



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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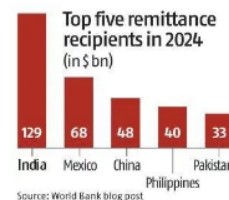
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1 India: Leading the World in Remittances in 2024

Context: India has retained its position as the **largest recipient of remittances** globally in 2024, with an estimated inflow of **\$129 billion**. Other top recipients include **Mexico, China, Philippines, and Pakistan**.

What Are Remittances?

- **Definition:** Remittances refer to the funds transferred by individuals working abroad back to their families or communities in their home countries.
- **Channels:** These funds are sent through **banks, online platforms, or money transfer services** and play a critical role in supporting household incomes.

**Rising Trends in Remittances:**

- **Growth Rate:** The growth of remittances in 2024 is estimated at **5.8%**, a significant jump from **1.2%** in 2023.
- **Global Impact:** Official remittances to **low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)** are projected to reach **\$685 billion** in 2024.
- **Regional Highlight:** **South Asia** is witnessing the highest increase in remittances (**11.8%**), driven by robust inflows to **India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh**.

Key Driver:

The **recovery of job markets** in high-income **OECD countries**, particularly the **United States**, has fueled remittance growth. Employment among foreign-born workers has surged **11% above pre-pandemic levels**, boosting remittance inflows to regions like **Latin America and the Caribbean**.

Why Remittances Are Crucial:

1. **Economic Stabilization:** Remittances contribute significantly to the **GDP** of developing nations, offering foreign currency that stabilizes **economies** and **balances payments**.
2. **Poverty Alleviation:** They provide a reliable source of income, enabling families to afford **education, healthcare, and daily necessities**.
3. **Development and Investment:** These funds support **small businesses, agriculture, and infrastructure projects**, fostering **local economic growth**.
4. **Cultural Connections:** Migrants maintain ties with their home countries, encouraging **cultural exchange** and strengthening **diaspora relations**.

Challenges in Remittances:

- **High Transaction Costs:** Despite advancements in technology, remittance costs remain high in certain regions, reducing the actual amount received by families.
- **Dependence on External Funds:** An over-reliance on remittances may hinder the development of sustainable local economies, creating vulnerabilities.
- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Stringent financial regulations and anti-money laundering policies often slow down and complicate remittance processes.

The Road Ahead:

Remittances are a lifeline for millions and a critical driver of **global economic stability**. To maximize their potential:

- **Reduce Transaction Costs:** Leveraging **financial technology** can enhance efficiency and lower costs.
- **Foster Financial Inclusion:** Remittances should be utilized to promote access to **healthcare, education, and capital markets**.
- **Prepare for Future Trends:** Demographic shifts, income disparities, and climate change will continue to influence **migration and remittance growth**.

By aligning policies and innovations, countries can harness the full potential of remittances to drive **poverty reduction** and support **sustainable development**.

2 Supreme Court Declares Coconut Oil as Edible Oil: Simplifies Tax Structure

Context: After years of ambiguity, the **Supreme Court of India** has resolved the taxation dispute surrounding **coconut oil**, classifying it as an **edible oil**. This landmark ruling ensures that coconut oil is taxed at a lower **GST rate of 5%**, instead of the 18% applicable to haircare products.

The Taxation Dilemma: Coconut Oil in India:

Historical Taxation Under the CET Act, 1985:

- **Before GST:** Coconut oil was taxed under the **Central Excise Tariff Act (CET Act)**, 1985.
- **Classification:**
 - **Animal or Vegetable Fats and Oils:** Taxed at **8% excise duty**.
 - **Haircare Products:** Taxed at **16% excise duty**.
- These classifications adhered to international norms set by the **Harmonised System of Nomenclature (HSN)** established by the **World Customs Organisation (1988)**.



The 2009 Circular and Controversy:

- **2009 Circular:** The **Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC)** classified coconut oil in containers below **200 ml** as **hair oil** and taxed it at **16%**.
- **Reversal in 2015:** Following court rulings, the circular was withdrawn, emphasizing that **packaging size** does not solely define the product's purpose.

GST Regime (2017 Onwards):

- Coconut oil was categorized under **edible oils**, attracting a **5% GST**.
- Haircare products were taxed at **18%** under the category "Preparations for use on the hair."

Timeline of Tax Disputes:

2007: Show-Cause Notices: Authorities issued **notices** to **Madhan Agro Industries** and others, proposing higher taxes by categorizing coconut oil as a **haircare product**.

