



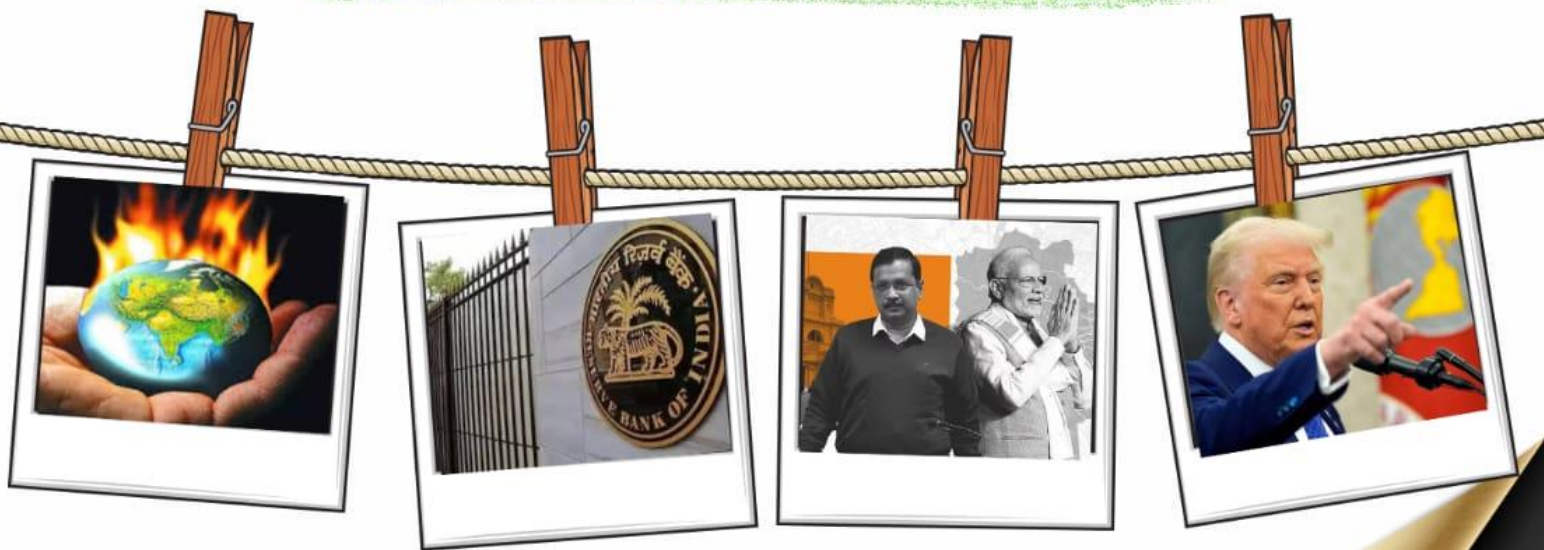
# Weekly Current Affairs



## To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

**09 - 15 Feb 2025**



Subscribe to our

**You Tube** *Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam*



## e-NAM 2.0: Upgrading India's Digital Agricultural Market

**Context:** The Union Agriculture Minister has announced plans to upgrade the National Agricultural Market (e-NAM) to e-NAM 2.0, aiming to resolve **logistical challenges** in inter-state and inter-mandi trade and enhance market efficiency.

### What is e-NAM?

- Launched in 2016, e-NAM is a **pan-India electronic trading platform** that integrates **Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis**, creating a **unified national market** for agricultural commodities.
- **Implemented by:** Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW)**.
- **Key Features:**
  - **Digital trading platform** for farmers, traders, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and mandis.
  - **Seamless price discovery** and online payments.
- **Current Reach** (as of Dec 31, 2024):
  - **1,361 mandis** across **23 states** and **4 Union Territories**.
  - **1.79 crore farmers** and **2.63 lakh traders** registered.
  - Facilitated trade worth **2.79 lakh crore**.



### Challenges in the Existing e-NAM System:

Despite its success, several **bottlenecks** remain:

1. **Logistical Issues:** **Inefficient transportation** causes **high transit times**, affecting timely delivery.
2. **Inadequate Warehousing & Storage:** **Lack of proper storage facilities** leads to **post-harvest losses**.
3. **Limited Digital Literacy & Internet Access:** Many farmers **struggle to use the platform** due to **lack of awareness** and **poor connectivity**.
4. **Interstate Trade Barriers:**
  - **Variations in state APMC laws** restrict smooth transactions.
  - **Different state tax & compliance norms** create complexity.

### Key Features of e-NAM 2.0:

1. **Enhanced Logistics & Transportation Support:**
  - **Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)** for **real-time tracking** of produce.
  - **Optimized freight options** to reduce **transit time** and improve delivery.
2. **Expanded Warehousing & Cold Storage Infrastructure:**
  - **Subsidized loans** under the **Agricultural Infrastructure Fund (AIF)** to promote **private investment** in storage.
3. **AI-Driven Price Discovery & Quality Assessment:**
  - **Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML)** for **fair market price suggestions**.



- Automated quality testing to minimize disputes over **product grading**.

#### 4. Faster Digital Payments & Financial Support:

- Direct bank transfers & **e-wallet integration** for quick settlements.
- Fintech partnerships to provide **micro-loans** based on transaction history.

#### 5. Simplified Interstate Trade:

- Unified digital pass to ease **regulatory compliance**.
- Standardized tax & compliance framework for smooth trade across states.

#### 6. Mobile Accessibility & Vernacular Support:

- Voice-based commands and **local language options** in the e-NAM app.
- Digital literacy campaigns to train farmers in using the platform.

#### Expected Impact of e-NAM 2.0:

1. **Increased Farmer Participation:** Easier access and **better incentives** will attract more farmers.
2. **Higher Price Realization:** Direct market access will reduce **middlemen**, ensuring **fairer prices**.
3. **Reduced Post-Harvest Losses:** Improved storage & transport infrastructure will cut wastage significantly.
4. **Boost to Logistics & Supply Chain Sector:** Increased investments in agri-logistics will fuel economic growth.

#### Conclusion:

The **e-NAM 2.0 upgrade** will transform India's agricultural market by **eliminating inefficiencies**, **boosting digital access**, and **ensuring fair trade opportunities** for farmers. If implemented effectively, it can revolutionize agricultural commerce, making Indian farming **more profitable and globally competitive**.

TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS





## India's Gold Investments Surge 60% to 1.5 Lakh Crore in 2024

**Context:** According to the **World Gold Council (WGC)**, India's **gold investments surged by 60%** in 2024, reaching **\$18 billion (1.5 lakh crore)** compared to 2023. This marks a significant rise in demand for gold as an **investment and hedge against economic uncertainties**.



### Key Highlights of the WGC Report

- **India's gold investment demand: 239 tonnes** in 2024 – the **highest level since 2013**.
- **29% increase** from **185 tonnes** in 2023.
- **Global gold demand: Rose 25%**, surpassing **945.5 tonnes** in 2023.
- **Growing interest in gold ETFs and mutual funds** as alternative investment avenues.

### Gold in India & Worldwide

- **Gold accounts for over 5% of India's total imports.**
- **Major gold reserves in India:**
  - **Bihar (44%)**
  - **Rajasthan (25%)**
  - **Karnataka (21%)**
  - **West Bengal & Andhra Pradesh (3% each)**
  - **Jharkhand (2%)**
- **Major gold reserves globally:**
  - **United States, Germany, Italy, and France.**

### Reasons Behind the Surge in Gold Investments:

#### 1. Rising Gold Prices:

- **Consistent increase in gold prices** throughout the year.
- Investors see **gold as a hedge against inflation and economic uncertainty**.

#### 2. Cultural & Festive Demand:

- **Traditional preference** for gold during **weddings, festivals, and auspicious occasions**.
- **Higher retail demand** significantly boosted gold purchases.

#### 3. Urban Buying Trends & E-Commerce Growth:

- **Increased gold-buying activity in metro cities.**
- **E-commerce platforms** enabled easy investment in **small gold bars and coins**.

#### 4. Weaker Performance of Other Asset Classes :

- **Stock market volatility** led investors to **shift towards gold**.
- **Gold seen as a stable investment** during uncertain economic periods.

### Impact on the Indian Economy:



1. **Widening Current Account Deficit (CAD):** Higher **gold imports** increase India's **trade imbalance**.
2. **Inflationary Pressures:** Surge in demand pushes **gold prices higher**, contributing to **inflation**.
3. **Financial Market Disruptions:** More money moving into gold can **reduce liquidity** in equity markets, affecting stock market growth.

#### Way Ahead: Managing Gold Investments Efficiently

1. **Gold Monetization Schemes (GMS):** Encouraging **depositing idle gold in banks** to **reduce import dependence**.
2. **Strengthening Gold ETFs & Mutual Funds:** Offering **tax incentives** to promote **digital gold investments**.
3. **Expanding E-Gold Infrastructure:** Fintech platforms to improve **accessibility to digital gold investments**.

#### About the World Gold Council (WGC):

- **Established:** 1987
- **Headquarters:** London
- **Offices in:** India, China, Singapore, UAE, and the USA.
- **Governance:** Led by a **Board of Directors** composed of **member company representatives**.
- **Members:** 32 global gold mining companies.

#### Conclusion:

With **gold demand reaching record highs**, India's love for gold as a **financial and cultural asset** remains **strong**. However, **balancing imports, investment, and economic stability** will be **key for sustainable growth** in this sector. **Digital gold investments and monetization schemes** could help manage demand while reducing the **impact on India's economy**.

## India Crosses 100 GW Solar Power Capacity – A Historic Milestone

**Context:** India has achieved a **monumental milestone** by surpassing **100 gigawatts (GW)** of installed solar power capacity. This marks a major step in India's journey towards a **clean and sustainable energy future**.

### Unprecedented Growth in Solar Power:

- **35x growth in a decade** – From **2.82 GW** in 2014 to **100 GW** in 2025.
- As of **January 31, 2025**, India's **total solar capacity** stands at **100.33 GW**, with:
  - **84.10 GW** under implementation
  - **47.49 GW** under tendering
- **Rooftop solar boom** – A **53% increase** in 2024, with **4.59 GW** of new capacity added.
- **Top solar states** – Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Massive expansion in solar manufacturing** – From **2 GW** in 2014 to **60 GW** in 2024, aiming for **100 GW** by 2030.



### Why Solar Energy is a Game-Changer for India?

#### 1. Energy Security:

- **Reduces reliance on fossil fuels and imports.**
- **Helps India achieve self-sufficiency in power generation.**

#### 2. Environmental Benefits:

- **Cuts greenhouse gas emissions**, making India a leader in **clean energy solutions**.
- A key tool in **combating climate change**.

#### 3. Economic Growth & Job Creation:

- **Millions of new jobs** in installation, maintenance, and manufacturing.
- **Boosts India's economy** by strengthening the renewable energy sector.

#### 4. Cost-Effectiveness:

- **Solar energy is now cheaper** than conventional electricity sources.
- **Lower electricity bills** for consumers and industries.

#### 5. Rural Electrification:

- **Brings power to remote and off-grid villages.**
- **Improves the quality of life** for millions.

### Government Initiatives Driving Solar Growth:

1. **National Solar Mission (NSM) (2010):** Target: **280 GW** of solar capacity by 2030.
2. **PM SuryaGhar Muft Bijli Yojana** : Empowers homes with **free rooftop solar power**.
3. **PM-KUSUM Scheme** : Supports **solar-powered irrigation pumps** for farmers.
4. **Solar Parks Scheme** : Aims to develop **large-scale solar parks** across India.

Download Our Application



Freedom UPSC with **Dhananjay Gautam**



5. **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme** : Encourages domestic solar panel manufacturing, reducing imports.
6. **Net Metering Policy** : Allows consumers to **sell surplus solar power** to the grid.
7. **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**: A **global solar energy initiative led by India** to promote renewable collaboration.

#### Challenges Hindering Solar Expansion:

1. **Land Acquisition**: Finding land for large-scale projects is a **major hurdle**.
2. **Grid Integration**: Ensuring **power stability** while handling **intermittent solar energy** is a challenge.
3. **Financial Constraints**: More **investment needed in infrastructure & technology**.
4. **Energy Storage Solutions**: **Affordable storage technology** is crucial for **uninterrupted power supply**.

#### The Road Ahead – A Brighter Future for Solar in India:

With the **right policies, technological advancements, and financial support**, India is on track to become a **global solar powerhouse**. The **next big goal – 280 GW by 2030** – will require **sustained efforts, innovation, and investment**.

India's **solar revolution has just begun**, and the future looks **brighter than ever**.

freedom UPSC  
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

## RBI Cuts Repo Rate by 0.25% to Boost Economic Growth

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6.25%, marking the first rate cut since May 2020. The move is aimed at stimulating economic growth, aligning with the Union Budget's 1 lakh crore income tax relief to boost urban demand.

- Inflation is expected to decline, creating space for monetary easing.
- GDP growth for 2025-26 is projected at 6.7%, an increase from 6.4% this year.
- The RBI continues with a neutral monetary policy stance, balancing growth support and inflation control.



### Why Did the RBI Cut the Repo Rate?

#### Slowing Economic Growth & Need for a Boost:

- Economic growth has been losing momentum, prompting the government to use both fiscal (tax cuts) and monetary (rate cuts) measures to revive demand.
- Lower interest rates reduce borrowing costs, making home loans, car loans, and business loans cheaper, which can boost consumption and investment.

#### Inflation Remains Under Control:

- Projected inflation for Q1 2025-26: 4.5%.
- Since inflation is moderating and staying within the RBI's target range ( $4\% \pm 2\%$ ), a rate cut was deemed appropriate.

### Challenges & Risks to the Economy:

#### Global Uncertainties & Trade Risks:

- Geopolitical tensions, rising protectionist trade policies, and volatile commodity prices pose risks to economic stability.
- The RBI remains cautious but expects a gradual economic recovery.

#### Mixed Domestic Demand Trends:

- Rural demand is improving, but urban consumption is still sluggish.
- Factors like employment gains, tax relief, and stable inflation are expected to support household spending.

#### India's External Sector & Forex Stability:

- The Rupee's depreciation has been factored into RBI's policy stance.
- The Current Account Deficit (CAD) remains within sustainable limits.
- Foreign exchange reserves stand at \$630.6 billion, covering 10+ months of imports, ensuring economic resilience.

### Understanding Monetary Policy Stances:

- **Dovish:** The RBI lowers interest rates to stimulate growth, making borrowing and investment more attractive.
- **Hawkish:** The RBI raises interest rates to control inflation, even if it slows economic expansion.
- **Accommodative:** The RBI maintains low interest rates and injects liquidity into the economy to support growth and employment.
- **Neutral:** The RBI takes a data-driven approach, adjusting interest rates based on economic conditions, without favoring growth or contraction.

With this rate cut, the RBI aims to revive growth while keeping inflation in check, signaling a shift toward a more supportive economic policy.



**TROPEX 2025: Indian Navy's Largest War Exercise Underway**

**Context:** The Indian Navy's premier Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX) for 2025 is currently in progress in the Indian Ocean Region. This biennial mega exercise involves all operational units of the Indian Navy, along with substantial participation from the Indian Army, Indian Air Force (IAF), and the Indian Coast Guard.



