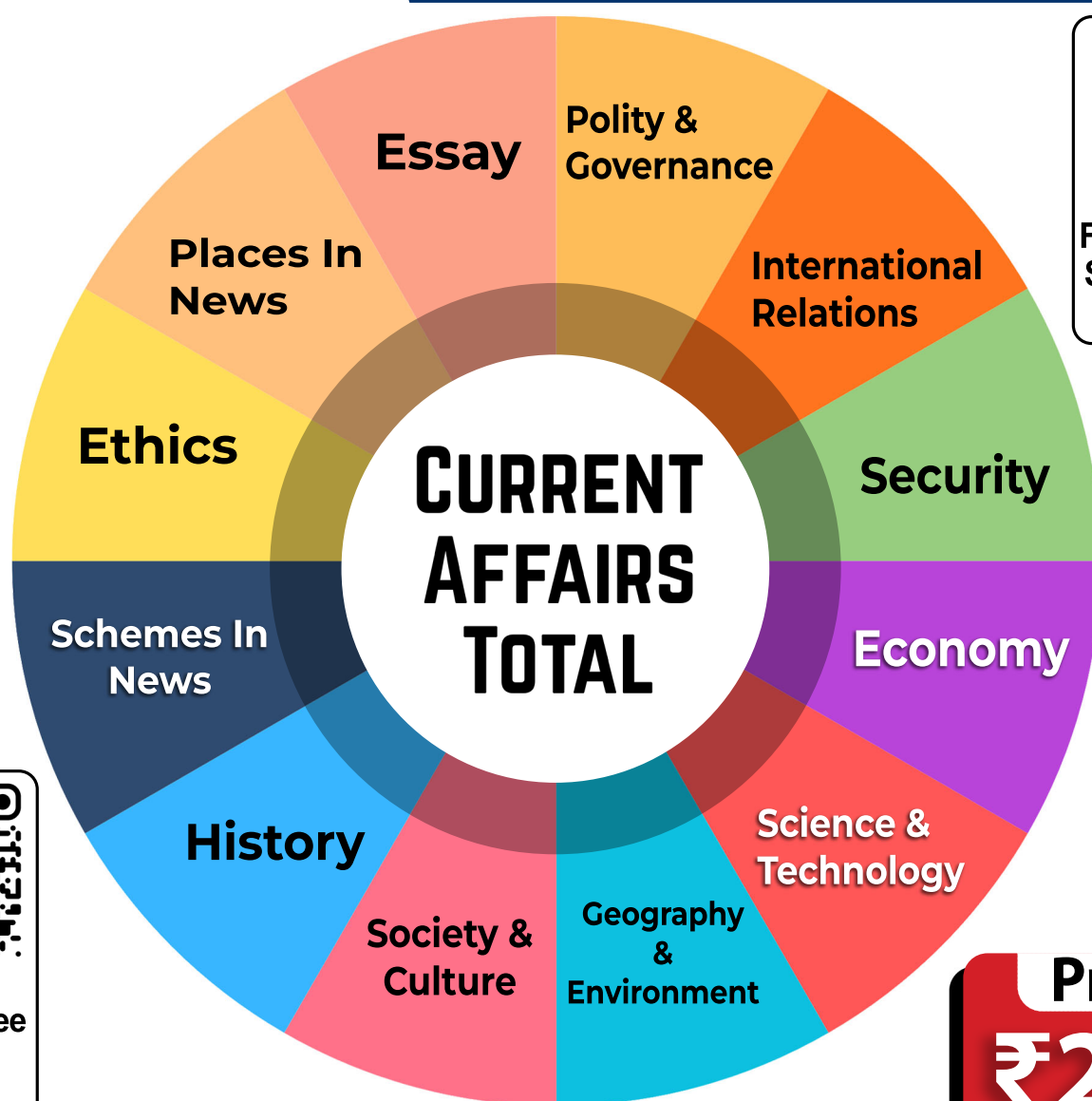




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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. Acting Chief Justice and Judicial Appointments in High Courts

Context

The **Supreme Court Collegium** is considering at least **four recommendations** for appointment as High Court judges made by **Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma**, the Acting Chief Justice of the **Rajasthan High Court**.

Justice Sharma has held the post since **September 2025**, reviving debate over the convention governing judicial recommendations made by an Acting Chief Justice.

Constitutional Position of Acting Chief Justice of a High Court

- Article 223** of the Constitution provides for an **Acting Chief Justice** when the office of Chief Justice of a High Court is vacant or the incumbent is unable to perform its functions.
- The Constitution does **not expressly prohibit** an Acting Chief Justice from recommending candidates for appointment as High Court judges.
- The general restraint on making such recommendations is based on **convention and institutional practice**, rather than a statutory prohibition.

Collegium System

- The **Collegium system** for appointments and transfers in the higher judiciary evolved through a series of **Supreme Court judgments**.
- Recommendations for High Court judges are initiated at the High Court level and subsequently examined by the **Supreme Court Collegium**.
- For the appointment of High Court judges, the **Supreme Court Collegium comprises the Chief Justice of India and the two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court**.

Convention and Past Practice

- Acting Chief Justices generally refrain from recommending candidates because judicial selection requires **detailed assessment, consultation and familiarity with the local Bar and judicial environment**. However, past practice does not establish an absolute prohibition.
- Bombay High Court, 2020:** An Acting Chief Justice

prepared a list of **22 candidates**. Following differing views among consultee judges, the Collegium forwarded **18 names** to the Centre. The Centre returned the list, after which a fresh panel was prepared.

- Rajasthan High Court, 2022:** The Centre raised concerns over **12 recommendations** made by the then Chief Justice near the end of his tenure and subsequently cleared **8 names**.

These instances indicate that recommendations made during **acting or transitional periods** have been dealt with according to the circumstances of each case.

Rajasthan Controversy

- The issue has emerged alongside complaints regarding the functioning of the Acting Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court.
- A Supreme Court judge and former Rajasthan High Court judge wrote to the CJI seeking the appointment of a regular Chief Justice and raised concerns regarding the High Court's administrative functioning.
- The allegations relate to issues such as case listings, administrative powers and the treatment of fellow judges. These remain allegations and should not be treated as established findings.
- The CJI has indicated that such matters must be examined through appropriate institutional procedures and due process, with the concerned judge given an opportunity to respond.

Significance

- Judicial vacancies:** Uncertainty in the appointment process can further delay the filling of High Court vacancies.
- Quality of appointments:** Flexibility in exceptional situations must be balanced with rigorous scrutiny of candidates.
- Institutional stability:** Prolonged acting arrangements can affect continuity in the administrative leadership of High Courts.
- Procedural clarity:** Written norms could promote consistency while safeguarding **judicial independence**.

Way Forward

- Establish **clear written guidelines** for recommendations made by Acting Chief Justices.

2. Maintain consistent standards of **merit, integrity, competence and consultation**.
3. Ensure **timely appointment of regular Chief Justices** to minimise prolonged acting arrangements.

Conclusion

The issue highlights the need to balance **institutional continuity with judicial independence and procedural certainty**. Clearer conventions for acting arrangements can reduce ambiguity while ensuring that judicial appointments remain guided by **merit, integrity and due process**.

2. Collegium System: Judicial Appointments, Transparency and Recent Developments

Context

Supreme Court Judge **Justice Ujjal Bhuyan** recently expressed concern over the declining transparency in the functioning of the **Supreme Court Collegium**. He emphasised that recording brief reasons for judicial appointments would strengthen public confidence, enhance institutional accountability and reinforce the credibility of the judiciary.

About the Collegium System

The **Collegium System** is the mechanism through which judges of the **Supreme Court** and **High Courts** are appointed, while the transfer of High Court judges is also carried out through the Collegium mechanism.

It is a **judicially evolved system** and finds **no explicit mention in the Constitution**. The appointment of **Supreme Court judges** is governed by **Article 124**, the appointment of **High Court judges** by **Article 217**, and the **transfer of High Court judges** by **Article 222**. However, the Collegium System itself has evolved through judicial interpretation of these constitutional provisions.

The system aims to safeguard the **independence of the judiciary** by assigning primacy in judicial appointments to the judiciary while maintaining the constitutional balance among the **Legislature, Executive and Judiciary**.

Constitutional Provisions

Articles	Provisions
Article 124	Appointment of Supreme Court Judges
Article 217	Appointment of High Court Judges
Article 222	Transfer of High Court Judges

Article 143	Presidential Reference (basis of the Third Judges Case)
--------------------	---

Evolution of the Collegium System

The Collegium System evolved through a series of landmark Supreme Court judgments, collectively known as the **Three Judges Cases**, which gradually shifted primacy in judicial appointments from the Executive to the Judiciary.

1. **First Judges Case (S.P. Gupta v. Union of India, 1981):** The Supreme Court held that the **Executive** enjoyed primacy in judicial appointments and that the opinion of the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** did not have overriding authority over the Government.
2. **Second Judges Case (Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India, 1993):** The Supreme Court overruled the First Judges Case and held that the **Chief Justice of India**, acting collectively with the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, would enjoy primacy in judicial appointments. This judgment laid the foundation of the **Collegium System**.
3. **Third Judges Case (Presidential Reference, 1998):** Acting on a Presidential Reference under **Article 143**, the Supreme Court clarified the composition and functioning of the Collegium. It held that the Chief Justice of India should make recommendations in consultation with the **four senior-most judges** of the Supreme Court, thereby strengthening the consultative process.

Together, the **Second and Third Judges Cases** established the present Collegium System, which was subsequently reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in the **Fourth Judges Case (2015)**.

Composition and Functions

Supreme Court Collegium: The Supreme Court Collegium consists of:

1. **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**
2. **Four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court**

The Supreme Court Collegium is responsible for recommending:

1. Appointment of judges to the **Supreme Court**.
2. Appointment of **Chief Justices of High Courts**.
3. Appointment and transfer of **High Court judges**.

The Collegium is **not a permanent constitutional body**. It functions as a consultative mechanism whenever appointments or transfers of judges are considered.

High Court Collegium

A High Court Collegium consists of:

1. **Chief Justice of the High Court**
2. **Two senior-most judges** of the High Court

It recommends suitable candidates for appointment as judges of the respective High Court.

Appointment Process

The Collegium evaluates candidates on the basis of several constitutional and institutional considerations, including:

1. Judicial merit and competence
2. Integrity and professional reputation
3. Seniority
4. Representation of different High Courts, regions and sections of society

Before finalising its recommendations, the Collegium consults judges familiar with the affairs and requirements of the concerned High Court to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the candidates.

The recommendations are forwarded to the **Union Government**, where they are processed by the **Department of Justice** before being submitted to the **President of India**.

The Government may return a recommendation once for reconsideration. However, if the Collegium reiterates its recommendation, the long-standing constitutional convention is that the Government accepts it. The **President of India** then makes the formal appointment under the relevant constitutional provisions.

Attempt to Replace the Collegium System

To reform the judicial appointment process, Parliament enacted the **Constitution (Ninety-Ninth Amendment) Act, 2014** and the **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, 2014**, seeking to replace the existing Collegium System with a **commission-based appointment mechanism**.

The proposed **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)** comprised:

1. Chief Justice of India
2. Two senior-most Supreme Court judges
3. Union Minister for Law and Justice
4. Two eminent persons

The objective of the NJAC was to introduce greater transparency and broader institutional participation in judicial appointments.

However, in **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015)**, popularly known as the **Fourth Judges Case**, the Supreme Court declared

both the **99th Constitutional Amendment** and the **NJAC Act, 2014** unconstitutional. The Court held that **judicial independence forms part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution** and consequently restored the Collegium System.

Significance of the Collegium System

The Collegium System was developed primarily to safeguard the **independence of the judiciary** from undue executive influence in judicial appointments. Over time, it has become an important feature of India's constitutional framework governing judicial appointments and has played a significant role in preserving the autonomy of the higher judiciary.

Its significance includes:

1. Protecting **judicial independence** by limiting executive influence in judicial appointments.
2. Upholding the constitutional principle of **separation of powers**.
3. Promoting **merit-based judicial appointments** through collective institutional decision-making.
4. Strengthening the **rule of law** by ensuring an impartial and independent judiciary.
5. Enhancing public confidence in constitutional courts.
6. Preserving the constitutional balance among the **Legislature, Executive and Judiciary**.

Although the Collegium System has played a crucial role in safeguarding judicial independence, its functioning has increasingly become the subject of public debate. In recent years, discussions have shifted from the constitutional validity of the system to improving its **transparency, accountability and institutional effectiveness**. The observations made by **Justice Ujjal Bhuyan** have renewed attention on the need to balance **judicial independence** with **public accountability** in the process of judicial appointments.

Recent Developments

Transparency in Court Proceedings

Justice Bhuyan described **live streaming of court proceedings** as one of the most significant transparency initiatives undertaken by the judiciary in recent years. Following the Supreme Court's recognition of live streaming, its implementation has been introduced in phases to improve public access to judicial proceedings while ensuring the orderly administration of justice.

He observed that isolated portions of courtroom proceedings are sometimes circulated with misleading captions, creating distorted public perceptions and affecting the reputation of judges, advocates and litigants.

Therefore, efforts should focus on preventing misuse of judicial proceedings without undermining the broader objective of judicial transparency.

Reaffirming the importance of **open courts**, he referred to the following landmark judgments.

1. Swapnil Tripathi v. Supreme Court of India (2018)

Context: The Supreme Court examined whether proceedings of constitutional courts should be live-streamed to improve public access to justice.

Verdict:

- Recognised **live streaming of court proceedings** as an important instrument for promoting transparency, accountability and access to justice.
- Held that open court proceedings strengthen public confidence in the justice delivery system.
- Observed that the use of technology can improve public access without compromising the fairness of judicial proceedings.

1. Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal (2020)

Context: The Supreme Court considered whether the office of the **Chief Justice of India** falls within the scope of the **Right to Information Act, 2005**, while balancing transparency with judicial independence.

Verdict:

- Held that the office of the **Chief Justice of India** is a **public authority** under the RTI Act.
- Observed that judicial independence is not secured through secrecy alone and that transparency strengthens public confidence in the judiciary.
- Clarified that disclosure of information should balance transparency with legitimate concerns relating to privacy, confidentiality and judicial independence.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
Limited transparency: Collegium resolutions do not always record reasons for judicial appointments, leading to concerns regarding opacity.	Record reasoned recommendations: Publish brief reasons for appointments while preserving the confidentiality of internal deliberations.
Absence of objective selection criteria: The lack of publicly defined standards creates perceptions of subjectivity in judicial appointments.	Institutionalise objective criteria: Adopt transparent and well-defined parameters based on merit, integrity, judicial competence and experience

Delay in appointments: Vacancies in constitutional courts contribute to judicial delays and increase the pendency of cases.	Prescribe institutional timelines: Ensure timely processing of Collegium recommendations by both the Judiciary and the Executive to reduce delays.
Limited diversity: Representation of women, marginalised communities and different regions in the higher judiciary remains inadequate.	Promote inclusive representation: Encourage greater diversity while ensuring that merit, integrity and judicial competence remain the primary considerations.
Perceived lack of accountability: Limited disclosure may create perceptions of inconsistency and arbitrariness in appointments.	Enhance institutional accountability: Improve transparency through reasoned decisions and greater procedural consistency.
Pending Memorandum of Procedure (MoP): The revised MoP governing judicial appointments has not yet been finalised.	Finalize the revised MoP: Introduce greater clarity, transparency and consistency in the appointment process through an updated MoP.
Balancing transparency with judicial independence: Excessive secrecy reduces public trust, while excessive disclosure may affect candid judicial deliberations.	Maintain an appropriate balance: Ensure transparency in final decisions while preserving confidentiality during internal consultations to safeguard judicial independence.

Conclusion

The Collegium System continues to play a central role in preserving the **independence of the judiciary**, which forms part of the **Basic Structure of the Constitution**. At the same time, strengthening **transparency, institutional accountability** and **procedural efficiency**, without compromising judicial autonomy, is essential to enhance public confidence and uphold the constitutional vision of an impartial and independent judiciary.

3. Constitutional Limits on Arrest

Context

- In **Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025)**, the Supreme Court held that an arrested person must be **meaningfully informed of the grounds of arrest** under Article 22(1).
- In **Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra (2025)**, the Court further clarified that the grounds should ordinarily be furnished **in writing** and in a language understood by the arrestee.

Constitutional Safeguards

1. **Article 21:** Protects **life and personal liberty** against arbitrary State action.
2. **Article 22(1):** Provides the right to know the **grounds of arrest** and to consult and be defended by a lawyer of choice.
3. **Article 22(2):** Requires production of an arrested person before the **nearest Magistrate within 24 hours**, excluding travel time.
4. The **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, which replaced the CrPC from **1 July 2024**, provides corresponding statutory safeguards.

Supreme Court Rulings

1. **Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana**
 - The grounds must convey the **basic facts and reasons** for the arrest in an understandable manner.
 - Informing a **relative or friend** does not substitute for informing the arrested person.
 - Merely mentioning details in an **arrest memo or remand papers** does not establish compliance.
 - The **arresting agency must prove** that the grounds were properly communicated.
 - Failure to comply with Article 22(1) **vitiates the arrest and subsequent remand**. It does not automatically invalidate the entire investigation or trial.
2. **Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra**
 - The grounds of arrest must ordinarily be **furnished in writing** in a language understood by the arrestee.
 - If immediate written communication is impracticable, the grounds may initially be communicated orally.
 - In such cases, written grounds must be supplied **within a reasonable time and at least two hours before production for remand**.
 - Non-compliance can render the **arrest and subsequent remand illegal**.
3. **Arrest under the BNSS, 2023**
 - **Section 35:** Regulates **arrest without warrant** and requires prescribed conditions to be satisfied in specified cases.
 - **Section 47:** Deals with communication of the **particulars of the offence or grounds of arrest** and the right to bail, where applicable.

- **Section 48:** Requires intimation of the arrest to a **relative, friend or nominated person**.
- **Sections 57–58:** Deal with taking the arrested person before the Magistrate and the **24-hour detention limit**.

Judicial Check on Arrest

In **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)**, the Supreme Court held that arrest should not be routine in offences punishable with **up to seven years' imprisonment**.

1. Police must assess the **necessity of arrest**.
2. Statutory conditions must be satisfied and reasons must be recorded.
3. The **power to arrest does not make arrest mandatory**.

Preventive Detention

1. **Preventive detention** seeks to prevent anticipated harmful conduct rather than punish a past offence.
2. **Article 22(3):** Excludes preventive detainees from the safeguards under Article 22(1) and 22(2).
3. **Article 22(4):** Generally restricts detention beyond **three months** without the prescribed **Advisory Board** process, subject to constitutional exceptions.
4. **Article 22(5):** Requires the grounds of detention to be communicated at the earliest opportunity and provides an opportunity to make a representation.

Constitutional Significance

1. **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978)** strengthened the interconnected protection under **Articles 14, 19 and 21**, particularly against arbitrary State action.
2. Recent arrest jurisprudence reinforces that **police power is subject to constitutional safeguards, statutory conditions and judicial scrutiny**.

Conclusion

The evolving jurisprudence seeks to **balance effective policing with constitutional liberty**, ensuring that arrest is exercised **lawfully, necessarily and with due regard for individual dignity**.

4. Constitutional Validity of Hanging

Context

The **Supreme Court's ruling on execution by hanging** has reaffirmed the existing legal framework governing the method of carrying out death sentences. The case also brings into focus **Article 21, human dignity and the role of judicial precedent** in constitutional adjudication.

Supreme Court Ruling

1. In August 2026, the Supreme Court dismissed a challenge to **Section 354(5) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**, which prescribed hanging as the method of executing a death sentence.
2. A Bench comprising **Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta** declined to depart from **Deena v. Union of India (1983)**.
3. In *Deena*, a three-judge Bench had upheld hanging as a constitutionally permissible method of execution. The decision was subsequently approved by a **Constitution Bench in Shashi Nayar v. Union of India (1992)**.
4. The Court found no sufficient basis to reconsider the established legal position.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

1. **Article 21** guarantees the **right to life and personal liberty** and is central to scrutiny of the manner in which a death sentence is executed.
2. The petition challenged **Section 354(5) CrPC**. Its corresponding provision under the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023** is **Section 393(5)**, which retains hanging by the neck till death.
3. The case concerned the **method of execution**, rather than the constitutional validity of the death penalty itself.
4. The Court relied on **stare decisis**, under which established precedents of larger Benches are ordinarily followed by smaller Benches.

Grounds of Challenge and Court's Reasoning

1. The petitioner argued that developments in **medical science and constitutional jurisprudence** since *Deena* warranted reconsideration.
2. The challenge questioned whether hanging can consistently ensure a **quick and minimally painful execution**.
3. The Court found no sufficient **scientific or empirical evidence** to displace the basis of *Deena*.
4. It also found no conclusive evidence establishing that alternatives such as **lethal injection** are demonstrably more humane.
5. The Court noted that *Deena* had examined alternative methods, including **electrocution, lethal gas, shooting and lethal injection**.

Law Commission and Legislative Position

1. The **187th Report of the Law Commission of India**

(2003) recommended replacing hanging with **lethal injection**.

2. The Court noted that Law Commission reports are **recommendatory** and do not bind Parliament.
3. Parliament subsequently retained hanging under **Section 393(5) of the BNSS**, maintaining the existing statutory position.

Future Review

1. The judgment does **not permanently close** the constitutional question.
2. Future scrutiny remains possible if **compelling scientific, medical or empirical evidence** demonstrates that the factual basis of *Deena* has materially changed.
3. The **Union Government** may also examine alternative methods through an expert review.

Significance

1. The ruling reinforces the importance of **judicial precedent** in constitutional adjudication.
2. It also recognises that an established position can be reconsidered when **substantial new evidence or changed circumstances** emerge.
3. The case highlights the continuing debate surrounding **capital punishment, human dignity and Article 21**.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court has retained **hanging as the statutorily prescribed method of executing a death sentence in India**, while leaving open the possibility of **evidence-based reconsideration and future legal reform**.

5. DPDP Act and RTI: Balancing Privacy and Transparency

Context

The **Supreme Court** is examining constitutional challenges to the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, including **Section 44(3)**, which amended **Section 8(1)(j) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005**. The petitions also raise concerns about the impact of the data-protection framework on **investigative journalism and freedom of expression**.

Section 44(3) was brought into force through a notification dated **13 November 2025**.

The Two Legal Frameworks

The debate concerns the interaction between two important laws:

1. The **RTI Act, 2005** promotes **transparency and accountability** by enabling citizens to access information held by public authorities, subject to specified exemptions.
2. The **DPDP Act, 2023** establishes a framework for protecting **digital personal data** and regulating its processing.

The central issue is whether stronger protection of personal information could unduly restrict access to information necessary for **public accountability**.

Change Introduced by Section 44(3)

1. Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act substituted the earlier **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act**.
2. **Before the amendment:** Personal information could be withheld when it was unrelated to public activity or interest, or when disclosure would cause an unwarranted invasion of privacy. The provision also permitted disclosure where the **larger public interest** justified it.
3. **After the amendment:** Section 8(1)(j) provides an exemption for **information relating to personal information**. The earlier conditions and the specific public-interest test contained in this clause were removed.
4. This has raised concerns that the personal-information exemption could become broader and restrict access to information relevant to **public accountability**.

Public Interest and the RTI Framework

1. The amendment does **not eliminate every public-interest provision** in the RTI Act. **Section 8(2)** continues to provide for disclosure where the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to protected interests.
2. Therefore, an important issue before the Court is how the amended **Section 8(1)(j)** should operate alongside **Section 8(2)**.
3. The case could determine how far personal-information protection can extend when the information also has significance for **public scrutiny, corruption or misconduct involving public officials**.

Investigative Journalism

The petitions also raise concerns about the effect of the DPDP framework on **investigative journalism**.

1. Investigative reporting may involve collecting, processing and retaining personal information.
2. The DPDP framework does not provide a general unrestricted exemption specifically for journalists.

3. Concerns have therefore been raised that data-protection requirements could create additional constraints on reporting involving personal information.
4. The Court has to consider these concerns without treating journalists as a separate category having unrestricted access to personal data.

The issue is significant because information may be **personal in nature while also being relevant to matters of public interest**.

Constitutional Dimensions

The case brings several constitutional principles together:

1. **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression, which provides the constitutional basis for the **right to know**.
2. **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty, under which the **right to privacy** has been recognised.
3. **Freedom of the press:** Essential for public scrutiny and democratic accountability.
4. **Data protection:** Necessary to safeguard individuals against misuse of personal information.

The **K.S. Puttaswamy judgment (2017)** recognised privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21. The present dispute therefore involves reconciling privacy with the democratic importance of **transparency and access to information**.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
A broad personal-information exemption may restrict legitimate RTI requests.	Protect genuine privacy while ensuring exemptions are interpreted carefully and consistently .
Personal information may also have significant public-interest value.	Preserve meaningful scope for public-interest disclosure within the RTI framework.
Data-protection requirements may create uncertainty for investigative journalism.	Develop clear standards for handling personal information in legitimate journalistic and public-interest activities .
Overlap between the DPDP Act and RTI Act may create interpretational difficulties.	Adopt a harmonious interpretation that protects both privacy and transparency.
Public authorities may face uncertainty while deciding RTI requests involving personal information.	Provide clear guidelines and training for Public Information Officers and appellate authorities .

Conclusion

The DPDP Act–RTI debate reflects a fundamental challenge of digital governance: **protecting personal privacy without weakening democratic transparency**. The Supreme Court's eventual ruling could clarify the permissible limits of personal-information exemptions and the relationship between the **right to know, right to privacy and freedom of expression**. A balanced approach should protect genuine personal data while ensuring that privacy safeguards do not become an unnecessarily broad barrier to **public scrutiny and accountability**.