CESTAT's Ruling:

- The **Customs Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT)** ruled that coconut oil is primarily an **edible oil**, regardless of its **packaging size**, aligning with the **2005 CET Act amendment**.

Appeals to the Supreme Court: Multiple similar cases were escalated to the **Supreme Court**, challenging CESTAT rulings.

Supreme Court's Verdict: Clarity at Last

2018 Split Verdict:

- **Justice Ranjan Gogoi:** Coconut oil is **edible oil**, irrespective of container size.
- **Justice R Banumathi:** Applied the **Common Parlance Test**, suggesting small packages are perceived as **hair oil**.

2024 Final Ruling:

A three-judge bench led by **Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna** addressed the issue decisively:

1. **Rejection of the Common Parlance Test:** The test is not applicable when the product is clearly defined under **legal norms** and **HSN classifications**.
2. **Legal and International Norms Take Precedence:** Coconut oil's ability to serve as a hair product does not exclude it from being classified as **edible oil**.
3. **Container Size Is Irrelevant:** Packaging size is common for both edible and cosmetic products and is not a valid classification criterion.

Significance of the Ruling:

The court's decision ensures that:

- **Taxation aligns with usage:** Recognizing coconut oil as predominantly **edible oil** simplifies its classification.
- **Uniformity in Application:** Adheres to **HSN norms**, rejecting subjective market perceptions and arbitrary distinctions.
- **Relief to Manufacturers and Consumers:** A **lower GST rate** benefits both producers and consumers of coconut oil.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court's decision resolves a long-standing taxation dispute, affirming coconut oil's **primary use as edible oil** and ensuring fairness in taxation. This clarity paves the way for consistent classification and simplifies the tax structure, benefiting businesses and consumers alike.

3 Russia's Breakthrough: Personalized mRNA Cancer Vaccine Set for 2025

Context: Russia has unveiled a groundbreaking development in cancer treatment: a personalized **mRNA-based cancer vaccine**. The vaccine is slated for **free distribution** to patients starting early **2025**, marking a significant milestone in cancer therapy.

Key Highlights of the Vaccine:**Personalized Approach:**

- Unlike traditional vaccines, this **mRNA cancer vaccine** is customized for each patient.
- It is designed to **treat existing cancers** rather than prevent them.

**How It Works:**

- **Tailored Genetic Material:** The vaccine incorporates genetic material from a patient's tumor.
- **Immune System Activation:** It produces specific **antigens**, prompting the immune system to identify and attack cancer cells.
- **Preclinical Success:** Studies show potential to suppress **tumor growth** and prevent **metastasis**.

Development:

- Created by the **Gamaleya National Research Centre for Epidemiology and Microbiology**, the same institute that developed Russia's **Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine**.
- Aligns with global efforts leveraging **mRNA technology** for cancer therapy.

Accessibility:

- Russia's plan to make the vaccine **free of charge** aims to enhance accessibility and improve patient outcomes.

What is mRNA?**Understanding mRNA:**

- **Messenger RNA (mRNA)** is a single-stranded RNA crucial for **protein synthesis**.
- Synthesized from **DNA** during the transcription process.

Function of mRNA:

- Transports genetic instructions from **DNA** in the nucleus to the cytoplasm.
- Directs the cell's machinery to produce **proteins** by decoding **codons** (three-base sequences).
- Acts as a bridge between the DNA code and the **protein synthesis** mechanisms of the cell.

How Do mRNA Vaccines Work?**The Vaccine Mechanism:**

1. **Introduction of mRNA:** The vaccine delivers a specific segment of **mRNA** coding for a viral or tumor-related protein.



2. **Protein Production:** Cells use the mRNA blueprint to create the target protein.
3. **Immune Response:** The immune system recognizes the protein as foreign and generates **antibodies**.
4. **Long-Term Protection:** These antibodies remain in the body to provide lasting immunity or aid in targeting cancer cells.

Key Features:

- Contains **no live virus**, eliminating the risk of infection.
- Relies on the body's natural mechanisms to stimulate an immune response.

How mRNA Vaccines Are Made:

1. **Identify Target Protein:** Scientists pinpoint a specific viral or cancer-related protein that elicits an immune response.
2. **Synthesize mRNA:** Using the DNA sequence of the target protein, scientists create a complementary mRNA strand.
3. **Purification:** The mRNA is purified, ensuring it's free from residual DNA or contaminants.