TROPEX 2025 is designed to validate the Navy's core warfighting strategies, ensuring an integrated and synchronized response to safeguard India's maritime security interests. It focuses on countering conventional, asymmetric, and hybrid threats in an evolving maritime environment.

**Duration and Phases:** The exercise spans three months, from January to March 2025, and is divided into multiple phases, including:

- **Harbour Phase** – Focused on planning, coordination, and combat preparations.
- **Sea Phase** – Conducts real-time war drills, including cyber and electronic warfare operations and live weapon firings.
- **Joint Work-Up Phase & Amphibious Exercise (AMPHEX)** – Tests inter-service interoperability and amphibious assault strategies.

**Massive Deployment of Warships, Submarines & Aircraft:**

This year, TROPEX 2025 features a formidable naval force, including:

- 65 Indian Navy warships
- 9 powerful submarines
- 80+ aircraft of various types

The exercise involves cutting-edge platforms like:

- INS Vikrant (India's indigenous aircraft carrier)
- Visakhapatnam & Kolkata-class destroyers
- Kalvari-class submarines
- MiG-29K fighter jets, P-8I surveillance aircraft, HALE Sea Guardian drones, and MH-60R helicopters

**Integration of Indian Army, IAF & Coast Guard:**

To enhance joint operations and synergy, the Indian Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard are actively participating, with:

- Sukhoi-30, Jaguar, C-130, AWACS, and Flight Refueller aircraft
- An Infantry Brigade with over 600 troops
- More than 10 Coast Guard ships and aircraft

**Strengthening India's Maritime Dominance**

Over the years, TROPEX has evolved into a high-intensity, complex exercise, reinforcing India's ability to conduct precise, coordinated, and effective joint operations. TROPEX 2025 signifies India's commitment to maritime security, ensuring readiness to defend national interests Anytime, Anywhere, Anyhow.

[Download Our Application](#)



**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**

**Baltic States Cut Energy Ties with Russia, Join European Grid**

**Context:** The Baltic nations—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—have officially disconnected from Russia's electricity grid, marking the end of more than 30 years of reliance on the Soviet-era power system. This move is a **major geopolitical shift**, as the three countries now fully integrate into the **European energy network**.

**Key Developments in the Transition:**

- In **2024, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania notified Russia and Belarus** of their plan to disconnect, preventing any unexpected escalations.
- Over the years, **16 power lines linking the Baltics to Russia and Belarus were dismantled** in preparation for this move.
- To ensure a smooth transition, the Baltic nations **developed new energy infrastructure**, including **underwater power cables in the Baltic Sea**, connecting them to Europe's energy network.
- The **Kaliningrad region**, a Russian exclave between **Lithuania and Poland**, has **already been energy-independent**, relying on its own power generation systems. Thus, the disconnection has **minimal impact on the exclave**.

**Geopolitical and Strategic Significance:**

- This move is a **symbol of autonomy and resilience**, highlighting the Baltic states' **determination to cut ties with Moscow** after decades of uneasy relations.
- The decision is particularly **significant amid ongoing tensions with Russia**, especially after its **invasion of Ukraine in 2022**.
- By joining the **European energy grid**, the Baltic nations **strengthen their energy security**, ensuring full control over their power supply and reducing the risk of **Russian energy manipulation**.

**The Baltic Nations: A Shift Towards Europe:**

- The **Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—are located in Northern Europe, along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea**.
- Formerly part of the **Soviet Union**, they **declared independence in 1990** following the USSR's collapse.
- Since **joining the European Union (EU) and NATO in 2004**, they have rapidly modernized their **democratic institutions, economies, and infrastructure**.
- Their focus has been on **deepening integration with Western Europe**, further distancing themselves from Russia.

**Geographical Positioning of the Baltic States:**

- **Estonia is the northernmost**, sharing borders with the **Gulf of Finland to the north, Latvia to the south, and Russia to the east**.
- **Latvia lies between Estonia and Lithuania**, with **Russia to the east and the Baltic Sea to the west**.
- **Lithuania, the southernmost Baltic nation**, borders **Latvia to the north, Poland and Belarus to the south and east, and the Baltic Sea to the west**.

**A New Era of Energy Independence:**

The **Baltic nations' disconnection from Russia's power grid is more than just an energy shift—it is a bold statement of sovereignty and strategic independence**. By fully integrating into the **European energy system**, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania ensure a **stable, self-reliant, and secure future**, free from Russian influence.

## Supreme Court Calls for Nationwide Survey of Sacred Groves

**Context:** The **Supreme Court of India** has directed the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** to conduct a **nationwide survey** of **sacred groves** to ensure their protection and conservation.



### Key Directives by the Supreme Court:

- Sacred groves should be **classified as 'forests'** and officially notified as **'community reserves'** under the **Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) 1972**.
- Each state government must form a **'Community Reserve Management Committee'** to oversee the **preservation and sustainable management** of sacred groves.

### What Are Sacred Groves?

Sacred groves are **forest patches or tree clusters** that hold **religious, cultural, and ecological significance**, traditionally protected by **local communities**.

- They are known by **different names across India**, such as:
  - **Devarakadu** (Karnataka)
  - **Kavu** (Kerala)
  - **Sarna** (Madhya Pradesh)
  - **Oran** (Rajasthan)
  - **Devrai** (Maharashtra)
  - **Umanglai** (Manipur)
  - **Law Kyntang/Law Lyngdoh** (Meghalaya)
  - **Devan/Deobhumi** (Uttarakhand)

### Importance of Sacred Groves:

- **Biodiversity Hotspots** – Home to rare and endangered species.
- **Climate Regulation** – Help in carbon sequestration and maintaining microclimates.
- **Water Conservation** – Preserve natural springs and aquifers.
- **Livelihood Support** – Sustain traditional herbal medicine practices.
- **Cultural Heritage** – Represent deep-rooted spiritual traditions.
- **Environmental Awareness** – Encourage local conservation practices.

### What Are Community Reserves?

The concept of **community reserves** was introduced through the **Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 2002**, to recognize and protect **community-managed ecosystems**.

### Key Features of Community Reserves:

- They are designated on **private or community-owned lands** where local communities actively participate in **habitat conservation**.
- Any **land-use changes** require approval from the **reserve management committee** and the **state government**.



- The **Chief Wildlife Warden** has the overall **authority** for managing the reserve.

#### Potential Conflict: WLPA vs. FRA

The **Forest Rights Act (FRA)**, 2006, was enacted to **recognize and protect the rights of forest-dwelling communities** over forests, including **sacred groves**.

- By classifying **sacred groves as community reserves under WLPA**, the **Supreme Court's directive may contradict** the **FRA's objective** of recognizing traditional community rights.

#### T.N. Godavarman v. Union of India (1996): A Landmark Case

The **Supreme Court's interpretation of Section 2** of the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**, in this case, established that **'forest land'** includes:

1. Areas that qualify as **'forests'** in the **dictionary sense**.
2. Any area **recorded as forest in government records**, regardless of ownership.

#### Way Forward: A Balanced Conservation Approach

- **Inclusive Policy Formulation** – The **MoEF&CC** should create a **Sacred Grove Conservation Policy** in **collaboration with local communities**, ensuring alignment with the **FRA**.
- **Co-Management Model** – Instead of handing **full control to the Forest Department**, a **joint governance framework** between **Gram Sabhas** and **forest officials** should be explored.
- **Legal Harmonization** – Clear legal **reconciliation between the WLPA and FRA** is essential to **avoid conflicts** and **protect community rights**.
- **Scientific Mapping with Traditional Knowledge** – **Satellite technology** should be combined with **local knowledge** to **identify and manage sacred groves effectively**.

#### A Step Towards Conservation with Community Involvement:

The **Supreme Court's directive** aims to **preserve India's sacred groves**, but it is **crucial to balance environmental conservation with the rights of local communities**. A **cooperative and inclusive approach** will ensure that these **sacred forests continue to thrive for future generations**.



**Budget 2025: Urban Development Gets a Boost, But Challenges Persist**

**Context:** The **Union Budget 2025** has allocated **96,777 crore** for **urban development**, reflecting a nominal increase from the previous year. However, after adjusting for **inflation**, the real value of the allocation has actually declined, raising concerns about the adequacy of funding for urban infrastructure and services.

**Key Budget Highlights:**

- **Cuts in Key Schemes:** The **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** has faced **significant budget reductions**, creating a gap between **policy ambitions** and **actual funding**.
- **Reduced Transfers to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):** Financial support to ULBs has been **slashed**, and the **revenue loss due to GST** has further strained their resources.
- **More Funds for Metro Projects: Central Sector Schemes**, particularly for **metro rail expansion**, have received increased allocations. However, funding for **urban programs** like the **Swachh Bharat Mission** and **Smart Cities Mission** has been cut.
- **10,000 Crore Urban Challenge Fund:** A new initiative aimed at **capital-intensive infrastructure projects** has been introduced. However, concerns remain over its **limited focus on sustainability, employment generation, and social equity**.

**Understanding India's Urbanization:**

Unlike **industrialization-driven urbanization** seen in the **Global North**, India's urbanization is primarily driven by **economic distress**. This phenomenon, often termed "**poverty-driven urbanization**," is characterized by both **rural-to-urban** and **urban-to-urban migration**.

- The **COVID-19 pandemic** exposed severe shortcomings in urban planning, with **reverse migration** highlighting deficiencies in **basic infrastructure and services**.

**Major Urban Challenges in India:****1. Lack of Reliable Data:**

- With the **2021 Census** yet to be conducted, the exact **urban population** remains unclear. However, estimates suggest that **40% of India's population** now resides in urban areas.

**2. Outdated Planning & Infrastructure Deficits:**

- **Spatial plans** are **outdated**, leading to **overcrowding, informal settlements, and slums**.
- **Development strategies** prioritize **capital investment** over **people-centric urban growth**.

**3. Climate Change & Environmental Risks:**

- Indian cities face increasing threats from **pollution, urban flooding, and heat island effects**.
- **Delhi NCR**, in particular, has been **severely impacted** by these environmental concerns.

**4. Governance & Funding Challenges:**

- Despite the **74th Constitutional Amendment**, urban planning remains controlled by **undemocratic bodies**, limiting the power of local governments.
- Cities receive **only 0.5% of GDP** in **intergovernmental transfers**, insufficient for **comprehensive urban development**.

**Government Initiatives for Urban Development**[Download Our Application](#)**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**



1. **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) 2.0:** Launched on **October 1, 2021**, for **five years**, aiming to achieve **safe sanitation** and **scientific waste management** in all cities.
2. **AMRUT 2.0:** Initiated on **October 1, 2021**, to make cities **self-reliant and water-secure**, focusing on **sustainable water supply** and **sewage treatment**.
3. **Smart Cities Mission:** Aims to **enhance urban living standards** in **100 cities** by developing **efficient services, modern infrastructure, and a sustainable environment**.
4. **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) 2.0:**
  - Aims to **construct 1 crore affordable houses** for the **urban poor** over the next **five years**.
  - **Investment: 10 lakh crore**, with **2.30 lakh crore** in government subsidies.
5. **Street Vending Plans:**
  - Development of **100 weekly haats (markets) and street food hubs** in key cities.
  - States encouraged to **design street-vending policies** to support **local vendors and micro-entrepreneurs**.

#### Way Forward: Creating Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Spaces:

While **progress has been made** towards **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, urban areas continue to struggle with **poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation**.

#### 1. Strengthening Urban Planning & Governance:

- India must adopt a **comprehensive national strategy** to enhance **urban infrastructure, governance, and resource management**.
- Cities should be treated as **engines of economic growth**, requiring **consistent and substantial investments**.

#### 2. Sustainable Urban Development:

- Instead of promoting **high-rise urban sprawl**, **low-rise, radial development models** should be prioritized to **reduce carbon emissions** and **improve urban sustainability**.

#### 3. Empowering Local Governments:

- Greater **financial autonomy** and **decision-making power** should be given to **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** for effective urban management.

#### 4. Climate Resilient Cities:

- Indian cities must focus on **green infrastructure, climate adaptation, and disaster preparedness** to tackle **climate change challenges**.

#### 5. Prioritizing Employment & Social Equity:

- **Urban development policies** must integrate strategies for **employment generation, affordable housing, and livelihood security** for marginalized communities.

#### Conclusion:

The **Budget 2025** allocation for **urban development** reflects the **government's focus on infrastructure expansion** but falls short in addressing **sustainable and inclusive growth**. To build **resilient, efficient, and people-centric cities**, India must shift towards **long-term urban planning, climate-conscious development, and empowered local governance**.



## South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone: A Game Changer for Andhra Pradesh

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the formation of the South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone, marking it as India's 18th railway zone under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the new zone's headquarters in Visakhapatnam in January.
- The reorganization involves splitting the Waltair Railway Division, with one section renamed Visakhapatnam Railway Division under SCoR, while the remaining part will be integrated into the Rayagada Division under the East Coast Railway (ECOR).



### Why Was the South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone Created?

#### Mandate Under Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014:

- Item 8 of Schedule 13 (Infrastructure) of the Act required Indian Railways to assess the feasibility of a new railway zone to cater to Andhra Pradesh's growing needs.

#### Strategic & Economic Importance:

- The Central Government announced the creation of SCoR in February 2019 to enhance railway efficiency and manage increasing passenger and freight traffic.
- Key Benefits of the New Zone:
  - Strengthening industrial and agricultural growth.
  - Improving logistics support for major ports like Visakhapatnam and Krishnapatnam.
  - Boosting tourism to cultural and spiritual hubs like Tirupati.

#### Political Factors:

- The demand for a separate railway zone had been pending since Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation in 2014.
- The decision was expedited after the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), an ally of the ruling BJP-led NDA government, came to power in Andhra Pradesh in 2024.

#### Divisions Under the South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone:

##### Regional Coverage:

- The new zone will primarily cover Andhra Pradesh, with portions of Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

##### Key Railway Divisions Under SCoR:

- Vijayawada Division (from South Central Railway)
- Guntur Division (from South Central Railway)
- Visakhapatnam Division (formerly part of Waltair Division)

##### Major Routes Under Visakhapatnam Division (SCoR):

The Visakhapatnam Division will span approximately 410 km, covering important railway sections such as:

- Palasa-Visakhapatnam-Duvvada
- Kureru-Vizianagaram
- Naupada Jn.-Paralakhemundi



- Bobbili Jn.–Salur
- Simhachalam North–Duvvada bypass
- Vadalapudi–Duvvada
- Visakhapatnam Steel Plant–Jaggayapalem

**Rayagada Division Under East Coast Railway (ECoR):**

- The remaining **680 km of Waltair Division** will be **reorganized into the Rayagada Division**, headquartered in **Odisha**.
- **Important Routes Under Rayagada Division:**
  - Kottavalasa–Bacheli
  - Kunderu–Theruvai Jn.
  - Singapur Rd.–Koraput Jn.
  - Paralakhemundi–Gunpur

**Why is the Waltair Division Important?****A Powerhouse for Freight Revenue:**

- Waltair Division is a major contributor to Indian Railways' earnings, driven by freight transport from Odisha and Chhattisgarh's mining and steel industries.