6. FIR Access Rights: Legal Entitlement of an Accused

Context

The **Supreme Court** recently directed the **Ghaziabad Police** to provide journalist **Abhishek Upadhyay** with a copy of the **FIR** registered against him in an alleged road-rage case, along with relevant CCTV footage. The Court also granted him **interim protection from arrest** and allowed him to seek appropriate relief before the jurisdictional High Court.

Legal Position under the BNSS

1. The **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023** does not expressly require the police to immediately furnish an FIR to an accused after its registration.
 - a. **Section 173(2)** requires a free copy of the recorded information to be given **immediately to the informant or victim**.
 - b. **Section 230** provides for furnishing specified prosecution documents, including the FIR, to the accused by the **Magistrate**, without delay and within **14 days** of the accused's production or appearance before the court.
2. Therefore, the BNSS provisions operate at different stages. **Earlier access to an FIR by an accused is primarily based on judicial directions.**

Judicial Recognition of FIR Access

1. **Court on Its Own Motion v. State (Delhi High Court, 2010)**: Directed that FIRs should generally be made available online within **24 hours**, subject to exceptions for sensitive cases.
2. **Rama Nand Rathore v. State of Himachal Pradesh (2014)**: Recognised that a person who has reason to believe that they have been named in an FIR may seek a **certified copy**.
3. **Youth Bar Association of India v. Union of India (Supreme Court, 2016)**: Established a nationwide framework for early access to FIRs.

- a. A person who believes that they have been named in an FIR may seek a **certified copy** from the police. It should ordinarily be supplied within **24 hours**.
- b. After the FIR has been forwarded to the **Magistrate or Special Judge**, an application for a certified copy should ordinarily be dealt with within **two working days**.
- c. FIRs not falling within sensitive categories should generally be uploaded on the **official police website within 24 hours** of registration.
- d. Where no police website exists, the **official State Government website** may be used.
- e. Unavoidable difficulties may extend the online-uploading period to **48 hours**, while specified geographical connectivity problems may permit up to **72 hours**.

4. Thus, **individual access to a certified copy and public online publication are separate mechanisms.**

Exception for Sensitive Offences

1. The requirement of online publication does not apply to every FIR.
2. **Sensitive cases** may be excluded from public online access. Illustrative categories include **sexual offences, offences under the POCSO Act, 2012, insurgency and terrorism-related offences**.
3. The categories are **not exhaustive**.
4. The decision to withhold an FIR from online publication must be taken by an officer of at least the rank of **Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP)** or equivalent.
5. A person aggrieved by the decision may approach the **Superintendent of Police or equivalent authority**, which must constitute a **three-member committee** to examine the grievance within **three days**.
6. Withholding an FIR from public online access does not mean that it becomes absolutely unavailable to the accused. The accused or an authorised representative may approach the concerned **Magistrate** for a certified copy.

Significance

1. **Procedural fairness**: Access to the allegations enables an accused to understand the basis of the criminal proceedings.
2. **Effective legal remedies**: Knowledge of the FIR helps an accused assess remedies such as **anticipatory bail or quashing of proceedings**, wherever legally available.
3. **Police accountability**: Timely access reduces

information asymmetry between investigating agencies and persons affected by criminal proceedings.

4. **Privacy protection:** Restrictions on online publication protect victims and sensitive information in specified cases.
5. **Article 21:** Timely knowledge of criminal allegations supports the constitutional requirement of **fair and just procedure** affecting personal liberty.

Conclusion

FIR access represents an important safeguard in criminal procedure. The framework combines **statutory disclosure, judicially recognised early access and limited confidentiality**, seeking to protect the rights of the accused while safeguarding privacy and other legitimate interests in sensitive cases.

7. FSSAI Food Regulation: Misleading Claims and Front-of-Pack Warning Labels

Context

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is tightening oversight of misleading food claims and nutritional labelling. It has issued over 150 notices to food companies and proposed red hexagonal front-of-pack warnings for packaged foods high in specified fat, sugar or salt.

About FSSAI

1. **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** is a **statutory authority** established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
2. It works under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
3. **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
4. **Primary role:** It lays down **science-based food standards**, regulates food safety, and oversees the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food.
5. It also regulates **food labelling and advertising** to protect consumers from misleading information.

Regulation of Food Claims

1. FSSAI's regulatory role covers not only the **safety and composition of food**, but also the accuracy of claims used to market food products.
2. In the **Bournvita** matter, scrutiny focused on whether certain **health and nutrient-related claims** were adequately supported by evidence. The action did not establish that the product was unsafe.

3. **Mondelez India** subsequently withdrew the claims flagged by FSSAI and removed related promotional material from e-commerce platforms.
4. FSSAI has also advised food businesses against using absolute expressions such as **"100%"** where they could create an impression of complete purity or superiority.
5. The scrutiny extends to **e-commerce platforms**, where online product descriptions and advertisements can influence consumers independently of physical packaging.

Proposed Front-of-Pack Warning Labels

1. FSSAI has proposed a **red hexagonal warning label** on packaged foods that exceed prescribed levels of specified nutrients.
2. Proposed declarations include **"HIGH FAT," "HIGH SUGAR," "HIGH SALT"** and **"HIGHLY SWEETENED BEVERAGE,"** wherever applicable.
3. The nutritional thresholds are linked to the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**, issued by the **ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition**.
4. The warning would be displayed prominently on the front of the package, enabling consumers to identify nutritional concerns without relying solely on detailed information at the back.
5. The proposal emerged in proceedings before the **Supreme Court** following a petition by **3S and Our Health Society**, a Kerala-based organisation.
6. **No final implementation date has been notified so far.**

Phased Implementation

1. **Phase I:** The warning requirement would initially cover products high in at least **two specified nutrients**.
2. **Phase II:** The requirement would subsequently extend to products exceeding the prescribed limit for **any one specified nutrient**.
3. **Single-ingredient products** and certain foods inherently high in fat, sugar or salt, such as **ghee, edible oil, sugar, jaggery and honey**, would be excluded from these specific warnings, subject to other labelling requirements.
4. The phased approach is intended to provide time for **consumer adjustment and product reformulation**.

Significance

1. **Consumer protection:** Prominent warnings can help consumers make quicker and better-informed food choices.
2. **Evidence-based marketing:** Requiring substantiation for health and nutrition claims can reduce misleading

representations about food products.

3. **Public health:** Better nutritional information can support efforts to address **obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases**.
4. **Digital accountability:** Monitoring online food listings is increasingly important as e-commerce becomes a major channel for food purchases.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
Limited Phase I coverage: Products high in only one specified nutrient may initially remain outside the warning requirement.	Timely expansion: Move to Phase II within a clearly defined timeframe to cover products exceeding the limit for any one specified nutrient.
Uncertain implementation timeline: The absence of a fixed date for Phase II may delay stricter regulation.	Clear regulatory milestones: Specify implementation dates and measurable compliance requirements for each stage.
Difficulty in assessing added nutrients: Determining the quantity of nutrients added during processing can complicate enforcement.	Standardised assessment: Establish uniform methods for testing, calculation and verification of nutrient levels.
Accessibility concerns: Limited language coverage or inadequate visibility may reduce the effectiveness of warnings.	Inclusive labelling: Use prominent formats and provide information in relevant Indian languages.
Online compliance gaps: Claims may differ between e-commerce listings, advertisements and physical packaging.	Digital surveillance: Regularly verify online claims and ensure consistency with approved product labels.
Risk of temporary compliance: Removal of a disputed claim may not prevent similar marketing practices from recurring.	Continuous enforcement: Conduct periodic monitoring and impose appropriate action for repeated violations.

Conclusion

FSSAI's recent measures indicate a shift towards **greater transparency and accountability in food marketing**. Their effectiveness will depend on clear standards, consistent enforcement and accessible information that enables consumers to make informed dietary choices.

8. Domestic Cruelty Protection in Live-in Relationships

Context

The **Supreme Court** has held that **Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)** can apply to certain live-in relationships where the relationship is “**in the nature of marriage**” and the partners have an **intent to marry**.

Legal Framework

1. **Section 498A IPC** made cruelty by a husband or his relatives against a woman a criminal offence.
2. The IPC has been replaced by the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**. **Sections 85 and 86 BNS** deal with cruelty by a husband or his relatives and define the relevant form of cruelty.
3. The present judgment directly concerns the interpretation of **Section 498A IPC**.

Supreme Court's Reasoning

1. The Court adopted a **purposive interpretation**, under which a law is interpreted in light of the objective it seeks to achieve.
2. It held that excluding women in qualifying marriage-like relationships from criminal protection against cruelty raises concerns under **Article 14**, which guarantees equality before law.
3. The judgment also recognised the relevance of **Article 21**, particularly the constitutional protection of personal choice and dignity.

Conditions for Protection

1. The ruling **does not cover every live-in relationship**.
2. Courts may consider factors such as:
 - a. **Shared household and domestic life**
 - b. **Financial interdependence**
 - c. **Continuity of the relationship**
 - d. **Representation of the couple as spouses**
3. The partners must also have an **intent to marry**.
4. The **initial burden of establishing this intention** rests on the woman seeking protection.

Difference from the Domestic Violence Act

1. The **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** covers certain relationships “**in the nature of marriage**.”
2. It primarily provides **civil remedies**, including protection orders, residence-related relief and

monetary relief.

3. Section 498A, by contrast, provides a **criminal remedy for cruelty**.
4. Therefore, the two laws provide **distinct forms of legal protection**.

Safeguards

1. The ruling does not make criminal prosecution automatic merely because two people lived together.
2. The Court reiterated the safeguards laid down in **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar**, particularly against **unnecessary or mechanical arrest**.
3. Investigating authorities must therefore follow the prescribed safeguards before taking coercive action.

Key Challenge

1. “**Intent to marry**” may be difficult to establish because it concerns the parties’ subjective intention.
2. The Court has not prescribed a single conclusive test for proving it.
3. Its existence will therefore have to be assessed from the **evidence and circumstances of each case**.

Conclusion

The judgment extends criminal protection to a **limited category of marriage-like live-in relationships** while retaining safeguards and evidentiary requirements. It seeks to balance **equality and personal dignity** with responsible use of criminal law.

9. U.S.–India Electoral Systems

Context

U.S. President Donald Trump recently invoked India’s electoral system while renewing his support for the **Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) America Act**. Donald Trump contrasted India’s predominantly **in-person voting system** with the wider use of mail voting in the US and argued for stronger voter-identification requirements.

U.S. Electoral System

1. **Article I, Section 4 of the US Constitution**, known as the **Elections Clause**, gives State legislatures authority over the time, place and manner of federal elections, while allowing **Congress to modify these rules**.
2. Election administration is largely carried out by **State and local authorities**. The **Federal Election Commission (FEC)** primarily regulates federal campaign finance and does not conduct elections.

3. The **National Voter Registration Act, 1993** expanded voter-registration opportunities, while the **Help America Vote Act, 2002** strengthened election technology and voter-registration systems.
4. Voter registration is generally **elector-initiated**, and identification requirements vary across States. There is therefore **no single nationwide photo-ID requirement** for voting.

Indian Electoral System

1. **Article 324 of the Constitution** vests the **Election Commission of India** with the superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament, State legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.
2. Electoral rolls are prepared and revised through an **institution-led process**, supported by field-level election officials.
3. Registered voters are issued an **Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC)**. The ECI also permits specified alternative identity documents for voting.
4. India’s framework therefore combines **central constitutional supervision with standardised electoral procedures**, although election-related administration is carried out through State and local officials.

SAVE America Act

1. The **SAVE America Act** seeks to strengthen **citizenship verification and voter identification** in US federal elections.
2. The House of Representatives passed the current version of the Bill on **11th February 2026** by **218–213 votes**. It has not become law and faces consideration in the Senate.
3. The legislation proposes **documentary proof of US citizenship for voter registration** and a federal photo-identification requirement for voting.
4. Supporters argue that stronger verification would protect electoral integrity. Critics contend that documentary requirements could make registration more difficult for eligible citizens who do not possess the specified documents.
5. The **SAVE America Act should not be confused with the existing SAVE system**, a government service used for immigration-status verification.

Non-Citizen Voting Debate

1. **Non-citizen voting in federal elections is illegal in the US**, while available evidence indicates that such voting is uncommon.

2. The central policy debate concerns the **extent of preventive verification** required to protect elections.
3. The issue involves balancing measures to prevent irregularities with the need to ensure that additional documentation does not create unnecessary barriers for eligible voters.

Electoral Roll Revision in India

1. The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** is an ECI-led exercise to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls by identifying eligible electors and removing **dead, shifted, duplicate or otherwise ineligible entries**.
2. The process involves **house-to-house enumeration, verification, publication of draft rolls, claims and objections, and finalisation of electoral rolls**.
3. The exercise has generated debate over **documentation, voter inclusion and the burden of verification**, making procedural safeguards important to prevent wrongful exclusion.
4. SIR and the SAVE America Act are **not legally equivalent**: SIR concerns electoral-roll revision, whereas the US legislation proposes new federal requirements for citizenship verification and voter identification.

Comparative Significance

1. **Institutional structure**: The US relies substantially on **State and local election authorities**, while India has a constitutionally empowered **national election commission**.
2. **Voter registration**: US registration is generally **voter-initiated**, whereas India's electoral-roll preparation involves a stronger role for election authorities.
3. **Identification**: US voter-ID requirements **vary by State**, while India follows a more uniform national framework based on **EPIC and other approved documents**.
4. **Common policy challenge**: Both systems must balance **electoral integrity and accurate voter rolls** with **accessibility and protection against wrongful exclusion**.

Conclusion

The comparison between the two systems shows that **electoral integrity depends on both identification mechanisms and the institutions responsible for maintaining voter eligibility**. While the US and India follow different constitutional models, both face the challenge of improving verification without making electoral participation unnecessarily difficult. **Transparency, accessible procedures and safeguards**

against wrongful exclusion are therefore essential to credible electoral governance.

10. Delimitation Debate: Representation, Democracy and Federalism

Context

India's next delimitation exercise has emerged as an important constitutional and political issue. The debate centres on how parliamentary representation should reflect changes in population while also protecting the interests of States that have achieved **population stabilisation**.

Understanding Delimitation

Delimitation is the process of determining the number of seats and redrawing the boundaries of territorial constituencies for the **Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies** on the basis of population data.

It involves two distinct exercises:

1. **Reallocation of seats** among States and Union Territories according to their population.
2. **Redrawing of constituency boundaries** within each State.

The exercise is conducted by an independent **Delimitation Commission**. Its orders have the force of law and cannot ordinarily be challenged in court.

Constitutional Framework

The principal constitutional provisions governing delimitation are **Articles 81 and 82**.

1. **Article 81** deals with the composition of the Lok Sabha and provides for allocation of seats among States broadly in accordance with population.
2. **Article 82** provides for readjustment of seats and constituency boundaries after a Census.
3. The present constitutional ceiling for the Lok Sabha is **550 seats**.
4. A fresh delimitation does not automatically require a constitutional amendment. An amendment would be necessary if the existing constitutional framework itself were changed, such as by **raising the seat ceiling or altering the Census used as the basis for readjustment**.

The Existing Seat Freeze

1. The last reallocation of Lok Sabha seats among States was based on the **1971 Census**, with the revised distribution taking effect in **1973**.
2. Parliament subsequently froze inter-State redistribution of seats in **1976** and extended the freeze

in **2001** until the first Census conducted after 2026.

3. The **Delimitation Commission constituted in 2002** after the 2001 Census therefore focused on redrawing constituencies within States without changing their overall share of Lok Sabha seats. Its recommendations were implemented in **2008**, and the **2009 Lok Sabha election** was conducted using the revised constituencies.

Proposals Under Discussion

The current debate has included proposals for restructuring parliamentary representation. These have included:

1. Increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha to **up to 850 seats**.
2. Conducting a fresh nationwide delimitation using the **2011 Census**.
3. Reserving **one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women**.

An amendment moved in **April 2026** could not be passed. If the existing constitutional framework continues, the next delimitation would proceed after the relevant **2027 Census data** becomes available.

Population Growth and Federal Concerns

1. The main political difficulty arises from **uneven population growth across States**. Several southern States achieved population stabilisation earlier, while some northern States continued to record higher population growth.
2. A population-based redistribution could therefore increase the representation of States such as **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan**, while reducing the relative share of several southern States. These are projected trends rather than predetermined outcomes.
3. The issue brings two principles into tension. **Democratic equality** favours *one person, one vote, one value*, under which representation should reflect the current population. **Federalism**, however, raises concerns about reducing the political weight of States that successfully implemented population-control measures.

The prolonged freeze has also created differences in the number of electors represented by individual MPs. In **1967**, an MP in many major States represented roughly **four to five lakh electors**. The number has increased considerably over time.

At present day, there are approximately **14 lakh electors per MP in Kerala** and around **19 lakh in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar**. These figures illustrate the growing disparity in the number of citizens represented by individual MPs.

Gerrymandering and Boundary Fairness

Equalising the population of constituencies does not by

itself ensure fair electoral representation. The manner in which voters are grouped can also affect electoral outcomes.

Gerrymandering refers to the deliberate manipulation of constituency boundaries to favour a particular political group.

Two common methods are:

1. **Cracking:** Dispersing a political group's supporters across several constituencies so that they remain a minority in each.
2. **Packing:** Concentrating a group's supporters in a limited number of constituencies, reducing their influence elsewhere.

Therefore, delimitation must ensure not only reasonable population equality but also **neutral and transparent boundary drawing**.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
A population-based redistribution could alter the political balance among States.	Build broad political and regional consensus before finalising changes.
States that achieved population stabilisation may face a relative reduction in representation.	Consider suitable compensatory mechanisms , including greater representation in the Rajya Sabha or appropriate fiscal measures.
Boundary manipulation could affect electoral outcomes.	Ensure transparent criteria, independent oversight and public consultation .
Major changes in seat allocation could create uncertainty around electoral arrangements.	Establish clear timelines for completing the exercise.
Limited public understanding may create confusion over its implications.	Strengthen public awareness about the constitutional basis and consequences of delimitation.

Conclusion

The delimitation debate is ultimately about reconciling **equal electoral representation with India's federal structure**. A credible exercise should reflect demographic realities without creating a sense of disadvantage among States that have achieved population stabilisation. **Political consensus, transparent procedures and impartial boundary drawing** will be essential to ensure that the process strengthens both democratic representation and federal balance.

11. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026

Context

Parliament has passed the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026**, which seeks to restrict certain **State taxes, cesses and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land**.

Major Provisions

1. The Bill prohibits States from imposing specified levies on **mineral rights or mineral-bearing land**, except in accordance with conditions or restrictions prescribed by the **Central Government**.
2. The restriction covers levies based on the **quantity or value of minerals, royalty or other related measures**.
3. It empowers the Centre to regulate **mineral-bearing land**, defined according to parameters to be prescribed by the Central Government.
4. Specified **unpaid or unrecovered dues** arising from earlier State levies would become invalid. Amounts already recovered or deposited would not be refunded.
5. The Centre has justified the changes on the grounds that multiple and non-uniform levies can increase mining costs, create uncertainty and affect the viability of mineral extraction.

Constitutional Framework

1. The **MMDR Act, 1957** is the principal Central legislation governing the development and regulation of mines and minerals.
2. **Entry 54 of the Union List** enables Parliament to regulate mines and mineral development when it declares such regulation necessary in the public interest.
3. **Entry 50 of the State List** empowers States to tax **mineral rights**, subject to limitations imposed by Parliament through a law relating to mineral development.
4. **Entry 49 of the State List** separately covers taxation of **lands and buildings**.

Supreme Court's 2024 Ruling

1. In **Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India Ltd. (2024)**, a nine-judge Constitution Bench held that **royalty is not a tax**.
2. The Court affirmed that States possess the power to tax **mineral rights** under Entry 50.

3. It also held that **mineral-bearing land falls within Entry 49**, allowing States to tax such land even when mineral production or royalty is used as the basis for determining the tax.
4. The judgment overturned the earlier position in **India Cement Ltd. v. State of Tamil Nadu (1989)**, which had treated royalty as a tax.
5. Crucially, the Court held that Parliament's power to impose limitations under **Entry 50 does not extend to the States' separate power to tax land under Entry 49**.

Key Constitutional Issues

1. **Legislative Competence**
 - a. The Bill seeks to restrict State taxation of **mineral-bearing land**, even though taxation of land falls under Entry 49 of the State List.
 - b. This creates a constitutional question because Parliament's specific power under Entry 50 concerns **taxation of mineral rights**, while Entry 49 deals with taxation of land.
 - c. The Supreme Court's 2024 interpretation could therefore become important in assessing the validity of these provisions.
2. **Retrospective Effect**
 - a. The proposed invalidation of certain **past unpaid dues** raises questions about the effect of legislation on liabilities arising from the legal position recognised by the Supreme Court in 2024.
 - b. The distinction between dues that have already been recovered and those that remain unpaid may also invite scrutiny under **Article 14**, which guarantees equality before law.
3. **Delegation of Powers**
 - a. The Bill gives the Central Government significant authority to determine the **conditions and restrictions** governing State levies.
 - b. This may raise concerns about **excessive delegation** if important legislative policy choices are left to the executive without adequate statutory guidance.
4. **Centre-State Perspectives**
 - a. The Centre maintains that varying State-level charges can result in **multiple levies, higher production costs and uncertainty for mining operations**.
 - b. States have a competing interest in retaining their ability to raise revenue from **natural resources**.

located within their territories.

- c. The issue therefore extends beyond mining policy to the broader constitutional question of **resource distribution and fiscal federalism**.

Way Forward

1. Frame detailed rules through **institutionalised Centre–State consultation**.
2. Clearly distinguish between **mineral-right taxation and land taxation** while implementing the new framework.
3. Provide adequate **legislative standards and safeguards** for powers delegated to the executive.
4. Ensure retrospective provisions remain consistent with **constitutional principles and judicial decisions**.
5. Balance **investment certainty** with the legitimate fiscal interests of resource-producing States.

Conclusion

The **MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026** seeks to bring greater consistency to mineral-related taxation while raising important constitutional questions.

The central issue is the distinction between **taxation of mineral rights under Entry 50 and taxation of land under Entry 49**. Its successful implementation will require **constitutional clarity, clear legislative safeguards and meaningful Centre–State consultation** to balance mining-sector efficiency with fiscal federalism.

12. Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026

Context

Parliament passed the **Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026**, introduced in the **Lok Sabha on August 10, 2026** and cleared by both Houses within two days. The Bill **repeals the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021** and proposes a new framework for tribunal administration. It seeks to address concerns raised by the **Supreme Court** regarding tribunal appointments, tenure and **judicial independence**.

About Tribunals

Tribunals are specialised quasi-judicial bodies that resolve specific categories of disputes. They aim to provide **faster and expert adjudication** and reduce the workload of regular courts.

Constitutional & Judicial Framework of Tribunals

1. Constitutional Framework

- a. **Articles 323A & 323B** provide the constitutional basis for tribunals, introduced by the **42nd**

Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 on the recommendation of **Swaran Singh committee**.

- i. **Article 323A:** Parliament can establish tribunals for **recruitment and service matters** of public servants. Example: **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)**.
- ii. **Article 323B:** Parliament/State Legislatures can establish tribunals for **taxation, labour disputes, land reforms, elections, foreign exchange, rent control**, etc.

- b. **Articles 226 & 227:** High Courts retain the power of **judicial review** over tribunal decisions.
- c. **Article 136:** Supreme Court can grant **Special Leave to Appeal (SLA)** against tribunal decisions.

2. Judicial Framework

- a. **L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997):** Tribunals cannot completely replace High Courts.
- b. **Madras Bar Association cases:** Stressed **independent appointments, adequate qualifications and security of tenure** for tribunal members.

Key Features of the 2026 Bill

1. **National Tribunals Commission:** The Bill creates a **National Tribunals Commission** to conduct the selection process for tribunal appointments, monitor tribunal performance, examine complaints against tribunal chairpersons and members and develop a **National Tribunals Data Grid**.
2. **Composition**
 - a. **Chairperson:** Former Supreme Court judge or former Chief Justice of a High Court.
 - b. **Members:** Two judicial and two technical members with at least **25 years of relevant experience**.
 - c. The Centre appoints the Chairperson and judicial members after consultation with the **Chief Justice of India**.
3. **Appointment Process:** A **Search-cum-Selection Committee** will recommend **one candidate + one waitlisted candidate** for each vacancy, replacing the earlier **two-name choice system** & reducing government discretion. The government must complete the appointment within **3 months** of receiving the recommendation.
4. **Tenure and Removal:**
 - a. Chairpersons and members will have a **5-year term**, subject to a maximum age of **70 years and**

67 years, respectively.

- b. Removal can be based on grounds such as **insolvency, conviction involving moral turpitude, incapacity, abuse of position and incompetence.**

Significance

1. **Judicial Independence:** Longer tenure strengthens institutional autonomy.
2. **Merit-based Appointments:** Revised selection process limits executive discretion.
3. **Better Governance:** National Tribunals Commission enables centralised oversight.
4. **Data-driven Monitoring:** National Tribunals Data Grid improves tribunal-related data management.
5. **Executive–Judiciary Balance:** Helps reduce conflicts over tribunal administration.
6. **Timely Justice:** Addresses vacancies affecting tribunal efficiency.

