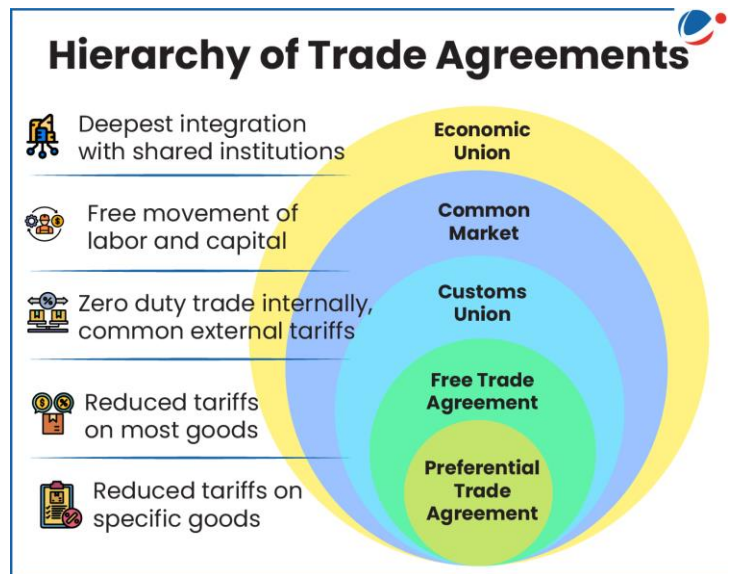
2.2. FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS (FTAS)

Why in the News?

After signing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with New Zealand India now has FTA with all Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) countries, except China.

More on the News

- **RCEP** is a mega free trade agreement (FTA) involving the 11 ASEAN member states and their FTA partners: Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand.
- **FTA** is an agreement between the country(s) or regional blocks to reduce or eliminate trade barriers, though mutual negotiations with a view to enhancing trade.
 - It can however be comprehensive to include goods, services, investment, intellectual property, competition, government procurement and other areas.
 - **Types of trade agreements:** They can be categorized as per the level of economic integration (refer infographic).



FTAs signed by India in Recent Years

India has aggressively pursued bilateral agreements to integrate with the global economy while bypassing Chinese dominance. Key agreements and negotiations include:

- **India-UAE CEPA:** A comprehensive partnership agreement implemented in 2022 that covers goods, services, and digital trade.
- **India-Australia ECTA:** This agreement came into effect in December 2022, securing access to critical raw materials.
- **India-EFTA TEPA:** An agreement signed with the European Free Trade Association in March 2024.
- **India-Oman CEPA:** Signed in December 2025, this deal eliminates duties on over 99% of Indian exports to Oman.
- **India-New Zealand FTA:** Negotiations concluded in December 2025, completing India's strategy to have deals with all RCEP members except China.
- **India-UK CETA:** Signed in July 2025, this agreement grants duty-free access to 99% of Indian exports. It aims to double bilateral trade to \$112 billion by 2030.
- **India-EU FTA:** Termed the "mother of all deals," this was signed in January 2026. It covers nearly 99% of India's export value to the bloc and opens access for Indian traditional medicine (AYUSH) practitioners.

Benefits of These FTAs

- **Market Access:** The India-EU deal is expected to remove duties on over 99% of India's export value to the region. Similarly, the Oman pact offers duty-free access to 98.08% of tariff lines.
- **Boost to Labor-Intensive Sectors:** Sectors such as textiles, leather, gems, jewelry, and footwear stand to gain significantly from duty elimination.

- **Services and Mobility:** New agreements focus heavily on services. The Oman deal allows for the long-term stay of Indian professionals and 100% FDI in key service sectors. The EU deal aids Indian traditional medicine (AYUSH) practitioners.
- **Strategic Sourcing:** Agreements with Australia and GCC nations secure energy sources and critical minerals necessary for India's growth.
- **Investment Inflows:** These partnerships aim to attract foreign investment. For example, the India-UK pact targets a bilateral trade of \$100 billion by 2030.
- **Integration of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs):** Recent FTAs explicitly focus on MSMEs integration into the global economy as MSMEs contribute 50% of the country's exports.
- **Mobility:** Recent deals aggressively push for the **movement of professionals**.
 - UK deal includes **social security exemptions**, and the New Zealand pact includes visa **quotas for Indian workers**.
- **Geo-economics (Supply Chain Diversification):** The "**China Plus One**" strategy drives India to forge ties with friendly nations to **reduce economic dependence on a single supply chain**.
- **WTO's Decline:** FTAs help overcome the decline of World Trade Organization (WTO) as **trade negotiation platform for developing countries** due to pressure from western nations, esp. USA.
 - FTAs also allow countries to create rules for sectors the WTO has not successfully addressed, such as **environmental protection and labor standards**.

Legality of FTA under International Trade

- **WTO Article XXIV:** While the WTO mandates non-discrimination (MFN treatment), **Article XXIV of GATT** allows members to form FTAs as an exception, provided they cover "substantially all trade" and do not raise barriers for non-members.
 - **Enabling Clause:** It **allows developing nations to reduce or eliminate tariffs on a limited range of products** without opening their entire economy.
- **Dispute Settlement:** Unlike the World Trade Organization (WTO), which has a single, unified Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) for all members, FTAs are negotiated individually, meaning the **rules for resolving conflicts are "custom-built" for each specific treaty**.
 - For example, the **Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) 2015 Framework** of India requires investors to **first seek relief in domestic courts**.
 - > If the local remedies fail, the investor must follow a structured path to Investor-State Dispute Settlement **under various frameworks** such as **International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) Additional Facility Rules**, or the **UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules**, etc.

Key concerns with India's FTAs

- **Rising Trade Deficits:** Historically, India has seen widening trade deficits with FTA partners like ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea after signing agreements.
- **Low Utilization Rates:** The utilization of FTAs by Indian exporters is low, ranging between 5% and 25%, due to complex compliance rules and lack of awareness.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Indian goods often face sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers in markets like Japan and the EU, limiting the benefit of tariff cuts.
- **Carbon Taxes:** The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) poses a risk to Indian steel and manufacturing exports, though India has sought safeguards.
- **Sensitive Sectors:** Negotiations frequently stall over market access for automobiles, wines, and the protection of the dairy/agriculture sectors.
 - India excluded dairy from the EU and New Zealand deals to protect domestic farmers' livelihoods.
- **Low Awareness:** MSMEs often lack adequate information about FTA benefits.

Key recommendations by the High-Level Advisory Group chaired by Surjit Bhalla

- **Strategic selection of partners and value chains:** Combine trade intensification with traditional partners while exploring regions with low current linkages, such as Eurasia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

- India should launch a **five-year program for the negotiation of FTAs** identified based on complementarity and long-term sustainability.
- **Integrated and deeper scope:** Negotiations should adopt an integrated approach covering trade in goods, services, and investment. For services, India should move beyond just Mode 4 (movement of persons) to include Mode 3 (commercial presence), as Indian businesses are increasingly interested in investing abroad.
 - India should **identify and resolve non-tariff barriers** that prevent exports to key partners and **implement extensive technical regulations** based on international standards to facilitate access to partner markets.
- **Institutional and process reforms:** An institutional mechanism should be established to seek inputs from stakeholders prior to finalizing an FTA to minimize adjustment costs for the industry.
 - The "**whole of government**" approach is required, ensuring that different ministries and state governments are involved in decision-making.
 - Government should create a database detailing the utilization of various FTAs and CEPAs.
- **Advocacy and MSME support:** A sustained medium-term advocacy program should be launched to spread awareness among the industry about potential opportunities and utilization of FTAs, with a specific focus on the MSME sector.
- **Managing Trade deficit and Rules of Origin:** Adequate provisions for trade remedies (like anti-dumping) should be available within FTAs and used based on scientific economic proof.

Conclusion

India's expanding FTA network marks a strategic shift toward proactive trade diplomacy. By aligning domestic reforms with external commitments, strengthening negotiation expertise, and empowering MSMEs and services sectors, India can transform FTAs from mere market-access instruments into engines of sustainable growth, supply-chain resilience, and long-term global competitiveness.

2.3. INDIA-EU (EUROPEAN UNION) FTA

Why in the News?

India-EU announced the conclusion of negotiations for **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, considered **Mother of all deals**, marking an important milestone in India's strategic economic partnerships.

More on the news

- FTA was announced at **16th India-EU Summit**, held in India, making **EU, India's 22nd FTA partner**.
- Negotiations began in **2007**, with the talks **suspended in 2013** and **relaunched in 2022**.
- Negotiated texts would undergo **legal review and translation** before being submitted for approval by **European Council** and consent by **European Parliament**.
- **Ratification by India** will follow before the **agreement enters into force**.
- During the 16th Summit, **EU-India Security and Defence Partnership (SDP)** was also signed providing an opportunity for India's burgeoning defence industrial ecosystem.
 - It is EU's **third SDP in Asia** after Japan and South Korea.

EU, Key Features and Relations with India

- **About:** Unique **economic and political union** operating as **single market** allowing goods, services, capital and persons to circulate freely, without technical, legal and bureaucratic barriers.
- **Founded:** In **1951 after Second World War** by six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and Netherlands).
- **Current Member States:** **27** countries.
 - United Kingdom officially left the European Union on January 31, 2020
- **Five Main Institutions of EU:** European Parliament, European Council, European Commission, Court of Justice and Court of Auditors.

- **Key Features:**
 - **Elections:** Held **every five years** to elect new Members of European Parliament.
 - **Open borders:** Through **Schengen area** that allows people to move around without border checks since 1985.
 - All EU Member States, **except Cyprus and Ireland**, are members of Schengen area.
 - **Single currency:** Launched in 1999, **euro is the official currency of 21 EU countries** (known as euro area).
- **India and EU: 4th and 2nd largest economies** respectively, comprising **25% of Global GDP**, **one third of global trade**, and home to **almost 2 billion people**.
 - In **2024–25**, India's bilateral trade in goods with EU stood at **INR 11.5 Lakh Crore** with **exports worth INR 6.4 Lakh Crore** and **imports worth INR 5.1 Lakh Crore**.
 - India-EU trade in **services reached INR 7.2 Lakh Crore** in 2024.



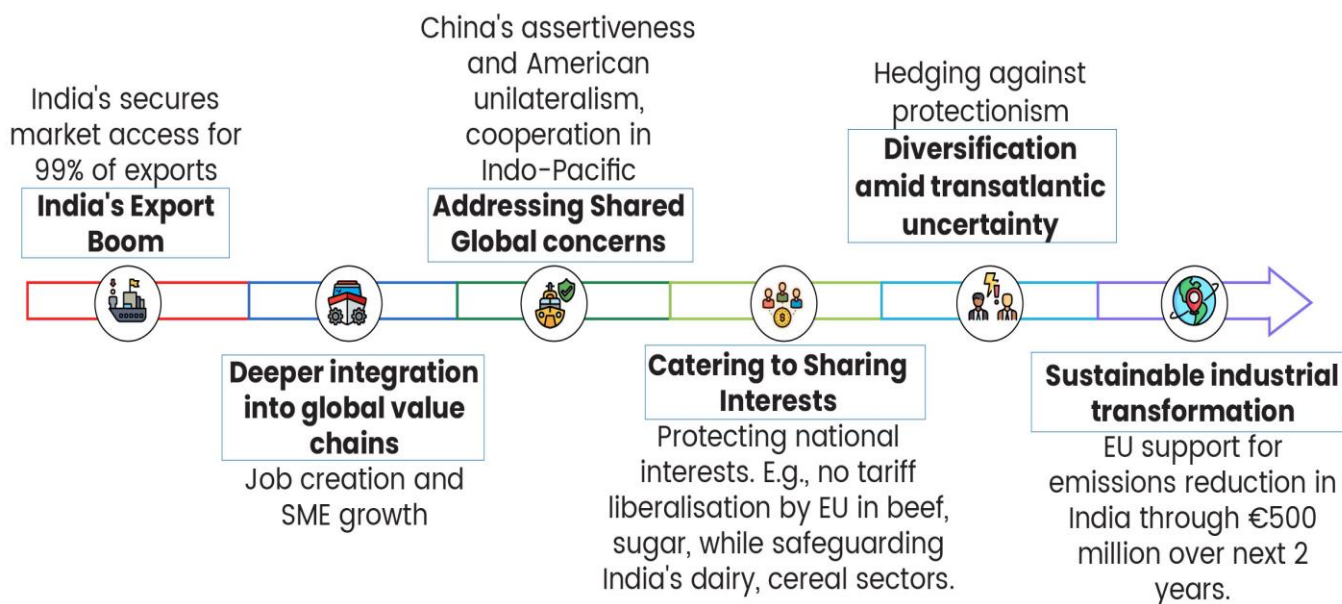
Key Features of India-EU FTA

- **Strategic Access to European Markets:** India gained **preferential access to European markets** across 97% of tariff lines, covering 99.5% of trade value.
 - 70.4% tariff lines covering 90.7% of India's exports will have **immediate duty elimination** for **important labour-intensive sectors** like textiles, leather and footwear, etc.
- **Key labour-intensive sectors:** Like textiles, apparel, marine, leather, footwear, chemicals, etc., currently subjected to 4%-26% import duty in EU would **face zero duty enhancing competitiveness in EU market**.
- **Access to Indian Markets:** India is offering **92.1% of its tariff lines** covering 97.5% of EU exports, with 49.6% of tariff lines having immediate duty elimination.
- **Powering India's Talent across Europe:** Through **Social Security Agreements** in 5 years with all **EU Member States** and a framework for entry of Indian students to study and avail post study work visa.
- **Services Sector:** Broader and deeper commitments from EU across **144 services subsectors**, including IT/ITeS, professional services, etc.
- **Others:**
 - **Preferential Market Access** for agricultural products like tea, coffee, etc.;
 - **Product Specific Rules (PSR)** aligned with existing Supply Chains;
 - Expanding Horizons for **India's traditional medicine**;
 - Reinforcing **intellectual property protections** under TRIPS;
 - Cooperation on **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS)** and **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)** matters.
- **Other Sector Specific Gains:** **Preferential market access** for engineering goods; Boost to **Marine, Leather and Footwear** exports; Gaining **zero duty access in textiles and clothing**, etc.





Significance of India-EU FTA



Key Issues with EU-India FTA

- **Ambiguity on Outcomes:** For this FTA to be implemented, it must be **first agreed by European Council** by a qualified majority, and also by the **European Parliament**.
 - The process is **lengthy and arduous** and contents and intentions of agreement could take 5-10 years to be implemented fully before the realisation of its impacts.
- **Complex Rules of Origin (ROO):** The agreement relies on product-specific rules of origin, which are designed to ensure that significant processing takes place within India or the EU to prevent trade abuse by third countries.
- **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** The EU's carbon tax on imports (such as steel, aluminium, and cement) could burden Indian exporters with an estimated 2–4 billion in annual compliance costs and complex data reporting requirements.
- **Services Barriers:** India faces hurdles in exporting services due to restrictions on remote service delivery and high minimum salary thresholds for EU visas.
 - To ease the movement of its professionals, India is seeking **Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)** for professional qualifications in fields such as medicine, engineering, and accountancy.
- **Data Security Barriers:** EU has not granted India "data secure" status under its General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which results in higher compliance costs for Indian tech and digital firms compared to their counterparts in other countries.

Conclusion

While India-EU FTA, complemented by **defence and security cooperation framework**, may not rewrite global trade and growth overnight, but it **meaningfully reshapes movement of trade, investment, and supply chains** in a new era of globalization.

Related News

EU Council and EU Commission

The Presidents of the **European Union (EU) Council** and the **EU Commission** were Chief Guests at India's **77th Republic Day**.

EU Commission

- **Established:** 1958
- **Role:** Promotes the general interest of EU by proposing and enforcing legislation and implementing policies and the EU budget.
- **Members:** Commissioners, 1 from each EU country
- **Location:** Brussels (Belgium)

Euratom

India and the European Union have agreed to strengthen cooperation in the **peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the India-Euratom Agreement**.

About Euratom

- EURATOM (European Atomic Energy Community) was established by the **Treaty of Rome, 1957**.
- **Objective:** Promote **peaceful use of nuclear energy**, research cooperation and dissemination of technical knowledge.
- **Prevents diversion of civil nuclear** material for military use.
- India and the EU signed an R&D agreement on peaceful uses of nuclear energy with EURATOM in July 2020, and India has been an associate member of CERN since 2017.

EU COUNCIL

Decision-Making Body of the EU

ESTABLISHED

In 1958 (as Council of the European Economic Community)

ROLE

Voice of EU member governments

Adopting EU Laws

Coordinates EU Policies

MEMBERS

Government ministers from each EU country, according to the policy area to be discussed.

PRESIDENCY

Each EU country holds the presidency on a 6-month

Currently held by Cyprus (Jan 2026)

LOCATION

Brussels (Belgium)



2.4. USA STRIKES ON VENEZUELA

Why in the news?

The United States of America conducted strikes codenamed '**Operation Absolute Resolve**', in and around Venezuelan Capital Caracas leading to capture of the Venezuelan President.

Key Developments post the strikes

- **United Nations:** UN Secretary-General expressed deep alarm, stating that the strikes failed to respect the rules governing the use of force and stressed the need for "full respect" of the UN Charter.
 - Strikes have highlighted issues such as violations of international law, violation of national sovereignty, unilateral armed aggression, and US imperialism.
- **UN human rights office:** Rejected the U.S. justification that the raid was necessary to combat human rights abuses, insisting that accountability cannot be achieved through military interventions.
- **Response from various nations:**
 - In Criticism of attack: Nations including **Russia and China** as well as **Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Panama, and Cuba** from Latin America expressed deep concern and criticized the action.
 - In support of attack: **Argentina, Paraguay and Israel** praised the U.S. operation as a decisive step against narcotics trafficking and terrorism.
 - European nations: They positioned themselves delicately to avoid strong condemnation while upholding international norms.
 - **India:** It expressed deep concern and reaffirmed commitment to sovereignty and non-intervention, and called for peaceful, diplomatic dialogue.

Probable reasons for the Strikes on Venezuela

- **Official U.S. Justifications:** Combating drug trafficking, narco-terrorism, mass immigration crisis and to combat transnational organized crime that threatened U.S. and regional security which is supported by Venezuelan regime as per USA.

- **Political Illegitimacy:** The U.S. argued that Maduro was not the legitimate head of state following the disputed 2024 elections.
- **Control of Oil Reserves:** Venezuela has vast crude oil reserves- 17% of global crude (largest in the world), mostly in the Orinoco Belt.
- **Hemispheric Hegemony:** The operation is widely viewed as the resurrection of the Monroe Doctrine now dubbed the "Donroe Doctrine" based on National Security Strategy 2025 of USA aimed at forcibly re-establishing absolute U.S. hegemony in the Americas.
- **Severing Chinese and Russian Influence:** The strikes are seen as a calculated move to purge extra-regional rivals, namely China, Russia, and Iran, from America's "near abroad".
 - U.S. aims to sever Latin America's growing ties with China, redirect Venezuelan crude exports toward the U.S. market, and choke off a vital energy supply line to China.



- **Spread of Socialism: United Socialist Party of Venezuela** is in power largely in last two decades in Venezuela which is not aligned with US capitalist policies.

About Monroe doctrine

- **Proclaimed:** In 1823 by U.S. President James Monroe (United States' policy on the new political order).
- **Objective:** To establish U.S. dominance and security in its surrounding region.
- **3 main concepts of the doctrine**
 - **Non-colonization:** European powers should not establish new colonies in the Americas.
 - **Non-intervention:** Europe must not interfere in the affairs of independent American states.
 - **U.S. Non-interference:** The U.S. would not meddle in European wars or colonies.

About "Donroe Doctrine," named after President Donald Trump

- It is not official policy, but general features are,
 - **Transactional Resource Extraction:** Prioritizes seizing and controlling vital natural resources (such as Venezuela's massive crude oil reserves and lithium) for U.S. economic profit.
 - **"Regime Management" over Regime Change:** Instead of dismantling a target nation's government and army.
 - **Expansionist Coercion:** Normalizes bullying tactics, using the threat of military intervention or weaponized tariffs.

The strike attack on Venezuela along with recent developments like U.S.A.'s **intention to occupy Greenland**; renewed blockade threatening **fuel shortages in Cuba**; trade wars etc. has raised concerns regarding U.S.A.'s imperialistic tendencies and threat to "rules-based international order".

Potential consequences of US Imperialism

- **Violations of International Law and Norms:** The "apprehension and forced exile" of Venezuelan President is condemned as a "flagrant violation of international law" and a direct contravention of **Article 2 of the UN Charter**.
 - **Article 2** of UN charter legally mandated states to refrain from use of force with some exception such as self-defence.
- **Destabilization:** E.g., the **2003 invasion of Iraq** resulted in the destabilization of West Asia and the rise of groups like ISIS.



Read our previous coverage on National Security Strategy 2025 of USA

- **Weakened multilateralism:** The U.S. has circumvented the UN Security Council, weakening multilateralism under institutions like the United Nations.
- **Warning to International community:** Failure of the post-Cold War hope for a "stable liberal order" is underscored by the actions of both the US and Russia (e.g., the ongoing conflict in Ukraine).
- **Economic Fragmentation:** Trade wars, economic sanctions, and export controls disrupt global supply chains through "Friend-shoring" and "de-risking" weaken globalization.
- **Erosion of Sovereignty:** Military interventions and sanctions may undermine national sovereignty.
 - E.g., US President's threat to Greenland of military action to annex it fracturing the Transatlantic Alliance and asking Canada to become 51st state of USA.

Way forward

- **United Nations reforms:** Reforming the United Nations Security Council to reflect contemporary realities by including India, Japan, Germany, Brazil (G4) and greater African representation to reduce dominance of permanent UNSC members (P-5).
- **Gujral Doctrine as a Model for Regional Stability:** Though originally for India and its neighbors, it can be helpful for global peace through its principles like- Non-interference in internal affairs, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, Peaceful resolution of disputes etc.
- **New World Order:** On the principles of Multipolar & Inclusive Framework transitioning from unipolar dominance to multi-polarity involving the U.S., China, EU, India, and emerging and middle powers.
- **Strategic Autonomy & Multi-Alignment:** India should pursue diversified partnerships rather than bloc politics avoiding overdependence on any one power for defence, technology, or energy as recently India concluded free trade agreements with UK, EU, and UAE etc.
- **Promoting resilient supply chains:** Need of "Re-Globalization" to address issues ranging from security, poverty to environment and global cooperation. (World Trade Report, 2023).

Conclusion

While U.S. imperial tendencies, including actions in Venezuela, raise concerns, they can catalyze stronger multilateral resistance, institutional reforms enforcing international law, empowering regional organizations, and accelerating movement toward a more balanced, multipolar, and rules-based world order.

2.4.1. US CLAIM ON THE GREENLAND

Why in the News?

The U.S. withdrew its tariff threat linked to Greenland, stating that the U.S. and NATO have developed a framework for a future arrangement.

Significance of Greenland

- **Strategic and Military Location**
 - **Geopolitical Crossroads:** Located between North America, Europe, and the Arctic and forms part of the "GIUK Gap" (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom), a heavily contested maritime corridor crucial for monitoring submarine activities in the northern Atlantic.
 - **Missile Defense and Early Warning:** Greenland is essential to North American aerospace defense and hosts the Pituffik Space Base, which is integrated into the U.S. early-warning radar network,
 - US consider Greenland vital for the proposed "**Golden Dome**" project, a space-based missile defense system designed to protect the U.S. from long-range attacks.



- **Countering Russia and China:** As climate change melts Arctic ice and opens new shipping lanes, the region is seeing increased strategic competition for military, economic footprint.
- **Natural Resources**
 - **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** Greenland possesses some of the world's largest untapped reserves of REEs, significant deposits include the **Kvanefjeld** (also contains uranium) and **Kringlerne sites** both in South Greenland.
 - US by controlling these reserves want to **Break Chinese Monopolies** in global rare-earth market,
 - **Fossil Fuels:** Greenland is believed to hold considerable reserves of oil and natural gas, which are becoming easier to access as the ice sheet recedes.
- **Climate and Environmental Significance**
 - **The "Albedo Effect":** Greenland acts as a planetary cooling mechanism with its massive white ice reflecting solar radiation back into space.
 - **Systemic Economic Risk:** It holds enough frozen water to raise global sea levels by more than seven meters if entirely melted leading to a massive economic risk, affecting coastal infrastructure and global supply chains.
 - **Climate Archive:** The ice sheet is an indispensable historical record for scientists, who use "ice cores" to understand the Earth's climate history over hundreds of thousands of years.
 - **Ideological Value for the U.S.:** Greenland holds immense symbolic value for the Trump administration's foreign policy a "Donroe Doctrine" which asserts absolute U.S. preeminence and sphere of influence in Western Hemisphere.

Stance of various nations on US claims on Greenland

- **Absolute Rejection of Annexation:** Denmark has indicated it would invoke **Article 5 of NATO** which talks about collective security, where an attack on one member is an attack on all.
 - **Danish Prime Minister** has stated that Greenland is "not for sale" and warned that if the U.S. chose to attack Greenland militarily, it would mean the end of NATO and post-WWII security.
- **Unified Military Solidarity:** The leaders of **France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the UK, and Denmark** issued a joint statement affirming that territorial integrity and borders are non-negotiable, many participate in "**Operation Arctic Endurance**" as a clear signal of military solidarity.

Some initiatives undertaken to resolve the issue

- **NATO Mediation: Talks on "Framework of a Future Deal"** To de-escalate the US rhetoric.
- **Military Basing Arrangements:** U.S. officials suggested renegotiating the 1951 U.S.-Denmark defense agreement to allow the U.S. to build more military bases in Greenland.
 - One proposed model is granting the U.S. control over small specific areas similar to the British sovereign bases in Cyprus (Akrotiri and Dhekelia).
- **Arctic Sentry Mission:** NATO allies proposed contributing to a new "Arctic Sentry" mission to increase the surveillance of ships and submarine activity in the High North to reassure the U.S. regarding Russian and Chinese threats.

Conclusion

The US-Greenland dispute reveals intensifying Arctic geopolitical tensions over strategic locations, critical minerals, and climate vulnerabilities, testing NATO cohesion. This episode underscores how resource competition challenges traditional alliances, requiring de-escalation through multilateral frameworks.

2.4.2. US WITHDRAWAL FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Why in the news?

US President signed a presidential memorandum to cease participation in and funding for **35 non-UN organizations and 31 UN entities**.

Reasons for the US withdrawal from international organizations

- **Eliminating Disproportionate Financial Burdens:** The administration argues that the U.S. spends billions on poorly run, mismanaged bureaucracies with little return.
 - **U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)** (dismantled now) was allocated \$44.2 billion in the 2024 budget which accounted for nearly 42% of all humanitarian aid tracked by the UN in 2024.
- **Protection of National Sovereignty:** The administration argues that many of these international bodies threaten or undermine U.S. independence and seek to impose external pressures on American domestic policies.
- **"America First" Policy:** A shift away from multilateralism toward prioritizing national interests over international consensus.
 - The U.S. withdrawal is expected to leave a **22% budget shortfall** for the UNFCCC and IPCC which may increase welfare spending in USA.
- **Economic alignment:** Entities promoting decarbonization or energy transitions through "Climate Orthodoxy" is deemed disadvantageous to US fossil fuel interests and economic growth.
- **Ideological divergence:** The administration expresses reservations about organizations that prioritise "globalist agendas", suggesting that these approaches may not always align with its policy preferences.
 - **For example**, the withdrawal from UNESCO was justified by claims that the agency supports "woke, divisive cultural and social causes" alongside a perceived anti-Israel bias.

Important Organizations from which the USA is withdrawing

- **Climate, Environment, and Energy:** UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (USA officially left the **Paris Climate Agreement** for the second time in January 2026); Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); International Solar Alliance (ISA); International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), International Union for Conservation of Nature etc.
- **Health and Gender Equality:** World Health Organization (WHO) (including *Gavi*, the *Vaccine Alliance*); UN Population Fund (UNFPA); UN Women etc.
- **Peace, Security, and Development:** United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC); Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Fund; Global Counterterrorism Forum; UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES in the Near EAST (UNRWA); UNESCO (third US exit from UNESCO- 1984, 2017 previously) etc.

Potential Impact of US withdrawal on multilateral organizations

- **Humanitarian and Global Health Crises:** A study in **The Lancet** estimates that cuts to international aid by the U.S. and other Western nations could lead to more than **22 million deaths** from preventable causes **by 2030**.
- **China's Ascendancy:** The retreat leaves the door wide open for China to dominate the UN system and global markets.
 - E.g., without U.S. economic prowess in international climate forums, **China's Belt and Road Initiative is positioned to occupy center stage in global renewable energy markets.**
- **Weakened Multilateral Budgets:** The UN regular budget is already falling by 7% in 2026 and around 20% of WHO's total revenue is diminishing international humanitarian and development aid.
- **Uneven Standards:** Instead of universal rules, global cooperation is fracturing into smaller, ad-hoc instruments, trade measures, and bilateral deals impacting globalization forces and trust in multilateral forums.
- **Climate change:** Hinder global efforts to curb greenhouse gases because it gives other nations the excuse to delay their own actions and commitments.
- **Fragmenting Multilateralism:** US withdrawal will further weaken international governance, enhance power rivalries, leading to shift towards protectionism and smaller ad-hoc regional blocs.
- **Global Peace:** Absence of US contribution for Peacebuilding Commission will hamper peace efforts in conflict-ridden areas (e.g. in Africa or the Caribbean).
- **Push for UN Reform:** It highlights the flaws of the current consensus-based system, calling for reforms to overcome deadlocks and creating diversified funding models through South-South cooperation.

Way forward

- **Reforming the Multilateral System:** Reforming key UN bodies such as UNSC as suggested by G4 nations for fair representation; improve coordination of existing forums to address interconnected challenges like climate change and health etc.
- **Financial Self-Reliance:** Diversify funding structure and strengthen international financial institutions to ensure global issues are adequately funded.
- **Accelerating South-South Cooperation and Autonomy:** E.g., International Solar Alliance is advancing a \$1 trillion solar energy goal outside the traditional structures of the UN.
- **Building National Resilience:** Nations heavily reliant on foreign aid must rapidly develop "national resilience mechanisms" to ensure essential services, such as healthcare and climate adaptation.
- **Diversifying Alliances:** Instead of nationalist and transactional diplomacy world must diversify its alliances building alternative leadership structures at regional level through forums like G20, BRICS+ and SCO etc.

Conclusion

Although the US retreat triggers uncertainty, this systemic crisis presents a profound opportunity for multilateral reform. By championing regional autonomy, building national resilience, and diversifying alliances, the international community can forge highly effective global governance.

2.4.3. 'BOARD OF PEACE' FOR GAZA

India attended the Board of Peace inaugural meeting held in Washington D.C. as an **observer**.

About Board of Peace

- Board of Peace is a core element of the **US 20-point Gaza Peace Plan (Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict)**, which was endorsed by the **UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025)**.
 - The formation of the **National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG)** and the **International Stabilization Force (ISF)** was also initiated.

The **Board of Peace** is being seen as a **new approach to resolving Global Conflict**, beyond its role in Gaza and the Middle East. It can be seen as a shift toward **minilateral, leader-centric institutions** over **universal multilateralism**.
Can the Board of Peace be an alternative to the United Nations (UN)?