**Freight Performance of East Coast Railway (ECoR):**

- In FY 2023-24, ECoR achieved a record-breaking freight loading of 250 million tonnes, surpassing its previous record.
- **Division-wise freight contribution:**
  - Khurda Road Division – 156.17 million tonnes
  - Waltair Division – 74.66 million tonnes
  - Sambalpur Division – 19.20 million tonnes
- ECoR became the first railway zone to surpass 200 million tonnes of freight loading for five consecutive years.

**Political Opposition from Odisha:**

- Odisha's political leaders have opposed the reorganization, arguing that shifting a major revenue-generating part of ECoR to SCoR could negatively impact the state's economy.
- The ECoR headquarters is based in Bhubaneswar, and this reorganization could lead to revenue losses for Odisha's railway network.

**The Road Ahead: What SCoR Means for India:**

- Improved connectivity and railway efficiency in Andhra Pradesh.
- Boost to trade, tourism, and industrial development.
- Stronger logistics infrastructure for major ports and freight corridors.
- Possible political challenges as Odisha seeks to retain its economic stronghold.

The South Coast Railway Zone is a landmark step towards regional development, ensuring better railway infrastructure and economic growth for Andhra Pradesh while reshaping the freight and passenger landscape of Indian Railways.



**India's Leadership in AI Governance: Co-Chairing the AI Action Summit 2025**

**Context:** India has accepted France's invitation to co-chair the AI Action Summit, scheduled for February 10-11, 2025, in Paris.

- The summit follows previous **global AI meetings held in the UK (2023) and South Korea (2024)**, reflecting India's growing influence in shaping global AI governance.

**India's Leadership in Global AI Governance:****Championing the Global South's AI Interests:**

- India has been a strong voice for developing nations in AI governance at global platforms like the G20 and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI).
- During India's G20 Presidency in 2023, the bloc endorsed a regulatory approach that balances AI innovation with risk mitigation.
- At the GPAI Summit hosted by India, the focus was on ensuring equitable AI access for developing countries.

**India's AI Infrastructure Push:**

- India is setting up a national AI computing facility with over 18,600 GPUs, supported by a 40% government subsidy, serving as a model for equitable AI access.
- India will advocate for **greater access to cloud computing platforms, open-source AI models, and distributed computing solutions** at the AI Action Summit.

**Key Priorities for India at the AI Action Summit:****1. Expanding AI Access for All:**

- Developing nations face restrictions on AI technology exports, limiting their progress.
- India will push for **flexible cross-border AI technology transfers** while ensuring compliance with safety norms.

**2. AI for Social Impact:**

- India will **highlight AI's potential in solving key societal challenges**, including:
  - Healthcare:** AI-powered early disease detection tailored to local health systems.
  - Education:** Personalized learning solutions adapted to diverse regional education needs.
  - Agriculture:** AI-driven tools designed for region-specific farming practices.
- Proposal for an AI Use-Case Repository:** A global database to help developing nations adopt AI solutions effectively.

**3. Addressing AI Risks in the Global South:**

- AI risks in developing nations differ from those in advanced economies—India will ensure these concerns are addressed in global AI governance.
- Preserving Cultural and Linguistic Diversity:** AI language models are mostly trained on Western data, leading to cultural erosion. India will advocate for AI models that support regional languages and cultures.



- **Proposal for a Global AI Risk Repository:** A central database to document AI-related harms in developing economies, shaping future AI regulations.

#### India's Role in Previous Global AI Summits:

##### 1. AI Safety Summit 2023 (Bletchley Park, UK):

- **First-ever major global AI safety summit**, focusing on AI risks and regulations.
- Participating nations: **US, UK, China, India, and others.**
- **UK launched the AI Safety Institute (AISi)** to monitor AI risks.

##### 2. AI Safety Summit 2024 (Seoul, South Korea): Follow-up to the UK Summit, addressing cybersecurity risks, deepfake threats, and AI ethics.

##### 3. AI for Good Global Summit 2024 (Geneva, Switzerland) Hosted by the UN's ITU, focusing on AI's role in sustainability, healthcare, and education.

##### 4. World AI Summit 2024 (Amsterdam, Netherlands):

- **Largest AI summit** with policymakers, tech leaders, and AI researchers.
- Discussions on **deep learning advancements, ethical AI, and global AI regulations.**

##### 5. Global INDIAai Summit 2024 (New Delhi, India):

- **India's flagship AI event**, promoting AI innovation and democratization.
- Key highlights:
  - **AI partnerships with the OECD and GPAI.**
  - **Showcasing of India's deep-tech AI startups.**

#### India's Role in the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI):

- **GPAI is a global initiative** that bridges AI research and real-world applications.
- Established during the **2018 G7 Summit** by **Canada and France** and officially launched in **June 2020.**
- **India joined as a founding member in 2020** and later **held the GPAI presidency for 2022-23.**
- **GPAI Secretariat is hosted at the OECD**, with 29 member countries, including **Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, the UK, the US, and the EU.**

#### India's AI Vision for the Future:

- **As co-chair of the AI Action Summit 2025**, India will continue leading global AI discussions, ensuring responsible and inclusive AI development.
- **Balancing AI innovation with ethical considerations and equitable access** will remain India's top priority.
- **With strong AI infrastructure, global partnerships, and proactive governance**, India is shaping the future of AI for the world.

**Meghalaya's Debate Over Article 371: A Push to Revive Rat-Hole Mining**

**Context:** The Voice of the People Party (VPP) has proposed that Meghalaya be brought under Article 371, similar to Nagaland's Article 371A, to bypass the ban on rat-hole coal mining.



- Rat-hole mining has been banned in Meghalaya since 2014 by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) due to its environmental and safety risks.
- VPP argues that special constitutional status under Article 371 would allow Meghalaya to regulate its own resources without central interference.

**The Argument for Article 371 in Meghalaya:**

**Rat-Hole Mining Ban and Its Impact:**

- The NGT banned rat-hole mining in Meghalaya in 2014 due to severe environmental damage and hazardous working conditions.
- The Supreme Court upheld the ban, extending it to other northeastern states.

**How Nagaland Avoids the Ban:**

- Rat-hole mining continues in Nagaland despite environmental concerns because Article 371A prevents the NGT from intervening in the state's resource management.
- Meghalaya's Sixth Schedule already grants district councils power over land and forests, but central laws like the NGT ban still apply.

**VPP's Stand:**

- If Meghalaya is granted Article 371, it could override central laws and independently decide on coal mining policies.
- They believe this would boost economic growth and employment in the state.

**Counterarguments Against Article 371 for Meghalaya:**

**Opposition from Political Leaders:**

- Most political parties oppose the demand for Article 371, arguing that it clashes with the Sixth Schedule's existing autonomy.
- Meghalaya's Tourism Minister and United Democratic Party (UDP) leader stated that Article 371 and the Sixth Schedule cannot coexist.

**Legal and Structural Conflicts:**

- The Sixth Schedule already grants autonomous powers to Meghalaya's district councils on issues like land, forests, and social customs.
- Adding Article 371 could create legal confusion over which authority governs resource management.

**Understanding Article 371: Special Provisions for Indian States**

**What is Article 371?**

- Article 371 provides special provisions for certain states based on their unique socio-economic and political conditions.

- The provisions vary for each state, ensuring local governance over land, culture, and resources.

## State-Wise Provisions Under Article 371:

State	Key Provisions
Maharashtra & Gujarat (Article 371)	Establishment of <b>development boards</b> to ensure resource distribution.
Nagaland (Article 371A)	Protection of <b>land, resources, and customary laws</b> . No <b>parliamentary act on land ownership</b> applies unless approved by the state legislature.
Assam (Article 371B)	Formation of a <b>committee of elected representatives</b> from tribal areas.
Manipur (Article 371C)	Creation of a <b>Hill Areas Committee</b> for tribal protection.
Andhra Pradesh & Telangana (Article 371D & 371E)	Ensures <b>equitable distribution of resources</b> and allows for a <b>Central University</b> in Andhra Pradesh.
Sikkim (Article 371F)	Special provisions to <b>protect traditional laws and land ownership</b> .
Mizoram (Article 371G)	Protection of <b>Mizo customary laws and land rights</b> .
Arunachal Pradesh (Article 371H)	Special provisions regarding <b>law and order</b> .
Goa (Article 371I)	Added in <b>1987 through the 56th Amendment Act</b> .
Karnataka (Article 371J)	Special <b>reservation in education and jobs</b> for people from the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.

## The Sixth Schedule and Meghalaya's Autonomy:

### What is the Sixth Schedule?

- The **Sixth Schedule** grants **special autonomy** to **tribal areas in northeastern states** like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam, and Tripura.
- Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** govern these regions, making laws on **land, forests, social customs, and village administration**.

### Powers of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs):

- Make laws on land, forests, and village administration.**
- Regulate inheritance and social customs.**
- Establish and manage schools, markets, roads, and dispensaries.**
- Governance by up to 30 members, with 26 elected and 4 nominated by the governor.**

### Paragraph 12A of the Sixth Schedule:

- Allows **state laws to override ADC laws** in case of a conflict.

## The Rat-Hole Mining Controversy:

### What is Rat-Hole Mining?

- A **highly dangerous method of coal extraction** where workers dig **narrow tunnels** to extract coal.

### Why Was It Banned?

- Severe environmental damage:** Leads to **deforestation and groundwater contamination**.





- **Extremely unsafe working conditions:** Frequent accidents and child labor exploitation.
- **The NGT banned it in 2014** due to its hazards to miners and the environment.

#### Illegal Mining Continues:

- Despite the ban, **rat-hole mining continues illegally in parts of Meghalaya**, leading to **legal battles and enforcement challenges**.

#### The Way Forward for Meghalaya:

##### Balancing Economic Growth with Environmental Safety:

- **Granting Meghalaya Article 371** could **bypass central regulations**, but it may **weaken environmental protections**.
- Instead, the **focus should be on legalizing and regulating coal mining** under strict **environmental and safety guidelines**.

##### Strengthening Regulation and Law Enforcement:

- **Meghalaya needs stronger enforcement** against **illegal rat-hole mining**.
- **Introducing scientific coal mining methods** could help **sustainably utilize resources** while ensuring **safety**.

##### Exploring Alternatives to Article 371:

- Instead of seeking **constitutional amendments**, Meghalaya could **push for specific mining regulations** under the **Sixth Schedule** to balance **autonomy and environmental responsibility**.

#### Conclusion:

The **debate over Article 371 in Meghalaya** is driven by the desire to **revive rat-hole mining**, but it raises **legal, environmental, and governance challenges**. While **economic benefits are undeniable**, it is crucial to **balance development with environmental sustainability and worker safety**. Instead of **pursuing Article 371**, Meghalaya could **focus on regulated and eco-friendly coal mining solutions** within its existing **Sixth Schedule framework**.



## New Zealand Raises Concerns Over Cook Islands' Growing Ties with China

**Context:** New Zealand's Foreign Minister, Winston Peters, has expressed concerns over the Cook Islands' upcoming agreement with China.

- The Cook Islands' Prime Minister, Mark Brown, is set to visit Beijing next week to finalize a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with China.
- New Zealand is worried about the security and strategic implications of the deal and has criticized the Cook Islands for **not consulting them beforehand**.



### Cook Islands' Relationship with New Zealand:

#### A Self-Governing Nation Under "Free Association" with New Zealand:

- The Cook Islands is a small Pacific nation that maintains a unique "free association" arrangement with New Zealand.
- This means the Cook Islands has **its own government** but **relies on New Zealand** for defense and foreign affairs.

#### Key Aspects of Their Relationship:

- **New Zealand Citizenship:** Cook Islanders hold New Zealand passports.
- **Financial and Diplomatic Support:** New Zealand provides economic aid, defense support, and diplomatic backing.
- **Consultation on Security Matters:** New Zealand expects to be informed about any agreements that may have strategic or security implications.

#### China's Expanding Influence in the Pacific:

##### Growing Presence in the Region:

- China has been **strengthening its ties with Pacific nations** through economic aid, diplomatic engagements, and infrastructure projects.
- This expansion is seen as a **challenge to the influence of New Zealand, Australia, and the U.S.** in the Pacific.

#### Strategic Concerns for Western Powers:

- Western nations worry that China's **deepening relationships in the Pacific** could lead to:
  - **Military footholds in the region.**
  - **Economic dependence on China.**
  - **Shifts in regional alliances** away from traditional partners like New Zealand and Australia.

#### About the Cook Islands:

##### Location & Governance:

- The Cook Islands is an island nation in Polynesia, South Pacific Ocean.
- It is **self-governing** but in free association with New Zealand.

#### Key Facts:

- **Capital:** Avarua, located on Rarotonga, the largest island.



- **Government:** Parliamentary democracy with a **Prime Minister as head of government**.
- **Economic Focus:** Tourism, offshore banking, and fishing are major contributors to the economy.

## What's Next?

- The **Cook Islands' state visit to Beijing** will be closely watched by New Zealand and other Pacific nations.
- If the **strategic partnership with China expands**, it could **reshape regional alliances** and **increase tensions** in the Pacific.
- New Zealand may **seek reassurances or new agreements** to maintain its influence over the Cook Islands.

The outcome of this agreement could **signal a shift in power dynamics in the Pacific**, affecting not just the Cook Islands but the **broader geopolitical landscape of the region**.



## NITI Aayog's Policy Report on State Public Universities (SPUs)

**Context:** NITI Aayog has released a **comprehensive policy report** titled 'Expanding Quality Higher Education through States and State Public Universities'. This **first-of-its-kind** document focuses on **State Public Universities (SPUs)**, analyzing key aspects such as **quality, funding, governance, and employability** in higher education.



### What Are State Public Universities (SPUs)?

An **SPU** is a university **established or incorporated by a Provincial Act or a State Act**. These institutions play a crucial role in **expanding access to higher education** across India.

### Key Findings:

#### 1. Higher Education Funding:

- **Highest Funding:** Maharashtra leads in higher education funding, followed by Bihar and Tamil Nadu.
- **Lowest Funding:** Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland have the lowest higher education budgets.

#### 2. University Density:

- The **national average** university density is **0.8**.
- **Sikkim** has the **highest density** at **10.3**, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Uttarakhand.
- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra have a university density **below the national average**.

#### 3. Female Enrolment:

- Kerala, Chhattisgarh, and Himachal Pradesh have **higher female enrolment rates** than males.

### Challenges in SPUs

1. **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Lack of **modern and high-quality** infrastructure.
2. **Faculty Shortage:** Insufficient **teaching and administrative staff**.
3. **Limited R&D Expenditure:** Low investment in **research and innovation**.
4. **Low Enrolment in MTech & Ph.D.:** Hindering **advanced research and academic progress**.
5. **Outdated Curriculum:** Courses and syllabi are **not aligned with industry needs**.
6. **Funding Issues:**
  - Heavy reliance on **state grants and admission fees**.
  - **Delays in fund sanctioning** due to administrative bottlenecks.
  - Absence of a **structured bank loan framework** for SPUs.