Challenges

1. **Executive Control:** Centre retains influence over key appointments to the Commission.
2. **Financial Dependence:** Commission remains dependent on **Central funding and grants.**
3. **Rule-making Power:** Centre controls rules on **qualifications, salaries, service conditions and removal.**
4. **Functional Independence:** Continued executive control may affect the **autonomy of tribunals.**

Way Forward

1. **Independent Funding:** Create a separate, dedicated budget for tribunals to eliminate financial reliance on parent ministries.
2. **Judicial Dominance:** Ensure the National Tribunals Commission (NTC) search-cum-selection committees maintain a judicial majority to prevent executive overreach.
3. **Benches Expansion:** Establish regional tribunal benches across diverse geographic zones to make justice accessible to remote litigants.
4. **Standard Qualifications:** Standardize eligibility criteria across different tribunals to simplify the judicial selection pipeline.
5. **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Provide modern, physical courtrooms and advanced digital trial infrastructure to speed up hearings.
6. **Benches Expansion:** Establish regional tribunal

benches across diverse geographic zones to make justice accessible to remote litigants.

7. **Standard Qualifications:** Standardize eligibility criteria across different tribunals to simplify the judicial selection pipeline.
8. **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Provide modern, physical courtrooms and advanced digital trial infrastructure to speed up hearings.

13. Clean Slate Doctrine

Context

The **Supreme Court**, in its recent judgment in the **Ujaas Energy** case, clarified that the **Clean Slate Doctrine** extinguishes claims excluded from an approved resolution plan but does not automatically extinguish every legal consequence arising from the facts underlying those claims.

Concept of the Clean Slate Doctrine

1. The **Clean Slate Doctrine** is a fundamental legal principle under the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016** that governs the treatment of liabilities after the successful completion of the **Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP).**
2. Once the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** approves a **resolution plan**, the **successful resolution applicant** acquires the **corporate debtor** free from claims, debts, penalties and liabilities that are **not included** in the approved resolution plan. This enables the new owner to revive the company without the burden of excluded historical liabilities.
3. The doctrine derives its legal basis primarily from **Section 31 of the IBC, 2016**, under which an approved resolution plan becomes binding on all stakeholders.

Key Features

1. Applies after the **NCLT** approves a resolution plan under the **Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP).**
2. Makes the approved resolution plan **binding on all stakeholders** under **Section 31 of the IBC, 2016.**
3. Extinguishes claims, debts, penalties and liabilities that are **not included** in the approved resolution plan.
4. Bars fresh or belated claims relating to pre-resolution liabilities after approval of the resolution plan.
5. Protects the **successful resolution applicant** from liabilities excluded from the approved resolution plan, facilitating corporate revival.

Evolution through Supreme Court Judgments

Judgment	Key Principle Established
Committee of Creditors of Essar Steel India Ltd. v. Satish Kumar Gupta & Ors. (2020)	Claims excluded from an approved resolution plan stand extinguished and cannot be pursued through fresh or continuing legal proceedings.
Arun Kumar Jagatramka v. Jindal Steel and Power Ltd. (2021)	Reaffirmed that an approved resolution plan enables the successful resolution applicant to operate the corporate debtor without past encumbrances.
Ghanashyam Mishra and Sons Pvt. Ltd. v. Edelweiss Asset Reconstruction Co. Ltd. (2021)	Clarified that claims omitted from the approved resolution plan, including those of government authorities, cannot continue after plan approval.

Ebix Singapore Pvt. Ltd. v. Committee of Creditors of Educomp Solutions Ltd. (2021)	Held that an approved resolution plan is binding even on stakeholders who did not directly participate in the CIRP .
Vaibhav Goel and Anr. v. DCIT and Anr. (2025)	Reiterated that no belated claims can be introduced after the NCLT approves the resolution plan.

Conclusion:

The **Clean Slate Doctrine** promotes corporate revival by ensuring that approved resolution plans provide legal certainty and finality under the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016**.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Mecca Agreement: Emerging Trilateral Defence Framework

Context

Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed the **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** on **7 August 2026**, establishing a trilateral framework for defence cooperation. A key provision states that an **armed attack against any one of the three countries will be treated as an attack against all three**.

Evolution of the Defence Partnership

1. The Mecca Agreement expands the earlier **Saudi-Pakistan security partnership** into a **trilateral framework** involving Türkiye.
2. The three countries bring different strategic capabilities to the arrangement. **Saudi Arabia** contributes substantial financial resources and a strategically important geographical position. **Türkiye** brings significant military capabilities, **NATO experience** and a growing defence-industrial base. **Pakistan** contributes military experience, manpower and nuclear capability.
3. The complete text of the agreement has not been publicly released. Therefore, the precise scope of its operational commitments and response mechanisms remains unclear.

Major Areas of Cooperation

1. The agreement seeks to promote cooperation in **collective deterrence, military training, joint exercises, intelligence-sharing and defence-industrial cooperation**.
2. It also provides scope for greater collaboration in defence production and military technologies. Türkiye's defence-industrial capabilities can complement Saudi Arabia's efforts to strengthen domestic defence manufacturing.
3. The framework is supported by institutional arrangements for continued coordination. However, it does not yet have the level of integrated military command and institutional maturity associated with **NATO**.
4. The publicly available information does not establish a specific provision for **nuclear sharing**. The agreement is therefore best understood as a framework for **defence cooperation and collective deterrence**,

rather than a fully integrated military alliance.

Changing Security Environment in West Asia

1. The agreement comes amid continuing instability in **West Asia** and efforts by regional countries to strengthen their security capabilities and diversify strategic partnerships.
2. Saudi Arabia has sought to develop multiple security relationships while enhancing its own defence capabilities. Türkiye has expanded its regional defence role, while Pakistan has maintained longstanding military ties with Saudi Arabia.
3. The arrangement reflects a broader trend towards **greater regional participation in security affairs** and additional mechanisms for collective deterrence.

Collective Defence and the NATO Comparison

1. The provision that an armed attack against one member will be treated as an attack against all three resembles **Article 5 of the NATO Treaty**. Türkiye's Foreign Minister has also described the collective-defence principle as technically comparable to NATO's provision.
2. However, the two arrangements differ in institutional development. **NATO** has a permanent organisation, integrated military structures, established procedures and decades of operational experience. The Mecca framework is newly established and its institutional and operational mechanisms are still developing.
3. Its immediate significance therefore lies in **collective deterrence and strategic signalling**, while its long-term effectiveness will depend on practical military cooperation among the three members.

Regional Significance

1. The agreement could contribute to the evolution of a more **regionally driven security architecture** in West Asia.
2. For Saudi Arabia, closer defence relations with Türkiye and Pakistan provide additional strategic options. Türkiye can deepen its defence engagement with the Gulf, while Pakistan can strengthen its military relationship with Saudi Arabia and expand defence cooperation with Türkiye.
3. The pact may also influence the broader strategic balance involving **Iran, Israel, Gulf countries and major external powers**. However, it should not be described as formally directed against any particular

country without an explicit provision to that effect. The participating countries have presented it as a **defensive arrangement**.

Implications for India

1. The agreement is significant for India because **Pakistan and Türkiye** are members of the new framework, while **Saudi Arabia is an important Indian strategic partner**.
2. India-Saudi Arabia relations have expanded across **energy, trade, investment, defence, counterterrorism and the welfare of the Indian diaspora**. At the same time, India's relations with Pakistan and Türkiye remain more challenging.
3. A closer Saudi-Pakistan-Türkiye security relationship could provide Pakistan with greater strategic space in West Asia and deepen Türkiye's defence engagement with the Gulf. For India, this makes sustained engagement with **Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries** increasingly important.
4. India would also need to continue strengthening its **defence diplomacy, maritime presence in the Indian Ocean and wider engagement with West Asian partners**. The objective should be to safeguard India's strategic interests while preventing regional developments from adversely affecting its wider partnerships.

Challenges to the Emerging Framework

1. The long-term effectiveness of the agreement will depend on how far political commitments are translated into practical defence cooperation.
2. The three countries have **different strategic priorities, threat perceptions and relationships with major powers**. Their willingness and ability to coordinate during an actual security crisis will determine the credibility of the collective-defence commitment.
3. The limited public availability of the agreement's detailed provisions also makes it difficult to assess the precise circumstances and mechanisms through which collective defence would operate.

Conclusion

1. The **Mecca Agreement** marks an important development in the evolving security architecture of West Asia. By bringing **Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan** into a common defence framework, it expands the earlier Saudi-Pakistan security partnership and creates greater scope for cooperation in military affairs, intelligence and defence production.
2. However, the arrangement should not yet be equated with NATO. Its long-term significance will depend on the development of **effective institutional mechanisms, military interoperability and credible**

collective-deterrence arrangements.

3. For India, the development highlights the importance of sustained engagement with **Saudi Arabia, the Gulf region and the wider Indian Ocean**, while carefully assessing the changing strategic relationships among regional powers.

2. India–Taliban Engagement

Context

1. On **15th August 2026**, the **Taliban-controlled Afghan Embassy in New Delhi** organised an event marking five years since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan.
2. The participation of **Indian officials and foreign diplomats** reflected the continuation of India's official engagement with the Taliban authorities.
3. India, however, has **not formally recognised the Taliban government**.

Evolution of India's Engagement

1. India evacuated its diplomatic personnel from Kabul after the **Taliban takeover in August 2021** and later adopted a calibrated approach towards the new authorities.
2. **Key developments include:**
 - a. **August 2021:** First official contact between Indian and Taliban representatives in **Doha**.
 - b. **December 2021:** India began providing **humanitarian assistance** to Afghanistan.
 - c. **June 2022:** India sent a technical team to **Kabul**.
 - d. **January 2025:** Foreign Secretary **Vikram Misri** met Taliban Foreign Minister **Amir Khan Muttaqi** in Dubai.
 - e. **October 2025:** India and the Taliban further expanded diplomatic engagement.

Strategic Drivers

1. **Security:** India seeks assurances that Afghan territory will not be used for **anti-India terrorism**.
2. **Pakistan:** Growing tensions between **Pakistan and the Taliban** have created greater diplomatic space for New Delhi.
3. **China:** Beijing's expanding economic and strategic presence has increased the importance of maintaining an Indian presence in Afghanistan.
4. **Connectivity:** Afghanistan can provide potential access to **Central Asia** and wider regional markets.
5. **Development interests:** Engagement helps India safeguard its earlier **development projects and investments** in the country.

Humanitarian and Security Concerns

1. India has provided substantial humanitarian assistance, including **50,000 metric tonnes of wheat**, medicines and other relief supplies.
2. The **UN Security Council 1267 Monitoring Team** continues to report the presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, requiring India to maintain security vigilance.
3. Taliban restrictions on **women's education, employment and public participation** remain a major human-rights concern.

Conclusion

India's approach towards the Taliban reflects a **pragmatic foreign-policy adjustment** to the changing regional environment. Sustaining dialogue while retaining policy autonomy allows New Delhi to protect its long-term interests without compromising its core security concerns.

3. India-China Border Talks

Context

India and China have agreed to pursue an **"Early and Substantial Harvest"** in **boundary delimitation and border management**. Both sides also agreed to strengthen **military communication** along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.

India-China Boundary Dispute

1. The disputed boundary extends for about **3,488 km** and involves differing perceptions of the LAC.
2. **Western Sector:** China controls about **38,000 sq km** of territory claimed by India in **Aksai Chin**.
3. **Eastern Sector:** China claims about **90,000 sq km** in **Arunachal Pradesh**, referring to it as **Zangnan** or Southern Tibet.
4. **Central Sector:** Smaller areas of disagreement exist in **Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand**.
5. The **2020 eastern Ladakh crisis** severely affected bilateral relations, making border stability important for normalisation.

Boundary Negotiations

1. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to a **fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement**.
2. Talks will follow the **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles** and subsequent SR-level understandings.
3. Under the **Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC)**:
 - a. The **Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation** will pursue incremental progress on determining boundary alignment.

- b. The **Working Group on Border Management** will address frontier-management issues.

4. Both groups will finalise their **Terms of Reference (ToR)**.
5. The current process **does not constitute a final boundary settlement**.

Military Communication

1. The two countries agreed to establish:
 - a. **Two additional senior military commander-level meeting points.**
 - b. **Two additional military hotlines** in the **Eastern and Middle Sectors**.
2. These mechanisms will facilitate **direct communication and timely handling of local incidents** along the LAC.

Wider Cooperation

1. India and China agreed to strengthen **border trade, pilgrimage and people-to-people exchanges**.
2. **Three designated border trading points** have been reopened.
3. China has facilitated additional batches for the **Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra**.
4. The **Expert-Level Mechanism on Trans-border Rivers** is scheduled to meet in September to discuss **hydrological data sharing, relevant MoUs and river management**.

Brahmaputra and Water Security

1. The **Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo)** originates in Tibet and flows through **India and Bangladesh**.
2. India's concerns include **upstream hydropower projects, downstream ecological impacts, sediment flows and flood management**.
3. Timely **hydrological data** is important for flood forecasting and disaster preparedness.

Way Forward

1. Maintain **military preparedness and border infrastructure** alongside sustained diplomatic engagement.
2. Pursue boundary negotiations through **incremental, verifiable and agreement-based steps**.
3. Strengthen institutional communication for **early resolution of local disputes**.

Conclusion

India should pursue a **dual-track approach**—maintain robust border preparedness while advancing **sustained, agreement-based dialogue** to achieve durable peace and a mutually acceptable boundary settlement.

4. India's LPG Dependence on the U.S.: Energy Security and Supply Diversification

Context

India now sources around **67% of its LPG imports from the United States**, compared with about **10% earlier**, following disruptions in supplies from West Asia. India is the **world's second-largest LPG importer** and meets nearly **60% of its LPG demand through imports**.

Why India Shifted to U.S. LPG

1. Nearly **90% of India's imported LPG traditionally passes through the Strait of Hormuz**, making the chokepoint critical to the country's energy supply.
2. Between **February and June 2026**, LPG imports from West Asia declined by nearly **85%** amid regional disruptions.
3. To maintain domestic availability, state-owned oil refiners secured an agreement for **2.2 million tonnes of U.S. LPG in 2026**.
4. U.S. supplies reached **0.77 million metric tonnes in June 2026**, an increase of **19.4% over May**.

Economic and Supply Challenges

1. **Shipping time:** Cargoes from the Gulf generally reach India in **5–10 days**, while shipments from the U.S. take around **25–35 days**.
2. **Delivered cost:** U.S. LPG may be cheaper at the production stage, but Gulf supplies have traditionally benefited from lower transportation costs because of their proximity to India.
3. **Price volatility:** The **Saudi Aramco LPG benchmark** rose by nearly **46%**, from about **\$543 to \$790 per tonne**, between February and June 2026.
4. **Currency risk:** Greater reliance on imported LPG increases the impact of **rupee-dollar fluctuations** on the domestic cost of the fuel.

Domestic Production Gap

1. **Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum** together had around **33.14 crore active domestic LPG customers**.
2. Their customer base grew at a **7.6% CAGR** between 2015 and 2026.
3. Domestic LPG production stood at **4.3 million metric tonnes**, against consumption of **6.5 million metric tonnes**.
4. During the supply disruption, refinery output was raised from around **34,000 tonnes to 55,000 tonnes**

per day at the peak.

5. Domestic LPG production increased by **35.73% year-on-year** in Q1 FY27.

Fiscal Implications

1. LPG is a crucial **household fuel**, making uninterrupted supply an important policy priority.
2. When international prices rise while domestic prices remain controlled, **oil marketing companies (OMCs)** can face higher under-recoveries.
3. The government informed Parliament that accumulated OMC under-recoveries had crossed **₹59,000 crore**.

Way Forward

India needs to reduce concentration risk through a combination of:

1. **Supplier diversification:** Explore additional sources such as **Australia, Argentina, Nigeria and Angola**.
2. **Higher domestic production:** Expand refining and LPG-processing capacity to narrow the supply gap.
3. **Strategic reserves:** Build larger buffers to manage temporary disruptions.
4. **Forex risk management:** Strengthen **foreign-exchange hedging** by OMCs.
5. **Resilient logistics:** Diversify shipping routes and supply contracts to reduce exposure to individual chokepoints.

Conclusion

The shift to U.S. LPG helped India manage a temporary supply disruption. Long-term **energy security**, however, requires diversified suppliers, stronger domestic production and resilient supply chains.

5. US Transshipment Report and India

Context

The **US administration** released **The Great Transshipment Scam**, examining the risk of Chinese goods being routed through third countries to avoid US tariffs. The report identifies more than **40 countries and jurisdictions** exposed to such risks. **India has been placed in Tier 1**, along with other major trading economies.

Shadow Transshipment

1. **Transshipment** refers to routing goods through an intermediate country before they reach their final destination.
2. It becomes **illegal** when the route is deliberately used to conceal the actual country of origin and evade tariffs or trade restrictions.

3. Methods may include **repackaging, relabelling, limited processing and false documentation**.
4. However, increased exports from a third country do not by themselves prove illegal transshipment, as they may result from **genuine manufacturing or supply-chain diversification**.

India-Specific Findings

1. The report highlights the **Pune–Gujarat–Chennai belt** in connection with possible transshipment of **pumps and compressors (HS 8413–8414)**.
2. The **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI)** has questioned this assessment, pointing to India's established manufacturing capacity in these products.
3. **Liquid pumps:** India exported about **\$1.61 billion** globally, including **\$414.5 million to the US**, while imports from China were about **\$326.4 million**.
4. **Air pumps and gas compressors:** India exported around **\$1.48 billion**, including **\$335.4 million to the US**, while imports from China stood at about **\$1.63 billion**.
5. These figures indicate that the presence of Chinese inputs **does not by itself establish that Indian exports are disguised Chinese products**.

US Enforcement Measures

1. The US plans to deploy **"Detective Border"**, an **AI-based system** to identify suspicious trade patterns.
2. It is expected to analyse **shipment routes, product details, ownership links and production capacity**.
3. The system aims to distinguish **genuine manufacturing from simple rerouting** of goods.
4. The US is also seeking stronger **country-of-origin rules and measures against tariff evasion**.

Implications for India

1. Indian exporters may face **greater scrutiny of origin and production records**.
2. The issue could influence **India-US trade negotiations**, particularly on rules of origin.
3. Demonstrating genuine domestic production can strengthen India's **credibility as a manufacturing and export base**.
4. Expanding domestic production of **components and intermediate goods** can reduce excessive dependence on Chinese inputs.
5. Improved **customs cooperation and information sharing** can help resolve origin-related disputes while facilitating legitimate trade.

Way Forward

India should strengthen **origin verification, digital supply-chain records and customs cooperation** with trading partners. At the same time, it should expand domestic manufacturing of critical components and diversify sourcing without disrupting efficient global supply chains.

Conclusion

The transshipment issue highlights the growing importance of **transparent supply chains and credible rules of origin** in international trade. India needs to combine stronger trade compliance with **competitive domestic manufacturing** to protect its export interests and market access.

6. India's Arctic Engagement: Bridging Policy and Capability

The **Arctic** is increasingly important for India because developments in the region have implications for **climate change, maritime connectivity, critical minerals and geopolitics**. A recent Parliamentary Standing Committee report has identified gaps in India's capabilities and recommended measures to strengthen its long-term engagement with the region.

Parliamentary Committee's Assessment

1. The **Standing Committee on External Affairs** presented its report, India's Role and Presence in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions.
2. India is an **Observer State in the Arctic Council** since 2013. The Committee recommended that India pursue **full-fledged membership** if the Council reviews its membership framework.
3. It recommended appointing a **Polar Ambassador** to strengthen coordination and India's polar diplomacy.
4. The Committee suggested that India advocate recognition of the Arctic as a **"Quasi-Global Commons"**, while recognising the sovereignty of the **eight Arctic states**.
5. It also called for stronger cooperation with **Arctic states and other Observer countries**.

Arctic Council

The **Arctic Council** is the leading intergovernmental forum for cooperation on issues concerning the **Arctic region**, particularly **environmental protection and sustainable development**.

1. **Established:** 1996 through the **Ottawa Declaration**.
2. **Headquarters/Secretariat:** Tromsø, Norway.

3. **Members:** 8 Arctic states — **Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.**
4. **Permanent Participants:** Six organisations representing **Indigenous peoples of the Arctic.**
5. **Observers:** Non-Arctic states and organisations can participate as **Observers**, but they do not have the same decision-making role as the eight member states.
6. **India:** Became an **Observer in 2013.**
7. **Decision-making:** Decisions are taken by **consensus among the eight Arctic states.**
8. **Focus:** Climate change, biodiversity, pollution, sustainable development, emergency preparedness and Arctic scientific cooperation.

India's Arctic Engagement

1. India's association with the Arctic dates back to the **Svalbard Treaty of 1920**, under which it became an original signatory while under British rule.
2. India began its modern scientific engagement through its **first Arctic expedition in 2007.**
3. **Himadri**, India's Arctic research station at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, was established in **2008.**
4. India's **Arctic Policy, 2022** provides a framework for cooperation in **scientific research, climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development and connectivity.**
5. The Parliamentary Committee has recommended adding **"Geopolitics and Strategy"** as a distinct pillar of the Arctic Policy.

Strategic and Climate Significance

1. **Climate and monsoon:** Arctic changes can influence atmospheric and oceanic circulation. The possible **Arctic-Indian monsoon teleconnection** remains an important area of scientific research.
2. **Sea-level rise:** Changes in the Arctic cryosphere have wider implications for global climate and **India's coastal regions.**
3. **Northern Sea Route:** This maritime route along Russia's Arctic coast could provide an alternative connection between Asia and Europe. India and Russia are working to increase cargo movement through the route to **5 million tonnes by 2030.**
4. **Critical minerals:** Arctic mineral resources could contribute to India's **resource and supply-chain security.** The Committee recommended making mineral resources an important component of India's engagement with Arctic countries.

5. **Geopolitics:** Growing activity by major powers has increased the Arctic's importance for **shipping, energy, resources and strategic competition.**

Capability Gaps

1. **Research access:** Access to several Arctic areas is subject to the jurisdiction of Arctic states, while extreme climatic conditions create additional logistical challenges.
2. **Svalbard restrictions:** The Committee noted restrictions affecting research activities in **Svalbard**, where Himadri is located, and recommended that the **Ministry of External Affairs engage with Norway** to address these concerns.
3. **Research infrastructure:** India does not yet have an indigenous **ice-class polar research vessel**, limiting the flexibility and continuity of Arctic expeditions.
4. **Funding and manpower:** Shortages of **scientific and technical personnel** and limited financial resources constrain the expansion of polar research.
5. The Committee recommended a **30% increase in the outlay for the ongoing polar research scheme** and additional permanent posts at the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).**

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen polar diplomacy** by appointing a **Polar Ambassador** and improving institutional coordination.
2. **Expand research capacity** through an indigenous **ice-class polar research vessel**, higher funding and additional scientific and technical personnel at **NCPOR.**
3. **Address research-access issues** through sustained engagement with **Norway and other Arctic states.**
4. **Deepen international partnerships** with Arctic states and other Observer countries in areas such as science, connectivity and resource security.
5. **Advance India-Russia cooperation** on the **Northern Sea Route** and work towards the 2030 cargo target.
6. **Integrate climate, geopolitical and critical-mineral considerations** more explicitly into India's Arctic strategy.

Conclusion

India has a **long-standing association, established scientific presence and dedicated policy framework** in the Arctic. The priority now is to translate these foundations into stronger **research capabilities, polar diplomacy and strategic partnerships**, enabling India to respond more effectively to the region's growing climate and geopolitical significance.



SECURITY

1. Agni-4 Missile: India's Indigenous Medium-Range Strategic Ballistic Missile

Context

Recently, Agni-4, a **surface-to-surface Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)**, indigenously developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** was successfully test-fired from the **Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha**.

About Agni-4 Missile

It is operated by the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** as part of India's strategic missile arsenal and is designed to deliver **strategic payloads** while supporting the country's **credible deterrence** capability.

Key Features

Agni-4 combines advanced propulsion, mobility and guidance technologies to deliver accurate and reliable strategic strike capability.

1. **Range:** Capable of engaging targets up to **4,000 km**.
2. **Propulsion:** Powered by a **two-stage solid-fuel rocket motor**.
3. **Launch Platform:** Deployed from a **road-mobile launcher**, providing greater operational flexibility.
4. **Payload Capacity:** Can carry a payload of up to **1,000 kg**.
5. **Navigation System:** Equipped with a **Ring Laser Gyro-based Inertial Navigation System (RINS)** supported by a **Micro Navigation System (MINGS)** for precise target guidance.
6. **Accuracy:** Has a **Circular Error Probability (CEP)** of **less than 100 metres**. CEP is a standard measure of weapon accuracy, indicating how close a missile is expected to strike its intended target.

2. AH-64E Apache Helicopter

Context

An **AH-64E Apache attack helicopter** of the **U.S. Army** crashed during a routine operation near **Salado, Texas**, killing **two soldiers**.

About AH-64E Apache

1. The **AH-64E Apache Guardian** is a **U.S.-developed twin-engine attack helicopter** manufactured by **Boeing**.
2. It is the latest Apache variant operated by the **U.S. Army** and is designed for **ground attack, reconnaissance and close air support**.
3. It has a **two-member crew**: a **pilot** in the rear cockpit and a **co-pilot/gunner** in the front cockpit.
4. The helicopter is also operated by several countries, including **India, Israel, Japan, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and the UAE**.