BOARD OF PEACE Gaza Transitional Governance Body	
 NATURE → International Body → Transitional Governing Authority → Conflict Peace → Administration	 MANDATE → Supervise NCAG → Oversee ISF Operations → Mobilise Global Resources → Ensure Accountability → Peace → Development Transition
 MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE → Chair: US President, → Executive Board; Global Leaders (Eg. Ajay Banga) → Global Invitees: India Argentina Canada Egypt Turkey etc.	 MEMBERSHIP TERMS → Invitation-based members → 3-Year Term (No Contribution) → Permanent Membership (\$1 Billion Contribution)

Arguments in Favour	Arguments Against
• Efficiency and Outcomes: Due to its structure, the Board can be more result-oriented compared to the UN consensus model which practically delays or hinders action-oriented outcomes. • Diverse Stakeholder approach: Inclusion of private sector experts along with world leaders makes it multi-faceted in ensuring sustainable outcomes.	• Potentially undermines international law and democratic representation. E.g. lacks checks and balances of the UN General Assembly • Sovereignty Concerns: Potentially favours external trusteeship instead of local democratic voice. • Exclusionary nature: Possible limited and paid membership may hinder balanced global order by marginalizing the "Global South."

2.5. NEWS IN SHORTS

2.5.1. THIRD PATH FRAMEWORK FOR A REFORMED, INCLUSIVE AND NETWORKED MULTILATERALISM

Canadian PM in his speech at World Economic Forum in 2026 outlined a **new agenda** for the world i.e. -“**Third Path**” amid US-China rivalry and fading Rule based world order.

About Third path or Carney doctrine:

- The third path or **Carney doctrine** is based upon “**Value-Based Realism**”, “**co-operation of middle powers**” against hegemons and a policy of “**variable geometry**”.
 - **Value-Based Realism** defends core principles such as **sovereignty, territorial integrity, and human rights** while **recognizing** incremental progress, diverging national interests, and partners having value differentials.
 - > Crucially, values-based realism rests on **building domestic strength**.
 - **Policy of “variable geometry”** involves **forming different coalitions** for different issues, based on values and interests.
 - > E.g. Schengen Area, G7 Grouping, Quad Formation etc.
- This third path framework is **relevant** for other middle powers, including and particularly **India**.



What are middle powers?

- **Great powers** are often defined as countries with a permanent seat on UNSC (i.e. **China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States**). These countries exert economic, political and military dominance over the world.
- Middle powers are states **below great powers** that do not dominate the international system but **possess significant diplomatic, economic, technological or normative influence**.
 - **Examples** include India, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Brazil, and several EU states.

Significance of Co-operation among Middle Powers



Bridge Great-power rivalries: By maintaining engagement with competing blocs and reducing zero-sum geopolitical competition.

Mediation and Coalition-building: Prevent smaller states from becoming collateral damage in conflicts between major powers.

Revive and Sustain Multilateralism: By reinforcing rules-based cooperation and supporting reforms of institutions like the UN, WTO and WHO.

Other: Protecting Sovereignty, Promoting Strategic Autonomy and Addressing Global Challenges like Climate change, pandemics, cyber threats etc.

2.5.2. GLOBAL RISK REPORT 2026 FOCUSES ON GEOECONOMIC CONFRONTATION

Released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the report identifies **gloeconomic confrontation** as the most **significant global risk**.

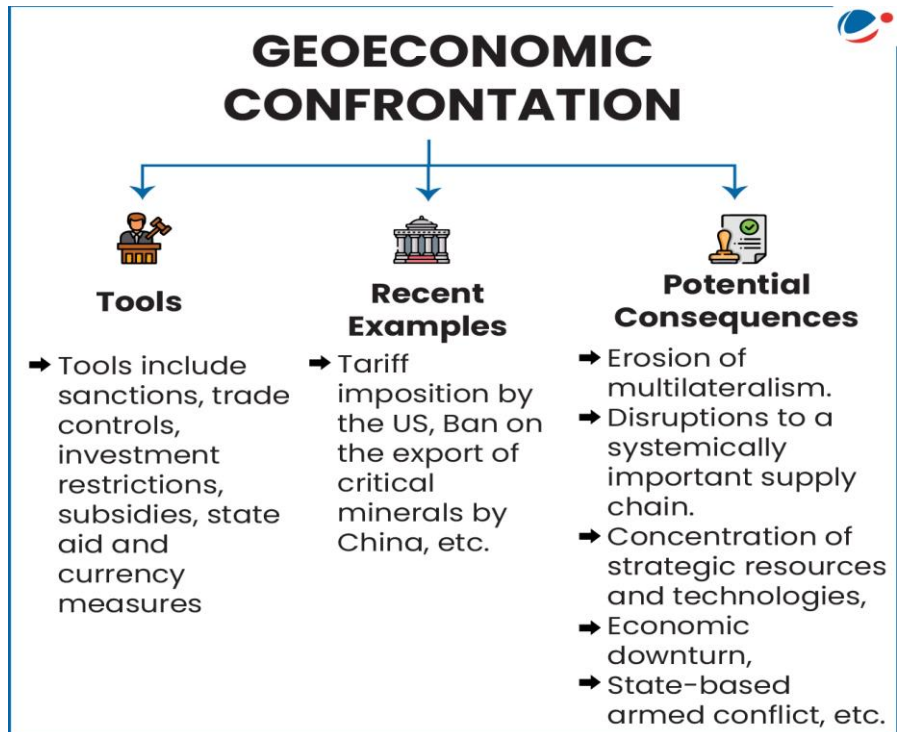
Key Highlights of the Report

- **In the current and immediate term (2026)** and **the short-to-medium term (up to 2028)**, the report highlights major risks such as **gloeconomic confrontation, state-based armed conflicts, extreme weather events, rising societal polarisation**, etc.

- **In the long term (up to 2036)**, the most significant risks identified include **extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse**, etc.
- **Major Risk faced by India:** Cyber insecurity, Inequality (wealth, income), Insufficient public services and social protections (incl. education, infrastructure, pensions), etc.

What is Geoeconomic Confrontation?

- Refers to strategic use of economic instruments by global or regional powers to reshape cross-border economic relations by restricting trade, technology, services, capital, or knowledge flows aimed at promoting self-reliance, constraining geopolitical rivals, and consolidating spheres of influence.
- **Actions Recommended:** Economic inducements that foster mutual gains should be prioritized, Reinforce existing multilateral institutions, Invest in local resilience, etc.



2.5.3. PAX SILICA

India has joined the Pax Silica initiative by becoming a signatory to the **Pax Silica Declaration**.

- India also signed a Joint Statement on the "**India-U.S. AI Opportunity Partnership**" as a bilateral addendum to the Declaration.

About Pax Silica

- It is an **U.S. led initiative** to build a secure, resilient, innovation-driven technology ecosystem
- The program covers the full technology supply chain, spanning:
 - Semiconductors and AI infrastructure
 - Critical minerals and energy inputs
 - Advanced manufacturing and high-end hardware
 - Compute and data logistics
- **Objectives:**
 - Reduce coercive dependencies.
 - Protect sensitive technologies and build trusted digital infrastructure.
- **Members:** Japan, South Korea, Singapore, United Kingdom, Israel, etc.

2.5.4. SPAIN JOINS THE INDO-PACIFIC OCEANS INITIATIVE (IPOI)

IPOI is a non-treaty-based voluntary arrangement that promotes cooperation for a free and open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based regional order.

- **Indo-Pacific** is as an interconnected space between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, joined together by its main trading channel, the Malacca strait.
- It is home to more than half of the world's population, and nearly 2/3rds of the global economy.

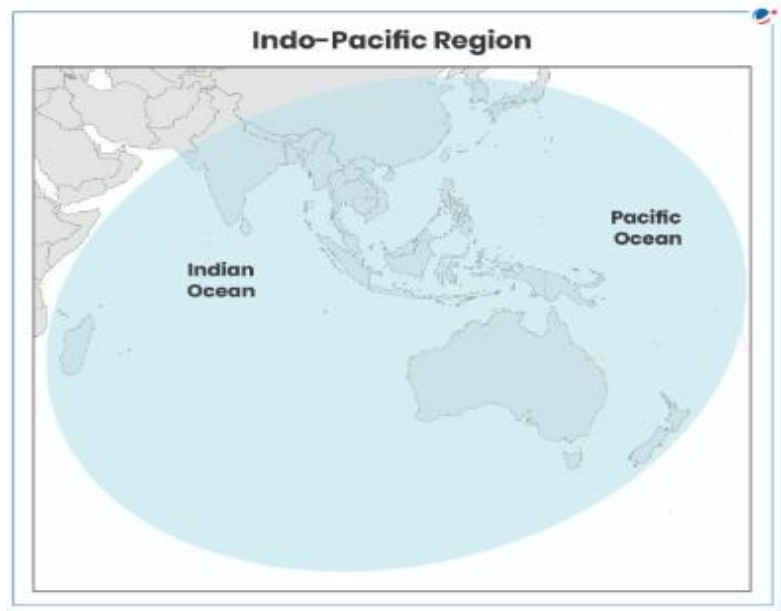
About Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

- **Genesis:** IPOI was launched by India at the **East Asia Summit in 2019**, held in **Bangkok (Thailand)**.

- **Background:** It builds upon the “**Security and Growth for All in the Region**” (**SAGAR**) initiative announced by India in **2015**.
 - **SAGAR** encourages countries to cooperate and synergise efforts towards a safe, secure, and stable maritime domain.
- **7 pillars of IPO:** It includes Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology, Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, etc.

Key Significance of IPOI

- **Countering China's assertiveness:** E.g., In 2020, India and Vietnam agreed to enhance their bilateral cooperation in line with IPOI.
- **Convergences with other global initiatives:** E.g., AIPOIP (Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership), **AOIP** (ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific), IPEF, etc.



2.5.5. VISIT OF PRESIDENT OF UAE TO INDIA

Key Outcomes of Visit:

- **Strategic Announcements:**
 - **Trade Target:** Agreed to double bilateral trade to over US\$ 200 billion by 2032.
 - > Both countries will promote new markets through initiatives like **Bharat Mart**, **Virtual Trade Corridor** and **Bharat-Africa Setu**.
 - **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** Explore partnerships in advanced nuclear technologies, including **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** and nuclear safety, following enactment of the **SHANTI Act 2025**.
 - **Establishment of Digital/ Data Embassies:** A **Digital/Data embassy** is an offshore centre where a nation-state stores its critical digital data, to ensure digital continuity and sovereignty against cyberattacks, natural disasters, or geopolitical conflicts.
 - **AI & Tech:** Collaboration for a **supercomputing cluster** under AI India Mission.
- **Key Agreements / MoUs / Lols:**
 - **Strategic Defence Partnership:** Aims to establish framework for deepened defence cooperation across technology, training and cyber domains.
 - **Energy Supply:** SPA (Sales & Purchase Agreement) for 0.5 MTPA LNG supply from ADNOC Gas to HPCL for 10 years.



Key aspects of India- UAE Relations

- Signed the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** in 2022, which helped boost bilateral trade to nearly USD 100 billion by FY 2024–25.
- UAE is consistently **India's third-largest** trading partner and **second-largest** export destination.
- UAE is India's major crude oil and LNG & LPG supplier.
 - The UAE is also assisting India in strengthening its Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).



Read our previous coverage on India-UAE Relations

2.5.6. INDIA AND GERMANY SIGN AGREEMENTS

The agreements were signed during the visit of the German Chancellor.

- The visit coincided with a milestone phase in bilateral ties, as India and Germany celebrated **25 years of their Strategic Partnership in 2025** and marking 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2026.

Key outcomes

- **Defence and Security:** Signed **Joint Declaration of Intent to develop a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap** was signed, emphasizing technology partnerships, co-development, and co-production of defence platforms.
 - Germany's expressed intent to participate in Indian Naval Exercise **MILAN** of, **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium**, Air Combat Exercise **Tarang Shakti** etc.
 - **Track 1.5 Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue** was also established
 - > **Track 1.5 Diplomacy** occurs when government representatives and non-governmental experts engage in dialogue in less formal ways
- **Trade and economy:** To ensure **supply chain resilience**, agreements were signed focusing on the **Semiconductor, Critical Minerals**, etc.
- **Visa and Mobility:** Germany announced a **visa-free transit facility** for Indian passport holders.
- **Other:**
 - Announced a new bilateral **Indo-Pacific** consultation mechanism.
 - **Education and skilling- Indo-German Comprehensive Roadmap on Higher Education** was adopted.



Other Key aspects of Indo- German Relations

- **Economic Relations -**
 - Indo-German bilateral trade surpassed USD 50 billion in 2024 (Germany accounts for over 25% of India's trade with the European Union)
 - **FDI status:** Germany is **9th largest** foreign direct investor in India (2024)
- **Environment- Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP)** is partnership between India and Germany to align their climate cooperation to the Paris Climate Agreement
- **Technology and Innovation:** E.g., Indo-German Science and Technology Centre (IGSTC)

2.5.7. SHAKSGAM VALLEY

India has formally objected to **China's** infrastructure projects in the Shaksgam Valley.

About Shaksgam Valley

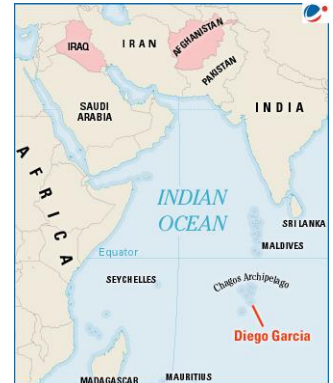
- Strategically located territory in **Ladakh, north of the Karakoram watershed** and an **integral part of India**.
- **Illegal cession: Pakistan** occupied since 1947, **unlawfully ceded to China** under the 1963 China–Pakistan Boundary Agreement.
- Also known as the **Trans-Karakoram Tract**, lying along both sides of the **Shaksgam River**.
- **Geography:** Bounded by the **Kun Lun Mountains and Karakoram range**; it lies adjacent to the **Siachen Glacier**.

2.5.8. DIEGO GARCIA

US President Trump has criticised the **potential return of Diego Garcia by the UK to Mauritius** which hosts a vital US military base.

About Diego Garcia

- **Location:** Diego Garcia is a **coral atoll** in the **central Indian Ocean**, part of the **Chagos Archipelago**.
- **History:** The Chagos Archipelago was administered by the **United Kingdom** as the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)** from 1965.
 - In May 2025, the **United Kingdom** and the **Republic of Mauritius** signed an agreement under which **Mauritius is recognised as sovereign over the entire Chagos Archipelago**, including Diego Garcia (with UK having a 99 years lease of Diego Garcia)
- **Military use:** Diego Garcia hosts a **joint UK–US military facility**.



2.5.9. WEIMAR TRIANGLE

The Minister of External Affairs participated in **India's first-ever engagement in the Weimar Triangle**.

About Weimar Triangle

- It is a regional alliance of **France, Germany, and Poland** set up in **1991** in the German city of **Weimar**.
 - Initially formed as a key forum for supporting **German-Polish reconciliation**.
- **Aim:** To promote **European integration**, political dialogue, security cooperation, etc.



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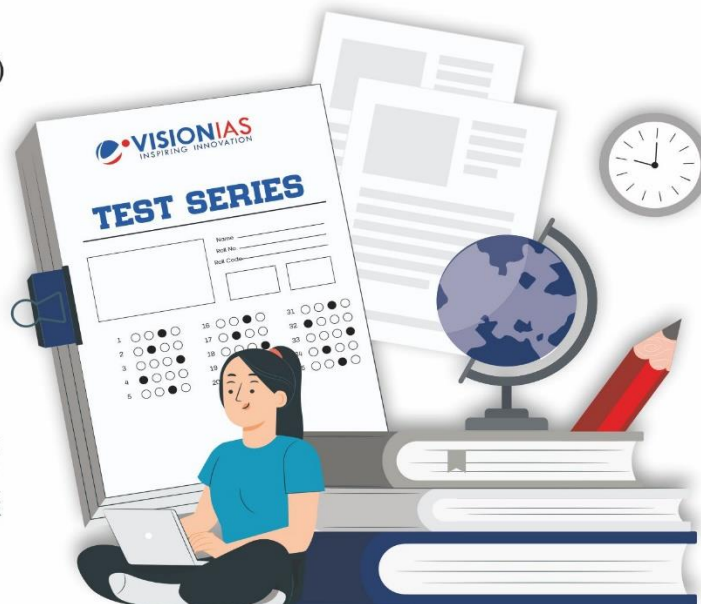
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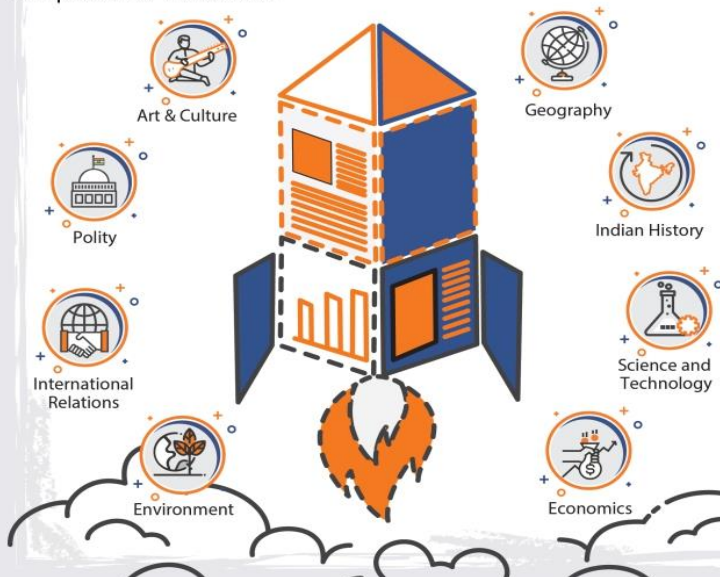


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3. ECONOMY

3.1. STATE FINANCES

Why in the News?

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India releases second edition of **Publication on State Finances 2023-24**.

More on the News

- Publication on State Finances 2023-24 presents a consolidated and audited overview of the fiscal position of all 28 States.
- The edition also includes trend analysis covering **10 years from 2014-15 to 2023-24**.

Fiscal position of states

- **Revenue Receipts: States' Own Tax Revenue (SOTR)** is the largest component of revenue receipts, contributing about 47 percent between 2014-15 and 2023-24.
 - **Other components:** Include share in Union Taxes and Duties (28 percent), Grants-in-aid (17 percent) and States' Non-Tax Revenue (8 percent).
 - **Share in Union Taxes:** Increased from 21.34 percent in FY 2014-15 to 29.77 percent in FY 2023-24 reflecting higher tax devolution under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Finance Commissions.
- **Capital Receipts:** In the decade of 2014-15 to 2023-24, public debt receipts, as a percentage of total debt and non-debt capital receipts, have ranged between 94 to 99 percent.
- **States' Expenditure:** Decadal trend analysis over 2014-15 to 2023-24 shows that States' budgetary spending ranged between 16.15 percent and 17.49 percent of total combined GSDP.
 - **Revenue Expenditure:** During 2014-15 to 2023-24, states' revenue expenditure constituted 80-87 percent of the total expenditure.
 - **Committed expenditure (salaries, pensions, interest payments, etc) and subsidies** consistently absorbed more than half of revenue expenditure, reaching 51.76 percent in FY 2023-24.
 - **Capital Expenditure:** On average, capital expenditure of the States has remained in the range of 13-20 percent of the total budgetary spending during 2014-15 to 2023-24.
- **Revenue and Fiscal Deficits:** During FY 2023-24, a total of 16 States were in Revenue Surplus, while 12 States were in Revenue deficit.
 - In FY 2023-24, 18 States recorded fiscal deficits above the 3% of GSDP limit recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

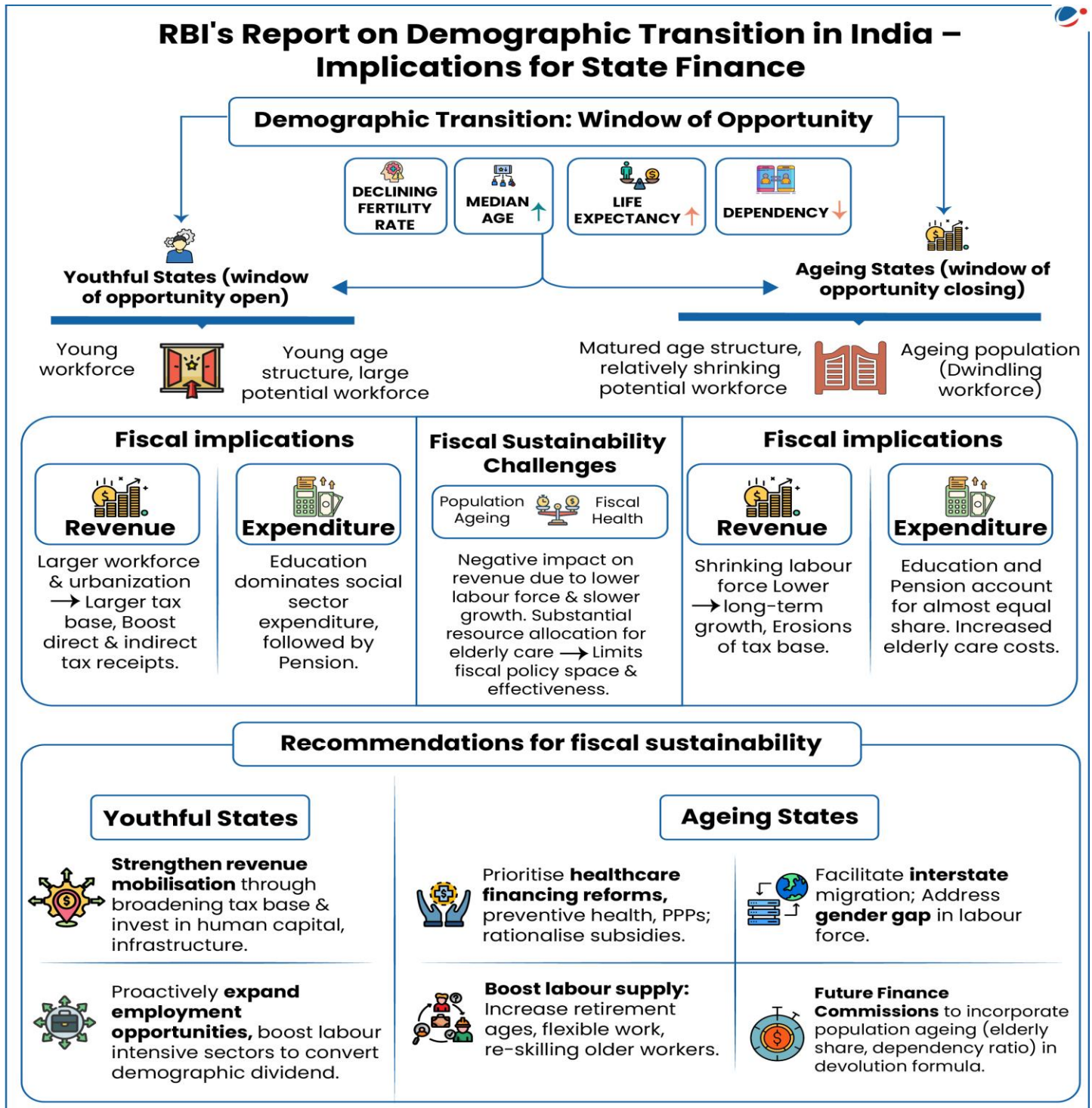
Risks to State Finances and Implications

- **Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs):** Rapid scale-up and persistence of UCTs raise concerns about **fiscal sustainability and medium-term growth (Economic survey finding in the box below)**

Economic Survey 2026 on UCTs

- The survey noted that the number of states **implementing UCTs programmes is rising steadily**.
 - Between 2022-23 and 2025-26, the number of states running such schemes is projected to **increase more than fivefold**, with nearly half of them expected to face revenue deficits.
- Citing recent research, it observes that such transfers range from **0.19 per cent to 1.25 per cent of GSDP** and can account for as much as 8.26 per cent of total State budgetary expenditure.
- It suggests that such transfer can reduce **female labour force participation and raise concerns about medium-term economic growth** if they are not paired with investments in employment, skills and human capital.
- **High Debt Levels:** Mounting debt levels put pressure on State budgets through rising interest expenses.

- To meet higher interest payments, governments often cut down other productive expenditures, affecting medium term growth prospects.
- **High Revenue Expenditure:** Combined gross fiscal deficit of States rose from 2.6% of GDP in FY22 to 3.2% in FY25, while the combined revenue deficit increased from 0.4% to 0.7% of GDP, indicating **continued borrowing to finance revenue expenditure**.
- **Growing Contingent Liabilities:** Outstanding guarantees of States increased from 2% of GDP at end-March 2017 to 3.9% at end-March 2024, putting debt-servicing pressure on states.



Way Forward to Strengthen State Finances

- **Conditional Cash Transfers:** As suggested by the economic survey, Cash support can be designed as conditional, review-based, and time-bound, reducing long-term fiscal rigidity.
 - For instance, **Mexico's Progres/Oportunidades**, families received cash only if children attended school regularly and pregnant women and young children visited health clinics for check-ups and nutrition monitoring.
- **Improving Revenue:** Through digitalisation and administrative streamlining, by broadening the tax base, raising property taxes, adopting new taxes, and reorienting spending toward capacity- and infrastructure-enhancing investments that promise to boost states' GSDP and revenues further.
- **Addressing Contingent Liabilities:** Adopt institutional reforms, such as creating self-standing debt management offices responsible for forecasting contingent liabilities and executing the state government's debt management strategy.
- **Fiscal Council:** Each state could create its own independent fiscal council, whose members would include academics, financial market participants and other experts.

3.2. EXPORT PREPAREDNESS INDEX (EPI)

Why in the News?

NITI Aayog released the 4th edition of Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024.

What is Export Preparedness Index (EPI)?

- It is a **comprehensive assessment** of export readiness across India's States and Union Territories (UTs).
- **The first edition** of the EPI was published in **2020**.
- **It is aligned** with India's objective of **achieving USD 1 trillion** in merchandise exports by 2030 and the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.
- **Enhancements to categorization of states in EPI 2024:**
 - **Two major categories:** **Large States** and **Small States, North Eastern (NE) States & Union Territories (UTs)** based on the aspects of land area, population and Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).
 - **Within the categories**, EPI 2024 classifies the states as:
 - > **Aspirers:** States in the **early stages** of developing their export potential.
 - > **Challengers:** States with **emerging export potential** that are enhancing foundational dimensions.
 - > **Leaders:** States that consistently demonstrate **high export performance**.



Data Bank

India export Scenario

- **USD 825.3 billion** was the total value of India's merchandise and services exports, registering a **6.1% year-over-year (YoY) growth in FY25**.
- **USD 437.7 billion** was the value of India's merchandise exports in **FY25**, broadly maintaining levels similar to those recorded in **FY24**.
- **USD 387.5 billion** was the value of India's services exports in FY25, marking an all-time high and registering a robust **13.6% year-over-year growth**.

Key-findings of EPI 2024

- **Leading Performers of EPI 2024**
 - **Large States:** Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh.
 - **Small States, North Eastern States & Union Territories:** Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, Goa.
- **Pillar-Wise weightage & performance**
 - **Export Infrastructure (20%):** It covers supply of power and water, ports, logistics network and last-mile connectivity that ensure timely delivery and reduced trade costs.
 - > **E.g., Maharashtra** hosts the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), India's largest container port, which handles over 50% of the country's containerized cargo.
 - **Business Ecosystem (40%):** It evaluates the presence of industrial clusters, **special economic zones (SEZs)**, and innovation hubs that enable businesses to scale efficiently.

- > **E.g., Gujarat's Industrial Policy 2020** and IT-ITES Policy 2022-27 focus on ease of doing business, research and development, and skill development.
- **Policy & Governance (20%):** It examines the policies that facilitate exports, the effectiveness of their implementation, and the role of state-level governance in supporting exporters.
 - > **E.g.,** One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme in Uttar Pradesh has significantly boosted local industries and exports by promoting traditional crafts and goods.
- **Export Performance (20%):** It focuses on the tangible outcomes of a state's export efforts, such as the volume, value and diversification of exports.
 - > **E.g.,** Karnataka's diverse and technologically advanced manufacturing base is a key driver of its strong export performance. The state excels in high-value sectors like aerospace, defence, electronics, auto components etc.

THE POWER OF INDIAN EXPORTS

Exports are the backbone of India's modern economic strategy.



GDP SHARE ROSE TO 21.2%

Contribution to India's GDP increased from 19.8% in 2015.



\$701.4 BILLION IN FOREIGN RESERVES

Record reserves now provide coverage for 94% of India's external debt.



MASS EMPLOYMENT IN LABOR-INTENSIVE SECTORS

Industries like textiles, agriculture, and MSMEs generate large-scale jobs across the country.



SPECIALIZED REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL CLUSTERS

Export growth fuels development in local hubs like Surat diamonds and Tiruppur textiles.

Challenges persist in Export sector of India

- **Logistics and Connectivity:** For e.g., Telangana landlocked geography and reliance on **distant ports** like **Krishnapatnam and Visakhapatnam** (600–700 km away) increase logistics costs and transit times, straining road and rail infrastructure.
- **Price volatility:** E.g., Gujarat's export profile is heavily skewed towards **petroleum and petrochemical** products, which make up **over half** of the state's total export value exposing it to global oil price volatility and environmental policy shifts.
- **Competition:** E.g., emerging competition from low-cost manufacturing hubs like **Vietnam** poses a challenge to Punjab's traditional export sectors such as textiles and agro-processing.
- **Geopolitical tensions:** E.g., Haryana's export resilience is challenged by overdependence on a limited set of markets primarily the **U.S., UAE, and Europe**, exposing it to external shocks from geopolitical tensions or trade policy change.
- **Quality and Certification:** E.g., Sparse network of National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) in **Uttar Pradesh** limiting its ability to meet global food safety standards.
- **Cold Chain Deficits:** E.g., In **Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu** the inadequate availability of cold storage and temperature-controlled logistics continues to limit the territory's ability to diversify into perishables, marine products, and pharmaceuticals requiring end-to-end cold chains.

Key Government Initiatives to Strengthen India's Export Landscape

- **Export Promotion Mission (EPM):** It is a flagship initiative announced in 2025 to strengthen India's export competitiveness, particularly for MSMEs, first-time exporters, and labour-intensive sectors.
- **Establishment of Export Facilitation Centres (EFCs)** across the country with an aim to provide requisite mentoring and handholding support to exporters especially MSMEs in exporting their products and services to foreign markets.
- **Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative** was launched in **2019** to foster balanced regional development across all districts of the country to identify, brand, and promote products from each district, encouraging their sale in both domestic and international markets.



Read our previous coverage on Export Promotion Mission (EPM)

- **National Logistics Policy (NLP) & PM Gati Shakti:** Aim to reduce logistics costs and enhance multimodal connectivity through **Geographic Information System (GIS)**-based planning.
- **Union Budget 2026-27 announced** the complete removal of the Rs 10-lakh per-consignment value cap on courier exports, which will help small businesses, artisans and startups access global markets through e-commerce channels.

Conclusion

India must transition to a state-led, infrastructure-driven export strategy. Through targeted collaborations with regions such as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India seeks to diversify its trade portfolio and strengthen resilient supply chains.

3.3. PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPP)

Why in the News?