### Key Recommendations:

#### 1. Increased Investment in Education & R&D:

- **Total education investment** (Centre + States) should be raised to **6% of GDP** as per NEP 2020.





- **R&D investment** (public + private) should be **2% of GDP** as per the **Economic Survey 2017-18**.

## 2. Establishing Centres of Excellence:

- SPU clusters should **identify 2-3 local issues** and establish **dedicated research centres** to solve them.

## 3. Specialized Financing Agency for SPUs:

- States should create a **Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA)-like body** specifically for SPUs.
- **HEFA**, a **joint venture of the Centre and Canara Bank**, was set up in **2017** to strengthen **infrastructure and research** in higher education institutions.

## Conclusion:

The report provides **nearly 80 policy recommendations** to **strengthen the quality, governance, and financial sustainability** of SPUs. By implementing these suggestions, India can **enhance the higher education sector** and foster greater academic excellence.



**Centre vs Delhi Government: Constitutional Conflict and Supreme Court Rulings**

**Context:** The governance of **Delhi**, India's national capital, has been a **contentious issue** for years, fueling ongoing legal disputes between the **AAP-led Delhi Government** and the **BJP-led Central Government**. The central issue revolves around Delhi's **unique constitutional status**, which designates it as a **Union Territory (UT)** with a legislature.



This setup has led to significant **struggles over administrative control**, particularly concerning **bureaucratic appointments**, **law enforcement**, and **governance powers**. These conflicts have prompted multiple **Supreme Court (SC)** interventions and amendments to the existing governance laws.

**Constitutional Status of Delhi:**

Delhi's governance is defined by **Article 239AA** of the Indian Constitution, introduced through the **Sixty-Ninth Constitutional Amendment Act (1991)**. This article grants Delhi:

- A **Legislative Assembly** with powers to legislate on subjects from the **State List** and **Concurrent List**, except on matters like **police**, **public order**, and **land**.
- An **elected Chief Minister (CM)** and a **Council of Ministers** responsible for day-to-day administration.
- A **Lieutenant Governor (L-G)**, appointed by the **President of India**, who represents the Centre in Delhi.

This division of powers has frequently led to **jurisdictional conflicts**, **policy clashes**, and **administrative control disputes**.

**Legal Battles Between Centre and Delhi Government:****The 2015 Notification and Initial Conflict:**

When **AAP** returned to power in **Delhi in 2015**, the **Union Home Ministry** issued a notification giving the **L-G control** over **bureaucratic services**, **land**, **police**, and **public order**. The **Delhi Government** challenged this decision in the **High Court**, arguing that the **elected government** should have authority over services and administration.

**Supreme Court Verdicts on Delhi's Powers:****2016 Delhi High Court Ruling:**

The **Delhi HC** ruled in favor of the **Centre**, affirming that the **L-G** held **overriding powers** over Delhi. This ruling effectively curtailed the Delhi Government's autonomy.

**2018 Supreme Court Judgment:**

In a **landmark judgment**, a **five-judge Constitution Bench** ruled in favor of the Delhi Government. The Court held that:

- The **L-G must act** on the "aid and advice" of the **elected government**, except on matters related to **public order**, **land**, and **police**.
- The **Delhi Government** has **legislative and executive control** over all other subjects, including **administrative services**.

**2023 Supreme Court Verdict:**

A **second Constitution Bench** reaffirmed the 2018 ruling, clarifying that:

[Download Our Application](#)



**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**



- The **Delhi Government** has control over **administrative services**, except in matters related to **law enforcement** and **land**.
- The **Centre's argument** that no UT should have control over services was **rejected**.

Despite these **Supreme Court victories**, the **Central Government** introduced **amendments** to further limit Delhi's powers.

### Central Government's Legislative Response:

#### Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2023:

In **May 2023**, the Centre passed an **amendment** to **override the Supreme Court's ruling**. This amendment:

- Extended the **L-G's power** over **appointments** and **transfers** of bureaucrats.
- Created a new authority, comprising the **Delhi CM**, **Chief Secretary**, and **Home Secretary**, where the **CM's authority can be vetoed** by bureaucrats.

The **Delhi Government** challenged this **amendment** in the **Supreme Court**, arguing that it **violates federal principles**.

### Governance Crisis and Political Fallout:

#### Impact of Legal Battles on Delhi's Administration:

The **legal battles** have caused significant **delays in policymaking** and **project implementation** in Delhi. The AAP has accused the Centre of **obstructing development programs** and **administrative reforms**, affecting the day-to-day governance.

### Political Context and Future Implications:

With **BJP** expected to contest elections and potentially take power in Delhi in **2025**, the legal challenges might lose momentum. However, the **Centre's increasing control** over Delhi's administration could continue to **hamper AAP's ability to govern freely**, with implications for the future political landscape.

The **Supreme Court** is yet to give a final ruling on the **2023 amendment**, which will have a crucial impact on the **future balance of power** in Delhi.

### Conclusion:

The **Centre vs Delhi Government conflict** is a **multi-layered issue** involving **constitutional, legal, and political dimensions** that has significantly shaped governance in the national capital. Despite **Supreme Court rulings** affirming **Delhi's autonomy**, the Centre continues to assert control through **legislative amendments**. This **legal and political struggle** continues, raising broader questions about **federalism** in India.

As this case progresses, it could set a **precedent** for the governance of other Union Territories with legislatures, such as **Puducherry** and **Jammu & Kashmir**.

## Southern States Should Benchmark Against Global Standards: CEA V. Anantha Nageswaran

**Context:** Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) V. Anantha Nageswaran has emphasized that **Southern States** should **benchmark themselves against global standards** rather than just **comparing with other Indian states**. The **Southern region** leads in several **economic parameters**, but further improvements are needed to enhance **global competitiveness**.



### Contribution to India's Economy:

- **Southern States contribute over 30% of India's GDP.**
- **Tamil Nadu and Karnataka** are standout performers, with **high compounded annual growth rates** in **Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**.
- The **region's annual growth rate in real terms** is **6.3%**, compared to a little over **5%** for the rest of India.

### Per Capita GDP Growth:

- **Southern States – Over 5%**
- **Rest of India – 4.2%**

### Labour Force and Economic Sectors Performance:

- **Southern States outperform the rest of India in Average Labour Force Participation Rate.**
- They have a **higher share of Gross Value Added (GVA)** across key economic sectors:
  - **Real Estate**
  - **Agriculture**
  - **Manufacturing**
  - **Services**

### Key Statistics:

- **37.4% of India's total factories** are in Southern States.
- **37% of operational factories** are located here.
- **25.6% of fixed capital investments** come from this region.

### Scope for Improvement in Productivity:

Despite **33% of India's manufacturing workforce** being in **South India**, its **output share is only 26%**. This **indicates lower productivity**, highlighting the need for:

- ✓ **Technology adoption**
- ✓ **Process improvements**
- ✓ **Workforce upskilling**

### Skill Levels and Need for Upgradation:

#### CEA's Four-Tier Skill Classification:

1. **Basic Skills (Level 1)**





2. Intermediate Skills (Level 2)
3. Associate & Professional Skills (Level 3)
4. Higher-Order Professional Skills (Level 4) (*medicine, engineering, geology, etc.*)

**Observations:**

**Tamil Nadu & Other Southern States** have a **high presence** of **Skill Level 2** (Intermediate skills). However, they **lag behind** in **Skill Levels 3 and 4** (Associate & Higher-Order Professional Skills).

**Conclusion:**

While **Southern States** are already **leading contributors** to India's economy, they **must now aim for global standards** in productivity and **high-skill workforce development**. **Future economic growth** in the region will depend on **enhanced skill levels**, adoption of cutting-edge technologies, and improvements in the **manufacturing sector**.





## India Launches EFTA Desk to Boost Trade and Investment Ties

**Context:** India has launched the **EFTA Desk** to serve as the **primary point of contact** for **businesses from European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nations**. This initiative will provide **market insights**, **address business concerns**, and **support expansion efforts** in India.



India-EFTA  
Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement

The **EFTA Desk** is a crucial component of the **India-EFTA Free Trade Agreement (TEPA)**, which was signed in **2024** to enhance **bilateral trade and investment**.

### Key Highlights of TEPA:

#### First-Ever Binding Free Trade Agreement:

- **Guaranteed investment of \$100 billion** over the next **15 years**.
- Creation of **1 million direct jobs** in India.

#### Major Tariff Reductions:

- **EFTA eliminates 92.2% of tariff lines**, benefiting **99.6% of India's exports**.
- Indian exporters gain **wider access to EFTA markets** with lower duties.

#### Expanded Market Access:

- **Full access for non-agricultural products**.
- **Special concessions on Processed Agricultural Products (PAP)**.

#### Enhanced Services Access:

EFTA offers improved access to India's **services sector** through:

- **Mode 1:** Digital delivery of services.
- **Mode 3:** Establishing a commercial presence.
- **Mode 4:** Easier temporary stay for key professionals.

#### Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Protection:

- Aligns with **TRIPS standards** for **stronger intellectual property safeguards**.

#### Recognition of Professional Qualifications:

- Covers professions such as **nursing, chartered accountancy, and architecture**.

#### Rules of Origin & Trade Safeguards:

- **Clear regulations** to ensure **smooth trade operations** and **protect national interests**.

#### Challenges Associated with TEPA:

- **Strict IPR rules** could impact India's **generic pharmaceutical industry**.
- **Trade imbalances**, particularly due to **high gold imports from Switzerland**, require careful monitoring.
- The **16-year-long negotiation process** highlights the **complexity of aligning economic interests**.

#### About EFTA:

The **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)** was established in **1960** to promote **free trade and economic cooperation** among its member countries:

[Download Our Application](#)





- Iceland
- Liechtenstein
- Norway
- Switzerland

Among these, **Switzerland is India's largest EFTA trade partner**, followed by **Norway**.

### Conclusion:

The **India-EFTA TEPA** marks a **major milestone** in India's trade policy, promising **significant investment, job creation, and enhanced market access**. The **EFTA Desk** will play a crucial role in **strengthening business ties, resolving trade challenges, and ensuring a smooth implementation of the agreement**.





## India-Sri Lanka Fishing Dispute: A Persistent Maritime Challenge

**Context:** The Sri Lankan Navy recently arrested Indian fishermen for fishing in Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Bay, reigniting the long-standing India-Sri Lanka fishing dispute.

In 2024, the number of Indian fishermen arrested in Sri Lanka crossed 500, marking the highest in a decade, compared to 787 arrests in 2014.



### Key Issues in the India-Sri Lanka Fishing Dispute:

#### 1. Recurrent Arrests & Vessel Seizures:

- Indian fishermen accidentally stray into Sri Lankan waters due to engine failures, weather changes, or the search for better fish stocks.
- Sri Lankan authorities confiscate boats, impose heavy fines, and destroy fishing vessels even after fishermen are released.

#### 2. Violation of International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL):

- Indian fishermen argue historical fishing rights beyond the IMBL, citing traditional practices.
- The Palk Bay is equally divided between India and Sri Lanka, but fishing rights remain disputed.
- The IMBL, as per UNCLOS, defines territorial waters, maritime jurisdiction, and fishing rights, but enforcement remains contentious.

#### 3. Depletion of Fish Stocks:

- Overfishing on the Indian side of the IMBL has forced Indian fishermen into Sri Lankan waters.
- Sri Lanka views this as “poaching”, impacting local livelihoods and posing security risks.

#### 4. Environmental Damage Due to Bottom Trawling:

- Indian fishermen use bottom trawling, dragging weighted nets along the seabed, which:
  - Destroys marine habitats like coral reefs and sponges.
  - Depletes fish populations, leading to severe ecological damage.
- Sri Lanka strongly opposes bottom trawling, pushing for a sustainable fishing solution.

#### 5. Sri Lanka's National Security Concerns:

- Regular incursions by Indian fishing trawlers are seen as a security risk by Sri Lanka.
- Fears persist over the potential resurgence of Tamil militant groups using fishing vessels.

#### 6. Katchatheevu Island Dispute:

- Katchatheevu, a 285-acre islet, was ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974.
- Indian fishermen are only allowed to dry nets and rest there, fueling political demands in Tamil Nadu for its return to India.

### International Laws on Freedom of Fishing:

#### 1. UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA, 1995):

- Mandates conservation and management of fishery resources.
- Countries must either become members of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) or follow their conservation rules.

#### 2. UNCLOS, 1982:

Download Our Application



Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam





- **Article 87 limits freedom of fishing** on the **high seas**.
- **Illegal fishing** occurs if **States fail to comply** with UNCLOS regulations.

### Palk Bay: A Strategic and Ecological Hotspot

- **Palk Bay**, a **narrow stretch of water** between **southern India** and **northern Sri Lanka**, is **rich in biodiversity** due to monsoon-driven nutrient inflows.
- **Boundaries:**
  - **Southern boundary:** Pamban Strait, Rameswaram Island, Adam's Bridge (Rama Setu).
  - **Northeastern boundary:** Palk Strait, linking **Palk Bay** to the **Bay of Bengal**.
- **Fishing Conflict:**
  - **Escalated post-2009** after the **end of the Sri Lankan civil war**.
  - **Peaked in 2013** due to **overfishing** and **bottom trawling** by **Indian fishermen**.

### Implications of the Indo-Sri Lanka Fishing Conflict:

#### 1. Livelihood Crisis:

- **Indian fishermen face frequent arrests**, causing **financial distress** for their families.
- **Sea conflicts have led to fatalities and missing fishermen**, heightening risks for fishing communities.

#### 2. Enforcement Challenges:

- **Surveillance and patrolling costs for IMBL enforcement** have significantly increased.

#### 3. Smuggling and Security Risks:

- Authorities **struggle to differentiate between fishermen and smugglers**, making the **IMBL vulnerable to illegal trade and security threats**.

#### 4. Political Ramifications:

- Allegations of **Sri Lankan Navy's harsh actions** fuel **diplomatic tensions** between India and Sri Lanka.
- India's stance on **UN resolutions concerning Sri Lanka's human rights record** has been influenced by the dispute.

#### 5. Environmental Damage:

- **Bottom trawling harms marine ecosystems**, affecting fish breeding and reducing fish stocks.
- **Recovery from trawling damage can take thousands of years**.

#### 6. Economic Consequences:

- **Overfishing reduces fishery resources and fisher incomes**.
- **Sri Lanka loses an estimated \$730 million annually** due to Indian fishing incursions.

### Conclusion:

The **India-Sri Lanka fishing dispute** is a complex issue involving **livelihood concerns**, **maritime laws**, **security risks**, and **environmental challenges**. A **collaborative approach**, focusing on **sustainable fishing**, **alternative livelihoods**, and **joint resource management**, is essential for a **long-term resolution**.

Strengthening **bilateral ties**, ensuring **fair regulations**, and **balancing economic interests** will help mitigate conflicts while preserving marine ecosystems and protecting fishermen's rights.