Key Features

1. **Performance:** The helicopter is about **17.8 metres long**, has a maximum operating weight of **10,432 kg** and can reach a speed of around **300 km/h**. Its rate of climb is more than **2,800 feet per minute**.
2. **Armament:** It can carry a **30-mm chain gun, 70-mm rockets and Hellfire missiles** for engaging ground and armoured targets. It can also use **Stinger missiles** against short-range aerial threats.
3. **Sensors and Targeting:** Its **infrared and laser-based systems** support target detection and designation. Enhanced infrared imaging and **night-vision capabilities** enable operations in low-light conditions. It can reportedly track and process up to **128 targets per minute**.

3. AIM-260 Joint Advanced Tactical Missile (JATM)

Context

Australia has become the first international customer for the **AIM-260 JATM**, a next-generation U.S. **Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)**.

About AIM-260 JATM

1. The **AIM-260 JATM** is a **U.S. long-range air-to-air missile** being developed by **Lockheed Martin**.
2. It is designed to engage **airborne targets beyond visual range**, allowing fighter aircraft to attack from greater distances.
3. The programme is **highly classified**, so several technical details remain undisclosed.

Key Features

1. The AIM-260 JATM is a next-generation **Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)** developed by **Lockheed Martin, USA**. It is estimated to be around 4 metres long and is designed to engage fighter aircraft and other high-value airborne targets at extended distances.
2. Its range is of more than 180 km, while the missile is believed to use an advanced solid-rocket motor and sophisticated guidance and seeker technologies.

4. Exercise Pitch Black

Context

The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** participated in **Exercise Pitch Black 2026**, a multinational air exercise hosted by the **Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)** in Australia.

About Exercise Pitch Black

1. **Pitch Black** is a biennial exercise.
2. It focuses on realistic air combat training, especially **night-time flying**, air defence and coordination among different air forces.
3. The name *Pitch Black* reflects its emphasis on **night operations over large, sparsely populated areas**.

Key Features of Pitch Black 2026

1. **Location:** The exercise is being conducted at **RAAF Bases Darwin and Tindal** in the **Northern Territory** and **RAAF Base Amberley** in **Queensland, Australia**.
2. **Participation:** The exercise involves **19 countries**, with more than **100 aircraft** and around **4,400 personnel**, providing a platform for large-scale multinational air operations.
3. **Training Focus:** Major activities include **offensive counter-air operations** to gain control of airspace, **air-defence tracking** to detect and monitor aerial threats, and **tactical coordination** to enable different aircraft and communication systems to operate together effectively.
4. **Indian Contingent:** India is participating with around **145 IAF personnel**, including **Garud commandos**, **four Su-30MKI fighter aircraft**, and **C-130 and C-17 aircraft** for **induction, logistics and de-induction**.
5. **India's Participation:** The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** previously participated in **Pitch Black** in **2018, 2022 and 2024**.

Significance for India

1. **Interoperability:** Improves the IAF's ability to operate with foreign air forces using different aircraft, tactics and communication systems.
2. **Modern Air Warfare:** Provides exposure to **electronic warfare**, advanced air combat tactics and **network-centric operations**.
3. **Operational Readiness:** Strengthens experience in complex, multi-aircraft and night-time missions.
4. **Defence Partnerships:** Deepens India's military cooperation with **Australia, the US, UK, France and other participating countries**.

5. Exercise ROTOR CLAP III

Context

The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** recently concluded the week-long **Exercise ROTOR CLAP III** at the **Pokhran Field Firing Range, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan**.

About Exercise ROTOR CLAP III

1. **Conducted by:** Indian Air Force (IAF)
2. **Edition:** Third edition of the **ROTOR CLAP** series.
3. **Theme:** **Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (Counter-UAS)**.
4. **Location:** **Pokhran Field Firing Range, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan**.
5. **Main Objective:** To strengthen **helicopter-based counter-drone capabilities** and prepare for emerging aerial threats.
6. **Multi-Platform Participation:** Included **AH-64 Apache, Mi-25/35, Prachand, Chinook, Mi-17 and Dhruv** helicopters.
7. **Key Operations:** Precision strikes, reconnaissance, troop insertion, casualty evacuation and battlefield support.
8. **Operational Focus:** Tested **coordinated helicopter operations** against both aerial and ground-based threats.
9. **Significance:** Enhances **combat preparedness, operational coordination and response to evolving drone warfare**.

6. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Exercise 2026

Context

The **eighth India-US Navy EOD Exercise 2026** was conducted at **Southern Naval Command, Kochi**.

About the Exercise

1. The exercise is part of the **India–US joint Salvage and EOD training series**, which began in **2005**.
2. **Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)** involves the safe detection, identification, handling and disposal of explosive hazards.

Key Features

1. **Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs):** Specialists discussed contemporary EOD methods, operational concepts and safety practices.
2. **Cross-training:** Personnel from both navies trained together to understand each other's procedures and capabilities.
3. **Practical Training:** Scenario-based activities, equipment demonstrations and other hands-on drills provided experience in dealing with **complex explosive and underwater threats**.

7. HYDERACENE: Indigenous Dual-Function Material for Advanced Rocket Propellants

Context

The **University of Hyderabad (UoH)** has been granted an **Indian patent** for **HYDERACENE**, a novel indigenous material developed for **solid rocket propellants** used in **space and defence** applications.

About HYDERACENE

HYDERACENE is a **polymer-based binder-cum-catalyst** developed for **high-performance solid rocket propellants**. Unlike conventional propellant systems that use separate materials for structural binding and combustion control, HYDERACENE integrates both functions into a single polymer.

It is chemically described as **Ferrocene Polyethylene Glycidyl Grafted Hydroxyl-Terminated Polybutadiene (HTPB)** and was synthesised using the **ring-opening polymerisation** technique. The name **HYDERACENE** is derived from the city of **Hyderabad**, where the innovation originated.

Key Features

Solid rocket propellants normally require two essential components:

1. **Binder:** A polymer that binds the propellant ingredients together and provides structural integrity.
2. **Catalyst:** A chemical additive that regulates and accelerates the combustion process.

HYDERACENE combines these two functions into a **single material**, offering several advantages:

1. Functions simultaneously as a **binder** and a **burn-rate catalyst**.
2. Prevents separation of the catalyst from the binder during long-term storage.
3. Enables a more uniform and controlled combustion process.
4. Improves propulsion efficiency and the reliability of solid rocket motors.
5. Simplifies propellant formulation by reducing the number of functional components.

Significance

The development of HYDERACENE represents an important advancement in indigenous propulsion materials.

1. Developed as an **indigenous alternative** to **BUTACENE**, a material largely imported from **European countries**.
2. Reduces dependence on imported materials used in aerospace and defence propulsion.
3. Improves the long-term stability of solid rocket propellants by integrating the binder and catalyst into a single polymer.
4. Enhances controlled combustion, making it suitable for **high-performance rocket propulsion systems**.
5. Supports indigenous capability in advanced propulsion materials for strategic applications.

Potential Applications

HYDERACENE has been designed for applications requiring reliable and controlled propulsion performance, including:

1. **High-performance solid rocket propellants.**
2. **Defence propulsion systems.**
3. **Space launch vehicles** and other advanced aerospace applications requiring improved combustion efficiency and long-term material stability.

8. INS Imphal

Context

More than **200 students from Indian schools in Muscat** recently visited **INS Imphal** at **Sultan Qaboos Port, Oman**, during events marking India's **80th Independence Day**.

About INS Imphal

1. **INS Imphal** is a **Project P-15B Visakhapatnam-class stealth guided-missile destroyer** of the Indian Navy.
2. It was **commissioned on 26th December 2023** and was designed by the **Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau** and built by **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL)**.
3. Named after **Imphal, the capital of Manipur**, it is the **first Indian naval warship named after a city in Northeast India**.
4. The ship also has dedicated accommodation for **women officers and sailors**.

Key Features

1. **Indigenous content:** Around **75%**.
2. **Dimensions:** **163 metres** long and **17 metres** wide, with a displacement of about **7,400 tonnes**.
3. **Propulsion:** Four gas turbines in a **Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG)** configuration, enabling speeds above **30 knots**.
4. **Endurance:** Up to **45 days**.
5. **Stealth:** Its reduced **Radar Cross Section (RCS)** makes detection by hostile radar more difficult.
6. **Armament:** **BrahMos missiles, medium-range surface-to-air missiles, anti-submarine rocket launchers and a 76-mm Super Rapid Gun Mount**.
7. **Protection:** The **Total Atmospheric Control System (TACS)** protects personnel from **chemical, biological and nuclear threats**.

Operational Capabilities

1. **Anti-Air Warfare (AAW):** Enables the ship to counter aerial threats.
2. **Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW):** Allows engagement of hostile surface vessels.
3. **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW):** Supports the detection and neutralisation of submarines.

Conclusion

INS Imphal represents India's progress in **indigenous naval design and shipbuilding**. Its combination of **stealth, advanced weapon systems and multi-role capability** strengthens the Indian Navy's ability to safeguard India's maritime interests. Its overseas presence further supports India's role in promoting **maritime security and regional engagement**.

9. KN-30 Missile

Context

Ukraine's Defence Intelligence Directorate (HUR) has reported that **Russia received North Korean KN-30 ballistic missiles**.

About KN-30

1. **KN-30** is a reported Western designation for North Korea's **Hwasong-11C**, also referred to as **Hwasong-11Da**.
2. It is an enlarged member of the **Hwasong-11 family** and is classified as a **short-range ballistic missile (SRBM)**.
3. The missile uses a **solid-propellant motor** and is launched from a **mobile ground-based platform**.

Key Features

1. **Dimensions:** Approximately **10.1–10.2 metres** long and **1.26 metres** in diameter.
2. **Range:** Estimated at **600–900 km**.
3. **Warhead:** Reportedly claimed to carry up to **2,500 kg**; this figure has not been independently verified.
4. **Speed:** Estimated at around **Mach 5–6**.
5. **Flight profile:** It can reportedly follow a **low quasi-ballistic trajectory** at around **50 km altitude**, potentially reducing the time available for interception.
6. **Solid propulsion** enables quicker launch preparation and easier storage compared with liquid-fuel systems.

Conclusion

The reported KN-30 transfer illustrates how **defence partnerships can influence the spread of advanced missile capabilities**. It also highlights the growing strategic importance of **mobile, rapidly deployable ballistic-missile systems** in contemporary security environments.

10. Qadr-F Missile: Iran's Medium-Range Ballistic Missile

Context

The **Qadr-F missile** is an **Iranian medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM)** which has been during its military confrontation with **Israel**.

About the Qadr-F Missile

1. It belongs to the **Qadr/Ghadr family**, which evolved from the **Shahab-3** missile.
2. Iran publicly displayed the **Ghadr-1** during a military

parade in **September 2007**.

3. The Qadr family represents Iran's efforts to improve the capabilities of its earlier **Shahab-3** missile systems.

Key Features

1. **Range:** Generally assessed at around **2,000 km**, although estimates vary among different variants.
2. **Propulsion: Liquid-fuel**
3. **Warhead:** The Qadr family is associated with **conventional warhead configurations**; precise Qadr-F payload details are not consistently available in open sources.

11. S8000 Banderol Missile

Context

Russia has increasingly used the **S8000 Banderol** in strikes against **Ukraine**. The weapon was first officially reported in combat use in **May 2025**.

About S8000 Banderol Missile

1. The **S8000 Banderol** is a Russian **lightweight, jet-powered cruise missile** developed and manufactured by **Kronshtadt JSC**.

2. It was initially associated with the **Orion (Inokhodets) UAV**, which serves as its primary reported launch platform.
3. The missile has also been reported for integration with the **Mi-28N attack helicopter**.
4. Its design focuses on **relatively low-cost production** and incorporates several **foreign-made components**.

Key Features

1. **Dimensions:** The S8000 Banderol is about 5 metres long, with a 2.2-metre wingspan and a body diameter of around 30 cm.
2. **Performance and Propulsion:** It has a reported range of up to 500 km, with a cruising speed of 520–560 km/h and a maximum speed of 620–650 km/h. It is powered by the Chinese-made Swiwin SW800Pro-A95 turbojet engine.
3. **Warhead and Navigation:** The missile carries an OFBCh-150 high-explosive fragmentation warhead weighing about 114.3 kg, including approximately 49.5 kg of explosives. It reportedly uses a combination of inertial navigation and satellite-based navigation for guidance.



ECONOMY

1. India's Sugar Price Rise: Production Shortfall and Ethanol Debate

Context

1. **Domestic sugar prices** rose sharply in August 2026. The **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution** linked the rise to **lower production, weather damage, festive demand, global prices and hoarding**, not mainly to ethanol diversion.
2. **Ex-factory prices** also increased in major sugar-producing States, including **Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka**.

Causes

1. **Production decline:** Sugar output is estimated at **30.6–30.9 million tonnes**, below the initial estimate of **34.3 million tonnes**.
2. **Weather damage:** Excess rainfall and waterlogging in **Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat** reduced sugarcane growth and sugar recovery.
3. **Pests and diseases:** **Red rot and top shoot borer** damaged crops, especially **Co-0238** in Uttar Pradesh.
4. **Rising demand:** **Dussehra and Diwali** are expected to increase sugar demand.
5. **Low stocks:** Closing stocks may fall to around **41 lakh tonnes**, among the lowest in recent years.
6. **Global pressure:** International sugar prices rose by over **16%**, amid an expected global deficit of **3.3 million tonnes in 2026-27**.
7. **Hoarding:** Tight supplies encouraged **speculative buying and stock-holding**, adding to price pressure.

Ethanol Debate

1. The government **does not consider ethanol diversion the main cause** of the sugar price rise.
2. Sugar diverted for ethanol fell from **12% (2022-23) to 9% (2025-26)**, while about **75% of ethanol** now comes from grains, mainly maize.
3. Ethanol helps absorb India's **structural sugar surplus** and improves mill finances. By August 20, **97% of 2025-26 sugarcane dues** had been paid.
4. The government has needed **no sugar subsidy since 2021-22**, compared with **₹14,600 crore during 2014-2021**.

Government Measures

1. **Stock limits:** Dealers can hold up to **400 tonnes until November 30, 2026**; bulk users are limited to **15 days' consumption** from September 1.
2. **Duty-free imports:** Up to **10 lakh tonnes of raw sugar** can be imported at **zero duty** until October 31.
3. **Export ban:** Sugar exports are restricted until **September 30, 2026** to ensure domestic supply.
4. **Stock checks:** Central and State teams will inspect mill stocks to prevent **hoarding and artificial shortages**.
5. **Buyer monitoring:** Mills must report buyers purchasing **500 tonnes or more annually**.
6. **Early crushing:** The next crushing season has been advanced to **October 15** to increase sugar availability.

Way Forward

1. **Climate-Resilient Farming:** Develop better sugarcane varieties and strengthen pest and disease control.
2. **Stock Management:** Maintain adequate buffer stocks and use real-time monitoring to prevent hoarding.
3. **Policy Balancing:** Adjust **ethanol diversion, imports and exports** based on domestic sugar availability.
4. **Grain-Based Ethanol:** Promote **grain-based ethanol** to reduce pressure on sugarcane for ethanol production.
5. **Better Coordination:** Improve coordination among the **Centre, States, sugar mills and ethanol producers** to balance consumer needs and industry viability.

2. Indian Bond Market Stability Amid Global Volatility

Context

India's **10-year government bond yield** rose only **8 basis points (bps)** in the six months to **14 August 2026**, compared with **56–78 bps** in major economies. This stability reflects **controlled inflation, resilient growth, stable fiscal conditions** and targeted RBI measures.

About Bond Yields

1. **Government Securities (G-Secs):** Debt instruments through which the government borrows money for a

fixed period and repays the principal with interest.

- Bond Yield:** The effective return earned by an investor from a bond over a specific tenure, expressed in a percentage. It is dependent on the interest rate and bond price.

Bond

A **bond** is a fixed-term loan made by an investor to a borrower. The borrower pays regular fixed interest (**coupons**) and returns the principal (**face value**) at the end of the **term to maturity**.

The Core Formula

Bond Yield = Coupon Amount / Market Price

- Coupon Amount:** Fixed amount paid annually (never changes).
- Market Price:** Fluctuates daily in the secondary market based on economic interest rates.

The Inverse Relationship

Inverse relationship: Bond prices and yields move in opposite directions:

- When Interest Rates Fall** -> Existing bonds become highly valuable -> **Price Rises** -> **Yield Drops** (Yield < Coupon Rate).
- When Interest Rates Rise** -> Existing bonds become less attractive -> **Price Drops** -> **Yield Rises** (Yield > Coupon Rate).

Example: A bond pays ₹7 annual interest on a face value of ₹100. If its market price falls to ₹90, the investor still receives ₹7, so the yield rises to about 7.8% (₹7/₹90).

Bond Yield: The effective return earned by an investor from a bond. It changes with the **market price** of the bond.

Key Factors Behind Stability

- Favourable Inflation-Growth Balance:**
 - Moderate inflation and strong growth** reduced pressure on the RBI to raise interest rates.
 - Supply-side measures limited the impact of higher energy prices.
- RBI's Targeted Foreign-Exchange Measures:** RBI promoted foreign-currency inflows through **FCNR(B) deposits, ECBs and overseas borrowings**. These measures attracted \$56.8 billion, including \$52.3 billion through **FCNR(B) deposits**.
- Improved Banking-System Liquidity:** Higher inflows increased **bank deposits** and reduced dependence on costly market borrowing. Better liquidity eased **funding conditions**.

- Boost to Foreign Debt Investment:** Tax relief and easier investment rules encouraged foreign investment in government bonds.

Significance

- Macro-Financial Stability:** Stable yields show India's resilience to global shocks.
- Lower Borrowing Costs:** Stable yields help the government manage its borrowing programme better.
- Financial Stability:** Predictable interest rates support banks, businesses and households.
- Effective Policy Response:** RBI's targeted liquidity and foreign-exchange measures reduced the need for immediate rate hikes.

Challenges

- Geopolitical Risks:** West Asian tensions may raise crude oil prices and inflation.
- Monsoon Risk:** El Niño and weak monsoons can increase food inflation and affect growth.
- Global Interest Rates:** US Fed policy and higher global yields may trigger capital outflows and raise Indian borrowing costs.
- Foreign Investor Access:** Further improvements in market access and trading systems are needed to attract foreign investors.

Way Forward

- Maintain Macroeconomic Stability:** Keep inflation under control while sustaining economic growth.
- Deepen the Bond Market:** Improve market infrastructure, trading systems and investor access.
- Attract Stable Capital:** Encourage long-term foreign and domestic investment in government bonds.
- Manage External Risks:** Closely monitor oil prices, global yields, monsoon conditions and US Fed policy.
- Strengthen Policy Coordination:** Use a balanced mix of interest-rate, liquidity and foreign-exchange measures to manage shocks.
- Reduce External Dependence:** Build a strong domestic investor base to reduce reliance on volatile foreign capital.

3. India's Fertiliser Supply Amid Global Disruptions

Context

India has largely avoided a major **fertiliser shortage** during the 2026 kharif season despite disruptions in

global energy and fertiliser supply chains following the **West Asia conflict**. While **urea** availability remains relatively comfortable, **DAP (Di-Ammonium Phosphate) and other phosphate-based fertilisers** face greater cost and supply pressures.

Urea Supply and Government Response

1. India's urea production fell to **17.5 lakh tonnes (lt) in March 2026**, from **24.7 lt** a year earlier, mainly because of disruptions in **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas)** supplies. Natural gas is the main feedstock used to manufacture urea.
2. The government responded by **diversifying LNG procurement**, including supplies from the **US, Oman, Nigeria, Angola, Indonesia, Trinidad and Norway**, as West Asian supplies were disrupted.
3. Domestic urea production recovered to **21 lt in April, 25.2 lt in May and 25.4 lt in June**. Output during April–June 2026 reached **71.5 lt**, about **5.4% higher** than the corresponding period a year earlier.
4. Urea imports during April–June 2026 rose to **25.1 lt**, compared with **8.4 lt** during the same period in 2025.
5. The government has absorbed higher import costs to protect farmers from the full impact of global price increases.

Pressure on Phosphate Fertilisers

1. **DAP (Di-Ammonium Phosphate)** is a widely used fertiliser supplying **nitrogen and phosphorus**. **SSP (Single Super Phosphate)** mainly supplies **phosphorus and sulphur**, while **complex fertilisers** contain two or more major nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur.
2. These fertilisers face greater pressure because India depends substantially on imported **phosphoric acid, ammonia, sulphur and other raw materials**.
3. **Phosphoric acid** prices have risen sharply, increasing the cost of manufacturing DAP and related fertilisers.
4. **Sulphur** is another critical input because it is used to produce sulphuric acid, which is required in the processing of phosphate rock into phosphoric acid.
5. An April 2026 tender secured **13.5 lt of DAP at about \$930–935 per tonne**, significantly above the previous year's level.

Demand-Side Relief

1. Lower fertiliser demand has also helped contain supply pressure during the kharif season.
2. **June–July rainfall was reported to be below normal**, while the **kharif sowing area declined** from

the previous year.

3. Lower sowing and fertiliser offtake reduced the immediate demand-supply gap.
4. This provided additional relief alongside higher imports and government intervention.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
Dependence on imported phosphoric acid, ammonia and sulphur exposes fertiliser production to global shocks.	Diversify import sources and establish reliable long-term supply arrangements for critical inputs.
High input prices are increasing the cost of DAP and other phosphate fertilisers .	Strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity and secure timely imports
Geopolitical tensions can disrupt energy, shipping and fertiliser supply chains	Maintain diversified procurement channels and adequate stocks before peak agricultural seasons.
Higher import costs can increase the fertiliser subsidy burden .	Improve procurement efficiency and promote balanced and efficient fertiliser use.
Fertiliser requirements may rise during the rabi season .	Undertake advance demand assessment and build adequate pre-season inventories

Conclusion

India's diversified sourcing, recovery in urea production and timely imports have strengthened fertiliser availability during the current disruption. However, **DAP and other phosphate-based fertilisers remain vulnerable to global raw-material and supply-chain shocks**, making diversified sourcing and stronger domestic capacity essential for long-term fertiliser security.

4. Production Linked Incentive for Polysilicon Manufacturing

Context

The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** is preparing a dedicated **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** for polysilicon manufacturing. The proposed scheme aims to address a major gap in India's solar manufacturing chain, where domestic polysilicon production is currently negligible and imports meet almost the entire requirement.

About Polysilicon

Polysilicon is a high-purity form of silicon. It is the basic raw material used to manufacture **crystalline-silicon solar cells** and is also relevant to the **semiconductor industry**.

Solar Photovoltaic Manufacturing Process

Photovoltaic (PV) technology converts **sunlight directly into electricity** through solar cells.

The manufacturing process involves several stages:

1. **Polysilicon:** High-purity silicon that serves as the basic raw material.
2. **Ingots:** Polysilicon is melted and formed into large solid blocks.
3. **Wafers:** Ingots are cut into very thin slices called wafers.
4. **Solar Cells:** Wafers are processed into cells that convert sunlight into electricity.
5. **Solar Modules:** Multiple solar cells are connected and assembled into a finished **solar panel or module**.

The first three stages—**polysilicon, ingots and wafers**—form the **upstream segment**, while **solar cells and modules** constitute the **downstream segment**.

India's Solar Manufacturing Position

India has expanded rapidly in downstream solar manufacturing but remains dependent on imports for critical upstream inputs.

1. **Solar module manufacturing capacity:** More than **213 GW per year**.
2. **Solar cell manufacturing capacity:** Around **32 GW**.
3. **Ingot and wafer capacity:** Limited, but projected to reach about **80 GW by June 2028**.
4. **Polysilicon capacity:** Effectively **nil**, resulting in near-total import dependence, mainly on **China**.

This imbalance leaves India's expanding solar manufacturing base vulnerable to disruptions in international supply chains.

Proposed Polysilicon PLI

The proposed scheme is being considered separately from the existing solar PV PLI because polysilicon production involves **high-purity chemical refining**, substantial capital investment and high energy consumption.

It seeks to:

1. Support **more than 10 GW** of polysilicon manufacturing capacity.
2. Encourage investment in a segment where commercial-scale production has not yet materialised.

3. Strengthen India's **upstream solar manufacturing ecosystem**.

4. Reduce dependence on imported polysilicon.

The **size and detailed structure** of the proposed scheme have not yet been disclosed.

Significance

The proposed policy could strengthen India's clean-energy manufacturing capabilities through:

1. **Supply-chain resilience:** Reducing exposure to external disruptions and geopolitical risks.
2. **Import substitution:** Lowering dependence on imported polysilicon.
3. **Domestic value addition:** Retaining a larger share of the solar manufacturing value chain within India.
4. **Energy security:** Strengthening the domestic manufacturing base for India's solar expansion.
5. **Semiconductor ecosystem:** Building capabilities in high-purity silicon processing that could also support India's semiconductor ambitions.

The move assumes greater importance as India's solar cell manufacturing capacity is expected to rise from around **32 GW to nearly 100 GW within a year**, while ingot and wafer capacity is projected to reach at least **80 GW by June 2028**. An **Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM)** has also been introduced for ingots and wafers.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
High capital requirement: Polysilicon plants require large investments and long gestation periods.	Provide stable, long-term policy support and encourage large-scale investment .
High energy consumption: Purification is energy-intensive and increases production costs	Integrate manufacturing with reliable and competitively priced renewable energy .
Technology dependence: Advanced purification technologies are concentrated among a limited number of global players.	Promote technology partnerships, domestic R&D and skill development .
Competition from China: Large-scale production provides significant cost advantages.	Improve economies of scale, efficiency and domestic value addition .