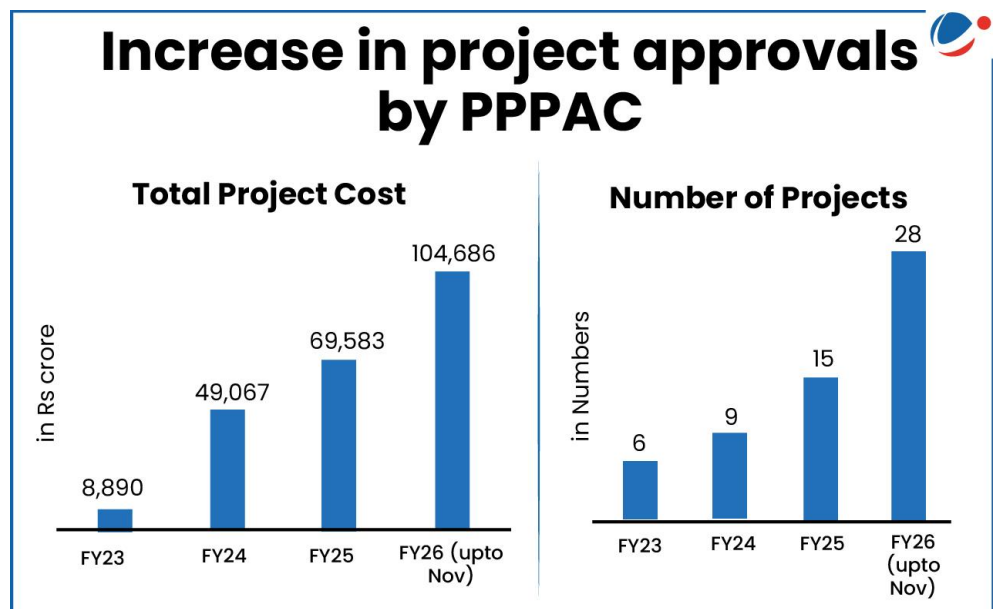
Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance, created a **three-year PPP project pipeline** to streamline infrastructure development in the country.

More on the News

- This followed **₹12.2 lakh crore public capex (Capital Expenditure)** announced in Union Budget 2026-27.
 - Public capex increased from ₹2 lakh crore in FY2014-15 to **₹11.2 lakh crore in BE 2025-26**.
- The pipeline offers an **organised framework, early visibility** of potential PPP projects **enabling investors, developer and others** to undertake informed planning and investment decisions.
- PPP project pipeline comprises **852 projects across Central Infrastructure Ministries and States/Union Territories** with a combined **total project cost of over Rs. 17 lakh crore**.

About PPP

- **Meaning:** Arrangement between a **Government** and a **private sector entity** for provision of **public assets or services** in a **contract** outlining each party's responsibilities.
- **Trends in India:** As per World Bank's Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) Report 2024, India has **consistently ranked among top five countries** globally in terms of private investment in infrastructure among low- and middle-income economies.
 - India emerged as **largest recipient of PPI investment** in South Asia, accounting for over **90% of the region's total private infrastructure investment**.
 - **129 projects with Total Project Cost (TPC) of ₹5.6 lakh crore** have been recommended by **Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC)** [From 2014-15 to 2025-26 (up to 04 December 2025)].



Key Characteristics of PPP Projects



Provision of public asset/service for public benefit:
Involves only those facilities/services which are generally provided by Government as a sovereign function.



Investment/management by private partner:
Financing or harnessing private sector efficiencies for delivery of services.



Time Period:
Expires at the end of a specified time period, unless extended mutually.



Risks Sharing:
Every PPP arrangement sets out allocation of risks between parties.



Performance linked payments:
Depending on service quality and delivery and not merely on provision of an asset/facility.



Conformity to performance standards:
Encouraging innovation and efficiency.

Key Investment Models under PPP

Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT)	Private partner to design, build, operate (during contracted period) and transfer back facility to public sector. E.g., National Highway projects.
Lease, Operate and Transfer (LOT)	Already existing facility entrusted to private sector (based on mutually decided terms) and transferred back to government once contract ends.
Build, Own, Operate or Transfer (BOOT)	Facility is transferred to government after end of contract period post private partner recovers its investment .
EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction)	Government provides its requirements and contractor prepares detailed engineering design, procures all materials/equipment and then constructs to deliver a functioning facility to government.
Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM)	Combines EPC (40%) and BOT-Annuity (60%) . Government releases 40% of total project cost while balance is arranged by the developer.

Importance of PPP Model in Infrastructure Development

- **Private Sector Efficiency:** The private sector is exposed to **competitive pressures** providing an edge in carrying out **capital (design, construction) and operating phases** of project.
 - Private sector is well placed to **access quality, skilled manpower and technology** and hold its **employees, suppliers and vendors** more accountable to performance.
- **Focus on Life Cycle Costs of Projects:** In addition to designing and building project, private partner also provide **ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M)** with an incentive to ensure that design and construction facilitate efficient O&M.
- **Increased Transparency & Accountability:** In contrast to conventional procurement where **public entity is both monitoring and providing service** and may be reluctant to question itself.
- **Access to Private Sector Finance:** PPPs allow public entity to leverage private finances in development of public infrastructure leaving more bandwidth to invest in social and other sectors without the need for borrowing.
- **Promoting Ease of Doing Business:** India aims to reduce logistics costs to **below 10% through PPP reforms**.
 - Currently developed countries operate with logistics costs of around 8-9%.

PPP in Key Sectors of India

- **Urban Development:** Projects under **Urban Challenge Fund**; cities having more than 10 lakh population to take up 10% of projects under PPP in Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation 2.0 (AMRUT), etc.
- **Ports and Logistics:** **Vadhvan Deep Draft Port**, envisioned as one of **world's top 10 container ports** being developed under **PPP mode**.

- **Higher Education (HE):** Projects in HE Institutions under **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** with 3 projects of IIT Madras, IIM Udaipur and IIIT Nagpur approved by the PPPAC.
- **Railways: Participative Policy, 2012** to encourage the investment in **rail connectivity by strategic partners and other investors.**
- **Civil Aviation:** In 2025-26, **11 Brownfield Airports of Airports Authority of India** identified for PPP Pipeline for next two years.
- **Connectivity: Highways** (E.g., Kishangarh-Udaipur-Ahmedabad Expressway; Parvatmala project, etc.); **Metro-rail projects** in major Indian cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Hyderabad, etc.

Key Challenges faced by PPP

- **Contract uncertainties:** PPPs often cover a **long-term period** (e.g. 15-30 years, or asset life), wherein huge costs could be involved in modifying contract as per future requirements.
- **Aggressive Bidding:** The private sector often engages in over-aggressive bidding with inadequate due diligence, leading to unviable offers and subsequent project failures.
- **Regulatory Environment:** Changing Governments and legislations has negative impact on PPP projects including issues in attracting further domestic and international funding.
- **Demand and Forecasting Uncertainties:** Inaccurate demand forecasting (such as overestimating traffic on a toll road) can drastically affect the private partner's revenue, making it difficult to demonstrate Value for Money (VFM) in advance.

Key initiatives to strengthen PPP in India

- **Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC):** Apex body for appraising and recommending central sector PPP projects, chaired by Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs.
- **Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme:** Financial assistance to projects economically desirable but commercially unviable.
 - Economic sector projects may **receive up to 40% of Capex as VGF grant**, while social **sector projects are eligible for up to 80% of Capex and 50% of operational expenditure for five years** post-commercial operations.
- **India Infrastructure Project Development Fund (IIPDF):** Notified in 2022, to create a pipeline of **viable, bankable projects** by funding transaction advisers for central and state authorities.
- **Standardisation and Institutional Capacity Building:** Development of reference guides on risk **allocation, PPP appraisal, and project implementation mode** (Waterfall Framework) including sector-specific PPP structuring toolkits.
 - **Capacity Building Initiatives for States/UTs** through seminars, and one-to one guidance.
 - **National Infrastructure Enablement Index (NIEI)** to assess the institutional preparedness of States/UTs and Central Ministries/Departments.
 - **Model RfP (Request for Proposal) for single-stage PPP projects** to embed best practices, ensure consistency, and enhance flexibility in procurement and contract management.
- **Others:** Proposed **Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund** to strengthen the confidence of private developers (Union Budget 2026-27); **PM Gati Shakti Master Plan; National Monetization Plan**, etc.

Way forward on Reforming PPP

- **Vijay Kelkar Committee Recommendations (2012):**
 - **Setting up of independent regulators for sectors adopting PPP**
 - **Rational Allocation of Risks:** Rather than a **One-size-fits-all** approach, a sector and project specific risk allocation to be done involving all stakeholders.
 - **Preventing Obsolescing Bargain:** It occurs when private players loses bargaining power over projects, typically in Infrastructure PPP that spans over 20-30 years.

- **Attitudinal Change:** Moving away from “transaction to relationship,” accommodating “give and take” between partners, accepting uncertainties and appropriate adjustments inherent in implementing long-time contracts.
- **Stable Policy Regimes, Standardised Contracts, and Clearer Regulatory Architecture:** E.g., tariff regulation in ports was initially institutionalised through **Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP)** and subsequently withdrawn as market depth and competition improved.
- **National level institution for institutional capacity building:** For all stakeholders, including implementing agencies, banks/financial institutions, private sector, etc.

3.4. REVISION OF CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Why in the News?

Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the Consumer Price Index (CPI) with new base year 2024.

More on the News

- **Key-findings of CPI for January 2026**
 - **CPI General:** Year-on-year inflation rate based on All India CPI with base year 2024 is **2.75%**.
 - > **Inflation rates** for rural and urban are **2.73% and 2.77%**, respectively.
 - **Food Inflation:** Year-on-year inflation rate based on All India Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) for the is **2.13%**.
 - **Housing Inflation:** Year-on-year Housing inflation rate is **2.05%**.

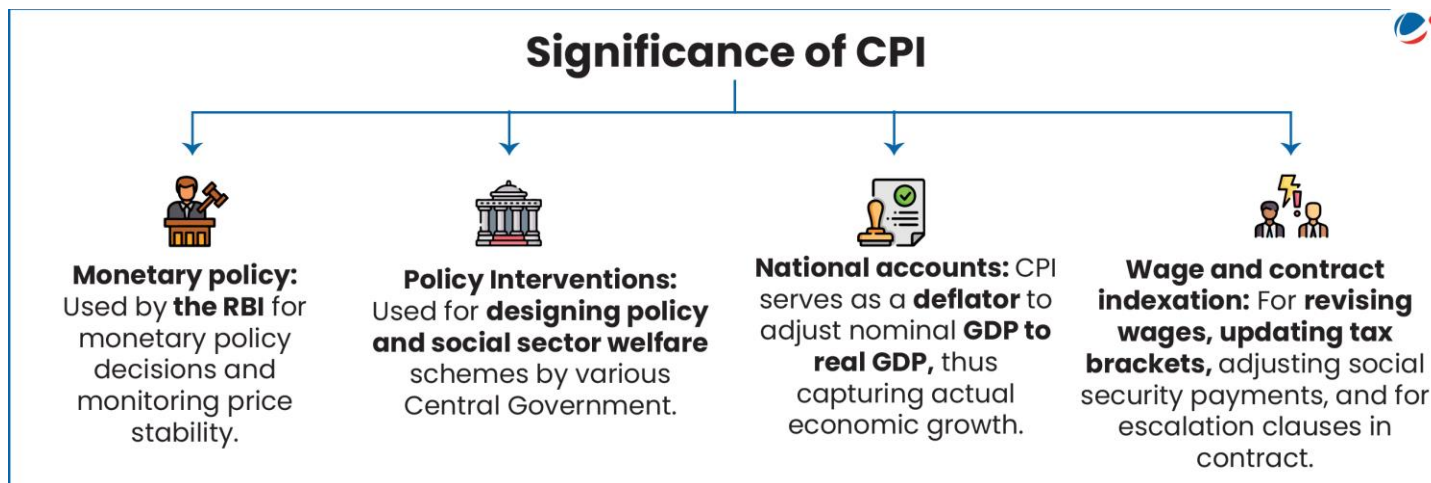
Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- **About:** CPI is designed to measure the **changes over time** in general level of retail prices of selected goods and services that households purchase for the purpose of consumption.
 - **Each item** in the CPI basket is assigned a **specific weight**, which reflects its relative share of total consumer spending.
- **Genesis:** **CPI (Rural, urban and combined)** has been started releasing by the **MoSPI** since January 2011 with base year 2010.
 - **CPI (Combined)** which covers both rural and urban households is used as the **headline inflation** measure.
- **The Base Year** is a chosen year taken as a **reference point (index = 100)** to compare prices over time.
 - It is important because it helps measure how much prices have increased or decreased and keeps inflation figures relevant and easy to understand.
- **Formula:** For compiling CPI, **Laspeyre’s Index Formula** is used, which is based on three elements:
 - **Base Year Price:** Average prices **across all months** of the base year.
 - **Base Year Weights:** Weighting diagram prepared using the results of the Mixed Modified Reference Period (MMRP) data of **Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES)**.
 - > **Under MMRP**, different recall periods (7 days, 30 days, 365 days) are used for different categories of consumption expenditure.
 - **Current Month’s Price:** Collected monthly by MoSPI’s Field Operations Division (FOD) for weighted items.

Need to update CPI base year:

- **Structural Changes in Economy:** Since 2012, shifts in consumption patterns, income levels, urbanisation and growth of the services sector demands updated weights.
- **Technological & Market Evolution:** Digital trade expansion (E.g., commerce) and fading rural–urban boundaries demand redesign of the inflation measurement framework.
- **Better Monetary Policy Transmission:** As RBI relies on CPI (Combined) for inflation targeting ($4\% \pm 2\%$), accurate weights ensure effective policy decisions.

- **International Comparability:** Aligning with global statistical standards improves credibility. Many countries **revise CPI baskets every 3–5 years**.



Key changes made in CPI 2024 in comparison to CPI 2012

Features	CPI 2024	CPI 2012
Base Year	2024	2012
Coverage of markets and items	Total number of weighted items in this basket will be 358 (goods will increase from 259 to 308 and services from 40 to 50 item).	At the All-India level, prices are collected for 299 items (number of items in rural are 288 in rural and 281 in urban).
Changes in Items	New Additions: Rural housing, Online media service provider/Streaming services, Value added dairy products, Barley & its product, Pen-drive & External Hard disk, Attendant, Babysitter and Exercise equipment etc. Items Removed from 2012 CPI: VCR/VCD/DVD player and hiring charges, Radio, Tape recorder, Clothing second-hand, CD/DVD audio/video cassettes and Coir/rope.	
Weight Reference	Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24.	Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES), 2011-12
Classification System	12 Divisions based on Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP 2018).	6 Groups based on COICOP 1999. COICOP is the international classification of household expenditure developed by United Nations Statistics Division.
Data Collection Mode	CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) on tablets	Paper-based schedules
Release of Housing index	All India, urban and rural (Rural rent included for the first time)	All India and urban.
Weight of Food & Beverages (Highest weightage)	36.75%.	45.86%.

Other important changes in CPI 2024

- **Housing Index Compilation:** In revised CPI, it is compiled using a weighted average of three constituent groups, namely “**actual rental payments for housing**”, “**maintenance, repair and security of the dwelling**”, and “**water supply and other miscellaneous services**” relating to the dwelling.

- Government and employer-provided accommodations will be excluded from the CPI housing index to avoid market distortion.
- **Inclusion of alternative data sources:** To reflect changing purchasing behavior, the CPI 2024 series supplement traditional collection with alternative data sources:
 - **E-commerce prices** introduced as an additional market in 12 large towns (population exceeding 25 lakhs)
 - **Online sources** for select services such as airfares and OTT subscriptions.
 - **Administrative data** for standardized services such as rail fares, postal charges and fuel prices (Petrol, Diesel, LPG, CNG & PNG etc.)
- **Linking Factor and Back Series:** To facilitate **continuity and ease of analysis** on the basis of time series data, the **linking factor** is calculated to connect the two series over a common overlapping period.
 - The overlapping period here is 2025, during which both **CPI 2012 and CPI 2024** indices are available.

Conclusion

To maintain relevance, the MoSPI planning regular base revisions every **3 to 5 years** based on Household Consumption Expenditure Survey data. A revised CPI will offer a more representative, transparent, and methodologically robust measure of retail inflation, aligned with global best practices and evolving consumption patterns.

3.5. STARTUP INDIA

Why in the News?

National Startup Day on January 16, 2026 marked a **decade of the Startup India Initiative**.

More on the News

- Startup India initiative was launched on January 16, 2016.
- January 16 was declared as the **National Startup Day in 2022**.

Definition of a Startup

- **Legal Structure:** It is incorporated or registered in India as a Private Limited Company, a Partnership Firm, a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), or a Cooperative Society (including Multi-State Cooperative Societies).
- **Age:** It has been in existence for up to **10 years** from the date of its incorporation or registration.
- **Turnover:** Its turnover for any financial year since incorporation has not exceeded **200 crore rupees**.
- **Scope of Work:** It is working towards the **innovation, development, or improvement** of products, processes, or services, or it has a scalable business model with a high potential for **employment generation or wealth creation**.

Note: An entity formed by splitting up or reconstructing an existing business is **not** considered a Startup.

Key Components of the Startup India Initiative

- **Financial Support Schemes:**
 - **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS):** Managed by SIDBI with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore, this scheme supports SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), which in turn invest in startups to expand domestic risk capital.
 - **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS):** With a corpus of ₹945 crore, this scheme provides financial assistance for early-stage activities like proof of concept, prototyping, and market entry.
 - **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS):** Operationalized by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company, this enables collateral-free loans for startups.



Data Bank

Startup Ecosystem in India

- **2 lakh** DPIIT-recognised startups in India in 2025.
- **3rd largest** startup ecosystem globally.
- **78 %** rise in funding for deep tech companies in 2024.
- **45%** of recognised startups having at least one woman Director or Partner as of December 2025.
- **~50%** of recognised startups now emerge from Tier-II and Tier-III cities

- **Digital Platforms and Ecosystem Enablers:**

- **Startup India Hub:** A digital platform connecting stakeholders such as investors, mentors, incubators, and aspiring entrepreneurs.
- **National Mentorship Portal (MAARG):** A program designed to offer startups easy access to strategic guidance from experienced mentors.
- **Startup India Investor Connect Portal:** Facilitates connections between early-stage ventures and multiple venture capital funds through a single application.
- **States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF):** Promotes competitive federalism by assessing States and Union Territories on their startup-friendly policies and implementation.

- **Broader Ecosystem Support:**

- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** Focuses on creating an innovation culture through Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) in schools and incubation support.
- **National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI), Department of Science and Technology:** An umbrella program nurturing knowledge-based innovations into startups through components like PRAYAS (prototyping support) and Technology Business Incubators (TBIs).
- **MeitY Initiatives:** Includes the **MeitY Startup Hub (MSH)** and the Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (**TIDE**) **2.0 Scheme**, which supports ICT startups using emerging technologies like IoT and AI.

Role of Startups in Economic Development

- **Employment Generation:** Startups leverage India's demographic dividend to create jobs in tech, manufacturing, and services, while also generating indirect opportunities in gig work and supply chains. The NIDHI program alone has generated 1,30,000+ jobs.
- **Bridging Rural-Urban Divides:** Innovations in agri-tech, telemedicine, and microfinance are addressing developmental gaps. For example, agri-tech platforms improve market access for farmers, while rural schemes support sustainable livelihoods.
- **Technological Integration:** Startups are driving the adoption of deep-tech and emerging technologies, collaborating with large corporates for technology transfer and global market integration.
- **Economic Multiplier:** Ventures in clean mobility and digital infrastructure are producing multiplier effects across finance and sustainability sectors, positioning the ecosystem as a central driver for India's goal of becoming a \$7.3 trillion economy by 2030.

Key Concerns with India's Startup Ecosystem

- **Risk-averse Mind-set**

- **Low Tolerance for Failure:** Indian society traditionally associates failure with stigma rather than learning.
- **Preference for Stable Employment:** Families and social structures prioritise secure government or corporate jobs.

- **Financial Hurdles**

- **Funding Gaps:** Early-stage startups struggle to raise capital as investors prefer mature ventures with proven traction.
- **Cash Flow Management:** Many startups fail due to poor revenue generation and high "burn rates" (spending money too fast).

- **Regulatory and Bureaucratic Roadblocks**

- **Exit Barriers:** Closing a business is often more bureaucratic and difficult than starting one.
- **Taxation Issues:** Startups struggle with tax compliance, including the controversial "Angel Tax" and delayed payments affecting liquidity.

- **Talent and Mentorship**

- **Skills Gap:** There is a disconnect between academic training and the practical skills required by the industry.
- **Retention Issues:** Startups struggle to retain talent against large corporations that offer higher job stability.

• Market and Infrastructure Barriers

- **Price Sensitivity:** Indian customers are highly value-conscious and often unwilling to pay for new services.
- **Fragmented Market:** India's linguistic and cultural diversity makes it difficult to scale a product across different regions.
- **Lack of Industry- Academia Convergence:** A mismatch between academic output and industry requirements.

Conclusion

As India enters the second decade of the Startup India Initiative, the focus must shift from scale to sustainability, from rapid proliferation to resilient innovation. Strengthening deep-tech research, easing regulatory bottlenecks, deepening industry-academia linkages, and nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets across geographies will be crucial to building globally competitive enterprises.

With coherent policy support, vibrant private participation, and an enabling socio-cultural ecosystem, India's startup movement can emerge as a cornerstone of inclusive growth, technological leadership, and long-term economic transformation.

Related News

Deep Tech Startup

Government has removed condition of 3-year existence for deep-tech startups to qualify for recognition and avail financial aid under Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR)'s Industrial R&D Promotion Program (IRDPP).

What is a Deep Tech Startup?

In addition to the standard Startup criteria, a Deep Tech Startup must demonstrate the following attributes:

- **Scientific/Engineering Advancement:** It is working on a solution based on new knowledge or advancements within a scientific or engineering discipline (or multiple disciplines) that is yet to be developed or is in the process of development.
- **R&D Intensity:** It has a high percentage of expenditure on research and development (R&D) activities relative to its revenue or funding.
- **Intellectual Property:** It owns or is in the process of creating significant novel intellectual property (IP) and is taking steps to commercialize it.
- **High Capital & Uncertainty:** It faces extended development timelines, long gestation periods, and high capital or infrastructure requirements, while carrying significant technical or scientific uncertainty.
- **Modified Limits for Deep Tech Startups:** For entities recognized as Deep Tech Startups, the age and turnover limits are higher:
 - **Age:** Considered a startup for up to **20 years** from the date of incorporation or registration.
 - **Turnover:** The turnover limit is increased to **300 crore rupees** for any financial year since incorporation.

Other initiatives taken for DeepTech Startup in india

- **Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP), 2023:** To address the challenges confronting deep tech startups through definitive policy interventions to create a conducive ecosystem.
- **North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR):** Autonomous society under DST aims to harness and leverage niche frontier technologies.
- **Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme:** It enables acquisition of strategically important technologies, and promotes the creation of a Deep-Tech Fund of Funds.
- **Indo-Israel Deep Tech & Life Sciences Mission:** This mission was launched in 2021 to promote collaboration between India and Israel in deep tech and life sciences.

3.6. GIG WORKERS

Why in the News?

Major delivery aggregators have agreed to remove the 10-minute delivery service deadline.

About Gig Workers

- **Definition:** The **Code on Social Security, 2020** for the **first time** provided the **definition of gig and platform workers** as:
 - **Gig Worker:** Person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities **outside of traditional employer-employee relationship**.
 - **Platform Workers:** Person engaged in or undertaking **platform work**.
 - > **Platform work** being a work arrangement where organisations/individuals use an **online platform to access other organisations/individuals** to solve specific problems or to provide specific services.
- The **Code on Social Security 2020** for the first time empowers Government to formulate schemes for providing social security benefits to unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers.
 - They were earlier considered part of **informal/unorganised sector** with no recognition under Payment of Wages Act (1936), Minimum Wages Act (1948), EPF Act, or ESI Act, etc.
- **Key Reasons for Rise of Gig Work:** Structural transformations driven by **digitalisation, green energy transition** in labour market has become the key reason for their emergence.
 - **Gig economy**, encompassing **delivery, ridesharing, and freelancing**, has witnessed structural growth, transitioning **informal jobs into ecosystem-integrated roles**.
- **Status:** Represent over **2% of total workforce in India**. (Economic Survey 2025-26).
 - From 77 lakh workers in FY21 to 120 lakh workers in FY25, the sector has witnessed a **55% increase** driven by smartphone penetration **among 80 crore users** and **15 billion UPI transactions per month**.
- **Rising Trends:** As per NITI Aayog, gig workforce is expected to expand to **2.35 crore by 2029-30**.

Key Benefits of Gig Employment

 Flexibility: Flexible scheduling by enabling workers to work remotely, task-based and on- demand basis.	 Diverse Income Opportunities: Enables workers to engage in a variety of revenue-generating activities promoting economic resilience.	 Global Market Access: Platforms like Uber, Airbnb, Amazon, connects workers and clients across regions.	 Skill Development: Sector requires range of digital (technological advances, task management) and soft skills (communication, problem solving), etc.	 Micro-Entrepreneurship: Allowing people to monetise their skills, assets and time, removing expensive start-up costs, etc.	 Female Employment: Platforms offers women workers opportunities. E.g., Urban company offers home based services.
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Key Issues faced by Gig Workers

- **Algorithmic Asymmetry:** Platform algorithms **control work allocation, performance monitoring, wages, and supply-demand matching**, raising concerns about algorithmic biases.
 - Platform aggregators have broad access to **workers' information** while workers do not have access to algorithms creating information asymmetry.
- **Income and Job Uncertainty:** Sector is **heavily reliant on market demand** with about **40% of gig workers** reporting earnings **below ₹15,000 per month** (Economic Survey 2025-26).
 - Further they also face **low financial inclusion** causing challenges in **accessing credit or have thin-file credit access**.
- **Lack of Collective Bargaining Power:** Due to gig economy being a **recent and emergent phenomena** and lack of employer-employee relationship, traditional concept of collective bargaining has not fully matured.

- **Limited Skilling:** Fears of **job losses** due to technological advances such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)** add to worker vulnerability.
- **Lack of Suitable Classification:** While the law recognises gig and platform workers as a distinct category, it treats them as a **largely homogeneous group**, which are highly **segmented by skill**.
 - Share of **high-skilled gig workers** is expected to be 27.5% by 2030, while 33.8% for **low-skilled workers**. (NITI Aayog).
- **Others: Mental and Health Concerns** due to irregular schedules, **gender specific concerns** due to lack of digital literacy and wage gaps within platforms, etc.

Global Regulations Concerning Gig economy

- **Spain (2021):** Introduced the 'ley rider' (rider law), recognising food courier workers as employees rather than self-employed contractors.
- **European Union Platform Workers' Directive (2024):** It corrected employment status of gig workers who are misclassified as self-employed.
- **International Labour Organisation (2025):** Formal discussions on establishing international standards for decent work in platform economy, focus on fair wages, working conditions, etc.

Initiatives taken for the Welfare of Gig Workers

- **Code on Social Security (2020):**
 - **Welfare/Social Security Fund:** It mandates aggregators to contribute **1-2% of their annual turnover** (capped at **5% of payments made** or payable to gig/platform workers) to fund life/health insurance, and pensions for gig workers.
 - **National Social Security Board:** Advises Government on formulating and monitoring suitable schemes.
 - > Similar provision for **State Unorganised Workers Social Security Board**.
 - **Portability of Benefits: Unique Aadhaar-linked ID generated through registration on e-Shram portal**, allowing gig workers' social security benefits to be **portable across platforms**.
 - > **e-Shram portal** is meant to register and support **unorganised workers** by providing them a **Universal Account Number (UAN)** on a **self-declaration basis**.
 - **Grievance Redressal: Toll-free helpline, call centre, or facilitation centre** for timely support.
 - **Social Security Schemes:** Life insurance, disability insurance, health, maternity, and pension benefits, etc.
- **Union Budget 2025-26:** Providing healthcare under **PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)**, likely to assist **nearly 1 crore gig-workers**.
 - 12 major aggregators, namely Zomato, Blinkit, Urban Company, Uber, Amazon, Ola, Swiggy, etc., have been onboarded to the **Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY benefits**.
- **State-level Initiatives:** **Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration And Welfare) Act, 2023;** **Karnataka Platform based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024;** etc.

Ways to address challenges faced by Gig Workers

- **Expediate Implementation of Social Security Code:** Across all states/UTs along with **strengthening administrative readiness**, creating a **gender disaggregated database** of unorganized, gig and platform workers, and **intensifying awareness** (Parliamentary Committee Report on Empowerment of Women).
- **Strengthen Social Security Coverage:** Tailored schemes, wider e-Shram registration, regular monitoring of fund use and wider healthcare delivery.
- **Estimating the size of Gig Economy:** During enumerations (census, PLFS, NSS or otherwise), different occupations of an individuals may be captured including **gig work status**.
- **Algorithmic Accountability and Fair Task Allocation:** Easy **access to data**, including money received, any deductions, ratings, with the workers.
- **Financial Planning Support:** Access to **low-cost emergency savings schemes**, portable social security benefits; budgeting and financial literacy programmes.
- **Others:** Transparent policy concerning **terms of services, inclusive social dialogue, right to collective bargaining and unionization; etc.**

Conclusion

Operationalizing the Code on Social Security could adopt **five-pronged RAISE approach** by **Recognising** varied nature of work; **Augmenting** Social Security; **Incorporating** interests of platforms and workers; **Support** Welfare programmes; **Ensure** accessibility of benefits.

3.7. NEWS IN SHORTS

3.7.1. TELECOM, FOOD DELIVERY, AVIATION: DUOPOLIES DOMINATING INDIAN MARKET

The recent Indigo fiasco in the aviation sector highlighted the issues and concerns faced due to duopoly in delivery of commodities and services.

What is Duopoly?

- It refers to a scenario in which **two suppliers dominate the market for a commodity or service**.
- In India, markets with just two suppliers in operation are becoming more common. E.g., **Duopoly of Ola and Uber in cab services**.
- **Reason for Rise of Duopoly**
 - **High capital requirements:** Makes entry and survival difficult for smaller firms. E.g., **Aviation sector**.
 - **Network effects:** Big firms spend early on to acquire customers, squeezing out competitors. E.g., **Telecom sector**
 - **Regulatory Gaps:** Allows dominance to deepen.

Challenges posed by Duopoly

- **Inflated Pricing and Reduced Affordability:** Lack of competitive pressure lets dominant firms raise prices with little resistance, increasing consumer costs. E.g., **Food delivery**.
- **Limited Consumer Choice and Market Options:** Shrinks the presence of smaller players leaving consumers with very few alternatives.
- **Stagnation in Innovation:** Innovation is driven by staying slightly ahead of the lone rival, not by fear of disruptive new entrants. E.g., **Telecom sector**.
- **Excessive Lobbying Power and Regulatory Influence:** Powerful duopolistic firms can use their significant influence to protect their interests and block new technologies. E.g., **e-commerce sector**.
- **Systemic Vulnerability and Capacity Failures:** Failure of one player in a duopoly can lead to economy-wide losses and unsatiated demand. E.g., **Recent Indigo crisis in aviation sector**.

Conclusion

Addressing India's emerging duopolies requires moving beyond **post-facto regulation to proactive market design**. This includes strengthening CCI's ex-ante powers, improving coordination between CCI and sectoral regulators, lowering entry barriers through regulatory sandboxes and shared infrastructure, and ensuring transparent pricing and data portability to empower consumers.