**Bills on Parliamentary Sitzings and POCSO Act, 2012: Key Reforms Proposed**

**Context:** Recently, two Private Members' Bills were introduced in the Rajya Sabha, focusing on:

1. Mandating a minimum number of Parliamentary sittings.
2. Amending the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.



These Bills aim to **enhance parliamentary accountability** and **strengthen child protection laws**.

**1. Bill on Parliamentary Sitzings:****Objective:**

- Proposes a **minimum of 100-120 sittings per year** in Parliament.
- Lost hours due to **disruptions to be compensated** in extended sessions.
- Aims to **improve governance accountability** and ensure **effective legislative discussions**.

**Current Scenario of Parliamentary Sitzings:**

- **First Lok Sabha (1952-1957):** 135 sittings per year (average).
- **17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024):** Only 55 sittings per year (lowest in history).
- The **General Purposes Committee (1955)** and **National Commission on Constitutional Review (2002)** recommended a **fixed calendar with 100-120 days of sittings**.

**Constitutional Provisions:**

- **Article 85 (Parliamentary Sessions):**
  - The **President summons Parliament** as needed, ensuring a **maximum gap of six months** between sessions.
  - The President can also **prorogue or dissolve the Lok Sabha**.
- **Article 174 (State Legislatures):**
  - The **Governor** has similar powers for **state assemblies**, ensuring a **six-month gap is not exceeded**.

**Why is the Reform Needed?**

- Declining number of sittings **reduces scrutiny over government decisions**.
- Productivity suffers due to **disruptions and early adjournments**.
- A **fixed parliamentary calendar** can ensure **effective legislative functioning**.

**2. Bill on Amending the POCSO Act, 2012:****Objective**

- The **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2024** aims to make the POCSO Act more victim-centric.
- Strengthens **reporting mechanisms, victim support, and legal procedures**.

**Key Provisions of the Amendment:**



- **24-Hour Reporting Rule:** Police/Special Juvenile Police Units must present the child before the Child Welfare Committee and report the case to the **Special Court** within 24 hours.
- **Enhanced Victim Support:** Structured compensation procedures to ensure **timely financial aid** to victims.
- **Training for Stakeholders:** Police, educational institutions, and child care personnel to receive **mandatory training** for better POCSO implementation.

#### Need for the Amendment:

- **Rising POCSO Cases:** 94% increase in cases since 2017, with over 2 lakh registered cases as of May 2024 (NCRB data).
- **Delayed Compensation:** Lack of structured procedures leads to long delays in victim compensation.
- **Shortage of Special Public Prosecutors:** Many cases suffer **insensitivity and inefficiency** due to lack of trained prosecutors.
- **Fear & Stigma:** Many cases remain **unreported or delayed** due to **social stigma and lack of awareness**.
- **Absence of "Support Persons":** 96% of cases lack designated support persons, who assist victims through legal procedures.
- **Legal Challenges for Consensual Cases (16-18 age group):** Minors engaging in **consensual relationships** face **legal consequences** under POCSO, including **prolonged detention and bail denial**.
- **Insufficient POCSO Courts:** Not all districts have designated **POCSO courts**, delaying justice.

#### What is a Private Member's Bill?

- A bill introduced by a Member of Parliament (MP) who is not a Minister.
- Less than 10% of Private Members' Bills become law, but they **highlight crucial issues**.

Click here to read more: [Private Members' Bill](#)

#### Overview of the POCSO Act, 2012:

- Aims to **protect children (below 18 years) from sexual abuse and exploitation**.
- Recognizes **both boys and girls as victims** of sexual crimes.
- **Maintains victim confidentiality:** No media disclosure of the child's identity.
- **Mandates mandatory reporting:** Anyone aware of child abuse **must report it** to authorities.

#### Conclusion:

The **proposed reforms** address **critical gaps in governance and child protection**:

- **Mandating more parliamentary sittings** can enhance legislative productivity and government accountability.
- **Amending the POCSO Act** ensures **faster justice, better victim support, and improved enforcement**.

These Bills **highlight the need for structural changes** in parliamentary functioning and child welfare laws to create a **more effective and just system**.

## India's Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025

**Context:** The Indian government is set to introduce the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, during the ongoing Budget session of Parliament. This comprehensive legislation aims to modernize and consolidate India's immigration framework by replacing four outdated laws:



- The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920
- The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
- The Foreigners Act, 1946
- The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000

### Key Features of the Bill:

#### 1. Stricter Penalties for Unauthorized Entry and Document Fraud:

- Unauthorized entry into India without valid documents may result in imprisonment of up to five years and fines up to 5 lakh.
- Using forged travel documents could lead to imprisonment ranging from two to seven years and fines between 1 lakh and 10 lakh.

#### 2. Obligations for Educational and Medical Institutions:

- Universities and educational institutions admitting foreign students are required to share their details with designated registration officers.
- Hospitals, nursing homes, and medical institutions providing lodging to foreigners must maintain and report records to authorities.

#### 3. Enhanced Visa and Passport Regulations:

- The central government is empowered to regulate the entry, exit, and movement of foreign nationals within India.
- Foreigners overstaying their visas, violating visa conditions, or entering prohibited areas may face imprisonment of up to three years, fines up to ₹3 lakh, or both.

#### 4. Liability of Carriers and Transport Operators:

- Carriers, including airlines and shipping companies, are responsible for ensuring passengers possess valid travel documents before boarding.
- Transporting foreigners without valid documents can result in fines up to ₹5 lakh. Failure to pay may lead to the seizure or detention of the transport vehicle.

### Rationale for the New Legislation:

The existing immigration laws were enacted during the early to mid-20th century, primarily under wartime conditions, and have become outdated in addressing contemporary security challenges and global migration trends. The new Bill seeks to provide a unified and updated legal framework to effectively manage immigration in today's context.

### Potential Challenges and Criticisms:

- **Human Rights Concerns:**





- Stricter deportation policies may adversely affect long-term foreign residents and asylum seekers.
- Human rights advocates may raise issues regarding due process and the treatment of deported individuals.

- **Impact on Institutions:**

- Educational and medical institutions might face challenges in complying with new reporting requirements, potentially leading to bureaucratic hurdles in admitting international students and medical tourists.

- **Enforcement and Implementation:**

- Effective implementation will require robust coordination among immigration officers, carriers, educational institutions, and security agencies.
- Ensuring transparency in enforcement is crucial to prevent harassment or wrongful detentions.

**Conclusion:**

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, represents a significant overhaul of India's immigration laws, aiming to align them with current global standards and security needs. While it introduces stricter regulations and penalties to deter illegal immigration and document fraud, careful consideration must be given to potential human rights implications and the practical challenges of implementation.

freedom UPSC  
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS



## Government Revamps Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) to Support Farmers

**Context:** The central government has recently revised the guidelines for the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS), aimed at supporting farmers by stabilizing prices of perishable agricultural commodities. The updated guidelines aim to enhance procurement processes and expand coverage to better assist the farming community during market price fluctuations.



### What is the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS)?

The Market Intervention Scheme is a government initiative designed to help State/UT governments procure perishable agricultural and horticultural commodities such as tomatoes, onions, potatoes, etc., when their prices fall below reasonable levels. It is used as a tool to address price volatility for commodities that do not have a Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Under the scheme, the government intervenes when there is a price drop of at least 10% in the prevailing market price compared to the previous normal year, ensuring farmers receive fair compensation for their produce.

### Revised Guidelines Under the Market Intervention Scheme:

#### Integration with PM-AASHA:

The Market Intervention Scheme has now been made a component of the integrated PM-AASHA scheme, which aims to support agricultural markets and ensure price stability for farmers across India.

#### Increased Procurement Coverage:

The revised guidelines have increased the procurement limit for crops under MIS from the existing 20% to 25% of the total production quantity. This expansion is aimed at enhancing farmer protection during periods of market distress, allowing more crops to be covered under the intervention program.

#### Direct Payments to Farmers:

In a significant change, States can now opt to pay the difference between the Market Intervention Price (MIP) and the selling price directly into the bank accounts of farmers, eliminating the need for physical procurement. This move aims to streamline the process and ensure farmers receive timely financial support.

#### Operational Cost Reimbursement:

The central government will reimburse operational costs incurred in storage and transportation of crops from producing States to consuming States. This will be handled by Central Nodal Agencies (CNA) like NAFED and NCCF, ensuring that farmers do not bear the additional financial burden of moving their produce across the country.

### Conclusion: Empowering Farmers with Enhanced Support

The revised Market Intervention Scheme represents a stronger commitment by the government to protect farmers' incomes and stabilize prices for essential perishable goods. With higher procurement limits, direct payment options, and cost reimbursements, the updated guidelines are designed to provide more efficient and timely support to farmers in times of market distress. By integrating MIS into PM-AASHA, the government is working towards a more holistic and farmer-friendly approach to price stabilization and market intervention.

**Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024: Key Insights & India's Performance**

**Context:** India ranked **96th out of 180 countries** in the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024**, highlighting persistent corruption challenges in the public sector.

**What is the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)?**

The **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** is an annual ranking by **Transparency International** that assesses **perceived levels of public sector corruption** worldwide.

**How is CPI Measured?**

- The index scores countries **on a scale of 0 to 100**:
  - **0 = Highly Corrupt**
  - **100 = Very Clean**
- **Rankings are based on expert assessments and surveys** conducted by international organizations.

**Why is CPI Important?**

- It **reflects governance quality**, transparency, and the **effectiveness of anti-corruption measures**.
- Corruption **undermines democracy**, **fuels inequality**, and **weakens institutions**.
- The 2024 CPI particularly highlights **how corruption is hindering global climate action**.

**Key Findings of CPI 2024:****1. Global Corruption Trends:**

- **85% of the world's population** lives in countries with **CPI scores below 50**, indicating widespread corruption.
- **Corruption is linked to declining democracy**, **instability**, and **human rights violations**.

**2. India's Performance:**

- **India's CPI score: 38 out of 100** (Dropped 1 point from 2023).
- **India's Rank: 96 out of 180 countries**.
- This indicates **ongoing challenges in tackling public sector corruption**.

**3. Least Corrupt Countries (Highest CPI Scores):**

- **Denmark**
- **Finland**
- **Singapore**

These countries have **strong institutions**, **transparency**, and **strict anti-corruption laws**.

**4. Most Corrupt Countries (Lowest CPI Scores):**

- **South Sudan**
- **Somalia**
- **Venezuela**

These nations **struggle with weak governance**, **conflict**, and **lack of accountability**.

[Download Our Application](#)



**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**



### How Corruption is Hindering Climate Action:

1. **Weakens Climate Policies:** Powerful corporate interests often manipulate policies to favor **profit over environmental protection**.
2. **Erodes Governance & Law Enforcement:** Poor governance leads to weak implementation of climate-related laws, reducing accountability.
3. **Misuse of Climate Funds:** Many climate-vulnerable countries **score below 50 on CPI**, indicating high risks of fund misallocation.
4. **Worsens Inequality:** Corrupt practices ensure that **marginalized communities** receive fewer benefits from **climate policies and disaster relief efforts**.
5. **Undermines Global Climate Negotiations:** Lobbying by fossil fuel companies and lack of **transparency** in negotiations delay **global climate progress**.

### Recommendations for Strengthening Anti-Corruption Measures:

1. **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Policies:** Integrate anti-corruption safeguards into **climate finance and public policies**.
2. **Increase Transparency in Climate Action:** Implement lobbying regulations and **open records for climate finance** to ensure accountability.
3. **Improve Investigations & Protect Whistleblowers:** Strengthen enforcement agencies and provide protection for environmental activists.
4. **Promote Public Engagement in Climate Policy:** Ensure affected communities have a voice in climate action planning and decision-making.

### Conclusion:

India's **CPI rank of 96** reflects **persistent governance challenges**, requiring **urgent anti-corruption reforms**. As **corruption weakens climate action**, the **government must implement stricter transparency measures, improve accountability, and strengthen law enforcement**.



## U.S. Tariff Policies on Steel, Aluminium, and Trade Relations with India

**Context:** U.S. President **Donald Trump** has announced a **25% tariff** on steel and aluminium imports from multiple countries, including **Canada, Mexico, and China**. This move is poised to reshape global trade dynamics, potentially drive inflation, and impact bilateral relations with key trading partners, including **India**.



### Key Context and Developments:

#### U.S. Tariffs on Steel & Aluminium:

- **25% Tariff on Steel Imports:** Aimed at reducing steel imports to the U.S. and boosting local steel manufacturing.
- **Aluminium Imports Affected:** Similarly, **aluminium** imports will face new trade penalties, hurting suppliers.
- **Key Suppliers to the U.S.:** **Canada, China, Mexico** are major suppliers of these metals, with potential for major ripple effects across global trade.

#### Impact of Trump's Steel Tariff Threat on India:

##### 1. Impact on Indian Industries & Exports:

- **Competitiveness Concerns:** Indian steelmakers fear that the U.S.'s tariffs could significantly reduce India's ability to compete in the **U.S. steel market**, a crucial export destination.
- **Export Market Contraction:** India, a major exporter of steel, might face **lost market share** in the U.S. due to increased tariff barriers.

##### 2. Rise in Steel Imports & Dumping Risks:

- **Diversion of Global Steel Trade:** The U.S.'s tariffs might **divert global steel trade** towards countries like **India**, potentially leading to **steel dumping** by producers from **China, Japan, and South Korea**.
- **Price Pressure:** Steel imports into India surged, with **Chinese steel imports rising by 80% in 2024**, potentially causing **price pressure** and **losses** for Indian manufacturers.

##### 3. Impact on Global Trade & Inflation:

- **Currency Depreciation:** A **weaker rupee** could exacerbate **imported inflation risks**, especially with rising steel prices.
- **Global Trade Tensions:** Countries like **South Korea** are concerned about how U.S. tariffs will affect their industries and exports.
- **Reciprocal Tariffs:** President Trump hinted at **imposing new tariffs** on products from countries that impose **higher tariffs on U.S. goods**, escalating the trade conflict.

#### India's Response and Trade Concessions:

##### 1. Lowering Import Duties:

India is looking to **reduce import duties on U.S. farm products** to ease **trade tensions**:

- **Pecan Nuts:** India already reduced duties on **pecan nuts** from **100% to 30%** in early 2023 to improve trade relations.
- **Other Farm Products:** Potential further reductions in duties to pacify Trump's tariff stance and smooth trade discussions.



## 2. Restoring GSP Status:

- **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** India will lobby for the **restoration of its preferential trade status under GSP**, which was revoked by the U.S. in 2019.
- **GSP Benefits:** Under GSP, India enjoyed **lower or zero tariffs** on several products, enhancing **market access** for Indian exports to the U.S.

## 3. Safeguard Measures:

India is considering **safeguard measures** to protect its industries in the event of a **sudden surge in imports**:

- **Anti-Dumping Duty:** Protecting local industries from unfairly low-priced foreign goods.
- **Countervailing Duty:** Addressing **foreign subsidies** that distort competition.
- **Tariffs & Quotas:** Imposing taxes or limits to control the influx of foreign products.