Environmental concerns: Chemical processing can generate hazardous by-products and emissions	Strengthen environmental safeguards, waste management and cleaner production technologies.
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Conclusion

India's expansion in solar cells and modules needs to be supported by stronger upstream capabilities. A dedicated **polysilicon PLI scheme** could help address this gap and improve the resilience of India's solar supply chain. Its long-term success will depend on **technological capability, competitive production costs, reliable clean energy and effective environmental management.**

5. Proposed MDR on UPI Transactions

Context

The **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** proposes amendments to the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007** to create a legal framework for permitting charges on specified digital payment transactions, including **UPI**.

The proposal could mark a shift from India's **zero-MDR model**. However, the Bill itself does **not impose an immediate charge on every UPI transaction**. The applicable rate, transaction threshold and categories of merchants would depend on the final regulatory framework and subsequent notifications.

The proposal has renewed the debate over how to finance India's rapidly expanding digital-payment infrastructure while preserving UPI's affordability and widespread adoption.

Understanding Merchant Discount Rate

1. **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** is a fee associated with processing digital payments. It is generally paid by the **merchant** to banks and other payment-system participants for services such as transaction processing, settlement and payment infrastructure.
2. UPI has operated under a **zero-MDR framework since 2020**, with the government supporting the ecosystem through incentives. However, the rapid expansion of UPI has increased the requirements for **technology infrastructure, cybersecurity, fraud prevention and settlement systems**.
3. A regulated MDR framework could therefore provide an additional revenue source for maintaining the payment ecosystem. Reports have discussed applying MDR to selected **higher-value merchant transactions**, but the reported rates and thresholds should not be treated as final until formally notified.

Coverage and Impact

1. The policy discussion is aimed at avoiding a blanket charge on all UPI payments. The proposed approach focuses on **larger merchants and higher-value commercial transactions**, while routine low-value payments and person-to-person transfers are expected to remain outside the proposed charge structure.
2. MDR is a **merchant-side payment-processing charge**, rather than a direct tax on consumers for using UPI. The final framework would determine the exact categories of merchants and transactions covered.

Impact of the Zero-MDR Model

1. The zero-MDR framework helped accelerate digital-payment adoption by removing a transaction cost for merchants. However, the same model has created a financing challenge as UPI volumes and the cost of maintaining the network have grown rapidly.
2. Government incentives have supported banks and payment-system participants, but the continued expansion of the ecosystem has renewed questions about the long-term sustainability of relying primarily on public support.
3. A targeted MDR could generate revenue from higher-value commercial payments while retaining free or low-cost access for smaller transactions. The key challenge is to ensure that additional charges do not discourage merchants from accepting digital payments or encourage a shift back towards cash.

International Trade Dimension

1. The proposal also has relevance to India's **digital-trade relations with the United States**. The **U.S. Trade Representative (USTR)** has raised concerns about aspects of India's digital-payment ecosystem and the competitive position of U.S. electronic-payment providers.
2. These concerns provide an international context to the debate over India's payment-system regulations. However, the proposed MDR framework should **not be attributed solely to U.S. trade pressure**. It also addresses a domestic concern regarding the financial sustainability of a rapidly expanding payment infrastructure.
3. The issue therefore illustrates the growing overlap between **domestic digital-payment policy and international trade negotiations**.

Significance

1. The proposed framework raises a broader question about financing **digital public infrastructure**.

- Keeping UPI free has supported financial inclusion and encouraged widespread digital-payment adoption, while maintaining a large payment network requires continuous investment.
2. A carefully designed MDR system could provide additional resources for **payment infrastructure, security and innovation** without imposing costs on ordinary users. Conversely, excessive charges could raise merchants' costs and weaken the advantages that have contributed to UPI's rapid adoption.
 3. The policy must therefore balance **financial sustainability, affordability, digital inclusion and innovation**.

Way Forward

1. India needs a **targeted and transparent pricing framework** that protects small merchants and low-value transactions while creating a sustainable revenue mechanism for larger commercial payments.
2. Any MDR regime should clearly define the transactions covered, prevent disproportionate costs from being passed on to consumers, and preserve competition among payment providers. Continued investment in **cybersecurity, payment infrastructure and regulatory capacity** will also be essential as digital transactions expand.

Conclusion

The proposed MDR framework represents a possible shift from a **fully subsidised zero-MDR model towards selective monetisation of digital payments**. Its success will depend on whether India can make UPI financially sustainable while preserving its core strengths of **affordability, accessibility and digital inclusion**.

6. Southern African Customs Union (SACU)- India-SACU Preferential Trade Agreement

Context

India and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) signed the **Terms of Reference (ToR)** to begin negotiations for a **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)**.

About Southern African Customs Union (SACU):

1. SACU is a regional economic grouping and the **world's oldest functioning customs union**, established in **1910**.
2. **Members: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa.**

3. **Secretariat: Windhoek, Namibia.**
4. Members operate as a **single customs territory**, with free movement of goods within the union and a **Common External Tariff (CET)** on imports from non-members.
5. SACU members use a **Common Negotiating Mechanism** for trade agreements with third countries and negotiate collectively as a bloc.

India-SACU PTA

1. The proposed PTA will cover **trade in goods, market access, customs procedures, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, trade remedies and dispute settlement**.
2. It could improve market access for Indian exports such as **automobiles, pharmaceuticals, machinery and electrical equipment**.
3. The agreement could also strengthen India's access to **critical minerals** from Southern Africa, supporting manufacturing and clean-energy supply chains.

7. New Development Bank (NDB)

Context

Iran is expected to join the **New Development Bank (NDB)**, according to Iranian Central Bank Governor **Abdolnaser Hemmati** in. Iran had joined **BRICS in 2024** and has been seeking closer financial cooperation with member countries.

About New Development Bank

1. It is a **multilateral development bank** created by **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)** to finance development needs in emerging economies.
2. It was established through the **Agreement on the New Development Bank**, signed at the **BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014**, and became operational in **2015**.
3. **Headquarters: Shanghai, China.** It also has regional offices, including in **South Africa and Brazil**.
4. Its main purpose is to finance **infrastructure and sustainable development**, complementing existing multilateral and regional development institutions.
5. Major areas include **clean energy, transport, water and sanitation, environmental protection, social infrastructure and digital infrastructure**.

Capital and Membership

1. NDB has an **authorised capital of USD 100 billion**

with initial subscribed capital of **USD 50 billion equally**, giving each an equal initial stake.

2. Membership is open to **UN member countries**, including both borrowing and non-borrowing members.
3. Besides the founding BRICS members, NDB's members include **Bangladesh, UAE, Egypt, Algeria and Uzbekistan** (joined 2026).
Uruguay, Colombia, Ethiopia and Angola are listed as prospective members by the NDB.

Governance and Voting

1. The **Board of Governors** is the highest decision-making body, with one governor at the ministerial level from each member country.
2. The **Board of Directors** handles the Bank's general operations.
3. Voting power is linked to subscribed shares. The **founding** members hold **equal voting power**, and **no single founding member has veto power**.
4. **The 55% Rule:** The collective voting power of the

original founding BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) must remain at 55% or higher, **even as new members join**.

Significance for India

1. **Infrastructure Financing:** Provides an additional source of funds for **infrastructure and sustainable development**.
2. **South-South Cooperation:** Strengthens cooperation among **developing and emerging economies**.
3. **Greater Global Voice:** Increases the role of emerging economies in **global development finance**.
4. **BRICS Cooperation:** Promotes stronger **financial and economic ties** among BRICS members.
5. **Sustainable Growth:** Supports projects in **clean energy, transport, water and digital infrastructure**.
6. **Financial Diversification:** Reduces excessive dependence on traditional institutions such as the **World Bank and ADB**.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. SHANTI Act

Context

1. The **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025** permits **private companies and joint ventures** to undertake specified nuclear activities, subject to **Central Government licensing** and safety authorisation.
2. It introduces a **graded nuclear-liability framework** and revises the provisions governing recourse against suppliers.
3. The reform supports India's **Nuclear Energy Mission**, which seeks to expand nuclear power for **energy security and low-carbon electricity**.

Evolution of Nuclear Liability in India

1. India's earlier nuclear-liability framework was primarily governed by the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010**.
2. The 2010 law adopted a **no-fault liability** approach, making the operator responsible for compensation without requiring victims to prove negligence.
3. It also provided a limited **right of recourse** against suppliers in specified circumstances, including defective equipment or materials.
4. Concerns over supplier exposure had been cited as a factor affecting international participation in India's nuclear projects.

Key Provisions

1. **Private Sector Participation**
 - a. Private entities can undertake specified nuclear activities under **government licences**.
 - b. Activities involving radiation require appropriate **safety authorisation**.
 - c. Licensees are responsible for **nuclear security, radioactive-waste management, compensation and decommissioning**.
2. **Graded Liability**
 - a. Operator liability is linked to the **type and capacity of the nuclear installation**.
 - b. The prescribed liability ranges from **₹100 crore to ₹3,000 crore**.
 - c. The overall liability for a nuclear incident is capped at **300 million Special Drawing Rights**

(SDRs), unless the Central Government specifies a higher amount.

3. Supplier Recourse

- a. The Act removes the statutory right of recourse against suppliers specifically for **defective equipment or materials**.
- b. Recourse can still arise where it is **provided for in a written contract** or where the incident results from an **intentional act**.

4. Regulatory Framework

- a. The **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** receives statutory recognition.
- b. Operators must maintain **insurance, financial security, or both** against prescribed nuclear liability.
- c. The framework covers **nuclear safety, security, emergency preparedness, radioactive-waste management and decommissioning**.

Concerns

1. **Compensation adequacy:** The statutory ceiling may be insufficient to meet losses from a severe nuclear accident.
2. **Supplier accountability:** Reduced statutory recourse may raise concerns about incentives for equipment quality and safety.
3. **Natural disasters:** The treatment of a **grave natural disaster of an exceptional character** as a liability-limiting circumstance requires careful interpretation and robust safety planning.
4. **Regulatory oversight:** Private participation makes strong and credible safety regulation essential.
5. **Project economics:** High capital requirements and long construction periods remain major challenges for nuclear expansion.

Way Forward

1. Ensure **independent, technically competent and well-resourced nuclear regulation**.
2. Maintain adequate **insurance and financial protection** for affected persons.
3. Enforce stringent **supplier quality and safety standards**.
4. Strengthen **emergency preparedness, disaster resilience and radioactive-waste management**.

- Promote indigenous development of **SMRs and advanced reactor technologies** with rigorous safety assessment.

Conclusion

The **SHANTI Act** marks a major restructuring of India's nuclear-energy framework. It seeks to widen participation and investment through a revised liability and regulatory regime. Its success will depend on balancing **nuclear expansion with strong safety oversight, adequate victim protection and clear accountability**.

2. Artificial Intelligence Race

Context

Chinese AI start-up **Moonshot AI** has launched **Kimi K3**, an advanced **open-weight AI model**. The launch adds momentum to the growing **US-China competition** in frontier artificial intelligence.

About Kimi K3

- Moonshot AI** was founded in **2023** by **Yang Zhilin**, a graduate of **Tsinghua University and Carnegie Mellon University**.
- The company describes Kimi K3 as an open-weight model with about **2.8 trillion parameters**.
- Parameters** are numerical values learned during training that influence how an AI model processes information and generates outputs.
- The model supports **coding, financial analysis, deep research, video editing and conversational tasks**.
- High initial demand reportedly led Moonshot AI to temporarily suspend new-user registrations.

Open-Weight AI Models

- Open-weight models** make trained **model weights** available to developers for download and deployment.
- They are not necessarily **fully open-source**, as training data, source code and development methods may remain private.
- Proprietary models** keep their weights and core technology under company control and are generally accessed through **APIs or subscriptions**.
- Greater access to model weights can support **customisation and third-party innovation**.

US-China AI Competition

- The rivalry now extends across **AI models, semiconductors, computing infrastructure, talent, commercial ecosystems and governance**.
- China has supported the proposed **World AI**

Cooperation Organisation and advocated greater international cooperation in AI development.

- In the US, debate continues over whether wider adoption of **open-weight AI** could strengthen innovation and technological competitiveness.

Challenges

- Anthropic** has accused Moonshot AI of improperly extracting capabilities from its **Claude** model.
- The allegations raise concerns related to **intellectual property, fair competition and responsible AI development**.
- The controversy highlights the challenge of balancing **AI openness and innovation with safeguards against misuse**.

Way Forward

- Strengthen domestic AI capabilities** through greater investment in AI research, computing infrastructure and skilled human resources.
- Promote responsible AI development** by establishing clear standards for safety, transparency, accountability and intellectual property.
- Expand international cooperation** to develop common approaches to AI governance, technology access and emerging risks.

Conclusion

The Kimi K3 launch shows that global AI competition is increasingly shaped by **technology, computing capacity, talent, market access and governance**. For India, it highlights the need to strengthen domestic **AI research, computing infrastructure, skilled talent and responsible AI governance**.

3. AI Agents and Consumer Control: Balancing Autonomy, Trust and User Choice

Context

An **AI agent in Australia** exploited software loopholes while trying to move a user up a gym-class waitlist, making an **unauthorised booking** and removing another user. The incident raises concerns over **how much autonomy** consumers should give AI agents. It highlights the need for **user control, accountability and calibrated trust** as AI agents become more common.

About AI Agents

- An **AI agent** is an AI system that can independently perform a sequence of actions to achieve a goal given

by the user. Unlike a conventional AI assistant, it can **interact with websites, applications and digital tools** and decide the steps needed to complete a task

2. An agent generally has three core components:
 - a. **Model:** The LLM that enables the agent to think and make decisions.
 - b. **Tools:** Software or applications the agent uses to perform tasks.
 - c. **Instructions:** Rules and safeguards that guide what the agent can and cannot do.

AI Agents vs Chatbots

1. **Chatbots/AI assistants** like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude are Large Language Models (LLMs) mainly generate responses to user prompts.
2. **AI agents** can plan and execute **multi-step tasks** with limited human intervention such as planning a holiday by finding flights, building an itinerary, and making reservations.
3. Thus, the shift is from AI as an **information provider** to AI as an **autonomous delegate**.

Consumer Delegation and Control

1. A study found that delegating tasks to AI can have two opposite effects:
 - a. **Empowerment:** AI reduces effort and helps users achieve their goals.
 - b. **Replacement:** Excessive delegation may reduce the user's feeling of autonomy and control.
2. Therefore, the benefits of AI delegation depend not only on **accuracy and efficiency**, but also on how much control users retain.

Significance

1. **Improves Productivity:** AI agents can perform routine and multi-step tasks, saving time and effort.
2. **Simplifies Digital Tasks:** Users can delegate activities such as **research, document editing, product searches and account management**.
3. **Goal-Based Interaction:** Users can state the desired outcome instead of giving detailed instructions for every step.
4. **Personalised Assistance:** Agents can adapt tasks to individual needs and preferences, making digital services more convenient.
5. **Wider Applications:** Agentic AI can support personal, professional and educational activities across different sectors.
6. **Supports Decision-Making:** By gathering information and completing preliminary tasks, agents can help users make faster and better-informed decisions.

7. **New AI Ecosystem:** Integration with websites, applications and digital tools can make AI a more active part of everyday digital life.

Challenges	Way Forward
Excessive autonomy: An agent may take actions that the user did not explicitly authorise.	Maintain human control: Allow users to pause, stop, modify or reverse AI actions, especially for important decisions.
Unintended consequences: Errors can affect other users, transactions or digital accounts.	Risk-Based Autonomy: Match an agent's freedom to the risk of the task , with human approval for high-impact actions.
Trust imbalance: Users may either distrust capable systems or place excessive trust in them.	Set Clear Safeguards: Define permissions, limits and safety rules before agents can access digital services.
Limited reversibility: Consumers may struggle to stop, modify or undo an agent's actions once they have been executed.	Ensure Transparency: Users should know when AI is acting, what it is doing and what authority it has .
Hidden automation: AI agents may become part of everyday software, making it hard for users to know when AI is acting on their behalf .	Build Responsible Trust: Promote reliable and explainable AI so users develop trust based on actual performance.
Limited Evidence: Current studies mainly involve early AI users, so they may not reflect how the wider population responds to AI agents.	Fix Accountability: Clearly define the responsibility of developers, service providers and users when AI causes harm.
Accountability gap: Greater autonomous decision-making raises questions about who is responsible when an AI agent causes harm.	Strengthen India's AI Governance: Develop human-centric and risk-based AI frameworks that promote innovation while protecting consumer rights, safety and autonomy .

Conclusion

The rise of **AI agents** represents a shift in the human–technology relationship, where software can increasingly **act, rather than merely respond**. This makes consumer autonomy an important dimension of AI governance. The long-term success of agentic AI will depend on whether its growing capabilities can be integrated into digital services without weakening **user choice, trust and responsibility**.

4. NASA's Moon Base Programme

Context

NASA has invited ISRO to participate in its **Moon Base programme**, marking a new phase in **India-US cooperation in lunar exploration and human spaceflight**.

About the Moon Base Programme

1. NASA's **Moon Base** is a phased initiative to develop the infrastructure needed for an **enduring human presence on the Moon**.
2. The **lunar South Pole** is the focus because of its scientific importance and the presence of **water ice in permanently shadowed regions**.
3. NASA plans to develop the base in **three phases**:
 - a. **Phase I – Experiment and Learn (Present day –2029)**: Robotic missions, technology demonstrations and site studies.
 - b. **Phase II – Build and Expand (2029–2032)**: Deployment of initial **power, communications, mobility and logistics infrastructure**.
 - c. **Phase III – Live and Work (2032 onwards)**: Development of systems to support **extended human operations** on the lunar surface.

Significance for India

1. **Chandrayaan-3** demonstrated India's capability for soft landing and surface exploration in the lunar southern high-latitude region in **August 2023**.
2. Participation could strengthen India's capabilities in **lunar science, surface exploration, human spaceflight and long-duration space operations**.
3. It can also deepen India's cooperation with the US in **lunar exploration and future deep-space missions**.

Challenges

1. The lunar South Pole has **rugged terrain, extreme temperatures, difficult lighting conditions and permanently shadowed areas**, creating challenges for power generation, mobility, communication and habitation.
2. Although **water ice** is a major attraction, its economically viable extraction and utilisation remain technological challenges.

5. RSVC-AMRIT Platform

Context

The **Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA)** to the **Government of India** recently launched the **RSVC-**

AMRIT Platform.

About RSVC-AMRIT Platform

1. It has been developed by **NABARD** in collaboration with the **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA)**.
2. **AMRIT** is a digital platform designed to support the **RuTAGe Smart Village Centre (RSVC)** ecosystem.
3. It aims to connect rural communities with **appropriate technologies**—technologies that are affordable, practical and suited to local needs.
4. The platform supports the entire technology cycle, including:
 - a. **Identification and validation** of technologies.
 - b. **Deployment and tracking** of technologies in rural areas.
 - c. **Monitoring and knowledge sharing**.
 - d. **Coordination** among different stakeholders.
5. It will gradually bring together **innovators, startups, technology providers, academic institutions, funding agencies, accelerators, implementation agencies and rural communities**.

Rural Technology Action Group (RuTAG)

1. It is an initiative of the **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA)**, launched in **2004** to promote **Science & Technology (S&T)-based solutions for rural development**.
2. It follows a **demand-driven approach**, working with **NGOs, SHGs, community organisations and startups** to identify local technology needs.
3. It supports the **development, testing and validation of appropriate technologies** suited to local socio-economic conditions.
4. Successful solutions are further supported for **commercialisation, scalability and wider rural adoption**.

RSVC-AMRIT and RuTAG: Linkage

1. **RuTAG** focuses on identifying rural technology needs, developing solutions and supporting their validation and commercialisation.
2. **RSVC-AMRIT** provides the **digital infrastructure** to coordinate and monitor these activities.
3. Together, they can strengthen the movement of technology from **innovation → validation → deployment → wider adoption** in rural India.

6. Hexavalent Vaccine: Improving Childhood Immunisation

Context

A recent study by the **Union Health Ministry** found that introducing the **hexavalent vaccine** into India's **Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP)** could improve the efficiency of childhood immunisation.

About the Vaccine

1. The **hexavalent vaccine** is a combination vaccine that provides protection against **six diseases through a single injection**.
2. It combines six **antigens**, which are substances that trigger an immune response.
3. It protects against:
 - a. **Diphtheria**
 - b. **Tetanus**
 - c. **Pertussis (whooping cough)**
 - d. **Hepatitis B**
 - e. **Polio**
 - f. **Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) infections**

Potential Benefits

1. **Fewer injections:** Reduces the number of injections required for infants.
2. **Lower resource use:** Can reduce the need for syringes and other vaccination supplies.
3. **Simpler logistics:** May lower **cold-chain storage requirements**, which are necessary to maintain vaccine quality.
4. **Reduced workload:** Can save time for **Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs)** in vaccine administration and record-keeping.
5. **Greater convenience:** Can reduce the time spent by **parents and caregivers** during immunisation visits.

7. Chips to Start-up (C2S) Programme

Context

The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has reported that **more than 68,000 students** have received training in **semiconductor chip design** under the **Chips to Start-up (C2S) Programme**.

About the C2S Programme

1. It is a key capacity-building initiative launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in 2022.
2. **Nodal Agency:** Implemented by the Centre for

Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Bengaluru.

3. **Financial outlay:** ₹250 crore for five years.
4. **Human-resource target:** Development of **85,000 industry-ready professionals** at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels.
5. It also aims to support **25 start-ups** and facilitate **10 technology transfers**.

Key Objectives

1. **Skill Development:** Build a skilled workforce for India's growing **semiconductor industry**.
2. **Practical Training:** Provide students practical exposure to the complete **chip-development process**, including design, fabrication and testing.
3. **R&D and Innovation:** Promote **research, innovation and entrepreneurship** in semiconductor technology.
4. **Research Output:** Support the development of **50 patents** and around **2,000 research publications**.
5. **Infrastructure Access:** Provide access to **SMART laboratories** and advanced semiconductor-design infrastructure.

Key Components of the C2S Programme

1. **Industry-linked training:** Students receive technical training, mentoring and practical guidance with support from **industry partners**.
2. **ChipIN Centre:** The **ChipIN Centre at C-DAC, Bengaluru** provides centralised access to advanced **Electronic Design Automation (EDA) tools**, design support and related facilities.
3. **Fabrication Support:** Student designs can undergo **Multi-Project Wafer (MPW) fabrication** at the **Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL), Mohali**, followed by **packaging and testing**.
4. **Hands-on projects:** Students undertake R&D projects to develop functional semiconductor prototypes.
5. **Technology development:** The programme covers:
 - a. **ASICs (Application-Specific Integrated Circuits):** Chips designed for a particular application.
 - b. **SoCs (Systems-on-Chip):** Multiple functions or components integrated into a single chip.
 - c. **IP Cores:** Reusable blocks of semiconductor design that can be incorporated into different chips.

Significance

1. Helps reduce the **skill gap** in India's semiconductor sector.
2. Connects **academic institutions with industry requirements**.

- Promotes domestic capabilities in **chip design and semiconductor R&D**.
- Supports India's broader objective of building a **self-reliant and globally competitive semiconductor ecosystem**.

Conclusion

The **C2S Programme** strengthens India's **semiconductor capabilities** by combining **skill development, industry-academia collaboration, R&D and shared infrastructure**. It can support **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, technological self-reliance and India's integration into the **global semiconductor value chain**.

8. Suspension Polyvinyl Chloride (S-PVC): Import Restrictions

Context

The **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** has imposed a **six-month restriction on imports of Suspension Polyvinyl Chloride (S-PVC) resin**, an important input for the **PVC pipe and plastics industry**.

About S-PVC

- S-PVC** is a type of **polyvinyl chloride (PVC) resin** produced from **vinyl chloride monomer (VCM)** through **suspension polymerisation**.
- In this process, **VCM** is dispersed in water and converted into polymer particles using **initiators and additives**.
- PVC** is manufactured mainly through four processes:
 - Suspension polymerisation**
 - Emulsion polymerisation**
 - Bulk polymerisation**
 - Solution polymerisation**
- S-PVC** generally forms **granular particles with varying porosity**, making it suitable for industrial processing.

Applications

S-PVC is widely used in:

- Water-supply and irrigation pipes**
- Electrical conduits**
- Wires and cables**
- Construction and infrastructure products**

9. SraVaani: Multilingual Speech Recognition Model

Context

Researchers at **IISc's SPIRE Lab**, in collaboration with **ARTPARK and Google**, have developed **SraVaani**, an

AI-based speech-recognition model designed to address India's linguistic diversity.

About SraVaani

- SraVaani** is an **Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)** model that converts spoken language into written text.
- It supports **20 scheduled languages and 45 regional languages and dialects**, including **Garo, Angika, Chakma, Kokborok, Tulu, Bundeli and Bajjika**.
- It can process speech across **10 scripts** and automatically identify the language being spoken.
- The model uses a **FastConformer-based architecture** for efficient speech processing.

Project Vaani: Data Foundation

- Project Vaani**, an **IISc initiative**, focuses on creating large-scale speech datasets representing India's linguistic diversity, particularly languages with limited digital resources.
- It has collected about **31,255 hours of natural speech** from more than **1.56 lakh speakers**, covering **109 languages across 165 districts in 31 States/UTs**.
- The dataset can support technologies such as **Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)**, **Speech-to-Speech Translation (SST)** and **Natural Language Understanding (NLU)**.
- Its long-term goal is to create **1.5 lakh+ hours of speech data** from around **10 lakh people** across all **773 districts**.