A New Era in Cancer Treatment:

Russia's personalized **mRNA cancer vaccine** represents a monumental step forward in oncology. By harnessing cutting-edge **mRNA technology**, this initiative could redefine how cancers are treated globally. The decision to offer the vaccine **free of charge** underscores Russia's commitment to advancing healthcare accessibility and patient outcomes.

This innovation also highlights the growing potential of **mRNA-based therapies**, not just for infectious diseases but also for complex conditions like cancer. The world will closely watch as this vaccine moves from development to implementation in 2025.

What is a Vaccine?

- **Purpose:** To prepare the body's immune system to fight off specific diseases.
- **How It Works:**
 - Introduces a harmless piece or imitation of the pathogen (e.g., a weakened or inactivated microbe, a part of the microbe, or genetic material).
 - Trains the immune system to recognize and remember the pathogen.
 - Helps the body quickly neutralize the real pathogen if exposed in the future.
- **Some examples of vaccines include:**
 - Oral Sabin polio vaccine
 - MRV Vaccine (Measles, Mumps, Rubella, and Varicella)
 - Nasal influenza vaccine

4

Supreme Court Expands NIA's Investigative Powers

Context: The **Supreme Court of India** has broadened the scope of powers vested in the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**, enabling it to tackle a wider range of crimes beyond its traditional mandate.

Supreme Court's Landmark Ruling:

A Bench comprising **Justices B.V. Nagarathna** and **N. Kotiswar Singh** interpreted **Section 8 of the NIA Act, 2008**, to extend the NIA's investigative jurisdiction:

- The agency's powers now cover **non-scheduled offences**, provided they are **connected to scheduled offences** under the Act.
- This expansion allows the NIA to delve into **interlinked criminal activities**, bolstering its capacity to counter threats to national security.

About the National Investigation Agency (NIA):

- **Established:** 2009, post-enactment of the **NIA Act, 2008**.
- **Primary Role:** India's **Central Counter-Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency**, operating under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- **Focus Areas:** Investigating offences related to **terrorism, arms smuggling**, and other crimes threatening **national security**.

**Key Provisions of the NIA Act:****Jurisdiction and Powers:**

- The NIA investigates **scheduled offences** across India, ensuring a unified approach to addressing national security threats.
- The **NIA (Amendment) Act, 2019:**
 - Extended its jurisdiction to crimes committed **outside India** involving Indian citizens or interests.
 - Allowed the NIA to probe cases of **human trafficking, cyber terrorism**, and violations of the **Explosive Substances Act**.

Special Courts: The Act mandates the creation of **Special Courts** for handling scheduled offences, ensuring **swift trials** and **effective justice delivery**.

Categories of Offences Under the NIA Act:**Scheduled Offences:**

These are severe crimes directly threatening **national security** and **sovereignty**, investigated by the NIA. Examples include:

1. **Terrorism** under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.
2. Offences under the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**.
3. Anti-hijacking laws and maritime safety violations.
4. Cyberterrorism under the **IT Act, 2000**.
5. Suppression of crimes under international treaties such as the **SAARC Convention (1993)**.

Non-Scheduled Offences:

While not explicitly listed under the NIA Act, these include crimes such as violations of the **NDPS Act**. With the recent ruling, the NIA can investigate these if connected to a scheduled offence.

Implications of the Supreme Court's Decision:

1. **Enhanced Investigative Authority:** The NIA's scope now extends to **non-scheduled offences**, enabling a **holistic approach** to dismantling complex criminal and terrorist networks.
2. **Strengthened National Security:** By targeting **interlinked criminal activities**, the ruling empowers the NIA to combat **organized crime** and **terrorism** more effectively.
3. **Legal Certainty:** The decision clarifies the **interpretation of NIA's powers**, reducing ambiguity and improving the efficiency of **investigations** and **prosecutions**.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court's ruling marks a pivotal shift in India's counter-terrorism framework. By allowing the NIA to investigate **non-scheduled offences** linked to its core mandate, the decision strengthens the agency's ability to address evolving **national security challenges**. This expanded authority ensures a more robust, unified response to organized crime and terrorism, safeguarding India's security interests.

5 SC Puts Kerala HC's Jumbo Parade Directives on Hold

Context: The **Supreme Court of India** has stepped into a dispute concerning the famous **Thrissur Pooram festival**, intervening in the directives issued by the **Kerala High Court** regarding elephant management during the event.

About the Case:

In **November 2024**, the Kerala High Court introduced specific rules for the management of elephants during the **Thrissur Pooram procession**, which included:

- A mandate requiring elephants to maintain a **minimum distance of three meters** from each other during the parade.