## Overview of GSP (Generalized System of Preferences):

### What is GSP?

The **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)** is a U.S. trade program aimed at supporting the **economic growth of developing countries** by offering **preferential tariff treatment** for their exports.

### Key Features of GSP:

- **Duty-Free & Reduced Tariffs:** Eligible products from **developing nations** can enter the U.S. market with **lower or zero tariffs**.
- **Non-Reciprocal Basis:** Initially offered without requiring reciprocal trade concessions from beneficiaries.
- **Market Access:** GSP has historically helped increase exports from developing nations, fostering economic development and diversification.

### Benefits of GSP for India:

- **Enhanced Competitiveness:** **Lower or zero tariffs** on Indian exports to the U.S. make products more competitive in the U.S. market.
- **Stronger Market Presence:** GSP helps Indian exporters **increase their foothold** in the U.S. and **improve profit margins**.

### Conclusion:

The **U.S. tariff policies** on steel and aluminium, alongside broader trade dynamics, have significant implications for **India**. The **renewed tariffs** raise **concerns** for Indian steelmakers while also **reshaping trade strategies** for agricultural exports.

India's response, including **reducing import duties on U.S. farm products** and lobbying for **restoration of its GSP status**, reflects an effort to **counterbalance** the impact of U.S. trade policies. However, tensions may continue to rise unless diplomatic solutions, including **safeguard measures** and **cooperative trade agreements**, can be achieved.

## Meghalaya Woman Challenges Age Restriction Under ART Act

**Context:** Legal Challenge to the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021

A woman from Meghalaya has filed a legal challenge against the **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021**, which restricts women over the age of 50 from undergoing assisted reproductive procedures. The case has drawn attention after the **Meghalaya High Court** criticized an **Assam-based fertility clinic** for failing to follow the court's directive to form a **medical board** to assess the petitioner's eligibility for assisted reproduction.



**Overview of the ART Act, 2021:**

The **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021** was introduced to **regulate** and **supervise ART clinics and banks** across India, ensuring that **ethical standards** and **safety protocols** are adhered to in the provision of ART services. ART includes a variety of techniques aimed at achieving pregnancy by handling **sperm** or **oocytes** outside the human body, followed by the transfer of the **gamete** or **embryo** into a woman's reproductive system.

**Key procedures under ART include:**

- **In-vitro fertilization (IVF)**
- **Gamete donation** (sperm or egg)
- **Gestational surrogacy**

The **National Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Board** was established to:

- Advise the **central government** on ART-related policy matters
- **Monitor** the implementation of ART policies
- **Lay down a code of conduct** for ART clinics and banks

**State-level boards** coordinate the enforcement of these policies at the regional level. All ART clinics and banks must be **registered** under the **National ART and Surrogacy Registry**, which acts as a **centralized database** to track all ART clinics and banks across the country. Registration is contingent upon meeting **specific standards** of infrastructure, staffing, and diagnostic facilities.

**Eligibility Criteria Under the ART Act:**

The **ART Act** outlines strict eligibility criteria for individuals seeking ART services:

- **For Married Couples:**
  - The woman should be between **21 and 50 years** of age.
  - The man should be between **21 and 55 years** of age.
  - The couple must be **infertile**, defined as the inability to conceive after **one year** of unprotected intercourse or having a **proven medical condition** preventing conception.
- **For Unmarried Women:**
  - Women **over 21 years** can access ART services independently.



- **For Donors:**

- **Female donors:** Age between **23 and 35 years**; can donate oocytes **only once** in their lifetime.
- **Male donors:** Age between **21 and 45 years**; can donate sperm **up to seven times**.

**Rights of Children Born Through ART:**

Children born through ART procedures are recognized as **biological children** of the **commissioning couple** or the **woman** who initiated the procedure. These children are entitled to all the **rights and privileges** available to **natural children** under the law.

The **ART Act** also includes stringent **prohibitions**:

- **Sex selection**
- **Sale of human embryos or gametes**
- **Use of intermediaries** to obtain donors

Violations of these provisions are subject to **penalties**, including **fines** and **imprisonment**, depending on the severity of the offense.

**Current Legal Challenge:**

The ongoing case has raised concerns over the **age restrictions** imposed by the ART Act, especially its impact on women over 50. This legal challenge could set a significant precedent for the interpretation and future application of the **ART Act**, particularly concerning **age-related eligibility criteria**.

The **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act** aims to provide a more **regulated** and **ethical framework** for ART procedures in India, but this recent challenge highlights ongoing debates about **age restrictions** and **individual rights** in reproductive technology. As this case progresses, it will be essential to see whether **age-based restrictions** will be reconsidered or revised in future legislation.





## Panama's Withdrawal from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

**Context:** Panama has recently made headlines by **withdrawing** from China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, a strategic development program launched by China in 2013. This marks a significant shift in Panama's relationship with Beijing, as it chose not to renew its **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with China, signed in 2017.



In response, China summoned Panama's **Ambassador** to protest this decision, accusing the **United States** of exerting pressure to undermine China's infrastructure projects. This move has raised questions about the growing influence of the U.S. in **Latin America** and the changing dynamics of international trade and geopolitics.

### The Trump Factor: A Backdrop of Tension:

U.S. President **Donald Trump** has long expressed concerns over China's growing influence in the region, particularly with regard to the **Panama Canal**. He claimed that **China** was gaining strategic control over the canal, suggesting that it should be **returned** to U.S. control.

Trump alleged that Panama was unfairly charging U.S. ships using the canal and even made claims that **Chinese soldiers** were operating the canal. However, Panama's **President José Raul Mulino** vehemently denied these accusations, affirming that there were no **Chinese soldiers** stationed at the canal and emphasizing that Panama remains open to investments from **all countries**, not just China.

### Chinese Influence and Investments in the Panama Canal:

China has been involved in the Panama Canal for years, with **Chinese companies** holding significant stakes in the region's infrastructure. For example:

- **Panama Ports Company (PPC)**, a subsidiary of **Hong Kong-based Hutchison Port Holdings**, has managed two key ports at either end of the canal since **1997**.
- **China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO)**, one of the canal's largest users, plays a crucial role in the region's trade. In **2021**, PPC's contract for port operations was **extended** for another **25 years**, although the extension is currently under review by Panama.

This involvement has led to fears in the U.S. that **Chinese control** over strategic infrastructure could provide China with **geopolitical leverage**, especially in times of international conflict. The U.S. sees these **Chinese companies** as being aligned with the **Chinese government's interests**, further escalating concerns.

### The Geopolitical Importance of the Panama Canal:

The **Panama Canal**, completed in **1914**, serves as a critical waterway connecting the **Atlantic** and **Pacific Oceans**, significantly reducing the travel time for ships. Originally constructed by the U.S., the canal was under American control until the **Torrijos-Carter Treaties** of **1977**, which paved the way for Panama to take control of the canal by **1999**, although the U.S. retained military defense rights.

The canal remains vital for **global trade**, particularly for **U.S. shipping routes**, increasing its **geopolitical significance**. The U.S. and other Western powers have long been wary of any foreign influence that could disrupt their access to this crucial trade artery.

### About the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

The **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** is a global development strategy spearheaded by **China** to enhance **regional connectivity** and foster **economic cooperation** across **Asia, Europe, and Africa**. Launched in





**2013**, the BRI aims to revive the ancient **Silk Road** trade routes through investments in infrastructure and trade.

- To fund BRI projects, China offers **loans** to participating countries, which often come with **commercial interest rates** and a fixed repayment period.
- Critics in the West have accused China of **debt-trapping** countries through “**predatory loans**”, pressuring them to cede valuable assets in return for the funding.

Despite criticism, the BRI continues to expand, with **over 140 countries** joining the initiative by **2024**, covering nearly **75%** of the world’s population and over half of its GDP.

### Panama's Decision: A Symbol of Changing Global Alliances?

Panama’s withdrawal from the BRI is not just a diplomatic decision—it signals potential shifts in **global alliances**. While the **U.S.** and China continue their geopolitical rivalry, Panama’s choice reflects broader concerns about **China's expanding influence** in Latin America and the region's need for **balanced partnerships**.

The **U.S.**, through its strategic political and economic influence, appears to be encouraging countries like Panama to reconsider their relationships with China. As geopolitical tensions rise, this shift could have long-term implications for the **BRI**, especially in **Latin America**.

### Conclusion: A Changing Landscape

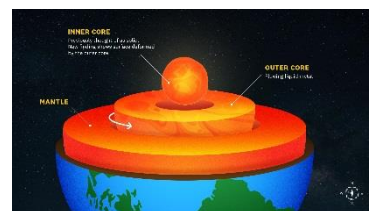
Panama’s decision to distance itself from China’s BRI marks a key turning point in international trade dynamics, with the U.S. playing a central role in shaping the future of the region. As the **BRI** continues to expand, it remains to be seen how countries like Panama will navigate the pressures from both **China** and the **U.S.**, balancing economic growth with geopolitical considerations.

Freedom UPSC  
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS



## Earth's Inner Core is Undergoing Structural Changes

**Context:** A recent study published in *Nature Geoscience* has revealed that **Earth's inner core is undergoing structural changes**, challenging previous assumptions about its stability and composition. Scientists have observed that **the inner core is not as rigid as once believed** and that **its rotation is slowing down**, which could have implications for Earth's day-length and internal dynamics.



### Key Insights from the Study:

#### How Was the Study Conducted?

- **Seismic Waves Analysis:** Researchers used **seismic waves (shockwaves from earthquakes)** to study the Earth's internal layers.
- These waves travel through different layers of Earth, similar to how **CT scans** help visualize the human body's internal structures.

#### Major Observations:

- Previously, scientists assumed that the **inner core was solid and rigid**, but the new study suggests it is **softer near the surface**.
- The **molten outer core** is influencing the **solid inner core**, potentially **altering its rotation** and **impacting Earth's day-length**.
- It was earlier believed that the **inner core rotates independently** due to its interactions with the mantle. However, this new research indicates that **its rotation is slowing down** over time.

### Understanding Earth's Layers:

#### 1. Crust – The Outer Shell:

- The **thinnest layer** (35 km on continents, 5 km on ocean floors).
- **Continental Crust:** Made of **silica and alumina (SIAL)**.
- **Oceanic Crust:** Made of **silica and magnesium (SIMA)**.

#### 2. Mantle – The Middle Layer:

- Extends from the **Moho's discontinuity** to **2,900 km deep**.
- **Asthenosphere (Upper Mantle, up to 400 km deep):** A semi-molten layer, **source of magma**.
- **Lithosphere:** Includes the **crust and upper mantle**, with a thickness of **10-200 km**.
- **Lower Mantle:** Solid and extends beyond the asthenosphere.

#### 3. Core – The Deepest Layer:

- Begins at **2,900 km depth** and has **extremely high temperature and pressure**.
- Composed of **nickel and iron (NiFe layer)**.

#### Outer Core:

- In a **liquid state**.
- Known for its **turbulence**, which generates Earth's **magnetic field**.

**Inner Core:**

- Previously believed to be **rigid and solid**, but **new findings suggest it has a softer surface**.
- The **turbulent outer core was thought to have little impact on the inner core**, but the latest research indicates **it may influence its motion and rotation**.

**Why Are These Findings Important?**

- **Changes in Core Rotation:** The slowing rotation of the inner core could impact **Earth's day-length** over long periods.
- **New Understanding of Earth's Dynamics:** The interaction between the inner and outer core challenges traditional models of Earth's structure.
- **Geophysical Implications:** These findings could help scientists **better understand seismic activities, magnetic field variations, and long-term planetary changes**.

This research **redefines our knowledge of Earth's inner workings** and paves the way for **further studies on planetary evolution and deep-Earth processes**.



## Could Trump Break the Capital Controls Taboo with a Tobin Tax?

**Context:** The topic of **investment barriers** has traditionally been avoided by U.S. policymakers, driven by concerns that even discussing such measures could spark panic in the global financial market. However, under **Donald Trump's economic agenda**, the conversation around **restrictions on inward investment** has become more open, signaling a potential shift in how the U.S. handles its relationship with foreign capital.



### Understanding Investment Barriers:

Investment barriers are factors that hinder access to markets or the ability to make investments. These can include:

- **Financial Barriers:** High costs, large capital requirements, and illiquidity.
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Government restrictions, high taxes, and legal limitations.
- **Psychological Barriers:** Risk aversion, lack of knowledge, and behavioral biases.

### Trump's Zero-Sum Trade View:

Trump's economic strategy is often described through a **zero-sum lens**, viewing **international trade** as a competition where gains by one nation come at the expense of another. His administration has sought to address **U.S. trade deficits**, which he believes arise from countries undervaluing their currencies to gain an advantage in trade. According to this view, countries with trade surpluses tend to **invest their savings** in **U.S. assets**, which increases the value of the dollar and, in turn, worsens U.S. trade competitiveness by making American goods more expensive abroad.

### Tariffs as a Tool:

To reduce the trade deficit, Trump has used **tariffs** as an economic weapon, imposing them on imports to incentivize local production and reduce reliance on foreign goods. However, this strategy has led to an unintended consequence: a **stronger dollar**. While tariffs are meant to limit imports, the increase in the dollar's value worsens the trade balance and further reduces the competitiveness of U.S. manufacturing.

The **core issue**, as critics argue, is the **relentless global demand for U.S. assets**, which sustains the dollar's strength and increases the trade deficit. **Tariffs**, then, do not address the underlying cause.

### Enter the Tobin Tax:

To combat the growing trade deficit and capital inflows, **James Tobin's idea** of a **Tobin tax**—a tax on currency transactions—has been revisited. Initially proposed in the **1970s**, the Tobin tax aims to **slow down excessive cross-border capital flows**, particularly those driving the **overvaluation of the U.S. dollar**. The goal would be to impose a tax on **foreign investment** coming into the U.S. to curb the financial inflows that exacerbate the dollar's strength and worsen the trade deficit.

### Tobin Tax: A Tool to Regulate Capital Flows:

#### The Tobin tax would:

- **Impose a levy** on **currency transactions**, potentially reducing the speed of speculative capital movements.
- **Generate substantial revenue** without significantly reducing the volume of global capital flows, making it an attractive alternative to tariffs.



- Help **manage capital inflows** and prevent the dollar from becoming too strong, which could mitigate trade imbalances.

Some economists believe a **Tobin tax** would be a more effective tool than tariffs for addressing the **trade deficit**. By taxing cross-border capital flows, it would reduce the incentive to invest in U.S. assets purely for speculative reasons, without significantly hurting productive foreign investment.

### Potential Risks of the Tobin Tax:

However, imposing a **Tobin tax** or similar **capital controls** could have significant risks and negative consequences:

1. **Impact on the Dollar:** The mere suggestion of restrictions on foreign investment could lead to a **sharp decline in the dollar's value**, destabilizing both the **U.S. financial markets** and the broader **global economy**.
2. **Impact on U.S. Markets:** A **restriction on foreign investment** could result in a **massive downturn in U.S. stock and bond markets**, causing significant **economic disruption**. Many U.S. companies rely on foreign capital for growth and expansion, and a sudden reduction in investment could lead to **market instability** and **lower corporate valuations**.