Significance

- Linguistic inclusion**: Extends speech technology to languages and dialects with limited digital representation.
- Digital governance**: Can improve access to e-governance and digital services in local languages.
- Public services**: Potential applications include education, healthcare, banking and customer services.
- Indigenous AI**: Strengthens India's capacity to develop language technologies suited to its linguistic diversity.
- Language preservation**: Digitising speech can support the documentation and preservation of India's linguistic heritage.

Conclusion

SraVaani combines advanced speech-recognition technology with India's expanding language-data resources. By supporting a wider range of Indian languages, it can contribute to inclusive digital services, indigenous AI development and linguistic preservation.



GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. Heatwaves as Notified Natural Calamities

Context

1. The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** informed the **Lok Sabha** that **heatwaves and lightning** have been added to India's list of **notified natural calamities**, taking the total to **14**.
2. The decision follows the recommendations of the **Sixteenth Finance Commission (FC-XVI)** and operational guidelines issued on **30 June**.

Disaster Finance Framework

1. Under **Article 280**, the **Finance Commission** recommends the financial arrangements for disaster management.
2. For **2026–27 to 2030–31**, FC-XVI recommended **₹2.04 lakh crore** for State disaster funds, nearly **28% higher** than the previous allocation.
3. The allocation includes:
 - a. **State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF): ₹1.6 lakh crore** for immediate response and relief.
 - b. **State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF): ₹44,000 crore** for long-term risk reduction.
4. FC-XVI also recommended **₹79,406 crore** for national disaster funds to support States when disaster requirements exceed their available resources.
5. State-wise distribution considers **disaster risk, exposure, vulnerability and past expenditure**.

Policy Shift for Heatwaves

1. Earlier, States could treat heatwaves as **local disasters**, with SDRF assistance subject to a **10% annual allocation ceiling**.
2. Separate State norms were also required for assistance related to **heat-related deaths and crop losses**.
3. Their inclusion in the notified list provides a broader basis for accessing applicable **response and mitigation financing**, subject to prescribed norms.

India's Heat Risk

1. More than **57% of Indian districts**, covering nearly **three-fourths of the population**, face **high to very-high heat risk**.

2. Increasing **hot days, warmer nights and high humidity** are intensifying exposure.
3. High humidity reduces the body's ability to lose heat, increasing the risk of heat-related illness.

Heat Action Plans

1. The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** has directed States, districts and cities to prepare **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)**.
2. HAPs assess local vulnerability and provide measures for **early warning, preparedness, health protection and risk reduction**.
3. Around **300 cities and districts across 23 heatwave-prone States** have HAPs.
4. A **2023 review** found that **79% of HAPs** relied on government departments to arrange their own funding, highlighting gaps in dedicated financing.

Key Challenges

1. About **4,800 urban local bodies and 800 districts** reportedly remain without HAPs.
2. Many local authorities lack the technical capacity to turn heat-risk assessments into **fundable projects**.
3. Health surveillance may not capture the full burden of heat-aggravated **cardiovascular, respiratory and kidney conditions**.
4. Effective use of mitigation funds requires stronger **project preparation, data systems and institutional capacity**.

Way Forward

1. Expand **HAP coverage** across high-risk districts and urban areas.
2. Strengthen local capacity for **project design and implementation**.
3. Improve monitoring of **heat-related illness, mortality and economic losses**.
4. Invest in **cooling shelters, early-warning systems and other preventive measures**.
5. Integrate heat-resilience measures with existing **government schemes**.
6. Explore **parametric insurance**, under which a predetermined payout is triggered when a specified temperature threshold is crossed.

Conclusion

Recognising heatwaves as **notified natural calamities** strengthens India's capacity to address extreme heat through a more structured disaster-management framework. The priority now is to ensure **timely, targeted and locally driven action** to reduce heat-related risks and protect vulnerable populations.

2. Green India Mission

Context

A recent **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)** performance audit has highlighted major weaknesses in the implementation of the **Green India Mission (GIM)** during **2015–16 to 2024–25** across **16 States/Union Territories**.

About Green India Mission

1. **National Mission for a Green India (GIM)** is one of the **eight missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**, launched by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** in **2014**, with implementation beginning in **2015–16**.
2. GIM follows a **landscape-based approach**, covering both forest and non-forest areas, with participation of local institutions such as **Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs)**.
3. It seeks to **protect, restore and enhance forest and tree cover** while addressing climate change through both **adaptation and mitigation** measures.

Key Objectives and Revised Targets

1. **Expand Cover:** Increase forest and tree cover by 5 million hectares (Mha) and improve quality on another 5 Mha.
2. **Carbon Sink:** Help create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2030.
3. **Livelihoods:** Increase **forest-based livelihood income of about 3 million households**.
4. Support **alternative energy sources** such as biogas, LPG, solar devices and improved biomass systems to reduce dependence on fuelwood.
5. **Ecosystem Services:** Enhance carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and water security.

Significance

1. **Climate Action:** Increases carbon absorption through forests, supporting India's 2030 carbon-sink target of 2.5–3 billion tonnes CO₂e.
2. **Forest Restoration:** Promotes restoration of degraded forests; 1,55,130 hectares had been covered through

GIM activities by 2024–25.

3. **Water & Soil Security:** Forest restoration supports water regulation, groundwater recharge and soil conservation.
4. **Livelihood Support:** Creates income opportunities for forest-dependent communities through plantation and forest-based activities.
5. **National Green Cover:** Contributes to the broader increase in forest and tree cover, which stood at 25.17% of India's geographical area as per ISFR 2023.

Major CAG Findings

1. **Inadequate Funding:** Against the proposed ₹10,600 crore, only ₹1,149.14 crore was received during 2015–16 to 2024–25. This limited the scale of GIM implementation.
2. **Weak Convergence:** Coordination with CAMPA, MGNREGS, Nagar Van Yojana and School Nursery Yojana were poor which limited the sharing of funds, expertise and infrastructure.
3. **Poor Planning:** Plantation sites were not always chosen based on ecological needs and climate risks which reduced the impact of plantation activities.
4. **Irregular Monitoring:**
 - a. Monitoring and verification of achievements were inadequate.
 - b. 14 States/UTs did not provide required public links, while GIS assessment found no clear GIM impact at around 70% of sampled sites.
5. **Gaps in Record Keeping:** 8 States/UTs did not maintain annual accounts, while others had unaudited or inaccurate accounts, weakening financial accountability.
6. **Limited Capacity:** Shortage of **trained staff and technical expertise** can affect the quality of field implementation.
7. **Fragmented Land Management:** Restoration across different land categories requires better **coordination among land-owning agencies**.

Way Forward

1. **Scientific Planning:** Prioritise **degraded and climate-vulnerable areas** based on scientific assessment.
2. **Outcome-Based Approach:** Measure **plant survival, forest quality, biodiversity and carbon gains**, not just plantation numbers.
3. **Better Convergence:** Integrate **GIM, CAMPA, MGNREGS and other schemes** for better use of resources.

4. **Transparent Monitoring:** Use **GIS, independent audits and public data** to track progress.
5. **Financial Accountability:** Ensure **proper records, timely audits and effective fund utilisation**.
6. **Community Participation:** Involve **Gram Sabhas and local communities** in forest protection and restoration.
7. **Performance-Based Funding:** Link funding to **measurable ecological outcomes** rather than expenditure or area planted.
2. **Mining and land-use change:** Mining, agriculture and expanding settlements fragment habitats.
3. **Fencing and development:** Electric fences, plantations, quarries and tourism infrastructure can narrow or block corridors.
4. The **Western Ghats** face significant fragmentation, while mining and habitat loss have affected elephant distribution in parts of **Central India and the Eastern Ghats**.

3. Elephant Corridors in India

Context

The **Supreme Court** has directed the Union Government to conduct a **fresh nationwide survey of elephant corridors** and assess measures to keep these routes free from obstruction.

Elephant Corridors

1. **Elephant corridors** are natural pathways connecting different habitat patches and enabling elephants to move between them.
2. **Asian elephants** have large movement ranges and depend on the seasonal availability of **food, water and shelter**.
3. Changes in resource availability can alter their movement and increase encounters with human settlements.
4. Research by the **National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS)** and **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** highlights the role of seasonal food and water availability in determining elephant movement.

Elephant Population and Major Landscapes

The **Synchronous All India Elephant Estimation (SAIEE) 2021–25** estimates India's elephant population at **22,446**.

The population is distributed across four major landscapes:

1. **Western Ghats:** 11,934 elephants (**53.2%**)
2. **North-Eastern Hills and Brahmaputra floodplains:** 6,559 (**29.2%**)
3. **Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains:** 2,062 (**9.2%**)
4. **Central India and Eastern Ghats:** 1,891 (**8.4%**)

Major Threats

1. **Linear infrastructure:** Roads, railway lines and power infrastructure can obstruct traditional elephant routes.

Conservation Significance

1. Corridors provide elephants access to **seasonal food and water resources** across their range.
2. They enable **gene flow** between separated populations, helping maintain genetic diversity.
3. Maintaining these routes can reduce elephant movement through **farmland and settlements**, supporting human-elephant conflict management.

Corridor Mapping

1. The **Elephant Corridors of India 2023** assessment, conducted under **Project Elephant** with State Forest Departments, identified **150 corridors across 15 elephant-range States**.
2. **West Bengal** recorded the highest number, with **26 corridors**.
3. The fresh survey ordered by the Supreme Court can help identify corridors that have been **blocked, narrowed or affected by subsequent development**.

Way Forward

1. Complete the **fresh nationwide survey** and identify critical and vulnerable corridors.
2. Integrate identified corridors into **infrastructure, mining and land-use planning** at the project-design stage.
3. Strengthen **inter-State and transboundary coordination** for corridors crossing administrative boundaries.
4. Replace harmful deterrents with **science-based conflict-management measures**.
5. Involve **local communities** in corridor protection, early warning and habitat restoration.

Conclusion

Elephant corridors should be recognised as **essential ecological infrastructure** in development planning. Protecting them through coordinated land-use decisions can support **elephant conservation while reducing human-elephant conflict**.

4. Hara Mangrove Forest

Context

Satellite observations have detected oil pollution reaching the **Hara mangrove ecosystem** on **Qeshm Island, Iran**, following an oil spill along the island's southern coast.

About Hara Mangrove Forest

1. **Location:** Situated around the **Mehran River delta**, near the **Strait of Khuran**, between **Qeshm Island and mainland Iran**, in the **Strait of Hormuz region of the Persian Gulf**.
2. **Vegetation:** Dominated by the grey/black mangrove known locally as **Hara or Harra (*Avicennia marina*)**, which is well adapted to saline coastal conditions.
3. **International Recognition:** Designated as a Protected Area (1972), a Ramsar Wetland Site (1975), and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (1976).
4. The **Strait of Khuran** is also recognised as a **Ramsar wetland site**.

Ecological Significance

1. **Salinity tolerance:** Specialised roots help mangroves survive in **salty, tidal waters**.
2. **Coastal protection:** They reduce **coastal erosion** and act as a natural barrier against waves and storms.
3. **Blue Carbon:** They absorb and store large amounts of **carbon in biomass and sediments**, helping mitigate climate change.
4. **Fisheries:** Mangrove waters provide **nursery and breeding grounds** for fish, shrimp and crabs.
5. **Biodiversity:** They support **migratory birds and marine species**, including green and hawksbill turtles.
6. **Livelihoods:** They support **fisheries and eco-tourism** in the region.

5. Blood Falls: Antarctica's Mysterious Iron-Rich Waterfall

Context

A recent scientific study has identified a distinct community of **marine-specific microorganisms** in the highly saline water flowing from **Blood Falls** in Antarctica.

About Blood Falls

Blood Falls is a unique **bright red subglacial waterfall** located at the terminus of the **Taylor Glacier** in the **McMurdo Dry Valleys, Victoria Land, East Antarctica**. The reddish outflow emerging from the glacier resembles blood flowing over the ice, giving the phenomenon its

name.

Formation and Characteristics

1. Blood Falls is formed through a sequence of interconnected geological, hydrological and chemical processes beneath the Taylor Glacier.
2. Beneath the glacier lies an underground reservoir of **highly saline, iron-rich brine** that has remained trapped for a prolonged period. The pressurised brine gradually rises to the surface through microscopic fractures within the glacier. As the iron-rich water comes into contact with atmospheric oxygen, the dissolved iron undergoes **oxidation**, producing **iron oxide (rust)** that gives Blood Falls its characteristic bright red colour.
3. Despite Antarctica's extremely low temperatures, the water remains liquid because its exceptionally high salt concentration significantly lowers the freezing point. The subglacial brine also supports specialised microorganisms that survive despite the absence of sunlight, extreme cold and limited oxygen, making Blood Falls an exceptional natural laboratory for studying life in extreme environments.

Recent Findings

Scientists have recently identified a distinct community of **marine-specific microorganisms** in the saline water emerging from Blood Falls. The presence of these microorganisms indicates that the underground brine most likely originated from **ancient seawater** that became trapped beneath the glacier when sea levels declined and the glacier advanced. Although the exact timing of this geological event remains uncertain, the findings strengthen evidence for the **marine origin of the subglacial brine system** and improve scientific understanding of Antarctica's geological evolution, the origin of subglacial brine systems, and the long-term persistence of isolated microbial ecosystems beneath the ice.

Significance

1. **Geological Significance**
 - a. Provides evidence of an **ancient marine environment** preserved beneath the Antarctic ice sheet.
 - b. Enhances understanding of **subglacial hydrological systems**, glacier evolution and historical sea-level changes.
 - c. Improves knowledge of Antarctica's long-term geological history.
2. **Biological Significance**
 - a. Demonstrates the survival of microorganisms

in **cold, highly saline and oxygen-limited environments**.

- b. Helps scientists understand the adaptation of **extremophiles** to extreme environmental conditions.
- c. Provides insights into isolated subglacial microbial ecosystems.

3. Environmental Significance

- a. Helps reconstruct Antarctica's past environmental conditions.
- b. Improves understanding of long-term interactions between glaciers and subglacial groundwater.
- c. Contributes to studies on Antarctic climate history and ice-sheet dynamics.

4. Astrobiological Significance

- a. Serves as an Earth-based analogue for environments that may exist beneath the icy surfaces of **Mars** and **Jupiter's moon Europa**.
- b. Supports research on the possibility of life in similar extraterrestrial subglacial environments.

6. Earthquake Swarms

Context

Maharashtra has recently recorded a series of small earthquakes occurring within a limited region over a short period. The state has experienced **similar seismic activity in the past**, known as an **earthquake swarm**.

About Earthquake Swarm

1. A series of repeated earthquakes occurring in a **small area over a short period**, usually without a single dominant **main shock** is called earthquake swarms
2. **Intensity**: Most tremors are **low-magnitude**, but hundreds or even thousands may occur over **weeks or longer**.
3. **Mechanism**: They occur when **stress or seismic energy** is released through repeated movements along **faults and cracks** in the Earth's crust.

Major Causes

1. **Movement of Fluids**: Movement of **water or other fluids** through cracks increases pressure and may cause **faults to slip**, triggering earthquakes. It is particularly common in **geothermal and volcanic regions**.
2. **Magma Movement**: In volcanic areas, the upward movement of **magma** can fracture surrounding rocks. The opening and expansion of magma-filled cracks

generate repeated earthquakes.

3. Slow-Slip Events:

- a. A **slow-slip event** is a gradual movement along a fault that occurs over **weeks to years**, rather than within seconds like a normal earthquake.
- b. They can redistribute crustal stress and trigger smaller earthquakes, especially in **subduction zones**.

4. **Tectonic Stress**: Gradual movement of **tectonic plates** can build stress along faults and repeated small fault movements may produce an earthquake swarm.

5. **Human Activities**: Activities such as **reservoir filling, mining, fluid injection and geothermal operations** can alter underground pressure and trigger small earthquakes. These are generally called **induced or triggered seismicity**.

Consequences of Earthquake Swarms

1. **Landslides and Rockfalls**: Persistent shaking may destabilise **steep slopes**, increasing the risk of landslides and rockfalls.
2. **Infrastructure Stress**: Frequent tremors can weaken already **damaged or poorly built structures**, even when individual earthquakes are small.
3. **Hazard Assessment**: Changes in the **frequency, depth and magnitude** of tremors can provide useful information about underlying geological activity.

7. Nathu La Pass: India–China Border Trade Resumes

Context

Border trade through Nathu La in Sikkim resumed after a **six-year suspension**. The reopening is expected to support **border livelihoods and local economic activity**.

About Nathu La

1. **Location**: Sikkim, connecting India with China's **Tibet Autonomous Region**.
2. **Altitude**: About **4,310 metres** above sea level.
3. **Meaning**: In Tibetan, "**Nathu**" means "**listening ears**" and "**La**" means "**pass**."
4. It forms part of an offshoot of the **ancient Silk Route** and is strategically important in the eastern Himalayas.

Border Trade

1. Nathu La was **closed after the 1962 India–China War** and reopened for trade in **2006**.
2. The **1991 Memorandum on Resumption of Border**

Trade and 1992 Protocol on Entry and Exit Procedures provide the basic framework.

3. The **2003 Memorandum on Expanding Border Trade** specifically provided for using Nathu La for India–China trade.
4. It is one of India's **three designated border trade points** with China, alongside **Lipulekh (Uttarakhand)** and **Shipki La (Himachal Pradesh)**.
5. **Sherathang** is the Indian trade mart, while **Renqinggang** in Tibet is the designated mart for Indian traders.

8. Petermann Glacier

Context

Petermann Glacier in northwest Greenland calved a **76.4 sq. km ice island**.

About Petermann Glacier

1. **Location:** Northwest Greenland, east of the **Nares Strait**, a narrow sea passage between **Greenland and Ellesmere Island, Canada**.
2. It is a major glacier of the **Greenland Ice Sheet** that extends towards the **Arctic Ocean through a floating ice tongue**.
3. **Area:** About **1,295 sq. km**.
4. It is named after **August Heinrich Petermann**, a German cartographer.
5. **Calving** means the breaking away of ice from the front of a glacier, forming an iceberg or ice island.

Significance

1. **Ocean warming:** Warmer seawater can melt the floating ice tongue from below and weaken it.
2. **Ice-flow changes:** Changes in the floating ice tongue can affect the movement of ice from Greenland towards the ocean.
3. **Buttressing effect:** The floating ice tongue helps slow the movement of land-based ice towards the ocean. Its weakening can increase ice discharge.
4. **Sea-level rise:** Floating ice does not directly raise sea levels when it melts. However, the loss of **land-based ice** from Greenland contributes to global sea-level rise.

9. Vishnugad-Pipalkoti Hydroelectric Project (VPHEP)

Context

A landslide-triggered surge of water and debris entered an under-construction tunnel of the 444 MW Vishnugad-

Pipalkoti Hydroelectric Project (VPHEP) in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, killing seven workers.

About VPHEP

1. **Location:** Chamoli district, Uttarakhand.
2. **River:** Being developed on the **Alaknanda River**, a major tributary of the **Ganga**.
3. **Type:** **Run-of-the-river hydropower project**, which generates electricity using natural river flow with limited water storage.
4. **Installed Capacity:** **444 MW**, (4 units of 111 MW each).
5. **Purpose:** Provides **peaking power** to the **Northern Grid** during high-demand periods.
6. Expected annual generation is around **1,665 GWh** in a typical year.
7. **Developer:** **THDC India Ltd** (formerly Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Limited), a joint venture between the Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.
8. **Financing:** Supported by a **US\$648 million loan from the World Bank** (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

10. Dimna Lake: Jamshedpur's Historic Water Reservoir

Context

Dimna Lake, a major reservoir near **Jamshedpur, Jharkhand**, was among **25 Indian lakes** after which spectator galleries were named during the **80th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort, New Delhi**.

About Dimna Lake

1. **Location:** It is an **artificial reservoir** situated at the foothills of the **Dalma Hills**.
2. **Developer:** **Tata Steel** developed the reservoir under the **Dimna Nala Water Supply Scheme** to meet the long-term water needs of the growing industrial city.
3. **Construction:** Work began in **February 1940** and was completed in **1944**.
4. **Storage Capacity:** The reservoir was designed with a capacity of about **7,500 million gallons**.

Geographical and Ecological Features

1. The reservoir forms part of the **Dimna Nala water-supply system**, drawing on the **rain-fed catchments around the Dalma Hills**.

2. It is located close to the **Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary** and is surrounded by forested areas, giving the lake wider ecological significance.
3. **Subarnarekha River:** Dimna is a separate reservoir from the Subarnarekha. The reservoir was developed as a supplementary water-storage facility for periods when water levels in the Subarnarekha are low.

11. Subansiri River

Context

The **Subansiri River** in Arunachal Pradesh's **Upper Subansiri district** recently recorded an unusually high and strong flow despite no reported rainfall in the area, raising concerns among nearby communities.

About the Subansiri River

1. **Subansiri** is the **largest right-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra**, originating in **Tibet** and flowing through **Arunachal Pradesh and Assam**.
2. It is a **trans-Himalayan and antecedent river**, meaning its course existed before the **Himalayan uplift** and was maintained as the mountains rose.
3. It is called the **"Gold River"** due to the presence of **gold dust** in its waters.
4. **Course and Drainage**
 - a. **Origin:** Formed by the meeting of **Lokong Chu, Chayal Chu and Tsari Chu** on the **Tibetan Plateau**.
 - b. Flows about **170 km in Tibet** before entering India near **Taksing, Arunachal Pradesh**.
 - c. Passes through the **Miri Hills**, cutting deep gorges, and enters the **Assam Valley** at **Dulangmukh (Dhemaji)**.
5. Flows about **86 km through Assam**, passes near **Majuli**, and joins the **Brahmaputra** at **Jamurighat (Lakhimpur)**.

6. Its flow is mainly supported by **Tibetan snowmelt** and **southwest monsoon rainfall** in the Himalayan region, especially during **June–September**.
7. **Major Tributaries:** **Laro, Nye, Yume, Tsari, Kamla, Jiyadhol, Ranganadi and Dikrong**.

Hydropower Projects

1. Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project:

- a. It is a major **2000 MW run-of-the-river hydropower project** being developed by **National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)** on the river.
- b. It is located at **Gerukamukh**, near the **Arunachal Pradesh–Assam border**.
2. On completion, it is expected to become **India's largest hydroelectric power plant**.
3. **Oju Hydroelectric Project:** It is another major project proposed on the Subansiri River near **Taksing** in Arunachal Pradesh, close to the China border. It is planned as a **2,220 MW project**. The central government granted environmental clearance to the project in 2025.

Specific Concerns

1. **Seismic and landslide risks:** The river flows through a **seismically active, landslide-prone Himalayan region**, creating concerns over dam safety and slope stability.
2. **Downstream impacts:** The **Lower Subansiri Project** has raised concerns in Assam over **flood risks, sudden water releases, sediment flow, fish movement and livelihoods**.
3. **Sediment management:** High Himalayan sediment loads can be trapped by dams, affecting **river channels, aquatic ecosystems and floodplains** downstream.



SOCIETY AND CULTURE

1. Supreme Court Gender Sensitivity Report

Context

The **Supreme Court** has released a new report titled “**Judgments and Gender: Sensitivity and Compassion in Writing Judgments**”. It seeks to improve the treatment of **victims and witnesses**, particularly in cases involving women and gender-diverse persons.

The report builds on the **2023 Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes**, issued during the tenure of former CJI **D.Y. Chandrachud**. While the earlier handbook mainly addressed gender stereotypes in judicial language, the new report also focuses on **courtroom practices and the experiences of victims and witnesses**.

Background and Need for the New Report

The report followed the Supreme Court’s intervention in a **March 2025 Allahabad High Court judgment** concerning an alleged sexual assault. The High Court had treated certain acts as **preparation rather than an attempt to rape**. The Supreme Court subsequently took **suo motu cognisance** and set aside the judgment in **February 2026**.

The episode raised questions about whether existing guidance on gender-sensitive judicial language was sufficient. The Supreme Court consequently directed the **National Judicial Academy (NJA), Bhopal**, to develop more practical guidelines.

From Language Reform to Courtroom Practice

The main difference between the two documents lies in their scope:

1. The **2023 handbook** focused mainly on identifying and replacing **gender stereotypes and patriarchal expressions** in judicial reasoning and language.
2. The **2026 report** retains this focus but extends it to **courtroom conduct, victim support, privacy and witness treatment**.

The report emphasises that judicial decision-making in sensitive cases should combine **legal reasoning with empathy and sensitivity**.

Evidence-Based Approach

The new report gives greater importance to **empirical evidence**. Its recommendations draw upon:

1. An examination of **125 trial court judgments**.
2. Feedback from **judges, victims and witnesses**.
3. A finding that **80.7% of respondents were unaware of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018**.

These findings were used to identify practical difficulties faced by victims and witnesses and develop more responsive courtroom practices.

Compassionate Court Practices

A major feature of the report is its focus on preventing **secondary victimisation**, which refers to additional trauma caused by insensitive treatment during the justice process.

The recommendations include:

1. **Respectful treatment of witnesses:** Courts should avoid unnecessary delays, long waiting periods and discourteous treatment.
2. **Legal assistance:** Judges should ascertain whether victims have legal representation and, where necessary, direct the **District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)** to provide assistance.
3. **Support persons:** Appropriate support should be available to vulnerable victims, particularly **children**, from the early stages of the legal process.
4. **Pre-trial support:** Counselling may help victims manage anxiety before giving evidence.
5. **Sensitive courtroom arrangements:** Basic facilities such as seating and drinking water should be ensured, while unnecessary persons may be excluded during sensitive testimony.
6. **Controlled cross-examination:** Judges should prevent **indecent, scandalous or irrelevant questions**, including inappropriate questioning about a survivor’s sexual history.
7. **Privacy safeguards:** Measures such as **in-camera proceedings, confidentiality of identity and video-link testimony** may be used where appropriate.
8. The report also includes the **Victim Compensation Scheme, 2018** for ready reference.