Existing Regulatory Mechanism

- **The Competition Act, 2002:** Provides the legal framework to prevent market distortion by prohibiting anti-competitive agreements and the abuse of a dominant market position.
 - Competition Commission of India (CCI) acts as the statutory watchdog responsible for enforcing competition laws.
- **Role of Sectoral Regulators:** **TRAI** (in Telecom sector), **DGCA** (in aviation sector), among others.

3.7.2. NON-PERFORMING ASSETS (NPA)

According to the **Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25** of RBI, the NPA of Indian banks has reached a multi-decade low, with the gross NPA ratio dropping to 2.1% by late 2025.

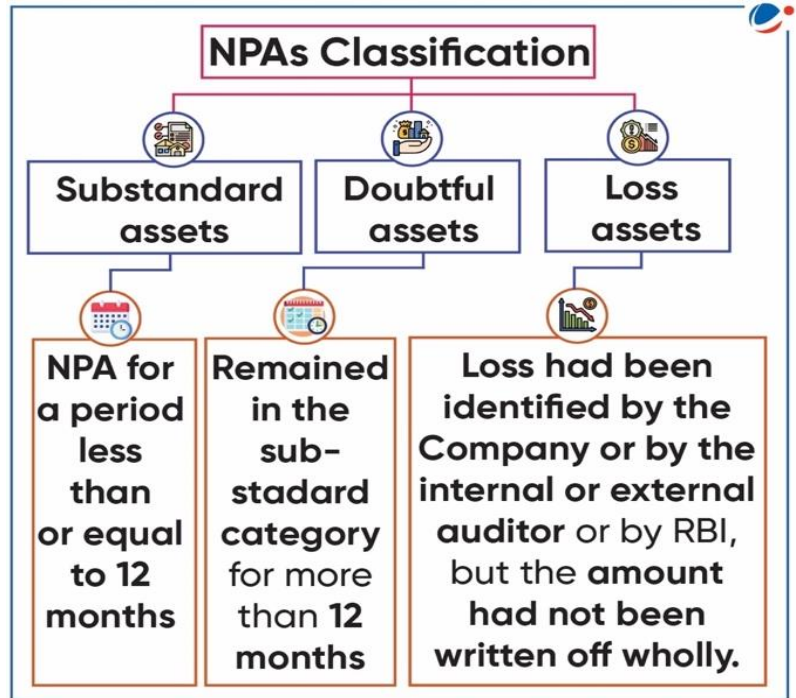
- The **net NPA (NNPA)** ratio also declined to 0.5 % at the end of March 2025
- **GNPA** ratio of banks started reached its peak in 2018 at 11.18%.

What is Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)?

- **NPAs** are loans or advances for which the principal or interest payment remains overdue for a period of more than 90 days.
 - **Gross NPA** is the total value of loans where interest or principal remains overdue and **Net NPA** is obtained by subtracting provisions (the funds the bank sets aside to cover expected losses) from GNPA.
- **Key Drivers of NPA:** Economic slowdowns, fraudulent borrowers, poor monitoring, etc.
- **Challenges associated with NPAs:** high provisioning, reduced lending capacity, etc.

Key initiatives that have played a crucial role in reducing NPAs

- **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016:** Created a time-bound and creditor-driven resolution framework for stressed assets
- **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act):** It allows secured creditors to take possession of collateral, against which a loan had been provided, upon a default in repayment.
- **Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs):** Banks continued to clean their balance sheets by selling NPAs to ARCs
- **Other:** Indradhanush plan (launched for revamping PSBs, envisaging infusion of capital in PSBs), Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs), etc.



3.7.3. RESERVE BANK - INTEGRATED OMBUDSMAN SCHEME (RB-IOS), 2026

RB-IOS 2026, a scheme for resolving customer grievances in relation to services provided by entities regulated by RBI, will come into effect from July 1, 2026.

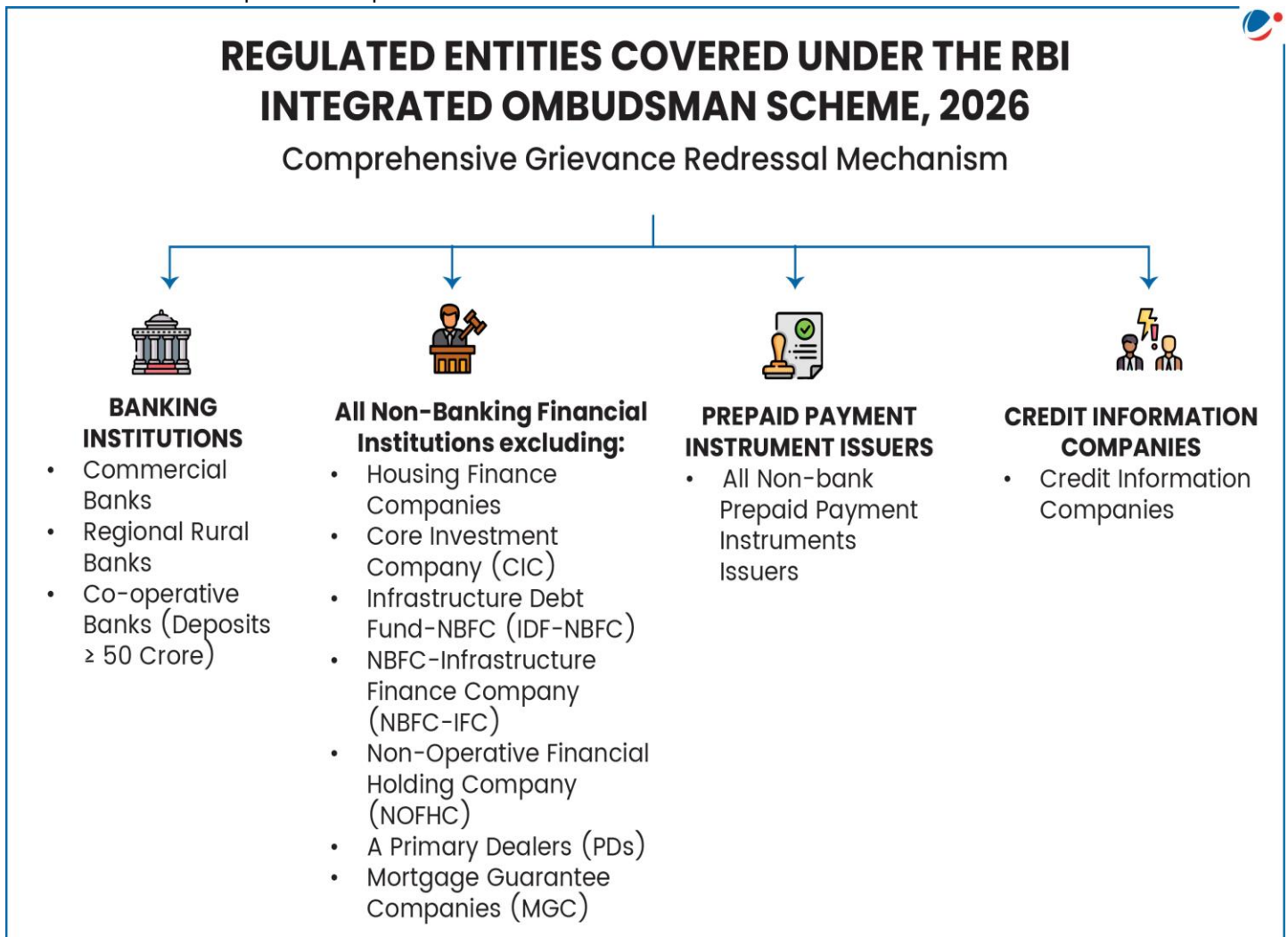
Key Features of RB-IOS 2026

- **Aim:** To provide a cost-effective, expeditious, non-adversarial alternate grievance redress mechanism for the resolution of complaints against Regulated Entities.
- **RBI Ombudsman:** RBI may appoint one or more of its officers as RBI Ombudsman and RBI Deputy Ombudsman, generally for a period of three years.
- **Centralised Receipt and Processing Centre (CRPC):** To be established by RBI to receive and process the complaints.
- **Powers of Ombudsman:**
 - No limit on dispute amount that can be brought before RBI Ombudsman.
 - Power to provide a compensation up to ₹30 lakh.
- **Grounds of Complaint:** Act or omission of a Regulated Entity resulting in deficiency in service.
- **Appeal:** Regulated Entity or Complainant may file an appeal before the Appellate Authority within 30 days.



Read our previous coverage on SARAFESI Act, 2002

- **Nodal Officer:** Regulated Entity shall appoint a Principal Nodal Officer at their head office for furnishing information on its behalf in respect of complaints filed.



3.7.4. RBI OVERHAULS PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING (PSL) NORMS

RBI issued **Reserve Bank of India (Priority Sector Lending – Targets and Classification) Directions, 2025**.

- **PSL** ensure that vulnerable sections of society and underdeveloped areas get access to credit.

Key Features of the Latest RBI PSL Guidelines

- **Enhanced Compliance & External Audit:** RBI requires banks to obtain certification from external auditors (or CAG-empanelled auditors for specific entities like NCDC).
 - This audit ensures that the same underlying loan exposure is not claimed as PSL by both the originating bank and the intermediary (such as an NBFC or Cooperative).
- **Revised Sector Targets:** The PSL target for **Small Finance Banks (SFBs)** has been adjusted from 75% to 60% of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC).
- **Inclusion of NCDC for Rural Credit:** Loans provided by banks to the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)** for the purpose of on-lending to cooperative societies are now officially classified as PSL.
- **Other**
 - Banks are also permitted to enter into co-lending arrangements to meet PSL targets.
 - Allowed banks to treat export credit to agriculture and MSMEs as PSL loans.

Targets for PSL for Different Types of Banks			
Categories	Domestic commercial banks & foreign banks with 20 branches and above	Foreign banks with less than 20 branches	Regional Rural Banks
Provisions	40% of ANBC or Credit Equivalent of Off-Balance Sheet Exposures (CEOBE), whichever is higher	Same as Domestic commercial bank (32% can be in the form of Export Credit and not less than 8% can be to any other priority sector)	75% of ANBC or CEOBE whichever is higher. Lending by to Medium Enterprises, Social Infrastructure, and Renewable Energy is now capped at 15% of ANBC.

3.7.5. STAR LABELLING

New revised star rating of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) comes into force.

- **BEE** is established as the **statutory body** under **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.

About BEE Star Ratings

- It is a key feature of **the Standards and Labelling (S&L) Programme**.
- **Objective:** To provide the consumer with an informed choice **about energy saving and thereby the cost-saving potential of the relevant marketed appliance**.
- **Mandatory Appliances:** Ceiling fans, Electric geysers, Tubular fluorescent lamps, Colour Television, etc.
- **Voluntary Appliances:** General Purpose Industrial Motor, Computer, Microwave Oven etc.

3.7.6. OECD FINALISES AGREEMENT ON GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX

OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) have agreed on a **side by side arrangement package** for the co-ordinated operation of **global minimum tax** arrangements.

- **Global Minimum Tax:** It is based on **Global Anti-Base Erosion (GloBE) Model Rules**. It aims to ensure that **large multinational enterprises pay a minimum level of tax on their income in each jurisdiction where they operate**, thereby reducing the incentive for profit shifting and placing a floor under tax competition, bringing an **end to the race to the bottom** on corporate tax rates.
 - BEPS refers to **tax planning strategies that multinational enterprises use to exploit loopholes in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations as a way to avoid paying tax**. (E.g. through deductible payments like interest or royalties).

Global Minimum Tax Package

- **The package includes five key components**
 - **Simplification measures:** Reduces compliance burdens for multinational enterprises (MNEs) and tax authorities.
 - > MNEs are groups of companies and generally operate worldwide through locally incorporated subsidiaries or permanent establishments.



OECD/G20 INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK ON BEPS

 **Launched:** 2016

 **Objective:** To tackle Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) by multinational enterprises.

 **Membership:** 147 countries and jurisdictions. (India is a member).



PILLAR ONE

Reallocates taxing rights to market jurisdictions where profits are generated



PILLAR TWO

Introduces a global minimum corporate tax (15%) to curb tax competition.

- **Tax incentive alignment:** Introduces a targeted **substance-based tax incentive safe harbour** to align global treatment of tax incentives.
- **Safe harbours for qualifying MNEs:** Available to MNE Groups with ultimate parent entities in eligible jurisdictions meeting minimum taxation requirements.
- **Level playing field:** Includes **evidence-based stocktake process** to ensure fair treatment for all Inclusive Framework Members.
- **Domestic minimum tax protection:** Reinforces qualified domestic minimum top-up tax regimes as the primary mechanism for protecting local tax bases, particularly in developing countries.

3.7.7. NEW COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK (NCPF)

A NCPF for 2026-2031 has been signed between India and the World Bank for a provision of \$8-10 billion.

About NCPF

- The partnership prioritises **private sector-led job creation** by upgrading skills, reducing barriers for small and medium enterprises, and expanding opportunities-particularly for youth and women
- The partnership identifies **four strategic outcomes**:
 - **Boosting rural prosperity and resilience:** By diversifying incomes beyond agriculture.
 - **Supporting urban transformation:** As the country's urban population is projected to double to 800 million by 2050;
 - **Investing in people:** Across health, education and skills.
 - **Strengthening energy security, core infrastructure and climate resilience:** Including renewable energy, e-mobility and green hydrogen.

3.7.8. REPORTS IN NEWS

- **Global Economic Prospects:** Released by the World Bank.
 - **Published twice a year** (January and June) assessing global growth prospects.
 - **Revision in India's growth forecast:** 7.2% for fiscal year 2025-26 from 6.3% projected last June.
 - > **Reasons:** Robust local demand, strong private consumption, tax reforms and rising real household incomes in rural areas.
 - **Global trade growth:** Projected to **decelerate from 3.4% in 2025 to 2.2% in 2026**
 - **Record Debt Levels:** Government debt in emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) has climbed to a 55-year high of nearly **70% of GDP**.
- **Employment and Social Trends 2026 Report:** Released by International Labour Organisation.
 - **Progress in employment quality has stalled:** Between 2015–2025, extreme working poverty fell marginally by 3.1%.
 - **Increase in Informality of Work:** By 2026, 2.1 billion workers globally are projected to be informally employed.
 - India accounts for 3% of the world's manufacturing.
- **Global Investment Trends Monitor (GITM):** Released by the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**.
 - FDI inflows in India **surged by 73% to \$47 billion** in 2025.
 - > **Reason:** due to large investments in services including finance, IT, and R&D as well as manufacturing, supported by policies aimed at integrating India into global supply chains.



**Read our Weekly
Focus coverage
on Investment
Ecosystem in
India**

3.7.9. COKING COAL

Coking coal has been included in **Part D of First Schedule** of MMDR (Mineral under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation)) Act which lists Critical and Strategic Minerals.

- This decision recognises the strategic role of coking coal in ensuring mineral security and meeting the **requirements of the domestic steel sector**.
 - Currently, around **95% of the coking coal requirement of steel sector is met through imports**, leading to significant foreign exchange outgo.
- This decision is expected to facilitate faster approvals, improve ease of doing business, and accelerate exploration and mining activities, including of deep-seated deposits.

About Coking Coal

- Coking Coal is a **vital raw material in steel production** through blast furnace route and is also used in cement, chemicals, petrochemicals industries.
- **Reserves:** Estimated 37.37 billion tonnes of reserves, mainly in **Jharkhand**, and in Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.
- **Challenges:** Insufficient domestic production, high ash content and surface levels, legacy mine issues like underground fires and land subsidence, limited geological data, land acquisition challenges etc.
- **Initiatives:** Mission Coking Coal, 100% FDI in commercial coal mining, revenue-sharing auctions, 39 First Mile Connectivity Projects etc.



About MMDR Act 1957

- It empowers the Union Government to make laws concerning regulation of mines and development of mineral resources.
- It **establishes District Mineral Foundation (DMF)** for welfare of people and areas affected by mining and **National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET)** to give thrust to exploration and curb illegal mining.
- **2023 amendments** omitted 6 minerals from list of 12 atomic minerals, empowered central government to exclusively auction mineral concessions for critical minerals and introduced exploration license for deep-seated and critical minerals.



3.7.10. SILVER

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) highlighted that India must enhance silver processing and diversify imports to reduce reliance on finished silver.

- India **imported about 21.4% of global silver trade in 2024**, making it the world's largest consumer of finished silver.

About Silver

- It is a relatively **soft, shiny metal**.
- **Applications: Highest electrical and thermal conductivity** makes it indispensable for **electronics, circuit boards, connectors, batteries, and automotive systems**.
 - Silver's **antibacterial properties** are used in wound dressings, medical-device coatings, catheters, surgical instruments, water purification systems, and pharmaceutical compounds.
- **Natural Abundance:** Silver occurs in ores such as argentite and chlorargyrite (horn silver).

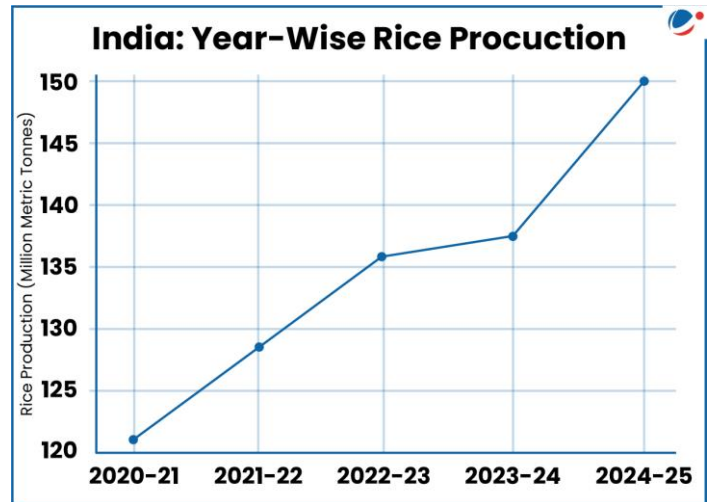
3.7.11. INDIA BECOMES WORLD'S LARGEST RICE PRODUCER, SURPASSES CHINA

Status of Rice Production and export:

- **Major producers of rice:** India (150 MT), China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Japan, Sri Lanka and Egypt.
- **State wise Production in India (2024-25):** Uttar Pradesh (13.8%), Telangana (11.6%), West Bengal (10.6%), Punjab (9.5%), Chhattisgarh (7%) etc.
- **Export:** India is the world's **largest rice exporter** (exporting 20.1 million metric tonnes of rice in 2024–25).
- **Major export destinations of India's Rice:** Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Benin, United Arab Emirates etc.

About Rice Crop

- **Type:** Major **food crop** of the world and **staple diet** of the tropical and sub-tropical regions.
- **Growth Conditions:**
 - Rice is grown under varying conditions in India from **8°N to 30°N latitude** and from **sea level to about 2,500 metre altitude**.
 - Grown in **variety of soils including silts, loams and gravels** and can tolerate acidic as well as alkaline soils.
 - Abundant rainfall (100-150cm), high humidity and high temperature (**30°C** during day and **20°C** at night).
 - > Paddy is a **semi-aquatic plant** that requires standing water (averaging 10–15 cm) for three-quarters of its growing season.
 - > It grows best in **impermeable subsoil** with a pH between **5.5 and 6.5**.
- **Cropping Seasons in India:** Rice is grown in three distinct seasons based on the region:
 - **Aman (Winter rice):** Sown in June–July and harvested in November–December.
 - **Aus (Autumn rice):** Sown in May–June and harvested in September–October.
 - **Boro (Summer rice):** Cultivated between November and May, often in areas that remain moist during winter.



3.7.12. CATTLE BREEDS- KARAN FRIES AND VRINDAVANI

The government has registered two high-yielding **synthetic cattle breeds**, **Karan Fries** and **Vrindavani**.

- Also, new indigenous breeds of cattle and buffalo have been recognised, such as **Medini** (Jharkhand), **Rohikhandi** (Uttar Pradesh), and **Melghati** (Maharashtra).

Significance of synthetic cattle breeds: Enhanced milk productivity without compromising **climate adaptability** and **disease resistance**.

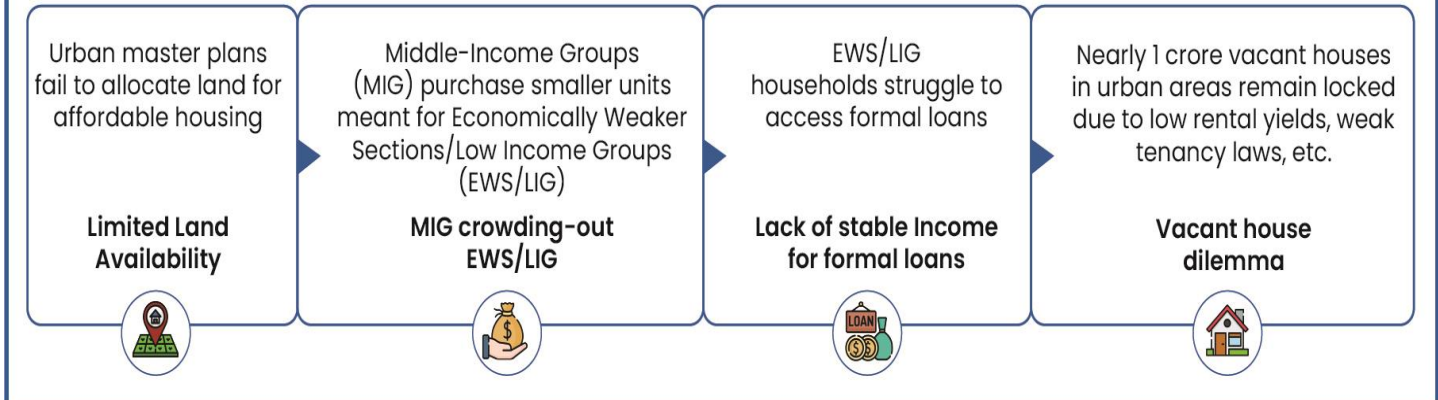
3.7.13. A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK TO PROMOTE AFFORDABLE HOUSING' REPORT BY NITI AYO

The reports offers a **working definition for Affordable House** as a dwelling unit with a carpet area and value of up to **60 sq. m. and ₹60 lakh (metropolitan cities)** and **90 sq. m. and ₹45 lakh (non-metropolitan areas)**.

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY- U) 2.0, 2024** defines affordable housing with the same carpet area as above and value **not exceeding ₹45 lakh**.

Karan Fries vs. Vrindavani		
Characteristic	Karan Fries	Vrindavani
Developed by	NDRI, Karnal, Haryana	ICAR-IVRI, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh
About	Cross between Indigenous Tharparkar and Holstein-Friesian	Blend of Holstein-Friesian, Brown Swiss, Jersey, and Hariana, known for resilience.

Key Issues in India's Affordable Housing Crisis



Key Recommendations on Affordable Housing

- **Zoning Reforms:** Designate **Affordable Housing Zones** within city Master Plans and Town Planning Schemes, with at least 10% of all residential land marked for affordable housing E.g. **Vienna and South Korea** adopts such approach.
- **Transit-oriented development (TOD):** Cities should **earmark areas near metro and mass transit stations** exclusively for mixed-use development, combining offices, commercial spaces, and affordable housing.
- **Reservation for EWS/LIG housing:** Mandatory **reservation of 10-15% of the built-up area for EWS/LIG housing** in all housing & commercial projects exceeding 10,000 sqm built-up area or 5,000 sqm plot area.
- **Reforms in rental housing legal framework:** States should adopt **dedicated rental housing stock policies through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models**, in line with PMAY-U 2.0 Affordable Rental Housing (ARH) vertical.

3.7.14. NPS VATSALYA SCHEME

Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) issued guidelines for the NPS Vatsalya Scheme, 2025.

NPS Vatsalya Scheme, 2025

- **Nodal Ministry:** Union Ministry of Finance.
- **Regulator:** Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (**PFRDA**).
- **Core Objective:** To inculcate a **habit of early and disciplined long-term savings among children**, ensuring financial security and pension preparedness from a young age.

Key Features



ELIGIBILITY

- All Indian Citizens
- NRI / OCI Included
- **Age:** Below 18 Years



BENEFICIARY

- Minor is Sole Beneficiary
- Full Ownership of Funds



ACCOUNT OPERATION

- Opened in Minor's Name
- Operated by **Parent / Guardian**



CONTRIBUTION

- **Minimum:** ₹250 / Year
- No Maximum Limit

3.7.15. TWO CREDIT-LINKED SUB SCHEMES LAUNCHED UNDER EXPORT PROMOTION MISSION

These pilot schemes form part of **NIRYAT PROTSAHAN** component of the **Export Promotion Mission**.

About New Schemes

- **Interest Subvention for Pre- and Post-Shipment Export Credit:** Provides interest subvention of 2.75% (as base rate) on rupee export credit.
 - **Additional incentive** for exports to **notified under-represented or emerging markets**.
 - **Annual cap:** ₹50 lakh for FY 2025–26.
 - **Eligibility:** restricted to exports **under a notified positive list of tariff lines** (at HS 6-digit level), covering ~75% of India's tariff lines.
- **Collateral Support for Export Credit:** Implemented in partnership with the **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)**.
 - It provides **guarantee coverage**:
 - > Up to **85%** for **Micro and Small exporters**.
 - > Up to **65%** for **Medium exporters**.
 - **Maximum limit:** ₹10 crore outstanding guaranteed exposure per exporter in a financial year.
 - **Eligibility:** same as above.

Export Promotion Mission (EPM)



Launched: In November 2025, for 6 years (FY 2025–26 to 2030–31)



Financial Outlay: ₹25,060 crore



Objective: Providing affordable trade finance, specifically for MSMEs, labour-intensive sectors (e.g. Textile), etc.

MISSION ARCHITECTURE

Two distinct but integrated pillars:

Niryat Protsahan (Financial Support)

through instruments like

- Interest Subvention
- Collateral Guarantees
- Credit Cards for E-commerce Exporters

Niryat Disha (Non-Financial Support)

- Support for Export Quality
- Compliance
- International Branding,
- Logistics

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4. SECURITY

4.1. INDIA'S DEFENCE INDUSTRY

Why in the News?

Defence Minister reiterated the Government's commitment to achieve Aatmanirbharta in defence manufacturing and make the country a global defence production hub.

Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem in India

- **Production:** Domestic defence production has grown from ₹46,425 crore in 2014 to a record approx. **₹1.51 lakh crore** in FY2025.
 - Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) continued to anchor production, contributing about 77% of the output.
- **Exports:** India's defence exports have increased from ₹686 crore in 2013-14 to **₹23,622 crore in 2024-25**.
 - **Role of Private Sector:** In 2024-25, defence exports reached ₹15,233 crore from the private sector and ₹8,389 crore from DPSUs.
 - **Export Destinations:** India now exports defence equipment to over 100 countries, with the USA, France, and Armenia emerging as the top buyers in 2023-24.
 - **Major Export Items:** These include bulletproof jackets, patrol boats, Chetak helicopters, Dornier (Do-228) aircraft, Radars and even advanced systems like torpedoes.
- **Startups:** Funding for India's military-tech start-ups has risen 61 times from Rs. 27 crore in 2016 to Rs. 1,653 crore in 2025, with total investments reaching Rs. 5,248 crore.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIGENOUS DEFENCE PRODUCTION

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY (Enhanced Global Standing)



Reduces dependence on foreign suppliers.



Ensures uninterrupted supply during wars, sanctions, or geopolitical tensions.



Enhances sovereign decision-making in foreign policy.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE (Boosts National Economy)



Reducing Import Burden, improving trade balance.



Growth of MSMEs, startups and manufacturing industry.



Creation, Employment especially in high-skill sectors.

TECHNOLOGY SPILLOVER (Drives Future Innovation)



Benefits from development of dual use technologies, especially in space, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing etc.



Development of Foundation for Critical and Emerging Technologies.



Encouragement to R&D ecosystem in universities and linked industries.

ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT: A SECURE AND SELF-RELIANT NATION.

Government Initiatives for Defence Manufacturing

- **Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs):** Two dedicated DICs have been established in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
 - Spread across 11 nodes in both states, these hubs are providing the infrastructure and incentives needed to turn India into a defence manufacturing powerhouse.

- **Positive Indigenisation Lists:** The government has issued **Positive Indigenisation Lists** that limit imports and encourage local manufacturing.
 - **Key indigenised technologies** include artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircraft, Light Combat Helicopters (LCHs), radars, wheeled armoured platforms, rockets, bombs, armoured command post vehicles, and armoured dozers.
- **Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX):** Launched in April 2018, iDEX has fostered a vibrant ecosystem for innovation and technology development in the defence and aerospace sectors.
 - By engaging MSMEs, startups, individual innovators, R&D institutes, and academia, iDEX has provided grants of up to ₹1.5 crore to support the development of cutting-edge technologies.
- **Liberalized FDI Policy:** Allows up to 74% FDI under the automatic route and beyond 74% (up to 100%) through the Government route.
 - Since April 2000, the total FDI in defence industries stands at Rs 5,516.16 crore.
- **Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS):** It aims to boost indigenisation by providing financial assistance for setting up eight Greenfield testing and certification facilities in the aerospace and defence sector.
- **Technology Development Fund (TDF):** Established to promote self-reliance in Defence Technology as a part of the 'Make in India' initiative.
- **DefExpo:** It was conceptualised in 1998 and has evolved as a flagship platform for showcasing India's defence industrial capabilities and promoting defence exports.

Challenges to Atmanirbharata in Defence Manufacturing

- **Limited Fiscal Space:** Fiscal constraints, competing developmental priorities and the structural burden of revenue expenditure continue to limit the pace at which indigenization can proceed.
 - Out of the total allocation made to the Ministry of Defence, only 27.95% of the Defence Budget allocation is for capital expenditure.
- **Lack of Technological Innovation:** While Indian defence planners have begun to prioritise cyber, electronic warfare, space and unmanned technologies, budgetary allocations for these domains remain modest compared to investments in conventional platforms.
- **Import Dependence:** India continues to depend on foreign suppliers for critical technologies and high-end platforms such as aero engines, propulsion modules, advanced materials, sensors etc.
- **Fragmentation of Defence Innovation Landscape:** Although India has created multiple DRDO-academia-industry collaboration frameworks, defence R&D remains fragmented in practice, with cooperation often project-specific rather than system-wide.
 - Unlike in Western countries, where most R&D occurs in the private sector, in India, it is dominated by the government and public-sector entities.
- **Lack of Input Enablers:** Advanced defence production requires reliable capital investments, precision machining and tooling, testing facilities, materials laboratories and secure digital networks.
- **Insufficient Skilling:** While India produces a large number of engineering and science graduates each year, persistent concerns remain regarding their employability.

Conclusion

Atmanirbharta in Defence has expanded production numbers, diversified the supplier base, and altered the political discourse and public awareness around defence production. By deepening public-private synergy, prioritising critical technologies and positioning exports as a strategic instrument of diplomacy, India can transition from being a major arms importer to a trusted global defence manufacturing hub. In doing so, defence indigenisation will not only enhance national security but also become a catalyst for industrial modernisation, strategic autonomy and long-term economic resilience.

4.2. QUANTUM TECHNOLOGIES IN ARMED FORCES

Why in the News?

Chief of Defence Staff released the **Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework**, a comprehensive document that includes the policy and the road map to implement Quantum Technologies in the Armed Forces.