### Conclusion: A Bold Shift or Dangerous Gamble?

Would Donald Trump break the **capital controls taboo** by imposing a **Tobin tax**? While the idea of taxing cross-border capital flows could provide a way to address the trade deficit without resorting to tariffs, it also carries substantial risks. The **strong dollar** has been a double-edged sword for the U.S. economy, benefitting investors while hurting manufacturing competitiveness. By taxing foreign investment, Trump could attempt to slow this cycle, but the **potential consequences**—from **dollar devaluation** to **market turmoil**—could outweigh the benefits.

Whether or not Trump will push forward with such a drastic measure remains uncertain, but his **zero-sum view of trade** and the ongoing challenges of balancing the **current account** suggest that **capital controls** may not be entirely off the table in his economic policy toolkit.

TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS





## Should Convicted Persons Be Allowed to Contest Elections?

**Context:** The **Supreme Court of India** is currently hearing petitions demanding a **lifetime ban** on convicted individuals from contesting elections. This debate raises critical questions about **legal provisions**, **judicial precedents**, and the broader implications of **criminalization in politics**.

### Legal Provisions Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951:

#### Disqualification Based on Conviction:

- **Section 8(3):** A person convicted of a criminal offense and sentenced to **at least two years of imprisonment** is **disqualified** from contesting elections.
- This **disqualification period lasts for six years** after the person's release from prison.

#### Disqualification for Specific Offenses:

- **Section 8(1)** mandates automatic disqualification for certain serious crimes, irrespective of the sentence length. These include:
  - **Rape**
  - **Offenses under the Protection of Civil Rights Act (Untouchability)**
  - **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**
  - **Prevention of Corruption Act**
- The **disqualification extends for six years beyond release from prison**.

#### Election Commission's Power to Remove Disqualification:

- **Section 11:** The **Election Commission (EC)** has the authority to **reduce or remove** the disqualification period.
- **Controversy:** In **2019**, the EC **reduced the disqualification period** of **Prem Singh Tamang**, allowing him to contest elections despite a **corruption conviction**.

#### Key Supreme Court Judgments on Decriminalization of Politics:

##### Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) Case (2002):

- **Mandated candidates to disclose their criminal records** while filing nominations.
- Strengthened **voter awareness** and **transparency** in elections.

##### CEC vs. Jan Chaukidar (2013):

- The **Patna High Court** ruled that **undertrial prisoners** are **not eligible to contest elections** since they are not 'electors.'
- The **Supreme Court upheld** this ruling, but **Parliament later overturned it** through an amendment.

##### Lily Thomas Case (2013):

- The Supreme Court **struck down Section 8(4)** of the RP Act, which previously allowed convicted legislators to **continue in office** if they filed an appeal.
- As a result, a **sitting legislator is now immediately disqualified** upon conviction.

#### Arguments For a Lifetime Ban on Convicted Politicians:



**1. Strengthening Electoral Integrity:**

- Politics should be free from **criminal influence**.
- Ensuring **clean governance** promotes **public trust in democracy**.

**2. Preventing Misuse of Power:**

- Convicted individuals may use **political influence** to manipulate legal proceedings.
- A **lifetime ban discourages the misuse of legal loopholes**.

**3. Global Best Practices:**

- Many democracies impose strict disqualification rules on **convicted politicians**.
- **India, as the world's largest democracy, should set a strong precedent.**

**Arguments Against a Lifetime Ban on Convicted Politicians:****1. Right to Rehabilitation:**

- A **lifetime ban violates the fundamental right** to seek public office after serving a sentence.
- Other professionals (doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats) **do not face lifetime bans** for convictions.

**2. Judicial Delays and Misuse:**

- **False cases and politically motivated convictions** are common in India.
- A lifetime ban could be misused to **eliminate political rivals**.

**3. Existing Laws Already Ensure Disqualification:**

- **Current disqualification rules** (six-year ban after release) **strike a balance** between punishment and rehabilitation.

**Conclusion: The Need for a Balanced Approach**

The debate over whether convicted individuals should face a **lifetime ban from elections** is complex. While **preventing criminal elements from entering politics** is crucial, a **blanket lifetime ban may be excessive and prone to misuse**. A potential **middle path** could involve:

- **Stricter scrutiny of cases involving serious crimes like corruption and sexual offenses.**
- **Enhanced judicial safeguards to prevent misuse** of disqualification provisions.
- **Public accountability mechanisms** to ensure greater **transparency** in candidate selection.

As the Supreme Court deliberates on this issue, its verdict will shape the future of **ethical governance and electoral democracy in India**.



## India's Obscenity Laws: Ranveer Allahbadia Case & Legal Perspectives

**Context:** The Mumbai Police have initiated an investigation into YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, comedian Samay Raina, and Apoorva Makhija for allegedly making obscene remarks on the YouTube show *India's Got Latent*. The case has sparked discussions on obscenity laws, free speech, and digital content regulation in India.



### Obscenity Laws in India:

#### Section 294 – Punishment for Obscene Material:

- Prohibits the **sale, import, export, advertisement, or profit** from obscene content (books, paintings, electronic media, etc.).
- Defines obscene material as anything **lascivious, excessively sexual, or corrupting** to viewers.
- Punishment:** Up to **2 years imprisonment** and a fine of up to **5,000** (first offense).

#### Obscenity in Digital Spaces: Section 67 of the IT Act, 2000:

- Punishes** the **publishing or transmission** of obscene material online.
- Uses the **same obscenity definition** as Section 294.
- Punishment:** Up to **3 years imprisonment** and a fine of **5 lakh** (first offense).

### Evolution of the Court's Understanding of Obscenity:

#### Early Rulings: The Hicklin Test

- Ranjit D Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra (1964):** The Supreme Court ruled that the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was obscene.
- Based on the **Hicklin test** (UK, 1868), which judged material by whether it could "deprave and corrupt" vulnerable individuals.

#### International Shifts in Obscenity Laws:

- UK (1959):** Introduced the **Obscene Publications Act**, requiring works to be judged "as a whole."
- US (Roth v. United States, 1957):** Adopted the **community standards test**, assessing material based on contemporary social norms.

#### India's Shift to the Community Standards Test:

- Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal (2014):** The Supreme Court ruled that **obscenity must be assessed in context**, rejecting the Hicklin test.
- Example: A **nude photograph** of Boris Becker and his fiancée was **not** considered obscene, as the content was judged based on **evolving community standards**.

### Obscenity in Online Content: Court Rulings

#### Supreme Court Ruling on *College Romance* (March 2024):

- The court **quashed obscenity charges** against the makers of the web series *College Romance* under **Section 292 IPC** and **Section 67 IT Act**.
- Key Arguments:**
  - Obscenity ≠ Profanity:** Foul language alone does not constitute obscenity.



- **Context Matters:** Obscenity must arouse sexual or lustful thoughts, which the show did not.

#### Application of the Community Standards Test:

- The **court ruled** that language reflecting **anger, frustration, or humor** is not inherently obscene.
- Set a **precedent for online content**, making it **harder for authorities to misuse obscenity laws**.

#### Ranveer Allahbadia Controversy: Legal Charges & Implications

##### The FIR Against Ranveer Allahbadia & Others:

- Mumbai Police have filed an **FIR against YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia**, comedian **Samay Raina**, and **Apoorva Makhija**.
- The controversy stems from **alleged offensive remarks** made on *India's Got Latent*, targeting the **Indian family system and religious sentiments**.

##### Legal Provisions Invoked:

Section	Description	Punishment
<b>Section 79</b>	Insulting the modesty of a woman through words or gestures.	Up to <b>3 years imprisonment</b> + fine.
<b>Section 196</b>	Promoting enmity between groups based on religion, race, etc.	Up to <b>3 years imprisonment</b> , fine, or both.
<b>Section 296</b>	Publicly performing obscene acts, songs, or words.	Up to <b>3 months imprisonment</b> , fine, or both.
<b>Section 3(5)</b>	If multiple people act with a common intent, all are equally liable.	Punishment based on the offense committed.

##### Key Allegations:

- **Demeaning Indian family values** and **offending religious sentiments**.
- **Inappropriate discussions on sex and parents** on a public platform.
- Complaints claim that the **show crossed ethical boundaries** of **free speech** and **responsible content creation**.

#### Conclusion: Balancing Free Speech & Obscenity Laws

The **Ranveer Allahbadia case** highlights the **complex intersection of free speech, morality, and obscenity laws** in India. While **obscenity laws** are **necessary to regulate harmful content**, they **must not be misused to suppress artistic freedom and open discussions**.





## Rare Einstein Ring Discovered by ESA's Euclid Telescope

**Context:** The European Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid space telescope has spotted a rare **Einstein ring** surrounding the galaxy **NGC 6505**, located nearly **590 million light-years** from Earth.

**Did you know?** A **light-year** is the distance light travels in a year, approximately **9.46 trillion kilometers**!



### What is an Einstein Ring?

#### Overview:

An **Einstein ring** is a **circular halo of light** that appears around a **massive celestial object**, such as a **galaxy**, **black hole**, or **dark matter cluster**.

#### How Does It Form? – Gravitational Lensing:

This phenomenon occurs due to **gravitational lensing**, where a **massive object's gravity bends and amplifies light** from a distant background galaxy. When the alignment is nearly perfect, it creates a **complete ring of light**.

- The object bending the light is called a **gravitational lens**.
- The Euclid telescope detected this ring due to the bending effect of **NGC 6505**, which distorted light from an **unnamed galaxy located 4.42 billion light-years away**.

### Why is it Called an Einstein Ring?

The concept originates from **Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity**, which predicted that **massive objects warp space-time**, curving the path of light around them.

#### How Rare are Einstein Rings?

- First discovered in **1987**, Einstein rings are **extremely rare**, appearing in **less than 1% of observed galaxies**.
- They are **not visible to the naked eye** and require **advanced space telescopes** like **Euclid**, **Hubble**, or **James Webb** for observation.

#### Scientific Importance of Einstein Rings:

Einstein rings serve as **natural cosmic magnifying glasses**, helping astronomers:

1. **Study distant galaxies** that would otherwise be invisible.
2. **Investigate dark matter**, revealing its distribution in the universe.
3. **Explore dark energy**, the mysterious force driving the universe's accelerated expansion.

#### Similar Phenomena: Einstein Cross:

**Einstein Cross** is another **gravitational lensing effect**, where instead of a ring, a **distant galaxy's light splits into four distinct images**, creating a **cross-like pattern** around the foreground galaxy.

#### Final Thought:

The discovery of an Einstein ring around **NGC 6505** is a **fascinating breakthrough** in astrophysics, offering deeper insights into the universe's **hidden structures and cosmic forces**.



## P-8I Aircraft: India's Cutting-Edge Maritime Patrol Aircraft

**Context:** India is set to **revive its proposal** to acquire **six additional P-8I** long-range maritime patrol aircraft from the **United States**. This move aims to **bolster the Indian Navy's surveillance capabilities**, reinforcing its strength in maritime operations.

### About the P-8I Aircraft:

The **P-8I Poseidon** is a **long-range, multi-mission maritime patrol aircraft** designed and built by **Boeing**, a leading **U.S. aerospace company**.

- It serves as a **successor** to the **Indian Navy's aging Tupolev Tu-142** aircraft.
- The **P-8I** is a **specialized variant** of the **P-8A Poseidon**, which is extensively used by the **United States Navy**.
- With **cutting-edge sensors, advanced weapons systems, and exceptional range**, the P-8I can **detect and neutralize threats** from **submarines, surface vessels, and aerial adversaries**.



### Key Capabilities of the P-8I:

The **P-8I Poseidon** is a versatile aircraft capable of executing multiple missions, including:

1. **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW)** – Tracking and neutralizing enemy submarines.
2. **Anti-Surface Warfare (AsuW)** – Engaging hostile surface vessels.
3. **Maritime Surveillance & Reconnaissance** – Conducting long-range patrolling and intelligence gathering.
4. **Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (ISR)** – Providing real-time battlefield awareness.

### P-8I Aircraft Specifications:

Feature	Details
Length	39.47 m
Wingspan	37.64 m
Height	12.83 m
Crew Members	9
Maximum Takeoff Weight	85,139 kg
Maximum Speed	789 km/h
Maximum Altitude	12,496 m
Operational Range	2,222+ km
Time on Station	4+ hours

The **P-8I's endurance and high-speed capabilities** make it a **formidable asset** for maritime security, ensuring that India maintains **dominance over its waters**.

### Why is the P-8I Important for India?

**Strengthens India's Maritime Defense:** Enhances surveillance and tracking of **hostile submarines** and warships.



**Supports Regional Stability:** Plays a **pivotal role in Indo-Pacific security**, helping counter growing threats in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.

**Enhances Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthens India's **defense ties with the U.S.**, promoting **defense cooperation and interoperability**.

### Conclusion:

The **P-8I Poseidon** is a game-changer in **maritime security**, offering **unmatched reconnaissance, warfare, and surveillance capabilities**. With India planning to **procure more P-8Is**, the Indian Navy will further **fortify its maritime defense**, ensuring **enhanced security and strategic dominance** in the region.





## New Income Tax Bill 2025

**Context:** Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** has presented the **New Income Tax Bill, 2025**, in the **Lok Sabha**, aiming to simplify tax laws and make compliance easier.

**Introduction:** The government has proposed the **Income Tax Bill 2025** to create a **simpler, more transparent, and streamlined tax regime**. Announced during the **Union Budget on February 1, 2025**, the bill eliminates **outdated provisions**, introduces **clearer terminology**, and replaces the term **'assessment year'** with **'tax year'**.



Although the **fundamental tax structure remains unchanged**, experts view this bill as a **significant step towards modernizing India's taxation system**. If approved, it will come into effect from **April 1, 2026**.

### Key Features of the New Income Tax Bill:

#### Introduction of the 'Tax Year' Concept:

- The bill defines a **'tax year'** as a **12-month period starting from April 1**.
- Unlike the current system, where income earned in one financial year is assessed in the following year, the **new system will assess income within the same tax year**.
- For businesses established mid-year, the **tax year will begin from the date of setup and end on March 31**.

#### Simplified Language for Better Understanding:

- The bill **removes complex legal jargon**, reducing the need for excessive cross-referencing.
- The total length of the tax bill has been **reduced from 823 pages to 622 pages**, despite keeping the number of chapters the same at **23**.
- The number of clauses has increased from **298 to 536**, making the provisions **more structured and easier to comprehend**.

#### Expanded Definition of 'Income':

- Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs)**, including **cryptocurrencies and NFTs**, are now included as taxable assets.
- This aligns VDAs with existing capital assets such as **land, buildings, shares, bullion, and artwork**.

#### Elimination of Redundant Provisions:

- The bill **removes outdated exemptions**, such as **Section 54E**, which provided capital gains exemptions for transactions before **April 1992**.
- Unnecessary amendments and outdated references** have been scrapped.