**Contention by the Devaswoms:**

The **Thiruvambady** and **Paramekkavu devaswoms**, key organizers of the festival, raised objections, arguing that:

- The High Court's directives went **beyond its jurisdiction** and exceeded the provisions outlined in the **Captive Elephants (Management and Maintenance) Rules, 2012**, established by the Kerala Government.
- The distance rule was **impractical**, as maintaining such spacing is nearly impossible during a grand procession.

Supreme Court's Stand:

The Supreme Court issued a **stay** on the Kerala High Court's directives, emphasizing that:

- The rules lacked **feasibility** and could disrupt the traditional conduct of the festival.
- Matters such as these should adhere to established guidelines and avoid over-regulation.

Thrissur Pooram: Kerala's Iconic Festival**About the Festival:**

Thrissur Pooram is one of Kerala's grandest temple festivals, celebrated with vibrant pageantry, cultural events, and a display of tradition. Key features include:

- A magnificent **elephant procession** adorned with decorative caparisons.
- Traditional **percussions and music**, such as the renowned **Melam**.
- Thousands of devotees from across Kerala and beyond.

Historical Significance:

- First celebrated in **1798**, the festival was initiated by **Raja Rama Varma**, famously known as **Sakthan Thampuran**, the Maharaja of Cochin.
- It was conceived to bring together two rival temples, **Paramekkavu** and **Thiruvambadi**, fostering unity through a grand celebration.

When and Where:

- Held annually in the **Malayalam month of Medam** (April-May).
- The celebrations take place in **Thrissur**, often referred to as Kerala's cultural capital.

Key Takeaways:

The Supreme Court's intervention ensures that the festival's **traditional essence** remains intact while balancing regulatory oversight. The **Thrissur Pooram**, a symbol of Kerala's rich culture and heritage, continues to captivate millions, upholding its legacy as a **unifying celebration** of faith and tradition.

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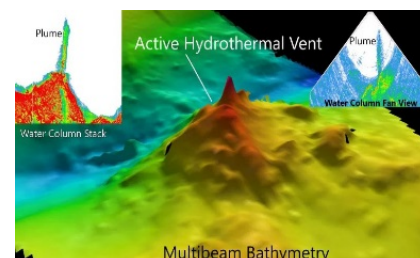


6 Indian Oceanographers Capture First-Ever Image of Active Hydrothermal Vent

Context: In a groundbreaking discovery, Indian oceanographers have successfully captured the **first image of an active hydrothermal vent** in the Indian Ocean.

Key Highlights:

- The discovery is the result of the **Hydrothermal Exploration Programme**, jointly conducted by the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)** and the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)**.
- The vent is located at a depth of **4,500 metres** below the ocean's surface.
- This site holds significant promise for **mineral exploration**, as part of India's **Deep Ocean Mission**.



What Are Hydrothermal Vents?

Hydrothermal vents are **underwater springs** found in tectonically active regions, primarily in the **global mid-ocean ridge system**.

Formation Process:

- Cold seawater** seeps through cracks and fissures in the ocean crust.
- The water encounters **magma** deep beneath the surface, causing it to heat up.
- As the heated water dissolves surrounding minerals, it rises and emerges as plumes rich in **trace metals, gases, and minerals**.

Ecological Significance:

- Hydrothermal vents sustain **diverse ecosystems** and unique **microbial communities**.
- These ecosystems form the base of the **food web** in deep-sea environments, thriving in conditions where sunlight is absent.

About the Deep Ocean Mission:

India's **Deep Ocean Mission**, launched in **2021**, is a comprehensive initiative aimed at unlocking the potential of the deep sea.

Key Facts:

- Approved with an estimated budget of **₹4,077 crore** over five years.
- Implemented under the guidance of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.

Major Components:

- Development of Deep-Sea Mining Technologies** and a **Manned Submersible**.
- Creation of an **Ocean Climate Change Advisory Service**.
- Innovations for exploring and conserving **deep-sea biodiversity**.
- Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration** programs.
- Harnessing **energy and freshwater** from the ocean.
- Establishment of an **Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology**.

Significance of the Discovery:

- Marks a significant leap in **understanding deep-sea ecosystems** and mineral-rich hydrothermal systems.
- Paves the way for **sustainable exploration** of deep-ocean resources.
- Supports India's **scientific and strategic goals** under the Deep Ocean Mission.

This discovery not only contributes to the global knowledge of deep-sea ecosystems but also positions India at the forefront of **deep-ocean exploration and technology development**.