Key Highlights of the Framework

- **Vision:** It aims for joint-ness and integration among the Tri-Services to achieve technological dominance in future battlefields and prepare for technology-centric warfare.
- **Civil-Military Fusion:** Aligned with National Quantum Mission (NQM) to ensure collaboration between civilian research and military applications through dedicated governing bodies.
 - **NQM aims to build a strong national ecosystem** spanning R&D, infrastructure, startups, and skilled human resources with a budget outlay of ~6,000 crores (2023-24 to 2030-31).
- **Core Domains:** Prioritises four critical quantum pillars:
 - Quantum Communication
 - Quantum Computing
 - Quantum Sensing & Metrology
 - Quantum Materials and Devices

Applications of Quantum Technology in Military

Application Area	Quantum Technology Capability	Advantage Over Existing Technology
Navigation and Positioning	Uses atomic interferometry (with super-cooled atoms) to enable highly precise navigation for missiles and submarines.	Eliminates the need for satellite-based navigation (like GPS), which is highly vulnerable to signal jamming, spoofing, and anti-satellite weapons.
Sensing and Metrology	Employs quantum magnetometers (like SQUIDs) and gravimeters to detect minute magnetic or gravitational anomalies.	Offers extreme sensitivity that can detect submerged submarines or hidden underground structures that easily evade traditional classical sonar and conventional magnetic sensors.
Warfare Capabilities	Powers autonomous military drones and robotic systems using Quantum-enabled AI (Quantum AI).	Processes complex battlefield variables much faster and more efficiently than classical artificial intelligence systems.
Quantum Imaging	Entangled-photon and ghost-imaging techniques allow imaging through fog, smoke, or darkness.	Surpasses optical/thermal cameras that fail in low-light or obscured environments.
Secure Communication	Uses Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) and the principle of entanglement to generate theoretically unhackable keys.	Replaces classical encryption methods that rely on mathematical complexity, which can be intercepted or decrypted by advanced computational power without the sender knowing.
Quantum Materials	Develops aerospace materials with extreme durability and adaptive properties, such as changing camouflage.	Outperforms standard, static composite materials by offering dynamic, molecular-level adaptability and superior resilience in extreme environments.
Chip Inspection	Uses quantum sensors to read magnetic "fingerprints" to non-invasively detect manufacturing defects or hardware "Trojans".	Allows for highly precise, non-destructive screening of microchips, whereas traditional deep-inspection methods often require destroying or damaging the hardware to verify its integrity.
Logistics Optimization	Applies quantum algorithms to solve complex optimization problems, such as routing supply chains.	Processes massive datasets and interconnected variables exponentially faster than classical supercomputers, which struggle with complex combinatorial problems.

Conclusion

India's quantum security strategy must integrate technology monitoring, research flexibility, and supply chain security while leveraging global partnerships and domestic innovation. A proactive, multi-pronged approach will ensure national security remains resilient in the quantum era.

4.3. NEWS IN SHORTS

4.3.1. PRALAY MISSILES

DRDO conducted launch of two Pralay missiles from the Odisha coast.

About Pralay Missile

- It is an indigenous, short-range, surface-to-surface quasi ballistic missile designed to carry various types of warheads and engage multiple target profiles.
- **Developed by:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the Indian Armed Forces.
- **Range:** 150 to 500 km.

4.3.2. DHRUV-NG HELICOPTERS

Dhruv-NG (New Generation) recently completed its **inaugural flight** in Bengaluru.

About Dhruv-NG Helicopters

- **Platform:** Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's **ALH Dhruv** is an indigenously developed, **twin-engine multi-role helicopter**.
- **Variant:** Dhruv-NG is the new-generation **civilian version** with **modern avionics and systems**.
- **Roles:** Designed for transport, air ambulance, disaster relief, tourism, and utility missions.

4.3.3. SURYAstra

Indian Army has signed a ₹293 crore contract with private defence manufacturer NIBE Limited, in collaboration with Israel, for the supply of an **advanced long-range rocket launcher system Suryastra**.

About Suryastra

- It is **India's first Made in India universal multi-calibre rocket launcher**,
- Capable of executing **precision surface-to-surface strikes** at ranges extending up to 300 km.
- **Capabilities**
 - Can engage **multiple targets simultaneously** at varying ranges.
 - Can integrate **multiple rocket types**.
 - Accuracy of less than **5 meters**.
 - Can fire **loitering munitions** up to 100 km.

4.3.4. MPATGM

DRDO successfully flight-tested indigenously developed third generation **Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM)** against a moving target.

About MPATGM

- It is a shoulder-launched, portable missile system, specifically designed to counter enemy tanks and armoured vehicles.
- It consists of state-of-the-art indigenous technologies like Imaging Infrared (IIR) Homing Seeker, all electric Control Actuation System, Fire Control System, etc.

4.3.5. LONG RANGE ANTI-SHIP HYPERSONIC MISSILE (LR-ASHM)

DRDO displayed the Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-ASHM) during the 77th Republic Day parade.

About LR-ASHM

- It is **India's first Long Range Hypersonic Glide Missile** designed to meet the **coastal battery requirements of the Indian Navy**.
- **Range** of approximately 1,500 km; can engage **static and moving targets**.
- **First-of-its-kind** with **indigenous avionics systems** and high accuracy sensors.
- **Speed**: Follows a **quasi-ballistic trajectory**, achieving **peak speeds of Mach 10** and maintaining an **average of Mach 5** via skipping manoeuvres.
- **Propulsion**: Powered by a **two-stage solid propulsion system**; performs an unpowered **glide** with required manoeuvres after the second stage burns out.
- **Stealth**: Flies at **low altitudes and high speed to evade radar detection**.

4.3.6. C-295 TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

India's first 'Made in India' C-295 aircraft will be rolled out before September 2026.

- It is being manufactured at the Airbus-Tata Final Assembly Line in Vadodara.

About C-295 aircraft

- It is Medium-range, twin-engine turboprop tactical transport aircraft.
- It is an efficient tactical transport aircraft having a flight endurance of up to 11 hours.
- **Other key features**: short take-off and landing (STOL), etc.



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5. ENVIRONMENT

5.1. SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES, 2026

Why in the News?

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026, superseding the SWM Rules, 2016.

About Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026

- **Notified under: Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, will come into full effect from April 1, 2026.
- The revised rules integrate the principles of **Circular Economy** and **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**.

Key Provisions of the Rules

- **Mandatory Four-stream Segregation of Solid Waste at Source** (see infographic).
- **Definition of Bulk Waste Generators (BWGs)**: Includes entities like government departments, local bodies, residential societies etc. with responsibilities to-
 - Ensure environmentally sound waste collection, transport, and processing.
 - Process wet waste on-site where possible, or obtain **Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR) certificate**.
 - > EBWGR framework holds BWGs accountable for solid waste generated by them.
- **Centralised Online Portal**: To track all stages of solid waste management; registration, authorisation and audit of waste processing facilities, etc.
- **Use of Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) by Industries**: Industrial units, including **cement plants** and **waste-to-energy plants** have been **mandated** to use RDF.
 - RDF is produced by shredding and dehydrating municipal solid waste with high calorific value, primarily consisting of non-recyclable plastic, paper and textiles.
- **Restrictions on Landfilling**: Mandatory Annual audits of landfills and mapping and assessment of all **legacy waste dumpsites** and provide biomining and bioremediation.
 - Landfills have been strictly restricted to **non-recyclable, non-energy recoverable waste and inert material**.
- **SWM in Hilly Areas and Islands**: E.g., Local bodies can levy user fees on tourists and regulate tourist inflow based on available waste management facilities.
- **Environmental Compensation (EC)**: Levied based on the 'Polluter Pays' principle for non-compliance.

Four-Stream Segregation of Solid Waste

Mandatory Under SWM Rules, 2026



Wet Waste

Kitchen waste, vegetables, fruit peels, meat, flowers

- ➔ Composted or processed through bio-methanation at nearest facility



Dry Waste

Plastic, paper, metal, glass, wood, rubber

- ➔ Transported to Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) for sorting and recycling



Sanitary Waste

Used diapers, sanitary towels, tampons, condoms.

- ➔ Securely wrapped and stored separately



Special Care Waste

Paint cans, bulbs, mercury thermometers, medicines

- ➔ Collected by authorised agencies or deposited at designated collection centres

Segregate at Source

Proper waste segregation helps in effective recycling, reduces landfill burden, and protects the environment



Data Bank

Status of SWM in India

➤ Type:

- ~55-60% is **biodegradable waste**
- 15-20% is **recyclable**
- 15-25% is **hazardous or non-recyclable waste**
- **60% of total waste generation** from **Urban areas**
- **2.56%** share of Waste sector in **India's total emissions in 2020** (India's fourth Biennial Update Report)

Challenges in Solid Waste Management

- **Rising Waste Generation:** Due to Rapid urbanisation, population growth, economic development, and changing lifestyles.
 - **Total waste generation** is projected to increase to **165 million tonnes by 2030** and **436 million tonnes by 2050**.
- **Operational Gaps:** Poor coordination among multiple stakeholders and inconsistent waste segregation at source continue to disrupt the efficiency of waste collection and processing.
 - Only **60-70%** of waste is **collected**, and merely **15-20%** is **processed**.
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Inadequate waste processing and monitoring facilities, limited financial capacity of municipalities for capital-intensive projects etc.
 - Only **~39%** of waste being **scientifically processed**, most urban areas rely on open dumping or underperforming treatment facilities.
- **Technical Challenges:** Technology gaps in processing, **limited R&D** in waste-to-resource conversion, and a **shortage of skilled personnel** constrain the modernisation of SWM operations.
- **Regulatory and Compliance Issues:** Weak **enforcement** mechanisms, **poor accountability** in waste tracking, and implementation gaps in **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**
- **Other challenges:** **Limited financial viability** of waste processing enterprises and **underdeveloped recycling markets**; widespread public **complacency** towards waste segregation; growing legacy waste etc.

Existing Legal Framework for SWM

- **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016**
- **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**
- **E-Waste Management Rules 2022**
- **Construction and Demolition (C&D) Waste Management Rules, 2016** (The Environment (Construction and Demolition) Waste Management Rules, 2025 are to come into effect from April 1, 2026.)
- **Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016**

Key Initiatives for SWM in India

- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM 2.0):** Expanding solid-waste processing capacity, promoting segregation at source, and strengthening scientific waste management systems.
 - **SBM Urban 2.0** aims to make **all its cities garbage-free by 2026**.
- **Dumpsite Remediation Accelerator Programme (DRAP):** Achieve **“Lakshya: Zero Dumpsites”** by October 2026 using **5P Framework** of Political Leadership, Public Finance, Partnerships, People’s Participation, and Project Management.
 - Over **62% of legacy waste** has already been **processed**.
- **City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain 2.0 (CITIIS 2.0):** Supporting implementing circular economy, integrated waste management and climate-resilient urban projects.
- **GoBARDHAN (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan):** converting organic waste from agricultural, livestock, and urban waste into **bioenergy**, including biogas, and organic fertilisers.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Regulatory Framework:** Integrate C&D waste management with building approvals, develop technology-driven monitoring systems, and **harmonize rules** across governance levels.
- **Build Infrastructure Capacity:** Invest in decentralized processing facilities, establish material recovery facilities (MRFs) in all cities, develop scientific sanitary landfills, and create waste-to-energy plants.
- **Leverage Technology and Innovation:** Deploy digital tracking systems with GPS and RFID, develop AI-powered sorting technologies, and promote R&D in waste reuse, recovery and reclamation.
- **Enhance Institutional Coordination:** Establish dedicated waste management cells in ULBs, create inter-departmental committees, build municipal staff capacity through training, and foster public-private partnerships.

- **Develop Markets for Recyclables:** Through quality standards for recycled products, tax incentives for recycled material use, integration of informal workers, mandated recycled content in government procurement etc.
 - E.g. **eco-industrial parks** focused on recycling industries.
- **Ensure Financial Sustainability:** Implement volume-based user charges, access **green financing** and climate funds, create dedicated waste management funds, and explore innovative financing like green bonds.
- **Address Legacy Waste:** Remediate dumpsites through bio-mining, set strict closure deadlines, convert remediated land for productive use, and ensure long-term monitoring.

Best Practices

- **Indore Model:** India's cleanest city for 7 consecutive years, achieved 100% door-to-door waste collection through consistent public engagement.
- **Anupam Model (New Delhi): Anupam Colonies** are residential colonies with successful decentralised waste management, overseen by dedicated sanitation inspectors.
- **SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling) Pune Model:** Integration of waste pickers in informal sector into formal door-to-door waste collection through Cooperative Organization.

Conclusion

Strengthening urban governance, and promoting sustainable waste practices will make the waste sector a critical enabler of India's long-term goals of advancing environmental health, resource efficiency, and Net Zero 2070 goals.

5.2. GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS (GLOFS)

Why in the News?

A study highlighted the **inadequate risk assessment** of the growing number, size, and volume of glacial lakes across the **Himalaya-Karakoram ranges**, despite increased risks of **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**.

Key highlights of the study (by IIT Roorkee)

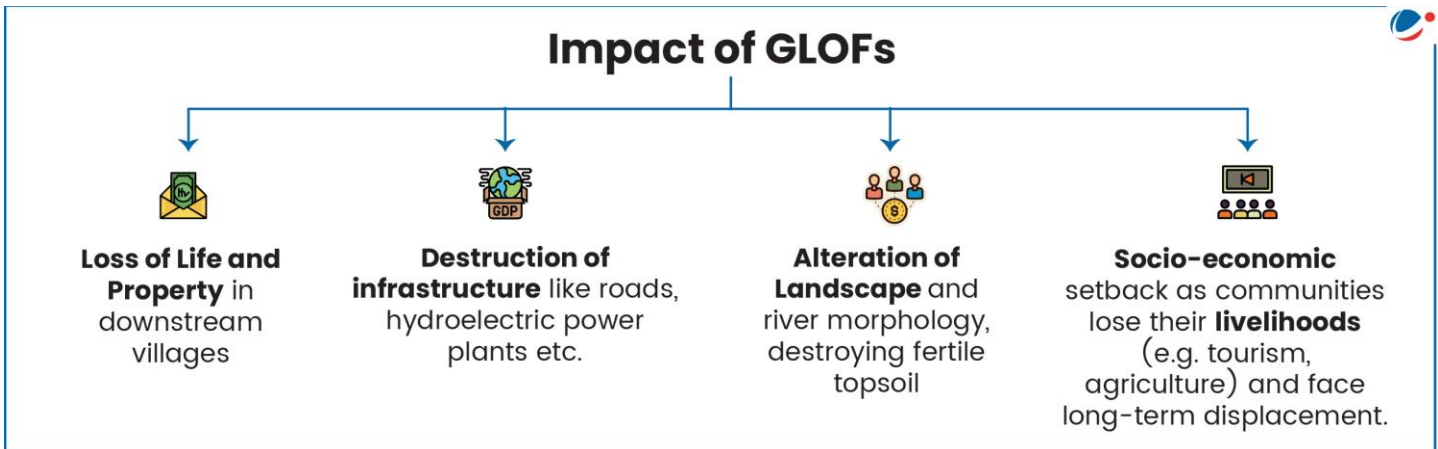
- > 31,000 of glacial lakes are growing across High Mountain Asia (HMA).
- **Highest area** coverage of glacial lakes observed in **Eastern Himalaya region**.
- Glacial lakes in HMA experienced a **total area increase of 5.5%**.

About Glacial Lake and Glacial Lake Outburst floods (GLOFs)

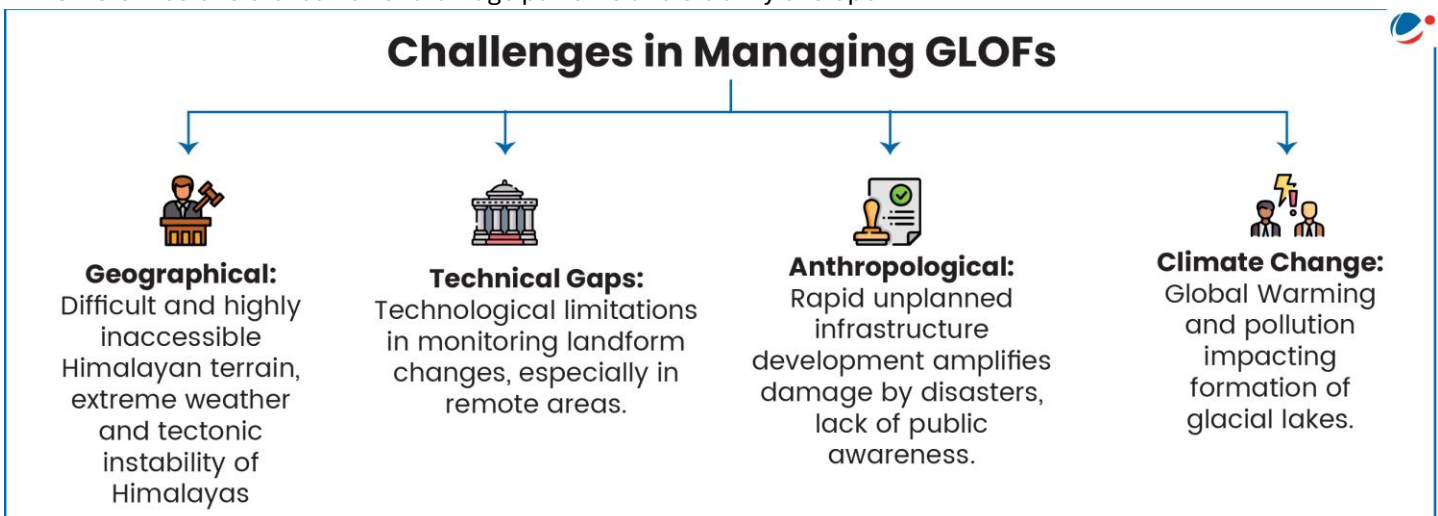
- **A Glacial lake** is a body of water formed by the melting of glacial ice, typically created in depressions or basins carved out by glaciers during their movement.
 - There are **4 categories of glacial lakes** (based on their formation process) i.e. Moraine-dammed, Ice-dammed, Erosion, and others.
- **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood** is the **sudden release of water** from a lake fed by glacier melt that has formed at the side, in front, within, beneath, or on the surface of a glacier.
- **Examples of GLOFs**
 - **2023:** GLOF at **South Lhonak**, destroyed the Teesta III Dam at Chungthang in **Sikkim**.
 - **2013:** GLOF in **Chorabari** glacial lake and floods in Mandakini river in **Uttarakhand**.

Major Causes of GLOFs

- **Rising global temperatures:** It accelerated glacier melting and retreat, driving the formation and expansion of glacial lake beyond their capacity.
 - Globally, since 1990, the number, area, and **volume of glacial lakes** have risen **by 53%, 51%, and 48%**, respectively.
- **Glacial Surging:** Sudden movement of ice over a relatively short period of time resulting in severe rapid glacier advance. E.g., Gilkey Glacier, Alaska.



- **Structural Failure: Unstable moraines** (loose debris and ice) can breach due to internal erosion, hydrostatic pressure or thawing permafrost.
 - E.g. South Lhonak GLOF, Sikkim.
- **Mass Movement: Avalanches or landslides** crashing into the lake create "displacement waves" that can trigger the dam breach.
 - E.g. 2021 Chamoli GLOF due to rock and ice avalanche.
- **Cascading Events: Earthquakes** (common in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region) can trigger immediate dam collapses.
- **Human Activity:** Activities such as unregulated urbanization, irrational mining, deforestation, hydropower projects, GHG emissions etc. can alter drainage patterns and stability of slope.



Mitigation Strategies for GLOFs

In India

- **National Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) Risk Mitigation Project (NGRMP):** Aimed at **GLOF risk reduction** in 4 states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand.
- **Hazard Mapping:** Using ISRO satellite data to create detailed vulnerability maps of the Himalayan belt.
 - **Central Water Commission (CWC)** monitors 900+ glacial lakes and finalized the criteria for **Risk Indexing of Glacial Lakes**.
 - **IIT Guwahati** researchers developed a **method to predict glacial lake formation** in the Himalayas, identifying **493 high-risk sites** in the Eastern Himalayas.

- **Early Warning Systems (EWS):** Installing sensors that detect sudden water level changes and trigger sirens in downstream villages.
 - E.g. 2 Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) installed in Sikkim for EWS.
- **Structural Engineering:** Reducing water levels by siphoning or pumping water out, and creating artificial spillways to control discharge.

Global Initiatives

- **Transboundary Cooperation:** Cross-border glacial lakes (e.g., China, Nepal, India) require data sharing for early warnings.
 - E.g. **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** encourages international cooperation to manage cross-border GLOF risks.
- **HKH cryosphere initiative:** by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to monitor glacial lakes.
- **Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR):** Training local "first responders" to recognize early signs of dam instability. E.g. In the Andes and Alps, Bhutan etc.

Way forward: National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines for Management of GLOFs, 2020

- **Identify, Map, and Prioritize Vulnerable Lakes:** Using Remote Sensing (RS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to classify them based on susceptibility.
- **Develop and Deploy Early Warning Systems (EWS):** Utilizing ground instrumentation, Automatic Water Level Recorders (AWLR), and seismicity monitoring at critical lakes.
- **Formulate and Enforce Land-Use Zoning Regulations:** Constitute a specialized committee to formulate specific land-use zoning, development controls, and building construction regulations tailored to GLOF/LLOF hazard areas.
- **Execute Structural Risk Reduction Measures:** Through structural engineering interventions such as controlled breaching, siphoning or pumping out water, excavating open drainage channels.

Conclusion

It is vital to develop **comprehensive understanding** of the causes, triggers and processes of GLOFs using **scientific research** and create a **robust institutional and community response** mechanism towards disaster preparedness and mitigation to ensure that the **impact of GLOFs is minimized**.

5.3. NEWS IN SHORTS

5.3.1. UN HIGH SEAS TREATY COMES INTO FORCE

Officially known as the **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement**, the legally binding UN treaty covers the ocean zones that lie beyond national waters (namely, the "high seas") and the international seabed area.

- These regions are **global common oceans** open to all for purposes such as navigation, overflight, laying submarine cables, pipelines etc. and make up **over two-thirds of the ocean's surface**.

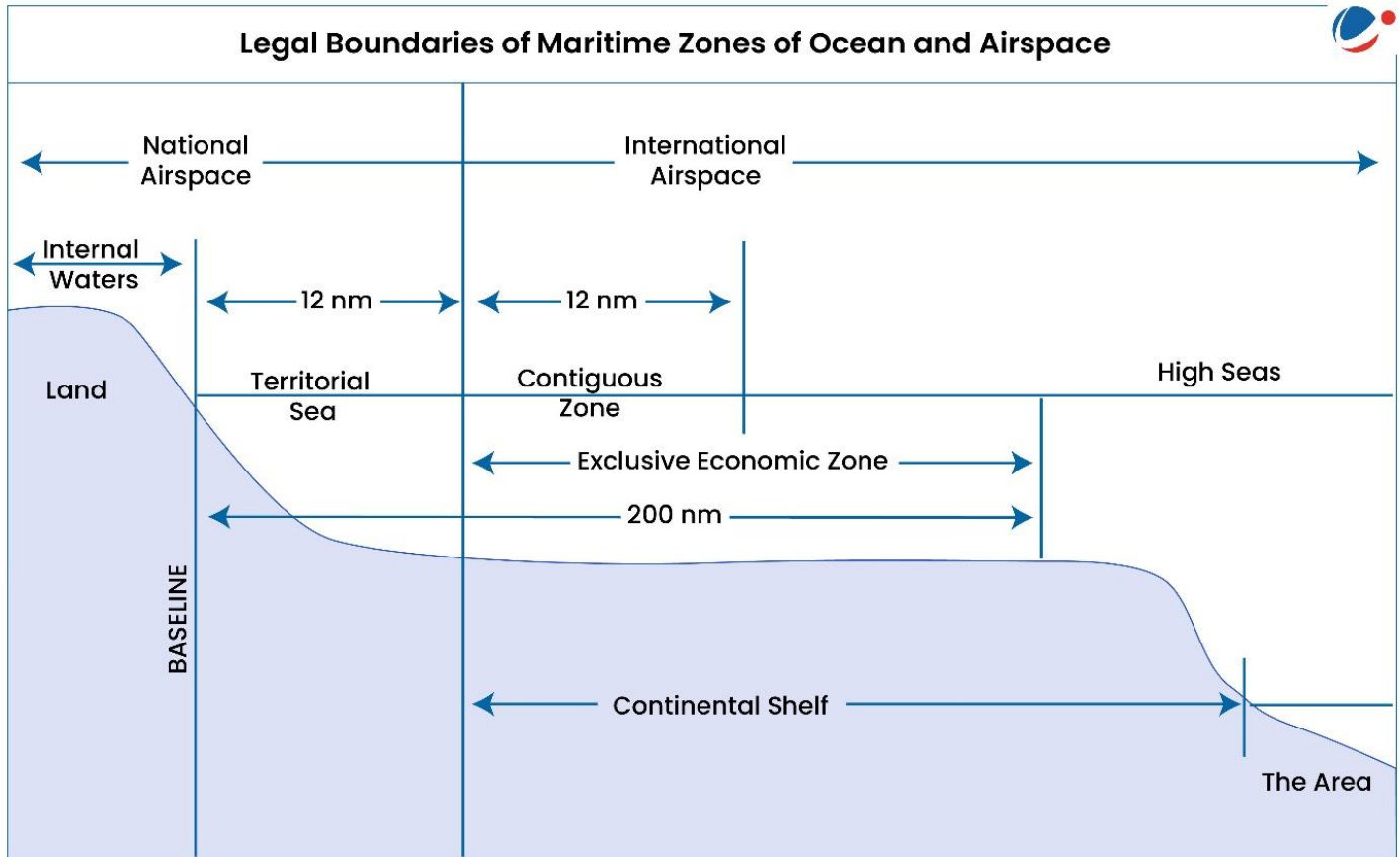
About BBNJ Agreement

- **Adopted in 2023** by the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction convened under the auspices of the United Nations.
 - It becomes **third implementing agreement to UNCLOS**, in addition to 1994 Part XI Implementation Agreement and 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement.
- **Objective:** Ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).
- It addresses **four main issues:**



Read our previous coverage on UN High Seas Treaty

- **Marine genetic resources**, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits
- Measures such as **area-based management tools**, including marine protected areas
- **Environmental impact assessments**
- **Capacity-building** and the transfer of marine technology
- It establishes a **funding mechanism** and sets up institutional arrangements, including a **Conference of the Parties**, a **Clearing-House Mechanism** and a **secretariat**.
- **Members: 83 nations** have ratified the treaty. **India signed the agreement but is yet to ratify.**



5.3.2. IRENA

The **sixteenth session** of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Assembly concluded in Abu Dhabi, UAE with adoption of IRENA's Medium-term Strategy 2023-2027 Evaluation and Work Programme.

- IRENA and International Labour Organization (ILO) jointly released **Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2025** prior to the assembly session.

Key highlights of the report

- **Global renewable energy (RE) employment (2024):** 16.6 million jobs (highest in Solar photovoltaic sector) dominated by China.
- **India related findings:**
 - **RE Employment:** 1.3 million jobs (7.7% global share); 2nd in Solar photovoltaic and Hydropower employment (after China); 4th globally in Liquid biofuels and Wind employment.
 - **Solar Manufacturing:** Holds 4.8% share of global PV module manufacturing.
 - > **Gujarat** is the leading state for module manufacturing with 42% of capacity, **followed by Tamil Nadu** (11%).



IRENA



It is an **intergovernmental organization** that supports countries in their transition to **renewable energy** for sustainable development, energy access, and climate action.



Genesis: 2009, while its statute entered into force in **2010**.



Membership: 170+ countries and the EU (**India is a founding member**)



Key Functions:

- Promotes **renewable energy adoption**, provides **policy advice, capacity building, and technical assistance**.
- Official custodian** to track progress on “**UAE Consensus**,” goals adopted at COP28.



Reports: World Energy Transitions Outlook

5.3.3. CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)

The EU implemented the **world’s first carbon tax (CBAM)** from January 1, 2026, imposing a carbon-related levy on imports of carbon-intensive goods.

About Carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM)

- It is the European Union’s (EU) policy to impose a **carbon tax** on imports of certain products from countries with less stringent climate policies. **E.g.** Steel.
- CBAM, **implemented in 2023**, moves from transitional phase to full enforcement by **2026**.
- Objective:** Prevent Carbon Leakage by stopping firms from shifting production to countries with weaker climate rules.
- Sectors Covered:** Cement, aluminium, fertilisers, iron and steel, hydrogen and electricity.
- Trade Impact:** Indian exports of steel, aluminium, cement may face higher costs.

5.3.4. RULES FOR PRIVATE AFFORESTATION WORK ON LEASED FOREST LAND EASED

The change was enacted by amending the consolidated guidelines of the **Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980** (formerly the Forest Conservation Act).

Key Amendments

- It allows **assisted natural regeneration including afforestation/plantation**, carried out by Government or non-Government entities to be treated as “**forestry activities**”.
- Consequently, on such activities, the requirements of **Compensatory Afforestation and payment of Net Present Value (NPV) shall not be applicable** to such activities.
 - Compensatory Afforestation (CA):** CA means afforestation done in lieu of diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.

Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023



It renamed the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.



Applicability

Limits the Act to land declared or notified as a forest.



Strategic Exemptions

Removes restrictions on forest land near international borders.



Permitted Activities

Reclassifies eco-tourism, zoos, and silvicultural operations

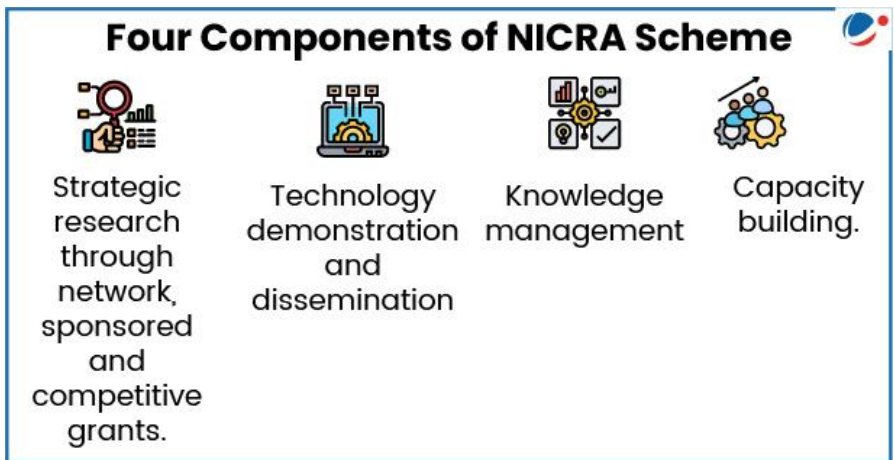
- > It compensates the loss of 'land by land' and loss of 'trees by trees' and is done on non-forest land.
- **Net Present Value (NPV):** NPV is a mandatory fee intended to compensate for the loss of ecosystem services like carbon sequestration, water recharge, and biodiversity.
- **Funds collected** towards CA and NPV are deposited in **State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)**, established under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016.
- State government can devise a framework for **utilization of such plantations** and for **revenue sharing**.



5.3.5. GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES DIGITAL CLIMATE ATLAS, MARKING 15 YEARS OF NICRA

A new digital platform, **Atlas of Climate Adaptation in Indian Agriculture (ACASA-India)** has been launched to **help farmers plan for climate challenges**.