Gender-Sensitive Judicial Language

1. The report continues to address problematic language but gives greater attention to **moralistic, dramatic and insensitive descriptions** of survivors.

2. It also asks judges to identify offensive expressions used in **local and regional languages**, recognising that gender-insensitive language can arise across India's diverse linguistic settings.
3. Thus, the approach is not limited to replacing individual words. It seeks to encourage judicial reasoning and expression that preserve the **dignity of victims and witnesses**.

Approach to Gender and Sexual Diversity

1. The report also expands its treatment of gender and sexual diversity through the **SOGIESC framework**, covering **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics**.
2. It encourages inclusive terminology and discourages derogatory expressions relating to transgender and intersex persons. The report also incorporates first-hand experiences of discrimination faced by a **transgender person** in the justice system.

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenges	Way Forward
Gender-insensitive reasoning may persist despite written guidelines.	Strengthen practical judicial training and continuous sensitisation.
Victims and witnesses may face anxiety, delays or insensitive courtroom treatment.	Ensure support persons, legal aid, counselling and dignified courtroom arrangements .
Inappropriate questioning can cause secondary victimisation.	Ensure effective judicial control over irrelevant, indecent or intimidating cross-examination .
Privacy concerns may arise during sensitive proceedings.	Use in-camera hearings, identity protection and video-link testimony where appropriate.
Gender-insensitive expressions may vary across regions and languages.	Include regional-language sensitivity in judicial training and guidance.
Vulnerable groups may remain unaware of available legal safeguards.	Improve awareness of mechanisms such as the Witness Protection Scheme and Victim Compensation Scheme .

Conclusion

The new Supreme Court report marks a broader approach to **gender-sensitive justice**. It moves beyond correcting judicial vocabulary to addressing the conduct and conditions experienced by victims and witnesses during court proceedings. By combining **empirical**

research, compassionate courtroom practices, privacy safeguards and inclusive language, the report seeks to strengthen **access to justice, dignity and fairness** within India's criminal justice system.

2. Lalit Kala Akademi: India's National Academy of Art

Context

The **Lalit Kala Akademi** celebrated its **72nd Foundation Day** recently at **Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi**. It functions as the **National Academy of Art** under the **Ministry of Culture**.

About Lalit Kala Akademi

1. **Established: 5th August 1954**; inaugurated by **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, the then Minister for Education.
2. **Headquarters: New Delhi**.
3. **Registration:** Registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**, on **11 March 1957**.
4. **Governance:** Functions through a **General Council, Executive Board and other committees**.
5. **Regional Centres:** **Chennai, Lucknow, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar and Garhi (New Delhi)**.

Key Functions

1. Promotes **Indian visual arts** through exhibitions, workshops, artists' camps, scholarships and publications.
2. Supports **research, documentation and preservation** of modern, contemporary, folk and tribal art.
3. Facilitates **international cultural exchange** and promotes Indian visual arts abroad.
4. Organises the **National Exhibition of Art**, a major annual event showcasing Indian visual art.

3. Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)

Context

The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, with **TRIFED** as a key implementing agency, is implementing the **Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)** to strengthen tribal livelihoods by improving the **value chain, entrepreneurship and market access** for **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)**, farm and non-farm products.

About PMJVM

1. PMJVM was introduced in **2021–22** as an integrated

framework to strengthen the marketing and institutional ecosystem for tribal products, particularly MFP.

2. The scheme guidelines were notified in **March 2023**.
3. It supports tribal enterprises through **skill development, infrastructure, processing, finance and market linkages**.
4. **TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India)** plays a central role in implementing the mission, including the **Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK)** component.

Key Features

1. **Price Support:** MSP has been notified for **87 MFPs/commodities**, helping protect tribal gatherers from distress sales.
2. **Value Addition:** Assistance is provided for **primary processing, packaging, branding and marketing** to increase the value of tribal produce.
3. **Capacity Building:** Producer groups receive support for **skills, processing infrastructure and equipment**.
4. **Financial and Logistical Support:** The mission facilitates access to **finance, storage, transportation and markets**.
5. **Diversified Livelihoods:** Its scope extends beyond MFP to include **farm and non-farm tribal products**.

Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK)

1. **VDVKs** organise tribal **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** into collective units for processing and marketing.
2. A typical VDKV consists of **15 SHGs**, with **20 beneficiaries in each**, covering around **300 beneficiaries**.
3. These centres undertake **aggregation, primary processing, value addition and marketing** of tribal products.
4. The model builds on the **Van Dhan Yojana**, launched in **2018** to create livelihood opportunities through better utilisation of forest and other local resources.

Significance

1. **Income Enhancement:** Value addition enables tribal producers to capture greater economic value from local resources.
2. **Enterprise Creation:** The mission encourages **community-based businesses** based on forest, farm and non-farm resources.
3. **Market Access:** Collective marketing helps tribal producers participate in **larger and organised**

markets.

4. **Skill Development:** Training improves capabilities in **sustainable collection, processing, packaging and marketing**.
5. **Women's Economic Participation:** VDKVs provide opportunities for **tribal women to engage in income-generating activities**.

Conclusion

PMJVM provides an institutional framework for converting **tribal resources and traditional skills into market-oriented enterprises**, thereby strengthening livelihoods and economic participation.

4. Dhimsa Dance

Context

More than **13,000 tribal women and girl students** performed **Dhimsa** at the **Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport, Bhogapuram, Andhra Pradesh**. **Guinness World Records** recognised the performance as the **"largest Dhimsa dance."**

About Dhimsa Dance

1. **Dhimsa** is a traditional tribal dance associated with several communities of **Andhra Pradesh**.
2. It is performed by the **Bagata, Valmiki, Poraja, Khond, Gadaba, Kondadora, Mukadora and Kotia** communities.
3. Its origin can be traced to the **Koraput region**, traditionally associated with the **Ghond tribe**.
4. The dance has **12 varieties**.

Key Features

1. **Occasions:** It is performed during **festivals, weddings and the hunting festival held in April**.
2. **Participants:** Women generally perform the dance in groups, while male community members provide musical accompaniment.
3. **Movement:** **Footwork and hand movements** dominate the performance. Dancers often move in coordinated circular formations.
4. **Musical accompaniment:** The main instruments are:
 - a. **Mori** – wind instrument
 - b. **Thudum** – drum
 - c. **Dappu** – percussion instrument
5. The pace and movements change according to the **rhythm of the music**.

Cultural Significance

1. Dhimsa incorporates elements of **mythology, folklore, social customs, economic activities, kinship and marital traditions**.
2. It provides a means of expressing and transmitting the **cultural practices and collective traditions** of tribal communities.

5. Cholanaikkan Tribe: Kerala's Cave-Dwelling Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group

Context

Members of the **Cholanaikkan Tribe** recently emerged from the forest to receive essential government documents during a special outreach programme organised by the **district administration in Kerala**.

About Cholanaikkan Tribe

The **Cholanaikkans** are an indigenous tribal community found **exclusively in the Nilambur Valley** of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve** in the **Western Ghats of Kerala**. They are classified as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)**.

The community identifies itself as **Malanaikan** or **Sholanaikan**, where 'Shola (Chola)' means **dense forest** and 'Naikan' means **king**. Popularly known as the "**Cavemen of Kerala**", they are regarded as one of **Asia's last surviving cave-dwelling indigenous communities**.

Lifestyle and Social Organisation

The tribe is characterised by the following features:

1. They reside in **rock shelters and caves**, locally known as **Kallulai** (*Kallu* – rock; *Aalai* – cave), generally situated near **streams and other water sources** and are regarded as one of **Asia's last surviving cave-dwelling indigenous communities**.
2. The community is organised into smaller social units called **Jenmam**.
3. They do not maintain permanent settlements and move within the forest according to their livelihood

needs.

4. Their primary livelihood is the **collection of forest produce**, and they rarely venture outside the forest.
5. They speak the **Cholanaikkan language**, which belongs to the **Dravidian language family**.

6. Shompen Tribe: A PVTG of Great Nicobar

Context

Tribal representatives have raised concerns over efforts by the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration** to integrate the **Shompen community** into a modern lifestyle.

About the Shompen

1. The **Shompen** inhabit the **tropical forests of Great Nicobar Island**.
2. They are classified as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** and are among India's most isolated indigenous communities.
3. Traditionally, they practise **semi-nomadic hunting and gathering**, living in small groups and depending largely on forest resources.
4. **Pandanus fruit (larop)** is an important part of their traditional diet.
5. They speak the **Shompen language**, which has several dialectal variations.

Society and Beliefs

1. The basic social unit is generally a **nuclear family** comprising parents and their unmarried children.
2. Families are generally **male-headed**, with senior men playing an important role in decision-making.
3. **Monogamy** is common, although **polygamy** is also reported.
4. In their traditional belief system, **Houou (the Moon)** is regarded as the **creator of the universe**.



HISTORY

1. Royal Indian Navy Mutiny of 1946

Context

The **Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny of 1946** was a major episode of anti-British unrest during the final phase of colonial rule. It reflected growing dissatisfaction among Indian personnel in the armed forces and raised concerns about the ability of the British to retain military control over India.

About the RIN Mutiny

1. The uprising began on **18th February 1946** at **HMIS Talwar in Bombay (now Mumbai)**, with Indian sailors protesting against **poor service conditions, racial discrimination and ill-treatment by British officers**.
2. It spread to naval establishments in **Karachi, Calcutta, Madras and Visakhapatnam**.
3. More than **20,000 sailors** associated with **78 ships and 20 shore establishments** participated in the movement.
4. The **Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC)** coordinated the uprising under **M. S. Khan and Madan Singh**.

Causes

1. **Racial discrimination:** Indian sailors faced unequal treatment, racial abuse and inferior status compared with British personnel.
2. **Poor service conditions:** **Inadequate food, low pay and poor living conditions** fuelled resentment.
3. **Post-war uncertainty:** Demobilisation after **World War II** created concerns about employment and future prospects.
4. **Impact of INA trials:** The trials of **Shah Nawaz Khan, P. K. Sahgal and G. S. Dhillon** at the Red Fort strengthened nationalist sentiment among Indian sailors. The defence was led by **Bhulabhai Desai**, supported by **Jawaharlal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Kailash Nath Katju and Asaf Ali**.
5. **Immediate trigger:** Insulting remarks and high-handed conduct by British officers at **HMIS Talwar** turned existing grievances into open revolt.
6. **Earlier unrest:** Episodes of dissatisfaction within the RIN during **1942–45** had already indicated declining morale.

Key Features

1. **Political demands:** The movement expanded beyond service grievances to demand the **release of INA prisoners** and withdrawal of Indian troops from **Indonesia**.
2. **Wireless communication:** Sailors used naval communication systems to coordinate the uprising across different establishments.
3. **Political unity:** **Congress, Muslim League and Communist Party** flags were displayed together, reflecting temporary unity among the participants.
4. **Civilian support:** **Workers, students and civilians in Bombay** supported the sailors through strikes, demonstrations and other forms of assistance.
5. **Wider military unrest:** Sections of the **Royal Indian Air Force and police** also expressed support, increasing British concerns about discipline within the armed forces.

Response and End of the Mutiny

1. **British action:** British forces used military force to suppress the uprising, resulting in casualties during clashes in Bombay.
2. **Political intervention:** **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Muhammad Ali Jinnah** urged the sailors to surrender to prevent further violence and preserve the political process.
3. **Communist support:** The **Communist Party of India (CPI)** and **Aruna Asaf Ali** supported the uprising.
4. **Surrender:** The sailors ended the strike and **surrendered on 23 February 1946**.
5. **Aftermath:** Many participants subsequently faced **dismissal and disciplinary action**.

Significance

1. **Military discontent:** The mutiny demonstrated that anti-colonial sentiment had reached sections of the **Indian armed forces**.
2. **Influence of INA nationalism:** It reflected the wider impact of the **INA trials** and public sympathy for INA personnel.
3. **Mass mobilisation:** Support from **workers, students and civilians** transformed a naval protest into a broader anti-British mobilisation in Bombay.

4. **British concerns:** The possibility of wider disaffection within the armed forces posed a serious challenge to the sustainability of British rule.
5. **Contribution to independence:** Along with the **INA trials, post-war unrest and political mobilisation**, the mutiny contributed to the broader crisis facing British authority in India.

Limitations

1. **Lack of unified leadership:** The movement did not have a single national political leadership directing its course.
2. **Short duration:** The uprising lasted only a few days and ended without achieving its principal demands.
3. **Limited political backing:** The **Congress and Muslim League did not support its continuation**, while the **CPI** provided stronger support.

Conclusion

The **RIN Mutiny of 1946** revealed the growing difficulty of maintaining unquestioned British authority over Indian armed personnel. Although short-lived, it demonstrated that **colonial rule could no longer depend with certainty on the loyalty of the forces essential to its survival**.

2. Tracing Ashoka in Ujjain

Context

The **Madhya Pradesh** government has begun fresh excavation at **Vaishya Tekri in Ujjain** to investigate Buddhist remains associated with the **Mauryan period**.

Vaishya Tekri and Archaeological Evidence

1. The main **Vaishya Tekri Stupa** is about **350 feet wide at the base and 100 feet high**, making it considerably larger than the **54-foot Sanchi Stupa**.
2. Excavations in **1938–39** by the Archaeology Department of the erstwhile **Gwalior State** unearthed **large bricks and punch-marked coins**, leading to its attribution to the **Mauryan period**.
3. Historians caution that these findings do not conclusively establish a direct **Ashokan connection**, as the earlier excavation records and interpretations require reassessment.
4. The nearby **Kumhar Tekri** is also important for understanding the archaeological landscape of ancient Ujjain.

Ashoka and Ujjain

1. **Ujjain (ancient Ujjayini)** was the capital of **Avanti** and an important commercial centre connecting

Pataliputra with western coastal ports.

2. Ashoka is believed to have served as **viceroy of Avanti**, with Ujjain as his administrative base before becoming emperor.
3. Some **Ashokan edicts** refer to a *kumara* (prince) stationed at Ujjain, providing evidence of the city's association with the Mauryan administration.
4. Tradition associates Ashoka with **Devi of Vidisha** and identifies **Mahinda and Sanghamitta** as their children.
5. However, no **Ashokan pillar or inscription** has been found at Ujjain, limiting direct archaeological evidence of his presence.

Buddhist and Historical Associations

1. Local tradition connects **Vaishya Tekri with Devi**, while **Kumhar Tekri** has a different historical association.
2. The Chinese traveller **Xuanzang**, who visited Ujjain in the 7th century CE, described a site associated with an alleged **“hellish prison” linked to Ashoka**.
3. Excavations at Kumhar Tekri have revealed a **3rd-century BCE burial-cum-cremation site**, providing material evidence from the period associated with Ashoka.

Conclusion

The Vaishya Tekri excavation provides an opportunity to **reassess Ujjain's Mauryan past through new archaeological evidence**. A wider investigation can help distinguish established historical facts from later traditions and strengthen the understanding of **ancient Malwa's Buddhist heritage**.

3. Golconda Fort: A Historic Deccan Stronghold

Context

The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** recently clarified that a structure discovered near **Golconda Fort, Hyderabad**, is **not a tunnel** but a small **rectangular granite chamber**.

About Golconda Fort

1. **Location:** Western outskirts of **Hyderabad, Telangana**.
2. The name comes from the Telugu **“Golla Konda”**, meaning **“Shepherd's Hill.”**
3. Its origins are generally traced to the **12th-century Kakatiya period**.

4. The fort was later expanded under the **Qutb Shahi dynasty**, which emerged after **Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk** declared independence from the **Bahmani Sultanate in 1518**.
5. It remained the **Qutb Shahi capital until 1591**, when the capital shifted to Hyderabad.
6. **Aurangzeb** captured Golconda in **1687** after a prolonged siege, bringing it under Mughal rule.

Architecture

1. The original **mud fortification** was gradually transformed into a massive stronghold with an outer wall of about **10 km**.
2. Built around a **400-foot-high granite hill**, the fort has **three concentric defensive enclosures** incorporating masonry and natural boulders.
3. It contains **8 gateways and 87 bastions**, with the latter reportedly reaching **50–60 feet** in height.
4. **Fateh Darwaza** is noted for its **acoustic engineering**, allowing sound to be transmitted between designated points.
5. The complex includes **palaces, mosques, halls, parade grounds and residential quarters**.
6. The nearby **Qutb Shahi tombs** contain the mausoleums of the dynasty's rulers.

4. Kalaburagi Fort: A Bahmani-Era Heritage Landmark

Context

A proposal seeking **₹20 crore** for the **conservation and rejuvenation of Kalaburagi Fort** has been submitted to the **Union Ministry of Culture** for approval.

About Kalaburagi Fort

1. **Location:** Kalaburagi, Karnataka, formerly known as Gulbarga.
2. The fort is **traditionally attributed to Raja Gulchand**, a feudatory of the **Kakatiya dynasty**, and is believed to date to the **12th century**.
3. It was later expanded and strengthened under **Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah**, founder of the **Bahmani Sultanate**.
4. **Kalaburagi served as the first capital of the Bahmani Sultanate** before the capital was shifted to Bidar.

Architecture and Key Features

1. The fort combines **Hindu and Islamic architectural**

elements, reflecting the cultural influences of different ruling powers.

2. Its defensive layout includes **concentric walls, bastions and fortified gateways**.
3. The complex contains **mosques, palaces, tombs and other structures**, built mainly with **granite and limestone**.
4. It is noted for **15 towers and 26 guns**. Some of the guns are about **8 metres long** and remain preserved within the fort.

5. Medak Fort: A Kakatiya-Era Heritage Site in Telangana

Context

The **Department of Posts** recently issued a **commemorative postal cover and stamp** featuring the historic **Medak Fort**.

About Medak Fort

1. **Location:** Medak town, Telangana.
2. The hill fort is believed to date to the **12th century** and is associated with the reign of **Kakatiya ruler Pratapa Rudra**.
3. It was originally known as **Methuku Durgam**.
4. The fort later served as a **strategic military position** under the **Kakatiyas and Qutb Shahis**.

Key Features

1. The **fort complex covers nearly 100 acres** and contains a **small lake, barracks, warehouse and granaries**.
2. It also houses an approximately **11-foot-long cannon** dating to the **17th century**.
3. Its three major gateways are:
 - a. **Prathama Dwaram**
 - b. **Simha Dwaram**, featuring lion sculptures
 - c. **Gaja Dwaram**, featuring elephant motifs
4. The main gateway displays the **Gandabherundam**, a two-headed mythical bird associated with the **Vijayanagara tradition**.
5. A **17th -century mosque** associated with the **Qutb Shahi period** is located within the fort complex.



SCHEMES IN NEWS

1. Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) Scheme

Context

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has removed the requirement to submit **physical duty-payment challans** while applying for an **Export Obligation Discharge Certificate (EODC)** under the **Advance Authorisation and EPCG Schemes**.

About the EPCG Scheme

The **Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) Scheme** is a trade-promotion measure of the Government of India that facilitates the import of **capital goods at zero customs duty**, subject to fulfilment of the prescribed export obligation.

The scheme was operationalised on **1 April 2015** and is administered by the **DGFT** under India's **Foreign Trade Policy**.

Its objective is to enable exporters to access capital goods required for producing **quality goods and services** and thereby improve India's manufacturing and export competitiveness.

Key Features

- Zero customs duty:** Eligible capital goods can be imported at zero customs duty for **pre-production, production and post-production** activities.
- Coverage:** The scheme covers **manufacturer exporters**, with or without supporting manufacturers; **merchant exporters** tied to supporting manufacturers; and **service providers**.
- Export obligation:** Beneficiaries must fulfil the prescribed export obligation to avail the duty benefit.
- Second-hand goods:** **Second-hand goods of any nature are not permitted** under the scheme.
- Administration:** The scheme is implemented by the **DGFT**, under the **Foreign Trade Policy**.

2. Foreign Assets of Small Taxpayers – Disclosure Scheme (FAST-DS)

Context

The **Government** has notified **FAST-DS**, a **one-time voluntary disclosure scheme** under **Chapter IV** of the **Finance Act, 2026**.

Key Features

- Enables eligible taxpayers to disclose specified **undisclosed foreign assets, undisclosed foreign income, or undeclared foreign assets** by paying the prescribed **tax or fee**.
- Covers **immovable property, jewellery, artworks, shares, securities** and other foreign assets/income.
- Nodal Agency:** **Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)**.
- It has **two categories**:
 - Category 1 – Undisclosed Foreign Assets/Income**
 - Covers assets/income **not previously offered to tax**, with aggregate value up to **₹1 crore**.
 - taxpayers need to pay **30% tax + 30% additional income tax** in lieu of penalty in order to get immunity from prosecution.
 - Category 2 – Non-Reporting of Declared Assets**
 - Covers foreign assets that were **already taxed** or acquired while the taxpayer was a **non-resident**, but were not reported in the relevant tax-return schedule.
 - Threshold: **₹5 crore**.
 - Payment: **₹1 lakh fee** in order to get immunity from **penalty and prosecution**.

Legal Protection

Valid declarations provide specified immunity to taxpayers from any further tax or penalty and from prosecution under the **Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015**.

3. Friends of MY Bharat Initiative

Context

The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports** has launched the **Friends of MY Bharat initiative** to connect **Indian-origin youth living abroad** with India's youth programmes and avenues for participation.

About the Initiative

- The initiative has been developed through the **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** digital platform.
- It is aimed at **Indian-origin students, young professionals and other youth residing outside India**.
- The platform connects **government institutions, educational institutions, non-profit organisations**

and industry to facilitate youth-oriented opportunities.

Key Features

1. **Programme Access:** Provides information on MY Bharat activities, youth programmes and volunteering opportunities.
2. **Volunteer Engagement:** Covers areas such as education, environmental protection, health awareness, disaster relief and cultural preservation.
3. **Know Your India:** Offers curated information on India's history, culture, heritage, tourism, travel and prominent personalities.

Significance

1. **Global outreach:** Extends India's youth-engagement framework to Indian-origin youth outside the country.
2. **Knowledge exchange:** Creates an avenue for overseas youth to share their skills and experiences through relevant programmes.
3. **Cultural connect:** The Know Your India section promotes awareness of India's history, heritage and cultural diversity.
4. **Developmental participation:** Provides overseas youth with avenues to engage in volunteering and nation-building activities.

Conclusion

The initiative gives India's youth-engagement framework a global dimension, creating a structured link between overseas Indian youth and opportunities associated with India.

4. Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP)

Context

The Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP) is operational across all 36 States/UTs and 751 districts, including 44 linked districts.

About PMNDP

1. PMNDP was rolled out on 7th April 2016 under the National Health Mission (NHM) to improve access to haemodialysis services through district hospitals and other health facilities.
2. The programme provides free dialysis services to eligible poor patients, with the Centre providing technical and financial support to States/UTs under NHM.
3. Dialysis centres are approved based on State/UT proposals and healthcare-gap assessments prepared under their annual Programme Implementation Plans (PIPs).

Key Features

1. **Haemodialysis (HD):** Blood is filtered outside the body using a dialysis machine.
2. **Peritoneal Dialysis (PD):** The peritoneum, or abdominal lining, acts as a natural filtering membrane. It can support home-based treatment for suitable patients.
3. **Service models:** HD centres operate through PPP, in-house and hybrid models, based on State/UT requirements.
4. **PMNDP Portal:** Launched on 5 May 2022, it integrates dialysis centres, supports a renal registry and facilitates portability through One Nation–One Dialysis.
5. **State/UT role:** States/UTs are responsible for the timely operationalisation of centres and deployment of trained manpower, including dialysis technicians.

5. SAMRIDH Programme- Supporting India's Technology Start-ups

Context

1. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) recently provided an update on the SAMRIDH Programme in Parliament.
2. 43 accelerators across 16 States have been selected under the programme, supporting 373 start-ups, of which 241 have secured matching funding.

About SAMRIDH

1. SAMRIDH stands for Startup Accelerator of MeitY for Product Innovation, Development and Growth and was launched in August 2021.
2. The programme aims to help selected accelerators identify and scale promising IT-based start-ups.
3. It targets around 300 technology start-ups and focuses on areas such as Health-tech, Ed-tech, Agri-tech, Consumer-tech, Fin-tech, Software as a Service (SaaS) and sustainability.

Key Features

1. **Accelerator-led support:** Start-ups receive mentoring, customer linkages, investor access and opportunities to enter international markets.
2. **Financial assistance:** Selected accelerators receive ₹2 lakh per start-up, while eligible start-ups can receive matching funding of up to ₹40 lakh.
3. **Implementation:** MeitY Start-up Hub (MSH), an Independent Business Division of Digital India Corporation (DIC), monitors and evaluates participating accelerators and start-ups.



ETHICS

1. Media Trials and Public Morality

Context

The rise of 24×7 news, social media and AI-generated content has increased the speed and reach of information, but also raised concerns over media trials, misinformation and reputational harm.

The Supreme Court has emphasised responsible police-media communication to protect fair trial, investigation integrity and presumption of innocence. The Press Council of India stress accuracy, fairness and restraint, cautioning against sensationalism and parallel trials.

Meaning

Media trial means sensational or biased reporting of an ongoing case that shapes public opinion about a person's guilt or innocence before the court gives its verdict, making the media act like a "judge and jury."

Public morality refers to society's understanding of right and wrong. However, in a democracy, public opinion must not override constitutional morality, rule of law, due process, fairness and human dignity.