- It has been developed by **ICAR-led National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES)** in collaboration with Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA) – CIMMYT to support **location-specific, data-driven adaptation planning** for climate resilient agriculture.
- Insights from ACASA-India would help government agencies determine future **investment requirements for climate risk mitigation** and scaling opportunities.



About National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA):

- **Launched by:** Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in 2011.
- **Objective:**
 - To **enhance resilience of Indian agriculture to climate change** and vulnerability
 - To validate and **demonstrate climate resilient technologies** on farmer's fields.

What is Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA)?

- It refers to **adopting adaptation and mitigation practices** in agriculture to enhance system's ability to **withstand climate shocks and recover quickly**.

Need for CRA

- **Preventing Yield loss:** Climate change can reduce yields by **4.5 to 9.0%** resulting in around **1.5% GDP** loss per year.
- **Protecting Livelihoods:** Around 57% of rural households depend on farming for income.
- **Rainfed Area Vulnerability:** 51% of India's net sown area is rainfed, producing ~40% of food, making it highly sensitive to climate variability.
- **Food security:** India faces increased issues of undernourishment, child malnutrition, micronutrient deficiency etc.

5.3.6. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND

Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the **Environmental (Protection) Fund Rules, 2026** to streamline use of the **Environmental Protection Fund**.

About Environmental Protection Fund

- **Legal Basis:** Constituted under **Section 16 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, in the Public Account of India.
- **Corpus:** Accumulates fines under **Air (1981), Water (1974), and Environment (1986) Acts**.
- **Allocation:** **75%** of funds are remitted to States/UTs, while **25%** is retained by the Centre.
- **Utilization:** Earmarked for monitoring networks, remediation of contaminated sites, and R&D in clean technology.
- **Oversight:** Managed by a Project Management Unit and **audited by the CAG**.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Finances the strengthening of regulatory bodies like CPCB and SPCBs.

5.3.7. OCEAN HEAT CONTENT SETS RECORD IN 2025: STUDY

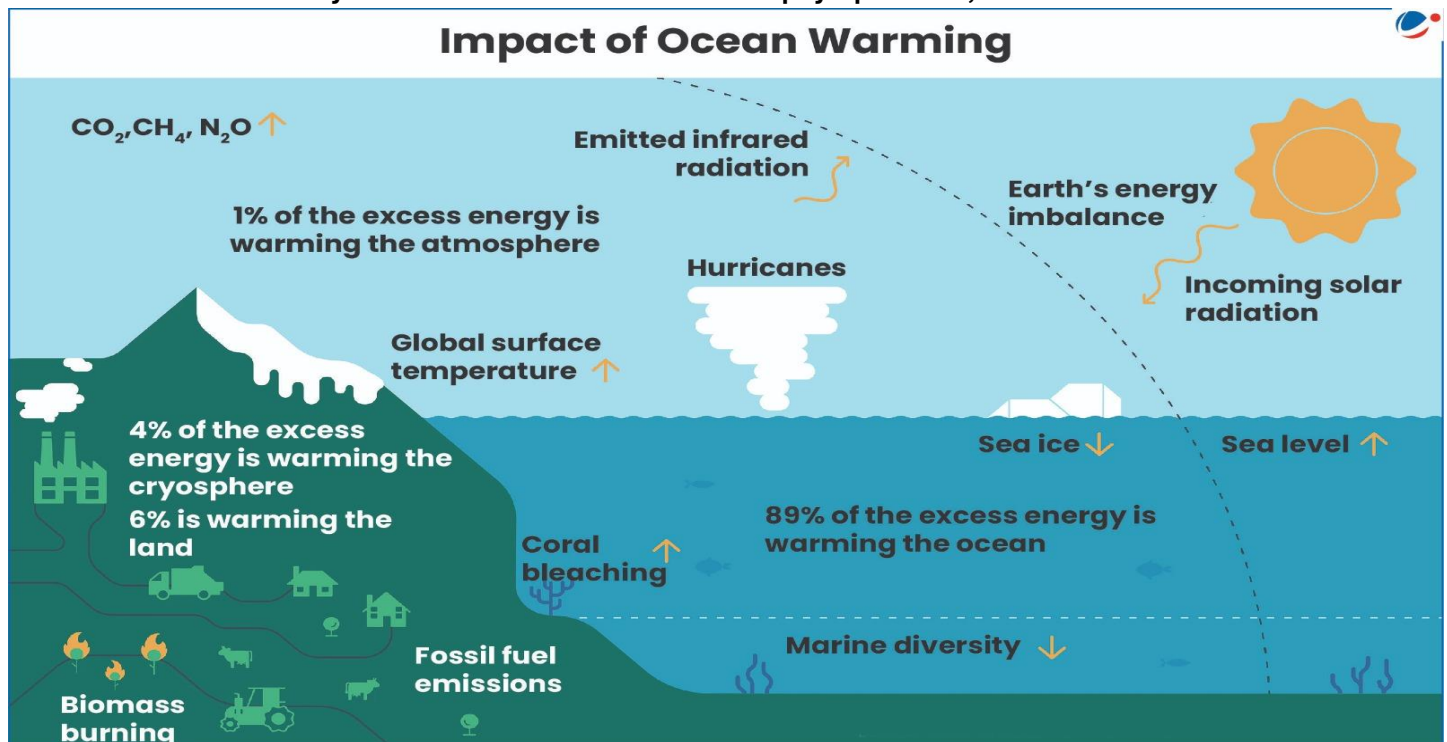
The study highlighted that **global ocean warming continued unabated in 2025** in response to **increased greenhouse gas concentrations** and **reductions in sulfate aerosols**.

Key Findings of the Study

- In 2025, oceans absorbed additional **23 zettajoules (ZJ) of heat**, the highest ever recorded since the 1960s.
- Nearly **90% of excess heat trapped by greenhouse gases is absorbed by the oceans**, which confirms oceans as the **primary buffer of global warming**.
- Global average **Sea Surface Temperatures (SSTs)** in 2025 were among the highest ever recorded (approximately **0.5°C above the 1981–2010 average**).

Major Implications of Ocean Warming

- **Increased ocean stratification:** Warmer surface waters reduce mixing of water layers, leading to **lower oxygen supply** to deeper waters, **reduced nutrient transport to the surface** and **decline in ocean productivity**.
- **Increase in Marine Heat Waves:** It can lead to **coral bleaching**, **coral diseases**, **changes in migration** and **breeding of marine species etc.**
- **Intense Storms:** Warmer oceans provide **more heat and moisture to the atmosphere** which can lead to more **intense cyclones and hurricanes**, bringing heavier rainfall and flooding.
- **Threat to Marine Ecosystems:** Reduced nutrients **threaten phytoplankton**, the base of marine food chains.



5.3.8. ARCTIC REPORT CARD (ARC) 2025

Released by **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**, it clearly highlights that the region is warming far faster than the rest of the planet.

Key Highlights

- **Arctic Surface Air Temperatures:** It was **highest on record** during the past year (October 2024-September 2025) since 1900.
 - The last 10 years are the 10 warmest on record in the Arctic.
- **Atlantification:** An influx of **anomalous water properties and biota** from lower latitudes to central Arctic Ocean.
 - It weakens the **Arctic Ocean stratification** enhancing heat transfer, melting sea ice, and threatening ocean circulation patterns.
- **Rusting of Rivers:** In Arctic Alaska, surface waters have changed from **clear to orange** in over 200 watersheds due to **iron release** from thawing permafrost soils, impacting both fishes and water supplies to local communities.
- **Greening of the Arctic:** First detected in the late 1990s, it is a **long-term increase in the productivity and abundance of tundra vegetation**.
 - It has far-reaching impacts to **Arctic landscapes, wildlife habitats, biodiversity, permafrost conditions**, and the livelihood of Arctic people.

Geopolitical Implications of Arctic Melting



New Shipping Routes

Previously impassable regions like the Northern Sea Route are becoming increasingly viable.



Role of Arctic Council

A leading intergovernmental forum to enhance cooperation and protection for indigenous communities.

Established in 1996

Members: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, USA



Importance for India

India could enhance engagement and research in the region with its Research Station and Arctic Policy.

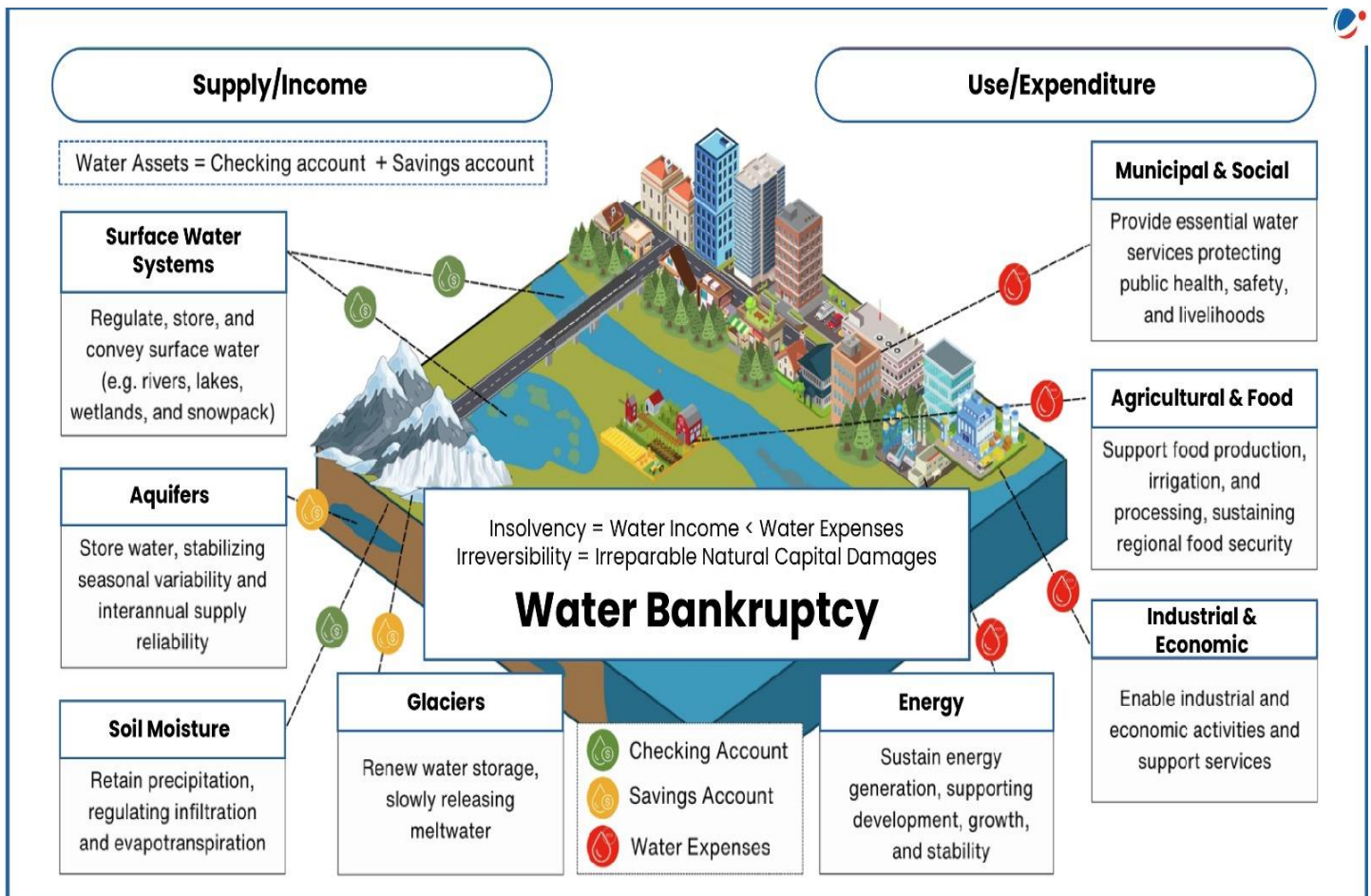
5.3.9. WATER BANKRUPTCY

A report by UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health highlighted that the planet has entered the Global Water Bankruptcy era.

- **Water Bankruptcy** is a persistent post-crisis condition of human-water system in which **long-term water use has exceeded renewable inflows and safe depletion limits**, causing irreversible or effectively irreversible degradation.
 - Report highlights that **parts of the water and natural capital**—rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands, soils, and glaciers—have been **damaged beyond realistic prospects** of full recovery.
- In contrast, **water stress** is a condition of high-water demand relative to supply but impacts are largely reversible and **water crisis** is where shock-driven disruptions temporarily push water systems beyond capacity but which can be restored through emergency and restoration measures.

Factors leading to Water Bankruptcy

- **Slow-onset depletion:** Chronic overuse of surface and groundwater slowly degrades storage and quality, with early warning signs ignored until irreversible thresholds are crossed.
- **Infrastructure-driven overshoot:** Large dams and transfers enable expansion beyond sustainable limits.
- **Ecological liquidation:** Wetlands, floodplains, forests, and soils are converted or degraded in ways that increase short-term productive capacity while eroding long-term water storage, filtration, and buffering.
- **Climate-amplified overshoot:** Climate change accelerates existing stress by reducing reliable supply and increasing variability in already overexploited systems.



5.3.10. EXPANSION OF GHG EMISSIONS CUT REGIME UNDER CARBON CREDIT TRADING SCHEME

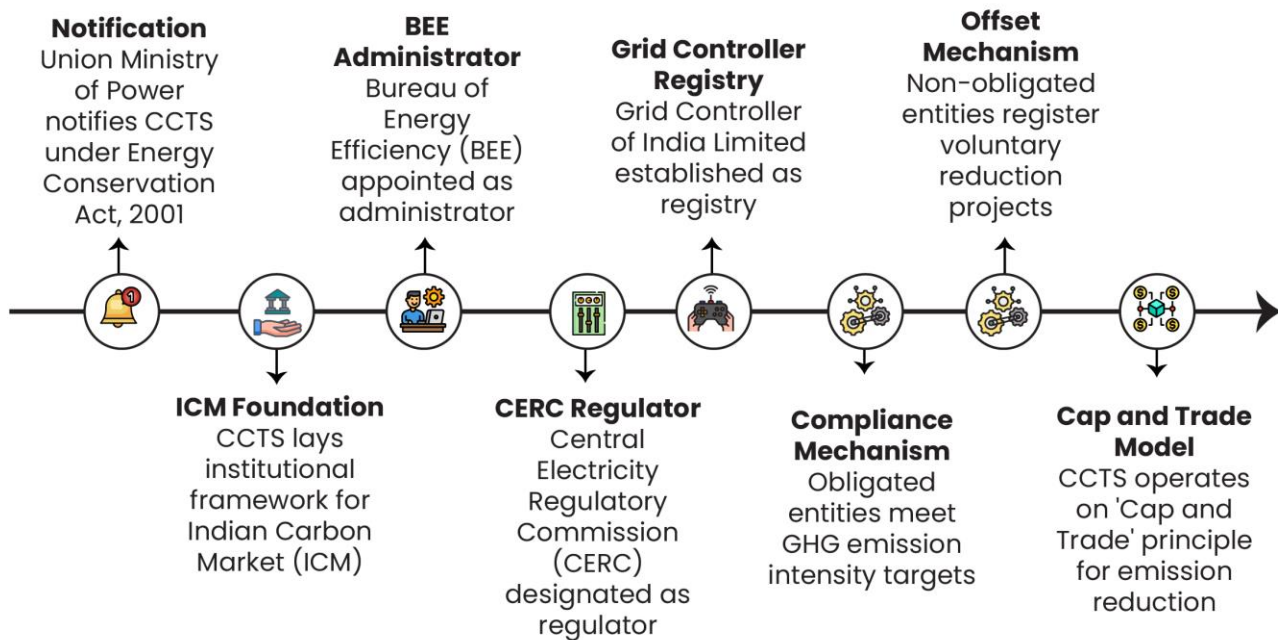
Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has notified **Greenhouse Gases Emission Intensity Target (Amendment) Rules, 2025** under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.

Key Details

- **Expansion:** Addition of four new sectors - **Petroleum Refinery, Petrochemicals, Textiles, and Secondary Aluminium**, to the list of obligated sectors to cut GHG emissions.
 - Previous sectors - **Aluminium, Cement, Chlor-alkali, and Pulp & Paper**.
- **Targets & Timeline:** The new rules mandate **208 specific industrial units** to reduce their GHG emission intensity (emissions per unit of product) starting from the **compliance year 2025-26**.
- **Reduction Goals:** The **overall** emission intensity reduction **targets range from 3% to 7% by 2026-27** (baseline: 2023-24).
- **Compliance Mechanism:** **Units failing** to meet targets **must** purchase Carbon Credit Certificates (**CCCs**) to cover the shortfall.
 - Failure to do so attracts an '**environmental compensation**' penalty equivalent to **twice the average trading price of CCCs**.
- **Significance:** This move **aligns with India's** Nationally Determined Contribution (**NDC**) target of reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% by 2030 and achieving Net Zero by 2070.



Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)



5.3.11. SECONDARY POLLUTANTS

A recent analysis by **Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)** found that at least **one-third of the Delhi's annual PM2.5 pollution** can be attributed to **Secondary pollutants**, mostly Ammonium Sulphate.

About Secondary Pollutants

- These pollutants are **not emitted directly from a source** (like vehicles or power plants).
- Instead, they form as a result of the **pollutants emitted from these sources reacting with molecules in the atmosphere to form a new pollutant**. E.g., Ammonium Sulphate, Ozone, NO_x, etc.
 - Pollutants that are emitted into the environment from a source are called **primary pollutants**.
- Formation of Ammonium Sulfate**: Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) gas gets oxidised in the atmosphere to form sulfate. This sulfate then reacts with ammonia to form ammonium sulfate.

5.3.12. BLUE CATEGORY OF INDUSTRIES

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has classified Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) as Essential Environmental Services under the **Blue Category** of Industries.

About Blue Category of Industries

- It includes **Essential Environmental Services (ESS)**.
 - ESS** are those facilities which are essential to control, abate and mitigate pollution generated from Domestic and Industrial activities.
- Key Examples**: Includes STPs, Waste-to-Energy plants, biomining, and composting units.

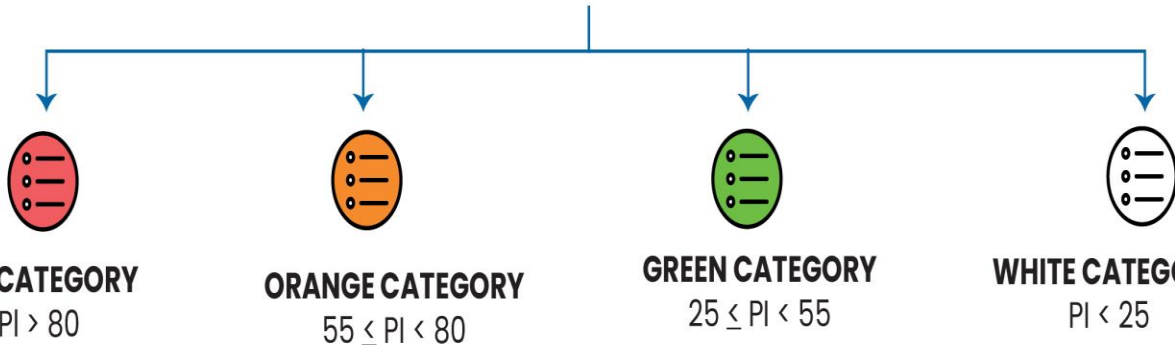
Classification of industrial sectors

- CPCB developed a **Pollution Index (PI)** -based scoring methodology to classify industrial sectors, guided by the **Precautionary Principle**.
 - PI evaluates potential for water pollution, air pollution, and Waste generation.



Read our previous coverage on Revised Classification of Industries

Classification of Industrial Sectors



5.3.13. ICGS SAMUDRA PRATAP

ICGS Samudra Pratap, India's first indigenously designed Pollution Control Vessel (PCV), was commissioned in Goa.

- It is first of two PCVs being built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
- **Largest ship in the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) fleet.**
- It is equipped with advanced pollution detection systems, dedicated pollution response boats, pollution control laboratory and modern firefighting capabilities.

5.3.14. NEW RAMSAR SITES

Union Environment Minister announces 2 New Wetlands to India's Ramsar List.

- The total **wetlands in India is now 98** under the Ramsar Convention.

About Patna Bird Sanctuary

- It is a protected sanctuary in **Etah district in Uttar Pradesh**. It was founded in 1991.
- It is the smallest bird sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh.
- **It inhabits Aquatic birds e.g.** Lesser Whistling-Duck, Graylag Goose, Comb Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail.

About Chhari-Dhand Wetland Reserve

- Located on the **edge of arid Banni grasslands** and marshy salt flats of **Rann of Kutch in Kutch district** of Gujarat.
- Chhari means "salty" and Dhand means "shallow wetlands" in kutchi language.
- **Home of endangered species:** Dalmatian Pelican, Oriental Darter, Black-necked Stork, and Indian Skimmer.
- Area is also famous for "**Chir Batti**" or **ghost lights**, an unexplained glowing phenomenon seen on **dark nights across the Banni grasslands**.

5.3.15. KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK

Prime Minister recently inaugurated the **Kaziranga Elevated Corridor Project** designed to **ensure safe wildlife movement across the Kaziranga National Park**.

About Kaziranga National Park (KNP)

- **Location:** Between the **Brahmaputra River** and the **Karbi (Mikir) Hills** in Assam.
- **Status:** National Park, Tiger Reserve, Important Bird Area (IBA), and **UNESCO World Heritage Site (1985)**.
 - An important area for **migratory birds** as it is **located at the junction of the Australasia and Indo-Asian flyway**.
- **Biodiversity found:** Tigers, elephants, swamp deer, wild buffalo, etc.
 - **Largest population of Indian one-horned rhinoceros** found here.

5.3.16. KUMBHALGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has issued a notification declaring **Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** as an **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)**.

- ESZs are notified under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** by the **central government** as a "**transition zone**" from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
- It is generally declared around 10 Km area, but can vary for each site as per the notification.

5.3.17. HOPE ISLAND AND CORINGA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY (WS)

Andhra Pradesh Government would develop a satellite launching facility as part of the Space City project on the **Hope Island (part of Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary)**.

About Hope Island

- Relatively young island, 16-kilometre-long sand spit from the sand carried by waters of **Godavari delta**.
- Protects **Kakinada city** from strong storm surges and acts as **sort of natural break water** providing tranquillity to ships making Kakinada Port one of the **safest natural ports**.

About Coringa WLS

- Location:** East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, at the confluence of **Godavari River with Bay of Bengal**
- Part of **Godavari Mangroves**, was declared a wildlife sanctuary by Andhra Pradesh in **1978**.

5.3.18. SECOND RANGEWIDE ESTIMATION OF RIVERINE AND ESTUARINE DOLPHINS LAUNCHED UNDER PROJECT DOLPHIN

The previous **nationwide survey (2021–23)** recorded an estimated **6,327 riverine dolphins** in India.

- The ongoing survey will include a new species, **Irrawaddy dolphin**, in Sundarbans and Odisha, apart from the **Gangetic and Indus River Dolphins**.

About Project Dolphin

- Launched:** 15th August 2020.
- Under **Centrally Sponsored Scheme: Development of Wildlife Habitats**.
- Aim:** To conserve both **marine and riverine dolphins**, along with associated cetaceans through habitat protection, scientific research, and community awareness.

River Dolphins (superfamily Platinistoidea)

Characteristics:

- Functionally blind**, and rely on **echolocation** to navigate and hunt.
- A **long thin snout**, rounded belly, stocky body and large flippers.
- As an **apex predator**, they are key **Indicator species** of the health of rivers.

KUMBHALGARD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY (1971)



Location: 610.5 sq km area surrounding Kumbhal Fort (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), in Rajsamand, Udaipur, and Pali districts of Rajasthan

GEOGRAPHY



Covers four hill and mountain ranges:

- Kumbhalgarh Range
- Desuri Range
- Bokhada Range

WILDLIFE



leopard, striped hyena, jungle cat, Indian pangolin, blue bull, chinkara, etc.

VEGETATION



Predominantly dry deciduous, with forests of Dhok, Salar, Khair, and Churel trees.

Types of River Dolphins



Ganges River Dolphin (*P. gangetica*)

- Occurs in Ganges Brahmaputra - Meghna, and Sangu-Karnaphuli River systems in India, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- Locally called 'susu', it is endemic and **India's National Aquatic Animal**.
- Protection Status:**
 - Endangered (IUCN)**
 - Schedule-I (Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972)



Indus River Dolphin (*P. minor*)

- Occurs in Indus basin (Beas River in India).
- Locally called 'Bhulan', it is Punjab's State Aquatic Animal
- Protection Status:**
 - Endangered (IUCN)**
 - Schedule-I (WPA, 1972)



Irrawaddy Dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*)

- Occur in marine, brackish, and freshwater environments throughout **Southeast Asia**
- Slow swimmers, have unique water spitting behavior.
- Protection Status:**
 - Endangered (IUCN)**

Initiatives taken for Conservation of Dolphins:

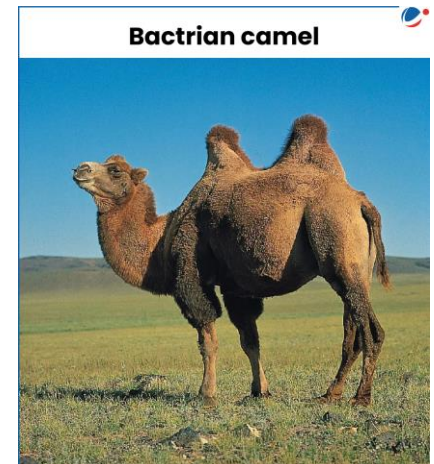
- **Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Wildlife Sanctuary, Bihar**
- **Chambal River Conservation Zone** designated as **Dolphin Conservation Zone**
- **Others: Reconstitution of Project Dolphin Steering Committee, Appointment of Dolphin and Whaling Commissioners, Satellite-tagging the Ganges River Dolphin.**

5.3.19. BACTRIAN CAMEL

Two Bactrian camels featured in the **2026 Republic Day Parade**.

About the Bactrian Camel (*Camelus bactrianus*)

- Named after Bactria, an ancient Central Asian region, it is large, **even-toed ungulate** adapted to cold deserts.
- **Habitat:** Native to the **steppes and arid regions of Central Asia** (Gobi and Taklamakan deserts).
 - About 300-400 exist in India as well, all in the **Nubra Valley region of Ladakh**.
- **Physical Features:** Characterized by **two humps** on its back which store fat.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Exhibits thick winter fur and **tolerance to extreme temperatures ranging from -30°C to 40°C**.
- **Conservation Status:** Endangered by the **IUCN**.
 - The Domesticated Bactrian Camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) is not considered to be a threatened species.
 - However, the Wild Bactrian Camel (*Camelus ferus*- a distinct species) is Endangered (IUCN).



5.3.20. STINGLESS BEES (MELIPONINI)

Amazon's stingless bees become the **first insect** to be granted legal rights.

About Stingless Bee (Meliponini)

- **Ancient origin:** The **world's oldest bee lineage**, existing for nearly 80 million years.
- **Anatomy:** They possess stingers, but these are **highly reduced** and functionally useless for defense.
- **Diversity:** **Nearly 500 species** exist globally, with over **170 found specifically within Peru**.
- **Healing:** Their "**liquid gold**" honey is prized for its potent antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Significance:** These ancient pollinators **sustain 80% of Amazonian flora**, including cacao and coffee.

5.3.21. FRESHWATER PUFFERFISH

Scientists have confirmed India's first case of pufferfish poisoning.

About Freshwater Pufferfish

- They are a diverse group of approximately 30 to 35 species within the family **Tetraodontidae** that live their entire lives in fresh water.
- **Common names:** toadfish, patkafish, balloonfish and fugu.
- **Distribution:** Western Ghats and major basins such as the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Mahanadi.
- Pufferfish are **omnivorous and benthic in habitat**.
- **Uniqueness:** Dangerous due to tetrodotoxin (TTX) which is one of the most potent neurotoxins known in nature.

5.3.22. MYCORRHIZAL NETWORKS

American biologist has been awarded the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement for her work on **mycorrhizal networks**.

- **Tyler Prize** is also called the "Nobel for the environment".

About mycorrhizal networks

- **Definition:** These are underground fungal networks in which **mycorrhizal fungi** connect the roots of multiple plants through **hyphae**(fungal threads).
 - **Mycorrhizal fungi** form a **symbiotic association** where plants provide carbohydrates to the fungi, and in return receive enhanced access to water and essential nutrients.
- The underground network of fungi in the forest ecosystem is known as **Wood Wide Web**.
- **Other Ecological Role:** They are responsible for drawing down 13 billion tons of CO₂ into soil systems every year.

5.3.23. BIO-BITUMEN

India has become the first country in the world to commercially produce bio-bitumen in road construction.

About Bio-bitumen

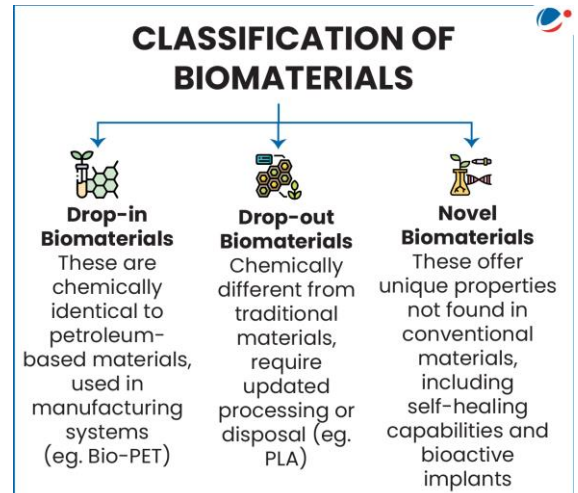
- It is an alternative form of bitumen **manufactured from organic elements**. E.g. agricultural waste, lignin, Bio-char, bio-oil, etc.
 - **Bitumen** is **black substance produced through distillation of crude oil**, known for its adhesive properties.
- **Benefits:** Reduced crude oil imports, address the issue of stubble burning, boosting Bio-economy etc.
 - It can be used as an addition to bitumen or to reduce the quantity of bitumen in the binder mixture.
- **Applications:** Paving roads, water proofing etc.

5.3.24. BIO-MATERIALS

Biomaterials provide sustainable alternatives to traditional, petroleum based products.

About Biomaterials:

- Biomaterials are materials **derived entirely or partially from biological sources** or created through biological processes.
- **Applications:** Bioengineering/Biomedicine, Packaging, Agriculture, Healthcare, Textiles etc.



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6. SOCIAL ISSUES

6.1. YOUTH'S ROLE IN NATION BUILDING

Why in the News?

Recently, at **Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBYLD) 2026**, New Delhi, PM underscored the critical role of youth leadership in achieving **Viksit Bharat @2047**

More on the News

- **VBYLD**, where PM interacted with youth leaders, **enables direct youth participation in India's developmental agenda**.
- It coincided with National Youth Day (12 January), the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda**.

Role of youth in nation-building

- **Economic Growth**
 - **Demographic dividend:** India's **favourable age structure** gives it a **growth edge** over countries facing **demographic winter** like Japan and Italy.
 - > **E.g.**, India has the largest youth population with 50% under 25 years of age and 65% under 35.
 - **Drivers of Innovation:** Youth are at the heart of the start-up revolution, making India the world's third-largest start-up hub and a global leader in emerging technologies
 - > **E.g.**, Youth led Space start-ups **Skyroot or Agnikul Cosmos**.
 - **Orange Economy:** Contributes US\$ 11 billion in exports and 8% in employment is increasingly being driven by India's creative industry.
 - > **Sindhuja Rajamaran youngest CEO in the world** running an animation company and achieving a **Guinness World Record**.
- **Scientific and Technological Prowess:** Young scientists are driving successes in space exploration, defence, and emerging technologies like AI.
 - **E.g.**, **Dr Satendra K Mangrauthia** won Vigyan Yuva Award for **Kamala**, India's first genetically edited rice varieties.

Challenges faced by India's Youth

 EMPLOYMENT PARADOX	 LACK OF SKILLS	 MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS	 DIGITAL AND SOCIAL DIVIDES	 LOW POLITICAL REPRESENTATION
Overall Unemployment Rate: ~3-5% Youth Unemployment Rate (15-29 years): ~10%	India Skills Report 2025: Only 54.81% of graduates employable at industry standards.	India reported highest suicide: 1.71 lakh suicide in 2023, Individuals below 30: 41% (NCRB)	Inequalities across gender, caste, geography. Limited tech access for low-income & rural families	Average age of MPs (18 th Lok Sabha): 56 years Only 11% of current MPs aged 40 below

- **Social Change Agents:** Youth lead Jan Bhagidari campaigns such as Swachh Bharat and environmental advocacy movements like Mission Life.
- **Strengthening democracy:** Youth participation—voting, political engagement, youth advisory councils and civic awareness movements reinforces democratic values.

- **Arya Rajendran** (India's youngest Mayor at 21 in Thiruvananthapuram) or **Chhavi Rajawat** (MBA graduate who quit her corporate job to become the Sarpanch of Soda village, Rajasthan, bringing water and solar power to her community).

Initiatives for youth

- **National Youth Policy (NYP):** Draft NYP 2025 outlines a ten-year vision focused on education, leadership, and social justice.
- **Skill India Mission & PM Kaushal Vikas Yojna:** Flagship programs to train Indians in industry-relevant skills.
- **YUVAi (Youth for Unnati with AI):** MeitY's YUVAi, launched with the National e-Governance Division (NeGD), empowers Classes 8-12 students to design practical AI solutions across eight thematic sectors.
- **Startup India:** Under DPIIT, ministry of commerce provides mentorship, incubation, and collateral-free loans to foster entrepreneurship.
- **Model Youth Gram Sabha:** Strengthens youth understanding of the Panchayati Raj System by simulating real gram sabha processes.
- **Agnipath Scheme:** Recruiting "Agniveers" to provide them with technical skills and discipline.
- **Health and Wellness:** Initiatives like Fit India, Kashi Declaration (drug-free campaign) focus on holistic well-being.
- **PM SETU Programme:** Under this, thousands of Industrial Training Institutes will be upgraded so that youth can be trained in line with the current and future needs of industry".

Ways to leverage youth energy for national building

- **Education Reform:** Aligning academic training with real-world demands and integrating vocational training from early stages as envisioned in NEP 2020.
- **Continuous Upskilling:** Investing in AI, robotics, and green energy skills to ensure the workforce remains adaptable to automation.
- **Inclusive Growth:** Incentivizing female workforce participation and expanding skill centers to rural and Tier-2/3 cities.
- **Strengthening Civic Engagement:** Creating formal platforms and training programs to move youth from apathy to active participation in governance.

6.2. VIKSIT BHARAT SHIKSHA ADHISHTHAN (VBSA) BILL, 2025

Why in the News?

The **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025**, was introduced in the Lok Sabha and referred to a joint parliamentary committee.

About Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025

- **About:** It aims to create a **unified regulatory architecture for higher education** in India under Entry 66 of the Union List (List I) in the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution.
 - Entry 66 of the Union list provides for the **coordination and determination of standards in institutions** for higher education or research, and scientific and technical institutions.
- **Need for the bill:** To provide simplified regulatory systems for higher educational institutions in the country.
 - Also, the **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**, envisions the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance.

Major provisions of the bill

- **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA):** The Bill establishes the Commission as the apex regulatory body for higher education.
 - VBSA will not control the funding of institutions.
- **Vertical Councils under VBSA**
 - **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyaman Parishad for regulation.**
 - **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad for accreditation.**
 - **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad for academic standards.**

- **Repeal:** It provides for the repeal of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956, the All India Council for Technical Education Act (AICTE), 1987, and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Act, 1993.
- **The functions of the Commission include:**
 - Providing strategic direction for higher education and research.
 - Developing a roadmap for transforming higher educational institutions (HEIs) into large multi-disciplinary education and research institutions, and
 - Suggesting schemes for improving the quality of education.
- **Penalties on HEIs:** The Regulatory Council may impose penalties on HEIs for contraventions of the Act.
- **Appeals:** Appeals against the decisions of the Commission and the Councils will lie before the central government.
- **Exemption:** The Bill exempts **legal and medical education from its purview**. These will continue to be regulated under separate Acts.
- **Proposed Council of Architecture (CoA):** To be established under the Architects Act, 1972 will function as a **Professional Standard Setting Body**.

Current Regulatory ecosystem for Higher education in India

- **Status:** Since education is in the concurrent list, it is a shared responsibility of both centre and the states
 - However, technical and scientific educational institutes, research and **standards determination** are included in the Union List.
- **Apex Regulatory Bodies: UGC** under the education ministry for funding, granting recognition, standard-setting, teaching, examination, and research.
- **Professional Councils:**
 - **AICTE:** Regulates technical education (Engineering, Management, etc.).
 - **Statutory bodies** that regulate specific professions. E.g., National Medical Commission, Bar Council of India, etc.
- **Accreditation Bodies:**
 - **NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) by UGC:** Assess institutions (Colleges/Universities) on quality parameters
 - **NBA (National Board of Accreditation):** Under the AICTE act accredits specific technical programs. (e.g., B.Tech in Mechanical Engineering).

Issues in higher education governance

- **Fragmentation of Functions:** Multiple regulators (UGC, AICTE, State Governments) often have overlapping mandates, leading to confusion and red tape.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Bodies like the UGC handle both Regulation (setting rules) and Funding (distributing grants), creating a conflict in governance.
- **Resource Inequity:** Approximately 65% of the UGC budget is utilised by Central Universities, while State Universities, which handle the bulk of student enrolment, receive only 35%.
- **One-Size-Fits-All Approach:** The same rigid rules often apply to a research-intensive university and a small teaching college, stifling innovation.
- **Faculty Shortages:** Many public HEIs report 50% vacancies, and recruitment processes are often stalled by bureaucratic or political interference.
- **Employability Gap:** There is a persistent lack of employable skills in technical graduates, leading to rising educated unemployment.
 - **Only ~55% of Indian graduates** are considered "**employable**."-India Skill Report 2025.
- **Research Deficit:** Public funding for research and innovation has seen a gradual decline, with India spending only 0.68% of GDP on R&D compared to much higher rates in China and USA.



Read our previous coverage on National Education Policy, 2020

Conclusion

The VBSA Bill has the potential to streamline higher education governance and align it to build a “Viksit Bharat,” provided implementation remains consultative, transparent, and student-centric.

Related News

In **Amit Kumar v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court invoked **Article 142** to address the alarming **rise in student suicides** in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

Key recommendations by the Supreme court

- **Unified Well-being Framework:** The **National Task Force** is tasked with creating a "Universal Design Framework" and model SOPs for "well-being audits".
 - Audit scores may be directly linked to NAAC grading to ensure institutional compliance.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** HEIs must report any incident of suicide or unnatural death to the police immediately, regardless of where it occurs (campus, hostel, or PG).
- **Filling Vacancies:** All vacant faculty and administrative positions must be filled within 4 months, with priority for reserved categories.
- **Data Centralization:** Sample Registration System's data on suicides, esp. for the 15-29 age group, must be centrally maintained for data-led policy making.
- **Scholarship Disbursement:** Clear of pending scholarships within 4 months, set timelines for future disbursal and ensure no academic restriction due to delays.
- **Others:** 24/7 Medical Help in HEI or within 1km radius, distinguishing between school and HEI students in NCRB student suicide data, regulatory compliance with mandatory UGC regulations, etc.

6.3. NEWS IN SHORTS

6.3.1. DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER

China's population declined for the fourth consecutive year. Its population dropped by 3.39 million to 1.405 billion, while the total number of births dropped to 7.92 million in 2025.

- This phenomenon called the “**Demographic Winter**” is no longer restricted to developed nations but is increasingly becoming a global reality with profound implications for the 21st century economy and social structure.

What is Demographic Winter?

- **Meaning:** It describes a demographic phase characterized by a persistent and structural decline in population growth.
- **Key indicators** include:
 - **Birth Rates below the Replacement rate** of fertility (2.1).
 - **Inverted Population Pyramid** (shrinking, aging population with a narrow base of young people and a wider top of older adults).

Reasons for Demographic Winter

- **Delayed Milestones:** Career aspirations and economic pressures are leading individuals to delay marriage and parenthood.
- **Urbanization:** Urban living spaces are smaller and more expensive, further discouraging large families.
- **Societal & Cultural Shifts:** Increasing female participation in the workforce and a shift toward smaller family norms.
- **Access to Family Planning:** Individuals have more control over family size.
- **Legacy Policies:** E.g., One Child Policy in China.

Demographic Winter Solutions



Pro-Natalist Policies

Financial incentives and parental leaves to encourage childbirth



Economic Structural Reforms

Addressing the cost of living crisis to make family-building viable



Global Migration Governance

Developing collaborative migration policies to support countries



Adapting to the 'Silver Economy'

Investing in healthcare and pension reforms for an aging population.



Technological Integration

Using AI and Automation to maintain industrial productivity

6.3.2. MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS INTEGRAL TO RIGHT TO LIFE

The Supreme Court recently observed that menstrual health in schools is integral to Right to Life.

The Court also directed the pan-India implementation of the **Union's national policy, 'Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Policy for School-going Girls'** in schools for adolescent girl children from Classes 6-12.

Key Highlights of the judgment

- **Menstrual Health as a fundamental right:** Right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right to menstrual health.
- **Link to Article 14 (Right to Equality):** Inaccessibility of MH measures strip away the **right to participate** on equal terms in schools.
- **Dignity of a girl child:** Dignity must translate into living conditions free from humiliation, stigma, and exclusion.
- **Structural discrimination:** Inaccessibility of sanitary products affects **fundamental right to education under Article 21A and Right to Education (RTE) Act.**
- **Mandatory institutional measures:** All schools must provide sensitization of male teachers and students, gender-segregated toilets, free sanitary napkins (preferably through vending machines), and dedicated MHM corners.

Initiatives taken for Promotion of MH



Scheme for Promotion of MH:

For awareness on MH, enhancing access to sanitary napkins, and promoting eco-friendly disposal practices.



National Guidelines on MHM:

Under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for creating awareness on MHM in rural areas.



Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janasudhi Pariyojna:

Janaushidhi Kendras provide 'Suvridha' (Oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins) at Rs 1/- per pad



Betbi Barcho Beti Padhao (BBBP):

Aims to generate awareness about MH and use of sanitary napkins



Samagra Shiksha Scheme:

Installation of sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators



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7. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

7.1. SCRAMJET ENGINE

Why in the News?

DRDO's Defense Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) successfully ground-tested a full-scale, actively cooled, long-duration Scramjet engine.

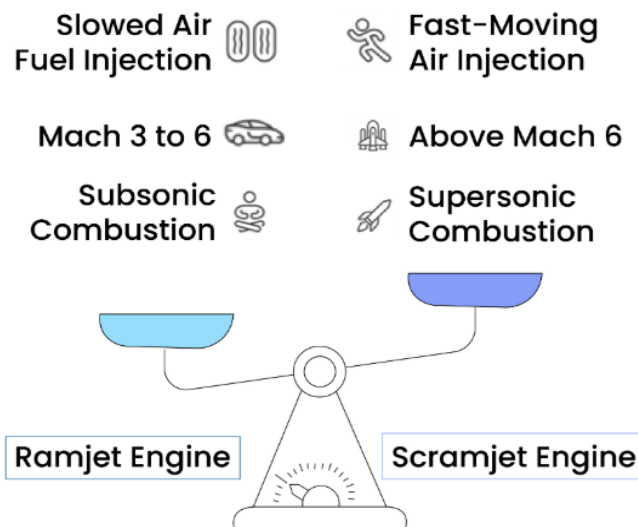
More on news

- It serves as a foundational success for the indigenous **Hypersonic Missile Development Program**.
- India is the fourth country** to demonstrate the flight testing of a Scramjet Engine, after the US, Russia, and China.

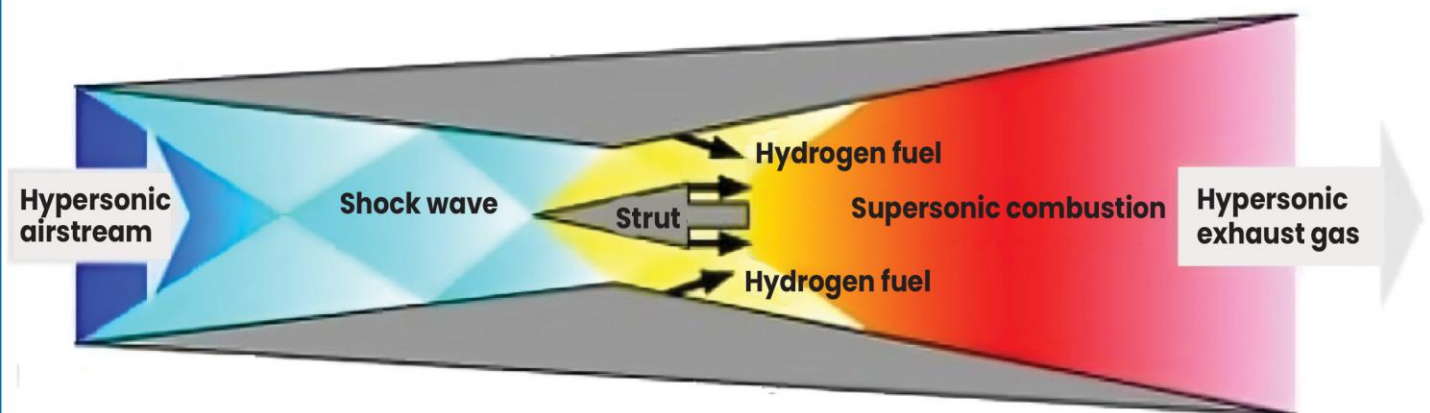
About Scramjet (Supersonic Combustion Ramjet) Engine

- Scramjet Engine:** It is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently **operates** at **hypersonic speeds (greater than Mach 5)** and allows **supersonic combustion**.
 - A **ramjet** is an **air-breathing jet engine** that uses the **vehicle's forward motion** to **compress incoming air** for combustion without a **rotating compressor**.
- Fuel Used:** It generally uses hydrogen as fuel and the **Oxygen** from the atmospheric air as the oxidizer.

Comparing Ramjet and Scramjet Engine Features



FUNCTIONING OF SCRAMJET



- Key Features:**
 - Depends on assisted take off:** Both ramjets and scramjets cannot produce thrust at zero air speed.
 - Require another propulsion system (like a rocket or turbojet) to reach a high enough speed to function.

- **Uses flame stabilization technique:** This holds a continuous flame inside the combustor with an air speed in excess of 1.5 km/s.
- **No Moving Parts:** Engine doesn't use a mechanical compressor or turbine.
- **Increased Efficiency:** It is a more efficient propulsion system than a rocket.
 - > A rocket engine carries both fuel and oxidizer.

About Hypersonic Weapons

- These are capable of speeds exceeding **Mach 5**, offering rapid global reach and high **evasion** capabilities against **air defense systems**.
- Fly at lower altitudes than **ballistic missiles**, and are highly maneuverable making them harder to track.
- **Types:**
 - **Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV):** A maneuvering weapon system that glides through the upper atmosphere at speeds exceeding Mach 5 (over 6,100 km/h) after being boosted by a rocket.
 - **Hypersonic Cruise Missiles (HCM):** Can be fired from aircraft, much like other cruise missiles, before accelerating to hypersonic speeds. Cruise missiles are self-propelled and precision-guided weapons.
 - > It maintains sustained and controlled flight to strike targets accurately.

7.2. NEWS IN SHORTS

7.2.1. ISRO'S PSLV-C62/EOS-N1 MISSION ENCOUNTERED ANOMALY DURING 3RD STAGE

The launch marked the **64th flight of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** and **9th dedicated commercial mission** undertaken by **New Space India Limited (NSIL)**.

- NSIL, incorporated in **2019**, is wholly owned Government Company under administrative control of **Department of Space** and is the **commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.

About PSLV-C62 / EOS-N1 Mission

- It includes the launch of **EOS-N1 earth observation satellite** along with **15 co-passenger satellites** from domestic & international customers.
 - EOS-N1 is designed to strengthen **space-based monitoring capabilities**.
- It will also demonstrate **KID or Kestrel Initial Technology Demonstrator** from a Spanish startup.
 - KID is a **small-scale prototype** of a re-entry vehicle which after launch is slated to re-enter the earth's atmosphere towards splashdown in **South Pacific Ocean**.
- EOS-N1 and 14 Co-passenger satellites will be injected into a **Sun Synchronous Orbit** and **KID Capsule** into a re-entry trajectory.

About PSLV

- **3rd generation launch vehicle** and is **first Indian launch vehicle** to be equipped with **liquid stages**.
- **Workhorse of ISRO:** Consistently delivered satellites to **Low Earth Orbits**, can take up to **1,750 kg of payload** to **Sun-Synchronous Polar Orbits** of 600 km altitude.
- **Stages in PSLV**
 - **First Stage:** Uses the S139 **solid rocket motor** augmented by 6 solid strap-on boosters.
 - **Second Stage:** Uses **Earth storable liquid rocket engine** known as **Vikas engine**, developed by Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.
 - **Third Stage:** **Solid rocket motor** that provides high thrust to upper stages.
 - **Fourth Stage:** Uppermost stage of PSLV, comprising of **two Earth storable liquid engines**.
- **Notable Missions:** Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission, Aditya-L1 and Astrosat Mission, PSLV set a world record by launching 104 satellites in a single mission in 2017.

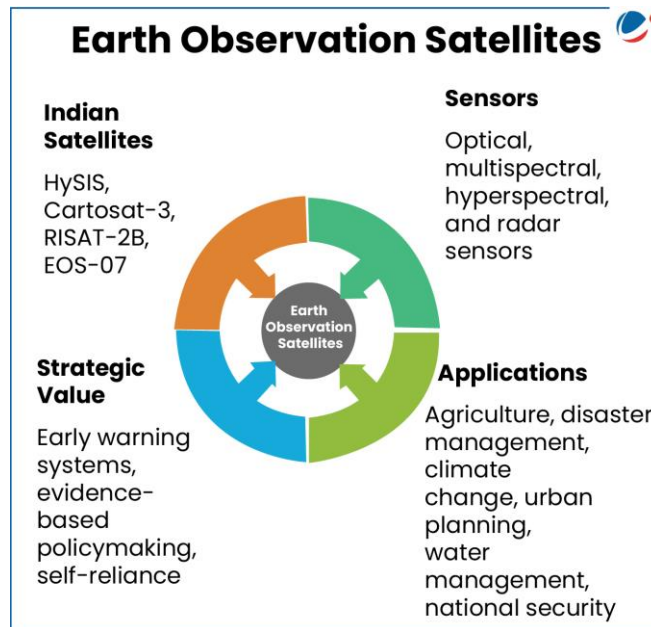
7.2.2. INDIA'S FIRST PRIVATE EARTH OBSERVATION (EO) SATELLITE CONSTELLATION

Pixxel-led Consortium has signed an agreement with IN-SPACe to design, build, and operate India's **first national EO constellation**

- Pixxel-led Consortium comprises Piersight Space, Satsure Analytics India, and Dhruva Space.
- **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe)** is India's nodal agency that **authorises, regulates, and promotes private sector participation** in space activities.

Key features of the EO constellation Project

- **PPP Model:** It will be executed under a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** framework.
 - The project will create a complete **end-to-end Earth Observation** ecosystem, from **satellite deployment to value-added geospatial analytics**.
- **Constellation:** It will consist of **12 satellites** covering very high-resolution optical, multispectral, **synthetic aperture radar (SAR)**, and hyperspectral imaging.
- **Project scale:** ₹1,200 crore investment over a 5-year period.
- **Strategic shift:** Transition from government-built to industry-operated national EO infrastructure.



7.2.3. DARK MATTER

Based on observations from **James Webb Space Telescope**, astronomers unveil a detailed map of dark matter.

Dark Matter

- It is a hypothesised form of matter that is **invisible** but is inferred to exist based on its **gravitational effects** on ordinary matter like stars, planets, moons, etc.
- It does **not emit, absorb, or reflect light** and barely interacts with normal matter.
- Composition of Universe: normal or visible matter (5%), dark matter (27%), and dark energy (68%).

7.2.4. FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

WEF announced five new 'Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) Centres' globally. One of the Centre will be built in in **Andhra Pradesh, India**.

- It will be 3rd such centre in India **after Mumbai and Telangana**.

Unveiling the Universe's History with JWST



Launch Year
Launched in 2021



Star and Planetary System Formation
Investigating star and planet system creation



First Luminous Objects
Observing earliest light after the Big Bang



Location
Orbits Sun at L2 Lagrange point



Solar System Evolution
Analyzing our Solar System's historical changes.



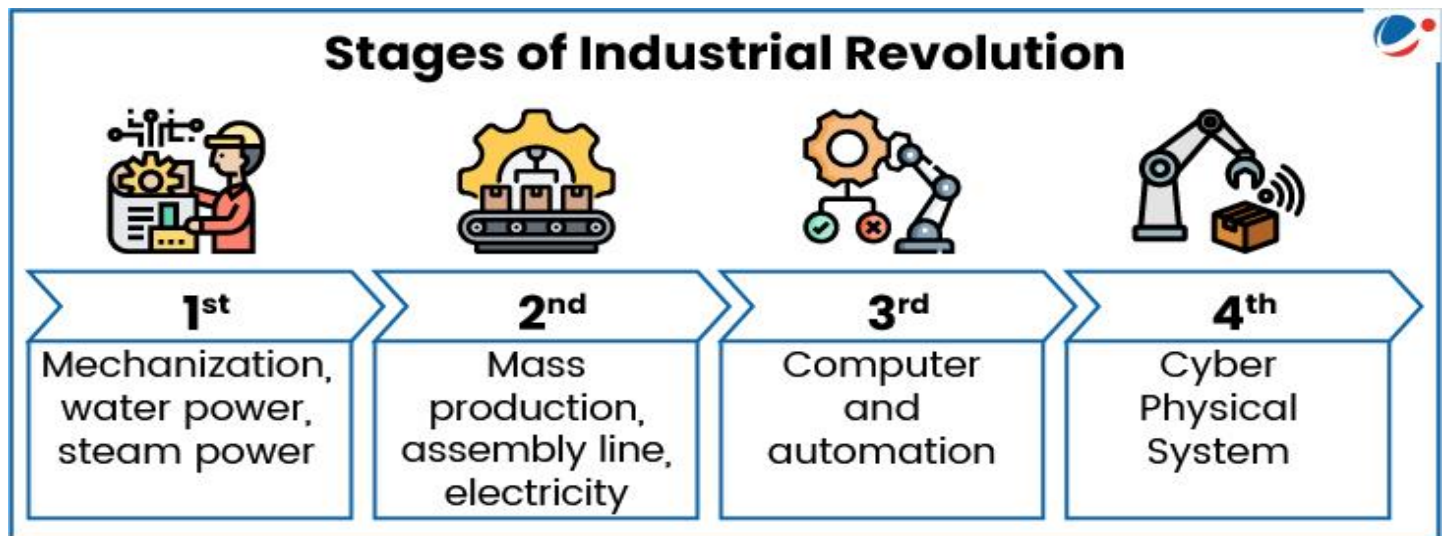
Galaxy Formation
Studying how galaxies formed and evolved.

What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

- The term was coined by **Klaus Schwab**, founder of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2016.
- **IR 4.0** describes the **current era in which digital, physical and biological technologies converge** such as AI, robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), quantum computing, etc.
- Unlike earlier revolutions, IR 4.0 is **blurring boundaries between physical, digital and biological systems**.

Significance of Fourth Industrial Revolution

- **Economic growth:** Enhances **productivity** and improves **supply chain resilience** through automation, data analytics and smart manufacturing.
- **Inclusive development potential:** Offers **developing countries like India an opportunity to leapfrog** legacy technologies and expand digital access.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Supports **low-carbon and resource-efficient growth** through smart grids, precision agriculture and circular economy practices.
 - For example, "**Lighthouse**" **factories** have demonstrated significant reductions in CO2 emissions and water usage through predictive analytics and IoT.
- **Human capital centrality:** Shifts the focus from physical labour to skills, innovation, and lifelong learning.



Challenges and Risks

- **The Technology Gap:** There is a risk of **widening inequality between developed and developing nations**.
 - E.g. Ten "frontrunner" economies account for **91% of global patent applications** in advanced digital production technologies.
- **Workforce Disruption:** Almost 40 percent of global employment is exposed to AI. (IMF)
- **Security and Cyber Resilience:** As industrial sites become more connected, they become **vulnerable to cyberattacks, espionage, and disruption of critical infrastructure**.
- **Environmental Effects:** The increased use of sensors, data centers, and connected devices **consumes energy and scarce resources**.

7.2.5. BATTERY PACK AADHAAR NUMBER (BPAN)

Government releases draft guidelines for Battery Pack Aadhaar System.

About Battery Pack Aadhaar System

- It is an indigenous **digital identification and data storage system** developed to ensure **end-to-end traceability of batteries throughout their entire lifecycle**.

- It includes a **unique identification number for each battery pack, capturing and storing vital information from extraction to final disposal.**
- Battery categories that are required to maintain a Battery Pack Aadhaar as an electronic record include Electric Vehicle Batteries and Industrial Batteries with capacity greater than 2kWh.
- **Significance:** Enabling **second-life usage, regulatory compliance, and efficient recycling.**

7.2.6. VEHICLE-TO-VEHICLE (V2V) COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister announced that India will roll out **Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication technology.**

About V2V Communication Technology

- It is an **inter vehicle communication paradigm** that it **does not rely** on third party networks like cellular networks to communicate.
- **Significance: Increased safety** as it works across the front, rear and sides of vehicles, and will **factor in terrain and road curves; strengthen Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS)** by allowing vehicles to share warnings even when a hazard is not visible.

7.2.7. MPEMBA EFFECT

Indian scientists developed first **supercomputer-powered simulation** to capture **Mpemba effect.**

About Mpemba effect

- It is a **long-existing paradox** suggesting that **hotter substances can freeze faster than colder substances** under certain conditions.
- Most famously, observed with water, but the **effect is not limited to water** and shows up in other materials and physical systems, too.
- **Significance:** Heat engines and refrigeration systems, Quantum computing, Materials science etc.

7.2.8. NIPAH VIRUS

As per National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), only two confirmed cases of Nipah Virus Disease have been reported from West Bengal from December last year till date.

About Nipah Virus

- **Nature:** Zoonotic virus (spreads from animals to humans).
- **Natural reservoir:** Fruit bats also known as flying foxes.
- **Transmission**
 - **Animal to human:** Direct contact with infected bats or pigs or consumption of raw date palm sap or fruit contaminated by bats.
 - **Human to human:** Close contact with body fluids of infected persons.
- **First identified:** 1999 outbreak in Malaysia and Singapore (from Bats to Pigs to Humans).
- **Incubation period:** 4–14 days.
- **Early symptoms:** Fever, Headache, Cough, Sore throat and difficulty in breathing.

7.2.9. STAPHYLOCOCCI

Researchers found high levels of antibiotic-resistant staphylococci in both the indoor and outdoor environment in parts of Delhi.

About Staphylococcus

- They are gram positive cocci (spherical-shaped bacterium) that occur in groups in clusters.
- It was first observed in humans by Von Recklinghausen.
- They showed tolerance to penicillin and resistances to all clinical useful antibiotics like erythromycin, tetracycline, aminoglycosides.
- **Types:** Staphylococcus aureus and Staphylococcus epidermidis.

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8. CULTURE

8.1. SOMNATH TEMPLE

Why in the News?

Somnath Swabhiman Parv commemorates 1,000 years since the first attack by Mahmud of Ghazni on the Somnath Temple in 1026.

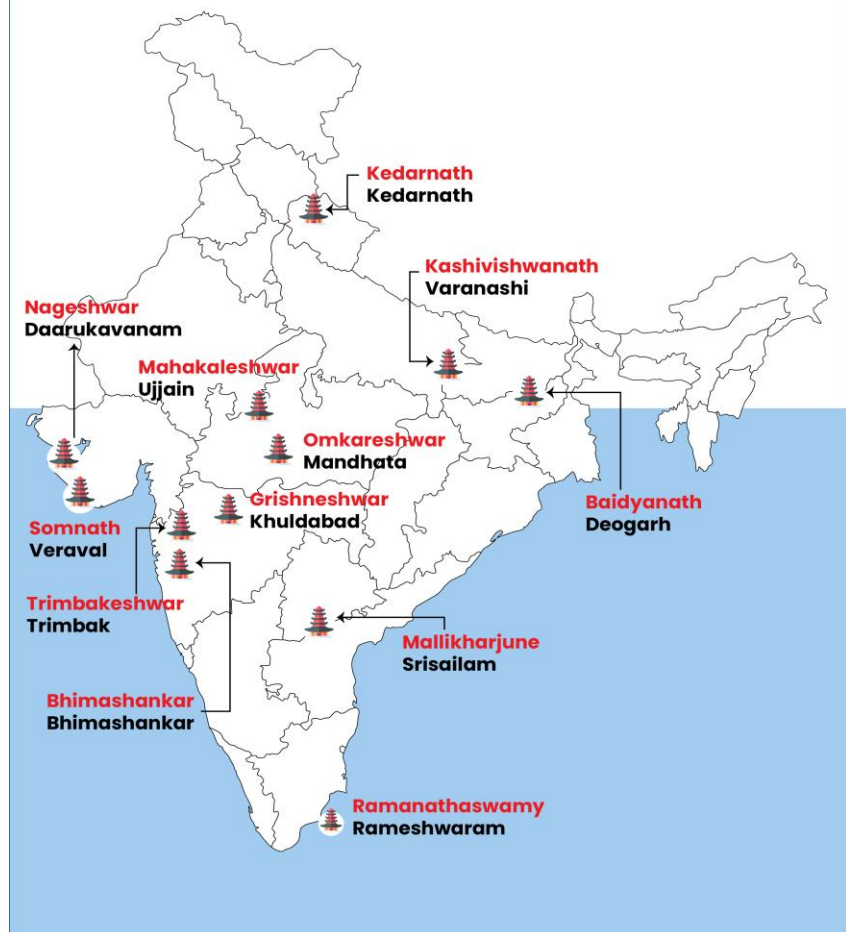
About Somnath Temple

- **Location:** Prabhas Patan near Veraval in Gujarat
 - The site of Somnath has been a pilgrimage site from ancient times on account of being a Triveni sangam (the confluence of three rivers — Kapila, Hiran and Sarasvati).
- **Jyotirlinga:** Revered as the first among the 12 Aadi Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva.
- **Architecture:**
 - The present temple is a **Maru-Gurjara architecture** (also called Chalukya or Solanki style) temple.
 - It has a “**Kailash Mahameru Prasad**” form which comprises: the **Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum)**, **Sabhamandap (assembly hall)** and **Nrityamandap (dance hall)**.
 - The temple is crowned by a **150-foot Shikhar**, with a **10-tonne Kalash** at its summit.
- **Description of Somnath Temple:**
 - **Ancient times:** Kalidasa (Raghuvamsa) mentions **Somnath-Prabhasa** as a revered Shiva pilgrimage site in 5th century.
 - **Medieval times:**
 - **Al-Biruni** (Kitab-al-Hind) praised Somnath Temple in 11th century.
 - **Amir Khusrou** (Khazain-ul-Futuh) recorded the destruction of the Somnath temple by Alauddin Khilji's army in 13th century.
- **Attacks on Somnath:** In 1026, during the reign of Bhima I, the **Turkic Muslim ruler Mahmud of Ghazni** raided and plundered the Somnath temple, breaking its jyotirlinga.
 - The temple was again destroyed in 1297, 1394, and finally in 1706 under Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.
 - The temple was looted as many as 17 times.