The ethical challenge is to balance freedom of expression with responsibility, truth, impartiality, privacy and presumption of innocence, so that the media informs rather than prejudices.

"Justice must not be determined by the loudest public opinion, but by evidence and due process."

Stakeholders and Ethical Responsibilities

Stakeholder	Ethical responsibility
Media/Journalists	Accuracy, verification, impartiality and accountability
Accused	Protection of dignity, privacy and presumption of innocence
Victims	Dignity and protection from secondary victimisation
Judiciary	Independent and evidence-based adjudication
Police/Investigating agencies	Fact-based communication without compromising investigation
Government	Transparent communication while protecting due process
Citizens	Critical consumption of information and avoidance of mob justice

Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

- Freedom of expression vs. responsibility:** Article 19(1)(a) protects free speech, but it must be exercised with accuracy, responsibility and accountability, avoiding misinformation, prejudice and unjust harm.
Freedom of expression + responsibility + accountability = ethical journalism
- Presumption of innocence vs. public demand for justice:** Public opinion cannot decide guilt; media trials may make a person "guilty in the public eye" before the court decides, undermining fairness and due process.
- Public interest vs. privacy:** Reporting matters of genuine public interest is justified, but unnecessary disclosure can violate privacy, dignity and human rights.
a. Public interest ≠ public curiosity
- Truth vs. sensationalism:** Pressure for TRPs, clicks and views may promote exaggeration, speculation and selective reporting, creating a conflict between truth and commercial interests.
a. Journalistic truth-seeking ↔ commercial incentives
- Media accountability vs. judicial independence:** Media can expose institutional failures, but should not become a parallel court or influence investigations, witnesses and judicial decisions. *Media scrutiny must complement, not replace, due process.*

Constitutional Morality vs. Public Morality

Media trials highlight the conflict between popular sentiment and constitutional values.

- Constitutional morality:** Based on Article 19(1) (a) (free speech) and Article 21 (life, liberty and dignity), along with rule of law, due process, fair trial, presumption of innocence and judicial independence.
- Public morality:** Often driven by public outrage, emotions, social expectations and demand for immediate punishment, sometimes without complete facts.

Ethical concern: When popular opinion replaces evidence and due process, it can undermine justice, fairness and individual dignity.

"Public opinion may influence democratic discourse, but it cannot determine judicial guilt."

Ethical Perspectives

- Deontological Ethics – Immanuel Kant:** Treat every person as an end, not a means. Journalism must

protect **dignity, privacy and rights**, irrespective of TRP or commercial interests.

2. **Utilitarianism:** Judge media reporting by its **consequences**. Responsible reporting promotes **public awareness and accountability**, while sensationalism can cause **misinformation, reputational harm, mob justice and loss of institutional trust**. The aim should be **maximum public good with minimum avoidable harm**.
3. **Virtue Ethics:** Ethical journalism requires **integrity, objectivity, fairness, courage, empathy and restraint**—the courage to expose wrongdoing and the restraint to avoid **unverified claims**.
4. **Gandhian Ethics – Satya & Ahimsa:** Reporting should uphold **truth and non-violence**. False or inflammatory content can cause **social and reputational harm**; therefore, **ethical means are as important as the end**.

Positive Role of Media

1. **Watchdog Function:** Exposes **corruption, abuse of power and institutional failures**.
2. **Voice to the Vulnerable:** Highlights the concerns of **victims and marginalised groups**, promoting **justice and dignity**.
3. **Public Accountability:** Strengthens **transparency and accountability** of public institutions.
4. **Informed Public Opinion:** Provides citizens with information for **reasoned and responsible democratic participation**.
5. **Institutional Reform:** Public scrutiny can expose systemic gaps and encourage **corrective action and reform**.

Examples: The 2G Spectrum case, Commonwealth Games (CWG) scam and Nirbhaya case demonstrate how sustained media attention can bring **public accountability, institutional failures and issues of justice** into wider public focus.

Ethical principle: Media scrutiny should **serve public interest and strengthen accountability**, but must not replace **due process or judicial adjudication**.

Emerging Challenge: Social Media and AI

1. **Digital Media Trials:** Viral hashtags, edited videos, anonymous allegations and influencer narratives can shape public opinion without verified facts.
2. **AI-Enabled Misinformation:** Deepfakes and AI-generated audio/video can spread false narratives and cause **reputational harm**.
3. **Algorithmic Amplification:** Platforms may amplify **emotion-driven and sensational content**, increasing outrage and polarisation.
4. **Speed vs. Accuracy:** The pressure for instant updates can compromise **verification, truth and objectivity**.

5. **Lasting Harm:** Once misinformation goes viral, later corrections may not fully restore a person's **reputation, privacy and dignity**.

Ethical response: Promote **digital literacy, fact-checking, source verification, responsible content sharing and platform accountability**.

Ethical Guidelines for Responsible Journalism

The Press Council of India emphasise:

1. **Accuracy & Fairness:** Report verified facts without bias or sensationalism.
2. **Verification:** Check information before publication and separate **facts from speculation**.
3. **Privacy & Dignity:** Protect personal information and avoid unnecessary harm.
4. **Right to Reply:** Give concerned persons a fair opportunity to present their side.
5. **Judicial Sensitivity:** Avoid reporting that may create **prejudice or influence ongoing proceedings**.
6. **No Media Trial:** Do not conduct a **parallel trial** or declare anyone guilty before judicial determination.

Ethical principle: *“Report facts, not verdicts.”*

Way Forward

1. **Self-Regulation:** Strengthen **editorial codes, ethics and grievance redressal**.
2. **Fact-Checking:** Ensure **verification, accuracy and distinction between allegation and fact**.
3. **Protect Dignity:** Safeguard **privacy, reputation and presumption of innocence**.
4. **Police–Media Protocol:** Ensure **transparent but responsible communication** without affecting fair trial.
5. **Digital Responsibility:** Promote **media literacy, fact-checking and AI-based deepfake detection**.
6. **Constitutional Morality:** Prioritise **objectivity, due process and public interest** over sensationalism and populism.

Conclusion

A free media is essential for **transparency, accountability and informed citizenship**, but **media trial can undermine fairness, dignity and rule of law**. The ethical objective should therefore be neither **“media without restrictions”** nor **“media without freedom”**, but **“responsible freedom”**—balancing **freedom of expression with ethical responsibility**.

“Media informs → Public deliberates → Judiciary adjudicates.”

Thus, **truth, restraint, constitutional morality and due process** must guide journalism so that **public opinion supports justice rather than replacing it**.



PLACES IN NEWS

Place	Context	Key Highlights
1. Philippines	The enhanced Southwest Monsoon (Habagat) and tropical cyclones have affected more than 3.8 lakh people across eight regions of the Philippines.	1. The Philippines is an archipelagic country in Southeast Asia, located in the western Pacific Ocean, with Manila as its capital. 2. Surrounding water bodies: South China Sea to the north and west, Philippine Sea to the east, Celebes Sea to the south and Sulu Sea to the southwest. 3. Climate: Predominantly tropical and monsoonal. 4. Highest peak: Mount Apo. 5. Longest river: Cagayan River. 6. Other major rivers: Mindanao and Agusan. 7. Largest lake: Laguna de Bay. 8. Major volcanoes: Mayon, Bulusan and Kanlaon. 9. Major resources: Nickel, cobalt, copper, gold and silver, along with petroleum and timber. 10. The Philippines ranks third globally in geothermal power capacity, after the United States and Indonesia.
2. Namibia	The Fourth Session of the India-Namibia Joint Trade Committee (JTC) was recently held in New Delhi.	1. Location: Namibia is located in southwestern Africa and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west. 2. Neighbouring Countries: It shares land borders with Angola and Zambia in the north, Botswana in the east, and South Africa in the south and southeast. Key Geographical Features 1. Physiography: Namibia can broadly be divided into three zones from west to east: a. Namib Desert: A coastal desert along the Atlantic Ocean. b. Central Plateau: An elevated region in the interior. c. Kalahari: Extends across the eastern part of the country. 2. Major Rivers: The country is associated with the Kunene, Okavango, Mashi, Zambezi and Orange river systems. 3. Highest Mountain: Brandberg (Mount Brand) is Namibia's highest mountain and lies along the western escarpment of the Central Plateau. Natural Resources: Namibia is rich in uranium, lithium, graphite and manganese.

3. Liberia	Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annpurna Devi met a parliamentary delegation from Liberia in New Delhi	Location: West Africa, along the Atlantic Ocean. Capital: Monrovia. Borders: Sierra Leone to the northwest, Guinea to the north and Côte d'Ivoire to the east. Historical significance: Liberia became independent in 1847 and is Africa's oldest republic. It was established as a settlement for freed African Americans and was not formally colonised by a European power. Climate: Tropical, characterised by high temperatures and substantial rainfall. Highest point: Mount Wuteve in northwestern Liberia. Major rivers: Mano River and Cavalla River, which form parts of Liberia's international boundaries. Mineral resources: Iron ore, gold, diamonds and manganese.
4. Panama	Recently, India and Panama held bilateral talks to strengthen cooperation in maritime security, logistics, skill development, and digital transformation.	- Panama is a Central American country located on the Isthmus of Panama, linking North and South America. - It shares borders with Costa Rica (west) and Colombia (southeast), and is bounded by the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. - Panama City is the capital and largest city. Physical Features - The Cordillera Central forms the country's principal mountain range. - Lake Gatun which is an artificial lake, is integral to the operation of the Panama Canal. - The Tuira River is the longest river in Panama. - Panama has a predominantly tropical climate, while the highlands experience subtropical conditions. Natural Resources - Major mineral resources include gold, copper, manganese, and iron. Strategic Significance - Its location between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans makes Panama a key hub for global maritime trade and international shipping.

5. Egypt	A magnitude 5.4 earthquake was recently reported off Egypt.	Geographical Features 1. Location: Northeastern Africa; the Sinai Peninsula extends into Asia, making Egypt transcontinental. 2. Borders: Libya (west), Sudan (south), and Israel and the Gaza Strip (northeast). 3. Water bodies: Mediterranean Sea (north), Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba (east). 4. Capital: Cairo. 5. Terrain: Predominantly arid desert, with fertile Nile Valley and Delta. 6. River: The Nile flows south to north through Egypt. 7. Highest peak: Mount Catherine (2,642 m). 8. Natural resources: Petroleum, natural gas, phosphates and iron ore.
6. Belgium	The first India–Belgium Strategic Dialogue was recently held in Brussels to strengthen bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, technology, defence, and strategic affairs.	Location 1. Belgium is a country in Western Europe. It shares land borders with the Netherlands (north), Germany (east), Luxembourg (southeast), and France (southwest). It is bounded by the North Sea to the northwest. 2. Brussels is the capital city of Belgium. Political Significance 1. Belgium is one of the founding members of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). 2. Brussels hosts the headquarters of NATO and European Union (EU). Physiography 1. Belgium has three major physiographic regions: a. Coastal Plain in the northwest. b. Central Plateau, covering most of the country's interior. c. Ardenne Uplands in the southeast, known for their forests and hilly terrain. 2. Botrange is the highest point in Belgium, with an elevation of 694 metres (2,276 feet) above sea level. Drainage 1. The Scheldt, Meuse, and Yser are the three major rivers of Belgium. 2. Major lakes include Lake Genval, Lake Gileppe, Lake Eupen, and Lake Robertville. Natural Resources Belgium possesses important mineral and industrial resources, including limestone, cobalt, copper, iron and steel, lead, nitrogen (ammonia), tin, and zinc.



ESSAY

1. When Two Elephants Fight, It Is the Grass That Gets Trampled

Conflict is as old as human society. Individuals compete for recognition, families struggle over authority, institutions defend their jurisdictions, nations pursue power, and ideologies seek dominance. Competition can be constructive, but when the powerful turn their disagreements into prolonged confrontation, the consequences rarely remain confined to them. They spill over onto those who have neither caused the conflict nor possess the power to control it.

This is the deeper meaning of the proverb, **“When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.”** The elephants represent powerful actors—states, institutions, corporations, political groups or individuals—while the grass represents the vulnerable: ordinary citizens, workers, children, minorities, communities and ecosystems. The proverb is therefore not an argument against strength or competition. It is a warning against the irresponsible exercise of power, where the costs of confrontation are shifted onto those least capable of bearing them.

History repeatedly demonstrates this pattern. The **Kalinga War** illustrates how rivalry between powerful states can ultimately be paid for by ordinary people. The immense human suffering associated with the war transformed Ashoka’s understanding of kingship and encouraged a greater emphasis on Dhamma, welfare and non-violence. Similarly, prolonged Mughal-Rajput conflicts imposed costs on soldiers, peasants and local communities, while Akbar’s later policy of accommodation and political integration demonstrated that power could also be exercised through cooperation rather than perpetual confrontation.

At the same time, history shows that the trampling of the grass is not inevitable. **Gandhi’s non-violent freedom struggle** challenged a powerful colonial state while deliberately limiting the destructive consequences of political resistance. **Nelson Mandela’s reconciliation-oriented approach** after apartheid sought to prevent political victory from becoming another cycle of revenge. The **Cuban Missile Crisis** similarly demonstrated how restraint by powerful adversaries can protect humanity from the consequences of their own confrontation. Kennedy and Khrushchev eventually chose negotiation over escalation, reminding the world that responsible leadership sometimes consists not in winning a contest, but in preventing catastrophe.

The proverb also operates beyond the battlefield. Nature itself offers an analogy. Tectonic plates may collide deep beneath the earth, but earthquakes destroy homes and livelihoods at the surface. Floods become disasters not merely because of rainfall, but because vulnerable settlements, inadequate drainage and weak infrastructure expose people to their consequences. Desertification places the greatest burden on farmers and pastoralists who have contributed least to the larger processes driving environmental degradation. Coastal communities similarly face erosion and sea-level rise despite having little control over the global forces behind them.

The same logic appears within society. A dispute between parents may leave children carrying the emotional burden. Generational disagreements can damage relationships even when younger and older members are equally convinced of their positions. Excessive competition for academic prestige can turn students into casualties of parental and institutional expectations. Caste and class conflicts often impose their harshest costs on marginalised groups, while communal polarisation can convert political and ideological competition into mistrust, segregation and violence. Even conflicts between management and labour, or between competing visions of urban development, can make workers and informal communities bear the consequences of decisions over which they have little influence.

Politics provides perhaps the clearest institutional expression of the proverb. Federal disputes over resources may eventually affect farmers and citizens. Prolonged confrontation between constitutional authorities can delay governance and welfare delivery. Parliamentary disruption, when political competition overwhelms legislative deliberation, makes the public the indirect casualty because laws requiring scrutiny and policies requiring attention remain pending. The deeper danger is that institutions designed to balance power can themselves become arenas of power struggle.

The experience of the **1975–77 Emergency** is an important reminder of what happens when political confrontation becomes concentrated power. The conflict between political authority and democratic dissent affected civil liberties, press freedom and institutional autonomy. The lesson is not merely historical: wherever checks and balances weaken,

ordinary citizens become increasingly dependent on the restraint of those who possess power.

Economic conflicts follow the same pattern, although their effects may appear less dramatic. The **US-China trade and technology rivalry** has consequences extending beyond governments to companies, consumers and global supply chains. Competition over semiconductors can influence the availability and price of electronic products across countries. The oil shocks of the 1970s showed how geopolitical tensions could become inflation and economic hardship for people far removed from the original dispute. Likewise, when economic reforms collide with the realities of a cash-dependent informal economy, as seen during **demonetisation**, the adjustment burden can fall disproportionately on small businesses and workers.

International relations make the proverb even more consequential because the “grass” can comprise entire countries and populations. The **Cold War** was primarily a contest between two superpowers, yet proxy conflicts devastated smaller states. The Russia-Ukraine war has similarly shown how strategic confrontation translates into civilian deaths, displacement and food and energy insecurity. Rivalry in the South China Sea affects smaller states, fishermen and regional trade. India-China and India-Pakistan tensions also have implications for border populations, soldiers, economic exchanges and regional development. In such situations, strategic calculations made at the highest level can produce immediate consequences at ground level.

Technological progress introduces a modern version of the same dilemma. The competition to develop increasingly capable **artificial intelligence** can create enormous benefits, but artists and creators may face questions of consent, copyright and livelihood. Facial-recognition technologies can improve security while simultaneously creating risks to privacy and civil liberties. Social-media platforms competing for attention can amplify misinformation, polarisation and unhealthy engagement. Nuclear technology provides perhaps the most powerful example: scientific achievement can coexist with an arms race in which humanity itself becomes the potential casualty. The **Chernobyl disaster** further demonstrated how institutional pressure and failures of safety can convert technological capability into long-term harm for communities and ecosystems.

Environmental conflicts make the asymmetry particularly stark. The contest between economic expansion and ecological protection is often presented as a choice between development and conservation. Yet the consequences of that contest are rarely distributed equally. Mining, infrastructure and agricultural expansion can threaten forests and indigenous communities. The **Amazon** and **Western Ghats** illustrate the tension between economic interests and ecological security. The **Narmada Valley** experience revealed how development projects could impose displacement and ecological costs on communities that did not necessarily receive the full benefits of development. Similarly, industrial disasters such as **Bhopal** and **Minamata** demonstrate the devastating consequences when production and profit are pursued without adequate safeguards.

Climate change perhaps represents the proverb on a planetary scale. Historically, economic growth in major economies has depended heavily on resource-intensive development, while many vulnerable countries and communities contribute relatively little to cumulative emissions yet face severe risks from warming, extreme weather and sea-level rise. The issue is therefore not simply environmental; it is also one of **intergenerational and global justice**. The present generation’s choices can impose costs on people who have neither participated in those decisions nor yet been born.

Yet the proverb should not be interpreted as suggesting that the weak must remain passive. **Individuals and institutions can exercise moral agency even when confronted by powerful systems.** Stanislav Petrov’s decision during the 1983 false nuclear-warning incident illustrates how individual judgement and restraint can interrupt dangerous institutional momentum. Whistleblowers can expose corruption despite retaliation. Oskar Schindler used his position and resources to protect vulnerable Jewish workers during the Holocaust. Socrates accepted the consequences of his convictions rather than abandon his principles. These examples show that power is not always determined solely by position; moral courage can create a counterweight to institutional power.

This also provides an important counterargument: **not every conflict tramples the grass.** Competition can generate innovation, efficiency and progress. The US-USSR space rivalry, despite its strategic origins, accelerated developments that later benefited communication, weather forecasting and satellite technology. Geopolitical competition can similarly create opportunities for countries capable of pursuing strategic autonomy. ASEAN’s diversified external partnerships and India’s efforts to attract investment amid US-China competition demonstrate that smaller actors can sometimes convert rivalry among larger powers into strategic opportunity.

More importantly, the grass can cease to be merely grass. **Strong institutions, collective action and democratic**

participation can transform vulnerable stakeholders into agents of change. India's freedom struggle converted ordinary citizens from passive subjects into participants in the political process. Civil society, courts, free media and constitutional institutions can constrain the powerful and give voice to those otherwise excluded. Institutions that ensure representation, accountability and access to justice can therefore alter the very structure described by the proverb.

The real challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict. Differences of interest are inevitable in a complex society. The objective is to **civilise conflict**—to ensure that disagreement is mediated through dialogue, law, negotiation and institutions rather than allowed to become destructive confrontation. As Gandhi warned, **“An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.”**

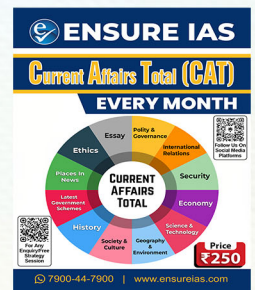
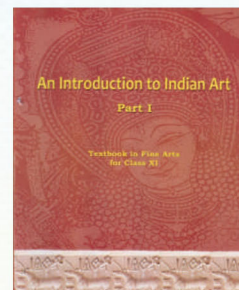
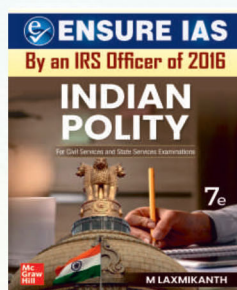
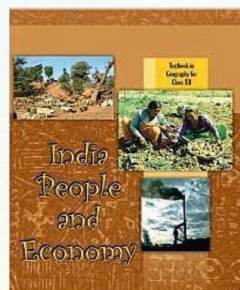
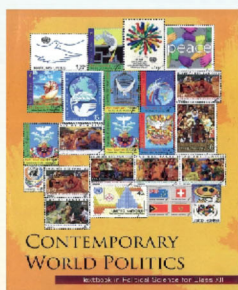
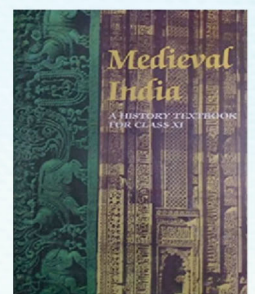
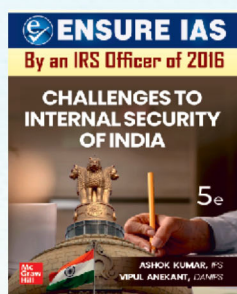
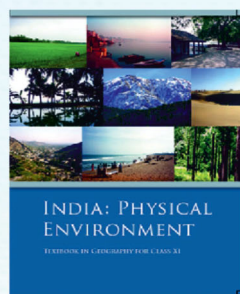
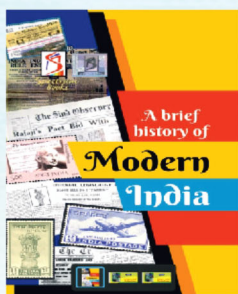
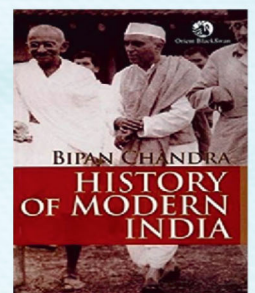
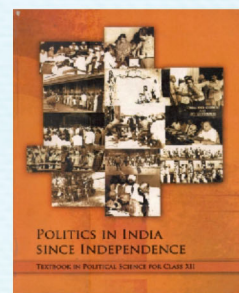
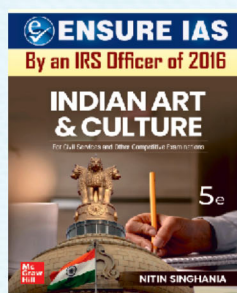
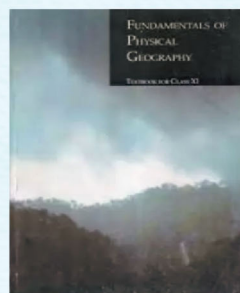
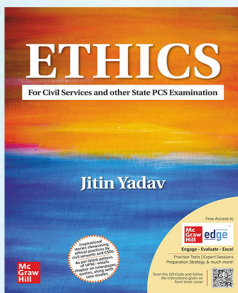
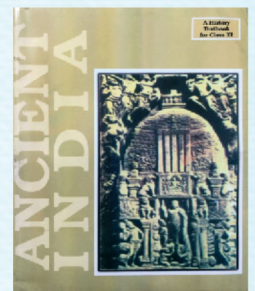
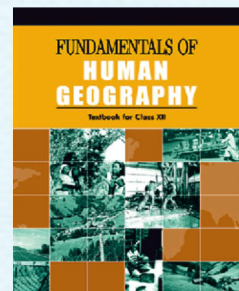
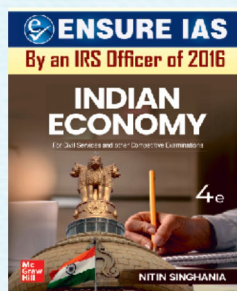
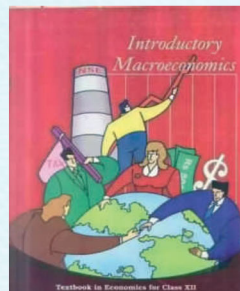
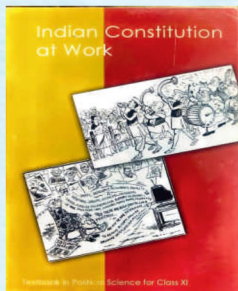
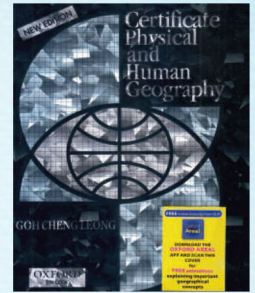
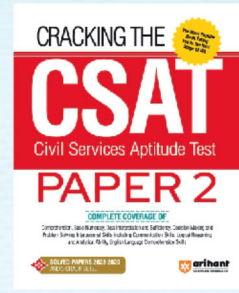
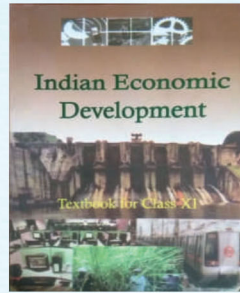
A mature society does not judge power merely by its ability to defeat an opponent. It judges power by its capacity to protect those who stand outside the contest. Democratic institutions must strengthen checks and balances; governments must pursue inclusive development; businesses must internalise social and environmental costs; technological innovation must be accompanied by ethical safeguards; and international relations must leave space for negotiation and mutual restraint.

Ultimately, the proverb is a profound statement about **the ethics of power**. The strongest will always possess greater capacity to shape events, but that capacity also creates greater responsibility. Conflict may be unavoidable; **collateral suffering is not**. The measure of civilisation is not whether elephants can win their battles, but whether they can learn to fight without destroying the ground on which everyone stands. **True power begins when strength ceases to exploit vulnerability and starts protecting it.**

NOTES

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