Somnath Temple



12 Jyotirlingas in India



- **Reconstruction:** Initiated in post-independence by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first Deputy Prime Minister of India in 1947.
 - **Pran Pratisthan/Inauguration** was done by President Rajendra Prasad on 11 May, 1951.
 - Earlier, **Ahilyabai Holkar rebuilt the Somnath temple in the 18th century** (around 1783).

About Maru-Gurjara Architecture (Solanki style):

- **Genesis:** Originated in the 6th century in the regions of Rajasthan (historically *Marudesh*) and Gujarat (historically *Gurjaratra*).
 - Reached zenith under the Chalukya dynasty of Gujarat (Solanki dynasty).
- **Features of Maru-Gurjara architecture**
 - **Jharokha:** A projecting stone window or suspended balcony supported by brackets or corbelling.
 - **Chattri:** An umbrella-shaped dome or pavilion used to symbolize memorials over funeral sites.
 - **Haveli:** Large mansions or townhouses belonging to the aristocracy, designed around a central courtyard.
 - > The courtyard acts as a micro-climate modifier, providing light, ventilation, and a transition between public and private spaces.
 - **Jaali:** A perforated stone or latticed screen featuring geometric or calligraphy-based patterns.
 - **Baoli (Stepwell):** Elaborate ponds reached by descending steps, used for accessing groundwater.
 - **Johad:** Rainwater storage tanks or simple mud/rubble barriers built across slopes to arrest rainwater and replenish groundwater

8.2. NEWS IN SHORTS

8.2.1 PADMA AWARDS

President of India approved conferment of 131 Padma Awards.

- It comprises **5 Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri Awards**.
- Awardees include 19 women, 6 persons from Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI category, and 16 posthumous awardees. There are 2 Duo cases (in a duo case, the Award is counted as one).

About Padma Awards

- It is one of the highest **civilian awards** of the country, are conferred in three categories, namely,
 - **Padma Vibhushan** for exceptional and distinguished service;
 - **Padma Bhushan** for distinguished service of a high order; and
 - **Padma Shri** for distinguished service in any field.
 - > The other civilian award is the **Bharat Ratna (highest civilian award)**.
- **History:** Instituted as Padma Vibhushan in **1954** with **three classes**, it was **renamed** in **1955** as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri.
 - **Conferred annually except interruptions** during the years 1978, 1979, and 1993 to 1997.
- **Activities/ Disciplines:** All fields such as Art, Social Work, Public Affairs, Science, etc. involving **public service**.
 - **Not eligible: Government servants** including those working with **PSUs, except doctors and scientists**.

Padma Awards Selection Process

Steps	Description
Nomination	All nominations are placed before the Padma Awards Committee headed by Cabinet Secretary
Committee Recommendation	Committee recommendations are submitted to the Prime Minister and President
Approval	Prime Minister and President provide approval
Announcement	Awards are announced every year on Republic Day eve
Conferment	President confers awards at ceremonial functions
Awardee Receives	Awardees receive a Sanad (certificate) and Medallion
Higher Category	Higher category requires at least five years

- **Status:** The award does **not amount to a title** under **Article 18(1)** and **cannot** be used as a suffix or prefix. (**Balaji Raghavan vs. UOI, 1996**)
 - **Article 18(1) prohibits** the State from conferring any **titles** except military and academic distinction.
- **Cap:** Number of awards is **capped at 120 per year** (excluding Posthumous and Foreigners/NRI).
- **Normally not conferred posthumously.** However, in highly deserving cases, it is **awarded**.

8.2.2. GALLANTRY AWARDS

President of India approved Gallantry awards to 70 Armed Forces personnel, including six posthumous.

About Gallantry Awards

- **Established:**
 - **Wartime Awards:** Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, and Vir Chakra were instituted **on January 26, 1950**.
 - **Peacetime Awards:** Ashoka Chakra Class-I, Class-II, and Class-III were instituted **on January 4, 1952**.
 - > These **peacetime awards** were **renamed Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra, and Shaurya Chakra**, respectively in 1967.
- **Conferred by:** **President**, who is the supreme commander of the Armed Forces.
- **Objective:** Recognitions given for acts of bravery, valour or self-sacrifice **both during wartime and peacetime**.
- **Selection Process:** **Ministry of Defence invites recommendations** twice in a year from the **Armed Forces** and **Union Ministry of Home Affairs** for gallantry awards.
- **Frequency:** announced **twice a year**, on the occasion of **Republic Day** and **Independence Day**.

Two main categories

Gallantry in the Face of Enemy:	Gallantry Other than in the Face of Enemy:
• Param Vir Chakra: Highest military decoration for most conspicuous bravery. • Maha Vir Chakra: Second highest for acts of conspicuous gallantry. • Vir Chakra: Third in precedence for acts of bravery on the battlefield.	• Ashoka Chakra: Highest peacetime award for bravery away from the battlefield. • Kirti Chakra: Second highest peacetime decoration. • Shaurya Chakra: Third highest peacetime decoration.
Order of precedence: Param Vir Chakra, the Ashoka Chakra, the Mahavir Chakra, the Kirti Chakra, the Vir Chakra and the Shaurya Chakra.	

8.2.3. BHADRAKALI INSCRIPTION

The Bhadrakali inscription serves as a vital **12th-century epigraphic record** that authenticates the historical and architectural evolution of the Somnath Temple under the patronage of the Solanki dynasty.

About the Bhadrakali Inscription

- **Location:** Situated at **Prabhas Patan, Gujarat**, this **1169 CE** inscription is **embedded** in the **wall of the ancient Bhadrakali Temple**.
- **Context:** It serves as a **prashasti (eulogy)** for **Acharya Bhavabrihaspati**, the spiritual preceptor of the Solanki (Chaulukya) King Kumarapala.
- **Chronology:** The record provides a **legendary history of the Somnath Temple across the four Yugas**, mentioning its construction in gold, silver, wood, and finally stone by Bhimdev Solanki.
- **Patronage:** It highlights the role of the Solanki dynasty in the temple's revival, specifically Kumarapala's efforts in the 12th century.

8.2.4. ZEHANPORA SITE

The discovery of **stupas** (man-made mounds) at Zehanpora underscores **Kashmir's rich Gandhara Buddhist heritage** and its historical role as a **centre of Buddhist culture and learning**.

Zehanpora Site (Baramulla, North Kashmir)

- Stupa structures belong to the **Kushan period (1st–3rd century CE)**.
- Located along the **ancient Silk Route to Kandahar**.
- **Other Findings:** Evidence of wooden superstructures, an **urban settlement complex** (potentially chaityas and viharas), Kushan-era pottery, copper artefacts, etc.

8.2.5. BAGURUMBA DANCE

Prime Minister participated in “**Bagurumba Dwhou 2026**”, celebrating rich heritage of the **Bodo community in Assam**.

About Bagurumba Dance

- Traditional **folk dance of the Bodo** community of **Assam**.
- **Inspired by nature**, symbolises blooming flowers, reflects harmony between human life and the natural world.
- Traditionally performed by **young Bodo women**, men accompany as musicians, playing traditional instruments.
- Usually performed **in groups**, forming circles or lines that enhance its **visual elegance**.
- **Cultural Significance:** Dance represents peace, fertility, joy and collective harmony, and is closely associated with festivals such as **Bwisagu (the Bodo New Year)** and **Domasi**.

8.2.6. HARVEST FESTIVALS

Traditional **harvest festivals** are being **celebrated in different parts of India**.

- These festivals, celebrated under different names and **customs across the country**, mark the change of seasons, the Sun’s northward journey (Uttarayana), and the harvest of crops.

Traditional Harvest Festivals

- **Makar Sankranti (Maharashtra):** It marks the Sun’s transition into Capricorn.
- **Uttarayana (Gujarat and Rajasthan):** It is known for kite flying, which commemorates the Sun's rise and is a day of joy and celebration.
- **Pongal (Tamil Nadu):** It marks four-day harvest festival that includes Thai Pongal, Mattu Pongal, Kaanum Pongal, and Bhogi, people make the rice and lentil dish Pongal.
- **Lohri (Punjab):** Celebrated a day before Makar Sankranti, it marks the harvest of Rabi crops and is celebrated around bonfires with folk songs, Bhangra and Gidda.
- **Magh Bihu (Assam):** It celebrates the end of the harvest season with community feasts, traditional games and bonfires known as Meji.
- **Kanuma (Telangana):** It is a festival to express thankfulness and admiration towards the agriculture sector.



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9. ETHICS

9.1. ETHICAL CONCERNS WITH AI USE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

The government has raised concerns over the misuse of the Grok, an AI tool of social media platform X, to generate and circulate sexually explicit and derogatory content, particularly targeting women and children.

Ethical Issues arising out of AI use on Social Media

- **Surveillance Tool:** AI algorithms rely on massive data collection about users' behaviours, preferences, and personal traits.
 - Social media companies often harvest detailed personal data under the guise of personalizing experience, creating a form of **surveillance capitalism**.
- **Privacy Invasion:** Users typically lack full awareness or informed consent about how their information is collected and exploited.
 - Through this invasion of privacy, not only are users' online actions tracked, but AI can also infer sensitive traits (interests, beliefs, even moods) without permission.
- **Misinformation:** AI has greatly amplified the spread of misinformation, ranging from **political disinformation campaigns** (e.g. propaganda bots influencing elections) to conspiracy theories (like anti-vaccine content) etc.
 - AI techniques like **deepfake** (synthetic image/video replacing original content) and **voice skins/voice clones** of public figures (manipulating audio and voice) are effective in spreading altered facts.
- **Bias and Discrimination:** AI systems can perpetuate **biases** present in their training data or design as algorithms can't differentiate stereotypes from bias.
 - Such algorithmic bias can marginalize voices and entrench inequality.
- **Psychological Impact:** By design, algorithms are being optimized by AI for engagement, often promoting sensational or validating content that keeps people scrolling.
 - This can foster addiction-like usage patterns and contribute to anxiety, depression, or distorted self-image – especially among younger users.
- **Social Divide:** Algorithmic personalization can create polarized communities (echo chambers), reducing exposure to diverse viewpoints and **fragmenting the public sphere**.
- **Violation of Dignity:** AI tools on social media can be misused to **violate individual consent and dignity**.
 - The generation of non-consensual explicit and deepfake images/videos is effectively AI-assisted harassment.

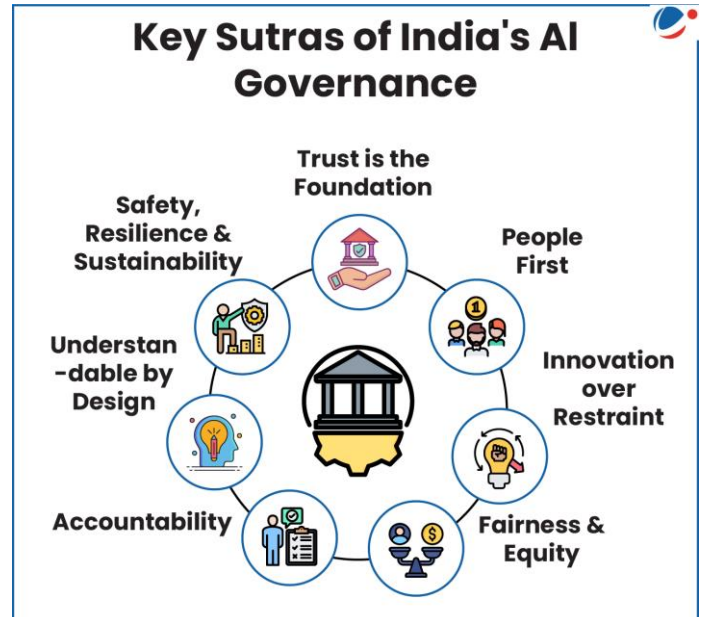
Stakeholders and their interests

Stakeholders	Interests/ Responsibilities
Social Media Platforms	• Leveraging AI to boost user engagement and grow user base • Self-regulation and enhance their public image • Preventing harm caused by AI on their services • Ethical obligations ensuring privacy, truthfulness and individual dignity
Users and Society	• Upholding of their rights and well-being • Interest in privacy, security and authentic experiences • Ensuring social cohesion and fulfilment of public interest • Fair representation free from algorithmic bias
Government and Regulators	• Protecting Citizens' interests • Upholding the law by enforcing compliance • Preventing propagation of misinformation, hate speech, election interference, privacy breaches etc.

AI Developers	• Exploring new opportunities and applications of AI • Developing AI models that are ethical by embedding fairness, diversity, and essential safeguards • Enhance public trust and utility of AI
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Regulations on Ethical Use of AI on social media platforms

- **Laws and Rules:** The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 and the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 form the backbone of social media regulation.
 - **IT Act and Rules:** Platforms are required under these rules to exercise due diligence for example, swiftly removing illegal or obscene content and having grievance redressal systems.
 - Non-compliance can lead to loss of safe harbour protection under Section 79 of the IT Act, which currently shields social platforms from liability for user posts.
 - **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** It aims to ensure that data fiduciaries (including platforms which control the AI systems) comply with prior consent requirement, data protection measures, and adequate grievance redressal measures.
 - **Laws protecting Fundamental Rights:** Laws such as **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act** and the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act** make it illegal to create or share obscene material, especially involving women or minors.
- **AI-Specific Guidelines:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued India AI Governance Guidelines for enabling safe and trusted AI innovation.
 - It presented seven sutras for ethical AI governance (see infographic).
- **Global Regulations:** The **European Union** has taken a lead with the landmark **EU Artificial Intelligence Act**, agreed upon in 2024.
 - This Act is the **world's first comprehensive AI law**, and it categorizes AI systems by risk, prohibits unacceptable risk AI practices, such as AI that involves subliminal manipulation of users or exploitative algorithms that seriously distort human behavior.
- **Ethical AI Principles:** Globally, there's movement toward **ethical AI principles** endorsed by bodies like the OECD and UNESCO, which, while non-binding, pressure companies to uphold values like fairness, transparency, privacy, and human oversight in AI systems.
 - Also, global platforms like **UNESCO's Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory** provide a global resource to find solutions to the most pressing challenges posed by AI.



Conclusion

AI's role in social media is a double-edged sword as it offers exciting possibilities to enrich our digital interactions, yet it also poses significant ethical questions. Social media platforms should integrate strong AI safeguards, such as effective content filters and clear verification of AI-generated content. Developers must follow ethics-by-design principles, using diverse data, reducing bias, and protecting privacy. Governments should strengthen regulations, mandate labelling and audits, and penalize misuse, while international cooperation ensures common standards.

Check Your Ethical Aptitude

You are posted as Joint Secretary in the Government of India. Over the last 48 hours, your office receives a surge of complaints from parents of school-going children and women professionals. The complaints state that AI-generated sexually explicit images are being created through prompts on a popular social media platform's integrated AI feature, and then circulated in public threads and group chats. Several victims report that their publicly available photographs have been altered into non-consensual sexualised visuals. A few complaints involve minors.

The platform's India compliance team claims that it is an "intermediary" and cannot pre-screen everything, and strong takedowns and restrictions will reduce user engagement and harm business. Meanwhile, women's groups and the media demand immediate action, while a digital rights collective warns against knee-jerk censorship and insists on transparency and due process in takedown decisions.

You have 72 hours to submit a reasoned, legally sustainable, and ethically defensible response plan that prevents further harm, supports victims, and preserves democratic values and trust in online governance.

Against this backdrop, answer the following questions:

- Identify the key stakeholders and the ethical issues involved.
- What options are available to you as a public authority in the immediate term? Critically evaluate them.
- Recommend a course of action, with ethical justification and a short-term implementation plan.

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10. SCHEMES IN NEWS

10.1. ATAL PENSION YOJANA

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) until 2030–31.

Objectives of the Scheme	Salient features of the Scheme
• To advance universal social security, with special focus on the poor, underprivileged, and workers in the unorganised sector. • To ensure income security in old age, thereby reducing vulnerability and old-age poverty. • To promote voluntary retirement savings through defined pension benefits calibrated to age of entry and contribution levels.	• Ministry: Union Ministry of Finance • Launched in: 2015 • Implementing agency: Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) under the National Pension System (NPS). • Type: Central Sector Scheme • Eligibility: ○ APY is open to all bank account holders in the age group of 18 to 40 years who are not income tax payers. ○ All eligible family members can join scheme. • Benefits: ○ Guaranteed Monthly Pension: Lifelong pension between ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 from age 60 until death. ○ Family Pension Provision: In case of death of subscriber, spouse receives the pension; nominee gets corpus. ○ Premature death of the subscriber (before 60 years of age): Spouse can continue contribution to APY account. ○ Tax Benefits: Contributions to APY are eligible for tax benefits similar to National Pension System (NPS) under section 80CCD (1). • Payment: Subscribers can make contributions to APY on monthly/quarterly / half-yearly basis. Depending upon the intended/desired monthly pension and the age of subscriber at entry. • Exit and Withdrawal Options ○ Exit at age 60: Full pension begins. ○ Exit before age 60: Permitted only in cases of death or terminal illness. ○ Voluntary Exit: Allowed, but the subscriber only receives the contribution made (with interest) and government co-contribution (if any) is forfeited. • Government Co-contribution (for Early Joiners): For eligible subscribers who joined between 1 June 2015 and 31 March 2016 (The scheme is continued but without Government Co-contribution). ○ The government co-contributed 50% of the total contribution or ₹1,000 per annum (whichever is lower) for 5 years. ○ This applied only to subscribers not covered under any statutory social security scheme and not income taxpayers at the time. • Implementation Strategy (Extended up to 2030–31): ○ Promotional and Developmental activities to expand outreach among unorganised workers, including awareness and capacity building. ○ Gap funding to meet viability requirements and ensure sustainability of the scheme. • Progress: As of 19th January, 2026, over 8.66 crore subscribers have been enrolled, making APY a cornerstone of India's inclusive social security framework.

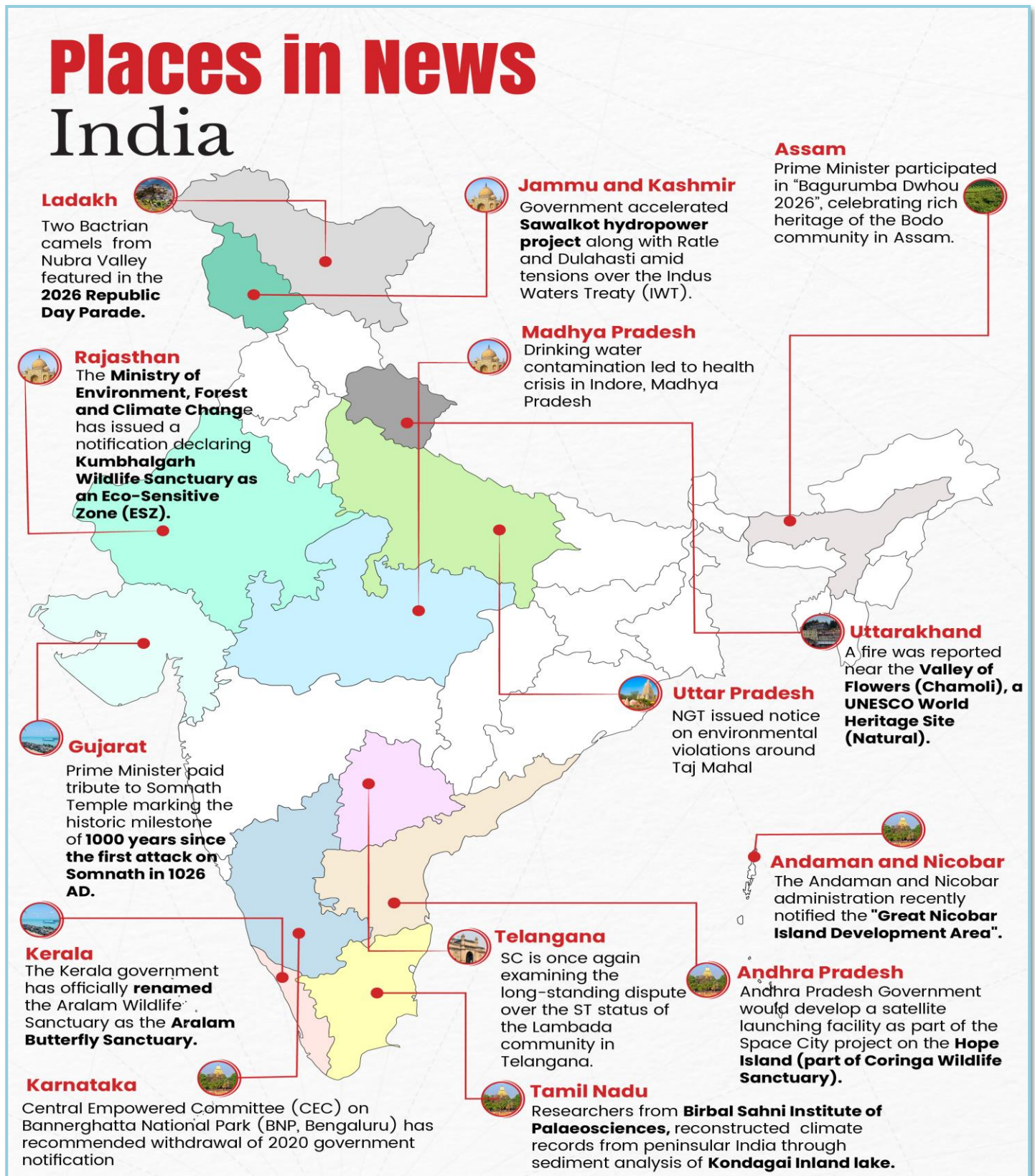
10.2. PM STREET VENDORS ATMANIRBHAR NIDHI (PM SVANIDHI) SCHEME

Why in the News?

Under PM SVANidhi, street vendors and hawkers are now eligible for a **dedicated credit card facility with a limit of up to ₹30,000.**

Objectives of the Scheme	Salient features of the Scheme
- To facilitate collateral-free working capital loans to street vendors to restart their businesses. - Holistic development of street vendors by offering a reliable source of finance to support business expansion and opportunities for sustainable growth - Promote financial inclusion, digital payments, and identity/recognition to street vendors	Ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Launched in 2020 to support street vendors who faced unprecedented hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Type: Central Sector Scheme. Implementation: Jointly by Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Department of Financial Services (DFS). - DFS responsible for facilitating access to loan/ credit cards through banks/financial institution and their ground level functionaries. Eligibility: Identified Vendors: Street vendors holding a Certificate of Vending/Identity Card or those identified in ULB surveys (even if documents are pending). Left-out & Peri-urban Vendors: Vendors missed in surveys, new entrants, or peri-urban/rural vendors operating within ULB limits, provided they possess a Letter of Recommendation from ULB/Town Vending Committee. Eligibility for state/UTs: States/UTs must have notified Rules under the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. Key Benefits: Working capital with Interest subsidy (7%) and Higher loan eligibility on timely/early repayment. Working capital Loan Tranches: - First tranche: up to ₹15,000. - Second tranche: up to ₹25,000. - Third tranche: unchanged at ₹50,000. Credit Guarantee: Provision for Graded Guarantee Cover for the loans sanctioned. It is administered by Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE). Digital Push: Up to ₹1,600 cashback incentives for street vendors for retail & wholesale transactions. Coverage Expansion: From statutory towns to census towns and peri-urban areas etc. in graded manner. SVANidhi se Samridhhi: Strengthened through monthly Lok Kalyan Melas for linking vendors with other welfare schemes. Eligibility for ₹30,000 Credit Card: Street vendors who have successfully repaid the second tranche and those who have already availed the third tranche (whether active or repaid).

11. PLACES IN NEWS



Places in News World

Greenland (Capital: Nuuk)

Danish PM claims of Greenland

Germany (Capital: Berlin)

India and Germany signed various agreements to boost relations

Bulgaria (Capital: Sofia)

Bulgaria has adopted euro as its official currency becoming a member.

Israel (Capital: Jerusalem)

India and Israel signed a Joint Ministerial Declaration of Intent to strengthen collaboration in the fisheries and aquaculture.

Venezuela (Capital: Caracas)

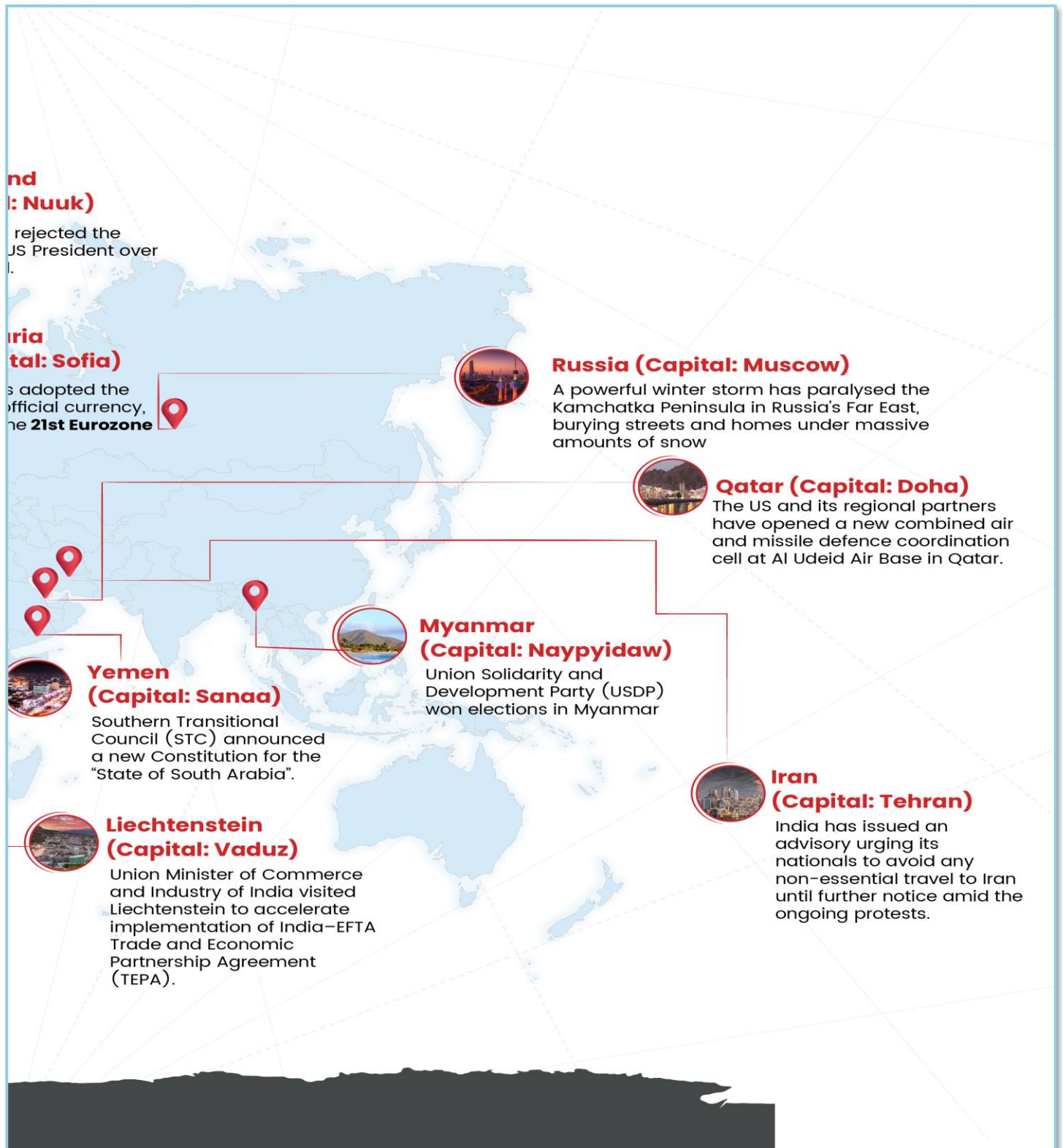
US' strikes in and around Venezuelan Capital Caracas

Chile (Capital: Santiago)

Violent wildfire raging in **Southern Chile** forced evacuation of more than twenty thousand people.

Argentina (Capital: Buenos Aires)

Wildfires erupted in Patagonia region of Argentina.

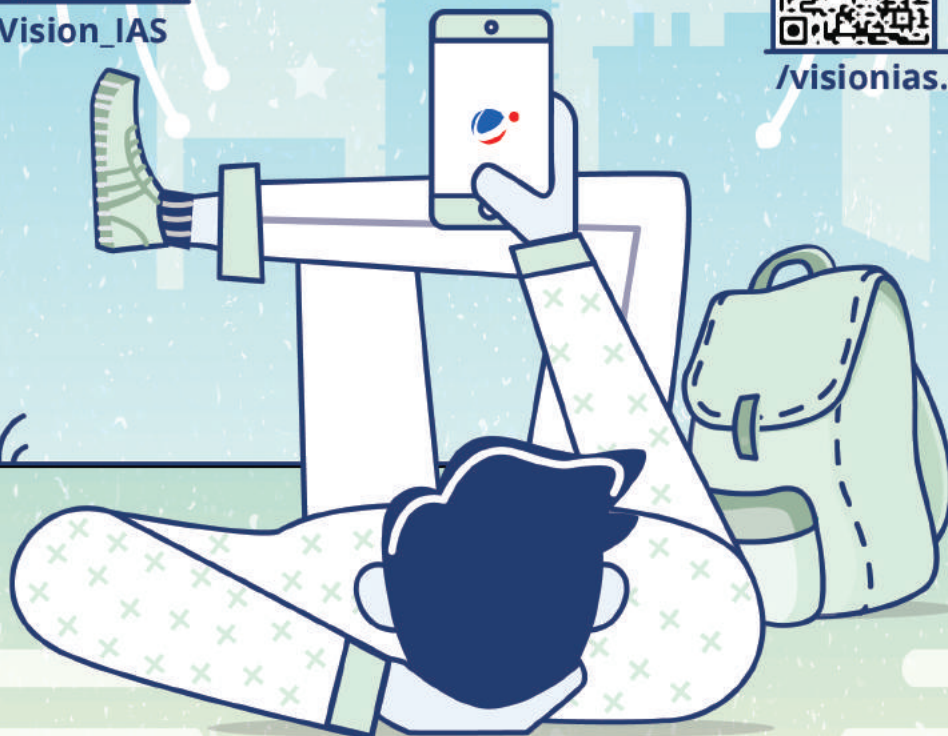


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