#### Clearer Tax Provisions:

- Several tax-related provisions, including **TDS (Tax Deducted at Source)**, **presumptive taxation rates**, and **assessment time limits**, have been consolidated into easy-to-read tables.
- Deductions for salaries** (such as standard deduction, gratuity, and leave encashment) are now grouped together under one section for better clarity.

#### Reforming the Dispute Resolution Process:

Download Our Application



Freedom UPSC with **Dhananjay Gautam**

Page No

58



- The **Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP)** will now provide:
  - **Points of determination**
  - **Detailed reasons for its decisions**
  - **Clear justifications for rulings**

### Impact on Taxpayers and Businesses:

#### Easier Compliance for Taxpayers:

- The bill **removes excessive cross-referencing**, making tax laws easier to navigate.
- **Legal terms have been simplified**, replacing complex words like “notwithstanding” with simpler alternatives like “irrespective of anything.”

#### Smoother Tax Filing and Compliance:

- Provisions related to **revenue recognition, inventory valuation, and income exclusions** have been consolidated into schedules instead of being scattered across multiple sections.
- **Wealth tax-related provisions** have been integrated, reducing the need for external references.

#### Recognition of the Digital Economy:

- The bill includes **specific provisions for digital assets and service-based revenues**, reflecting the modern structure of the Indian economy.
- Income generated from **digital assets and online services** is now categorized clearly under capital assets.

### Challenges & Future Implications:

#### No Major Structural Reforms:

- The bill focuses on **simplification rather than major policy changes**.
- There are **no alterations in tax rates, penalties, or compliance mechanisms**.

#### Transition to the ‘Tax Year’ Concept:

- Taxpayers and businesses may **require time to adapt** to the new system.
- **Financial professionals and accountants** will need to **update their taxation models and planning strategies**.

#### Pending Approval from Parliament:

- The bill has been **introduced in Lok Sabha** but still needs to be **reviewed by a parliamentary committee** before final approval.

### Conclusion:

The **Income Tax Bill 2025** is a significant step toward **simplifying and modernizing India’s tax system**. The introduction of the **‘tax year’ concept**, removal of **redundant provisions**, and **streamlined tax structures** aim to make compliance **easier and more transparent**.

However, while the bill enhances **clarity and efficiency**, it does not introduce **major tax rate changes or structural reforms**. The government is **prioritizing continuity and simplification**, potentially paving the way for more substantial tax reforms in the future.



## TRAI's New Rules to Tackle Spam Calls &amp; Messages

**Context:** India's telecom regulator, TRAI, has introduced **new regulations** under the **Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations (TCCCPR), 2018**, aimed at reducing **spam calls and messages**.

Leading telecom providers such as **Airtel, Jio, and Vi** must now **monitor call and SMS patterns in real time** to detect and report spammers. Any **failure to comply** will result in hefty **penalties ranging from 2 lakh for the first offense to 10 lakh for repeated violations**.



These updated regulations aim to **protect consumers** from intrusive spam communication and ensure a **more secure and transparent telecom network**.

**How TRAI is Cracking Down on Spam Calls & Messages:****1. Faster Action Against Spam:**

- Consumers can now **report spam calls and messages more easily**.
- **Telecom operators must take action within 5 days**, a major improvement from the earlier 30-day timeframe.

**2. Clear Identification of Spam Calls:**

- Telemarketers **can no longer use normal 10-digit numbers** for promotional calls.
- Instead, calls will be categorized as:
  - **140 series** – Reserved for promotional calls.
  - **1600 series** – Dedicated to transactional and service-related calls (already in effect).

**3. Opt-Out Option for Promotional Messages:**

- Users can now easily **opt out of promotional messages** through telecom providers.
- However, they will have the flexibility to **opt back in whenever they choose**.

**4. Stricter Monitoring of Spam Activity:**

- Telecom operators will **analyze call and SMS patterns** in real time based on:
  - **High call volumes**
  - **Short call durations**
  - **Unusual incoming-to-outgoing call ratios**
- This monitoring will help **identify and block spammers more effectively**.

**5. Stronger Verification & Harsher Penalties:**

- Telemarketers must now undergo **physical verification, biometric authentication, and link their mobile number to their identity**.
- **Repeat violators will have all their telecom resources permanently blocked**.
- Telecom companies are required to **maintain detailed records of spam complaints and sender details** to ensure **quick and effective action**.

**Spam Calls: A Growing Problem in India**[Download Our Application](#)**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**





Millions of Indians face relentless spam calls every day, especially from banking, insurance, and financial service providers. Despite multiple crackdowns, the problem has continued to worsen over time.

A LocalCircles survey (Feb 2023) of 12,000 respondents found that:

- 60% receive three or more spam calls daily.
- 30% get one to two spam calls every day.
- 36% receive three to five spam calls daily.
- 21% report receiving six to ten unwanted calls each day.
- 3% are bombarded with over ten spam calls daily.

With telecom operators sometimes playing a role in the rising spam call surge, TRAI's new stringent measures aim to bring relief to millions of frustrated consumers.



## Trump-Putin Talks: US Pushes for Ukraine War Settlement

**Context:** In a **major diplomatic move**, President Donald Trump held a **"lengthy and highly productive"** conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin—their first confirmed dialogue since Trump's return to office.

The discussion marked the beginning of a **US-led initiative** to **negotiate an end to the Ukraine war**, signaling a **potential turning point** in global diplomacy.

**Trump Takes on Mediator Role in Ukraine Conflict:**

**Trump's Renewed Focus on Ending the War:**

From the start of his **second term**, Trump has made **ending the Ukraine war a priority**. His administration is working towards **facilitating peace talks between Russia and Ukraine**, aiming to bring stability to the region.

**Russia's Response & Diplomatic Signals:**

- The **Kremlin confirmed** the **90-minute conversation** between the two leaders.
- **Putin welcomed Trump's peace initiative**, acknowledging the need for both nations to work together on global stability.

**Trump's Evolving Stance on Russia:**

- Trump's **approach to Russia has shifted significantly** from his first term, when he was accused of being **too accommodating** toward Putin.
- While he previously **praised Putin's strategic tactics**, he has now **adopted a more critical position**, questioning Russia's conduct in the war.

**Challenges Facing the Peace Process:**

Despite Trump's **diplomatic push**, there are **several obstacles** to achieving peace:

- **Ukrainian President Zelenskyy** remains **unwilling to compromise Ukraine's sovereignty**, especially given **strong military and financial backing from the West**.
- **Western nations remain skeptical** of Russia's intentions, fearing that Moscow may use negotiations as a delay tactic while solidifying its hold over **eastern Ukraine**.

**Europe Pushes for a Role in Peace Talks:**

**European Leaders Demand Inclusion:**

European leaders have made it clear that **Ukraine and Europe must be involved** in any diplomatic resolution.

**Trump's Shift on NATO & Ukraine's Borders:**

- Trump has hinted at a **major policy shift**, suggesting that **Ukraine should abandon its NATO ambitions**.
- He has also questioned whether **Ukraine's pre-2014 borders are realistic**, indicating a **possible compromise with Russia**.

**US Prioritizing Other Global Concerns:**

Experts suggest that Trump's administration is **shifting focus away from European security**, instead emphasizing:

- **Border control policies**
- **Strengthening US-China deterrence**

**The Importance of the Trump-Putin Call:**

**A Shift in Global Power Dynamics:**

Trump's direct **negotiations with Putin** signal a **major departure** from past US foreign policy.

[Download Our Application](#)



**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**





- He invoked **World War II comparisons**, likening his diplomacy with Putin to the historic **Yalta Summit**.
- This move effectively **ends Russia's diplomatic isolation**, which had lasted over a decade.

#### A Ceasefire in Sight?

- Trump **announced immediate talks** to negotiate a ceasefire in Ukraine.
- A **meeting with Putin in Saudi Arabia** is already in the works, hinting at a **potential diplomatic breakthrough**.

#### Europe's Absence from Negotiations:

- Much like in **1945**, Europe has been **sidelined** in **US-Russia negotiations**.
- **Trump's administration rejects Ukraine's NATO membership bid**, acknowledging that reclaiming lost territories is **increasingly unrealistic**.

#### Russia's Weakened Position Could Encourage Negotiations:

- Past US-Russia talks, including **Biden's 2021 Geneva summit with Putin**, collapsed due to **Moscow's rigid demands**.
- However, **after three years of war**, **Russia's position has weakened**, making it more likely to **consider serious negotiations**.

#### Could Trump Visit Moscow?

If successful, Trump may **visit Moscow for Russia's Victory Day in May**, a **symbolic step towards a US-Russia deal**. For Putin, this would mean **recognition of Russia's great power status** and a **shift in Europe's security structure in Moscow's favor**.

#### What This Means for Asia & India:

##### Asia's Geopolitical Landscape Could Change:

If Trump succeeds in brokering a **Ukraine peace deal**, his next focus may shift towards **China**. Key questions arise:

- Will Trump **shift his foreign policy towards countering China**?
- Could he extend his **peace negotiations to Taiwan**?
- How will a **potential US-Russia reconciliation impact Moscow-Beijing relations**?

#### Implications for India:

For **India**, this is a **critical moment** in global diplomacy.

- Unlike in the **20th century**, India **now holds significant geopolitical influence**.
- **PM Modi's upcoming meeting with Trump** will be a chance to understand his **larger global strategy**.

#### Economic & Trade Considerations:

Beyond geopolitics, India and the US may **collaborate on economic restructuring**:

- **Countering China's trade dominance** will be a major topic.
- With both nations facing **large trade deficits with China**, Modi might align with **Trump's push for a new economic order led by democratic nations**.

As the **global power balance shifts**, all eyes are now on how Trump's **Ukraine peace efforts unfold** and what they mean for the **future of international diplomacy**

**President's Rule Imposed in Manipur, 11th Time in State's History**

**Context:** The President of India has issued a proclamation imposing **President's Rule in Manipur**, placing the state assembly under **suspended animation**.

This marks the **11th instance** of President's Rule in the state, with the **last imposition occurring in 2001-02**.

**What is President's Rule?****Constitutional Provision: Article 356:**

Under **Article 356 of the Indian Constitution**, the President can impose central rule in a state if:

- The **Governor's report** indicates that the **state government is unable to function as per constitutional provisions**.
- The **President is satisfied** that the state's governance **cannot be carried out in accordance with the Constitution**.

**Duration & Parliamentary Approval:**

- As per **Article 356(3)**, **President's Rule remains in effect for two months** unless approved by **both Houses of Parliament** through a **simple majority**.
- If approved, it can be **extended up to six months**.
- The maximum duration is **three years**, but **Parliament must approve an extension every six months**.

**How Can It Be Revoked?**

- **President's Rule can be revoked** by the **President through a subsequent proclamation**, restoring normal governance in the state.

**What Happens When President's Rule is Imposed?**

- The **President takes over the functions of the State Government** and assumes the **powers of the Governor**.
- The **state legislature's powers are transferred to Parliament**.
- The **functioning of the High Court remains unaffected**.

**Key Judicial Ruling: S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994):**

- The **Supreme Court ruled** that **President's Rule under Article 356 is subject to judicial review**.
- The **President cannot dissolve a state legislative assembly immediately**—this can only happen **after parliamentary approval** of the proclamation.
- Until Parliament grants approval, the **state assembly remains suspended, not dissolved**.

**Significance of the Latest Imposition in Manipur:**

With **political instability in Manipur**, the central government has once again invoked **Article 356**, taking direct control of the state's governance. The move raises **questions about governance, constitutional mechanisms, and the future political landscape of Manipur**.

All eyes are now on the **Parliament's decision** on whether to extend or revoke **President's Rule** in the state.



**Union Government Releases Report on Panchayat Devolution Status**

**Context:** The Union Government has released a report titled ‘**Status of Devolution to Panchayats in States – An Indicative Evidence-Based Ranking**’, offering a **detailed assessment** of how effectively Panchayats function under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

This report provides **key insights** into the **progress of devolution**, highlighting areas of improvement and major challenges.

**Key Findings of the Report:****Panchayat Devolution Index:**

The report ranks **States and Union Territories** based on **six key dimensions** of devolution:

1. **Framework**
2. **Functions**
3. **Finances**
4. **Functionaries**
5. **Capacity Enhancement**
6. **Accountability**

- Overall devolution has improved from 39.9% in 2013-14 to 43.9% in 2021-22.

- **Top 3 States in Devolution:**

- Karnataka
- Kerala
- Tamil Nadu

**Capacity Building Improvements:**

- **Capacity enhancement** for Panchayats has **increased from 44% to 54.6%**, driven by initiatives like the **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**.

**Challenges Hindering Effective Devolution:****1. Election Management Issues:**

- **State Election Commissions (SECs)** are sometimes **forced to consult state governments** on election dates, leading to **delays and potential political interference**.

**2. Weak Implementation of District Planning Committees:**

- **District Planning Committees (DPCs)** are constitutionally mandated under **Article 243ZD**, yet **detailed grassroots-level planning** is rarely undertaken in most states.

**3. Panchayats Overlooked in Governance:**

- **Multiple parallel bodies** operate in areas meant for Panchayats under the **Eleventh Schedule**, **weakening their constitutional authority**.

**Key Recommendations for Strengthening Panchayats:****1. Empowering State Election Commissions (SECs):**

[Download Our Application](#)



**Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam**





- Grant **full autonomy to SECs**, ensuring they can independently handle **election schedules, delimitation, and seat reservations**, without **state government interference**.

## 2. Strengthening Panchayat Governance:

- Establish **structured district planning frameworks**, ensuring Panchayats work in **alignment with state and national policies**.

## 3. Direct Fund Allocation to Panchayats:

- Ensure **all funds for subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule** are transferred **directly to Panchayats**, rather than being diverted through **parallel bodies**.

### The Way Forward:

The **findings of the report emphasize the progress made** in empowering Panchayats but also highlight **critical gaps in governance and autonomy**.

With **proper implementation of the recommendations**, Panchayats can be **strengthened to play a central role in local governance**, ensuring **effective grassroots democracy and development** across India.





## India Ranks Sixth in Global Climate Risk Index

**Context:** A recent Climate Risk Index (CRI) report has revealed that India ranks sixth among the top 10 countries most affected by extreme weather events over the last three decades (1993-2023).

This ranking highlights the increasing vulnerability of India to climate-related disasters, including floods, heatwaves, and cyclones.



### What is the Climate Risk Index?

- Introduced in 2006, the Climate Risk Index (CRI) is one of the longest-running annual reports assessing the impact of climate-related extreme weather events on different nations.
- The index evaluates realized risks, ranking countries based on the economic and human toll, including:
  - Fatalities
  - Injuries and affected populations
  - Homelessness and financial damage
- The rankings are based on data from the International Disaster Database (EM-DAT) and economic statistics from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The CRI is published by Germanwatch, a Bonn- and Berlin-based independent development, environment, and human rights organization.

### Key Findings of the Report:

- India remains among the 10 most affected nations due to extreme weather between 1993 and 2023.
- The country accounted for 10% of global fatalities caused by climate disasters and 4.3% of worldwide financial losses (in dollar terms).
- India ranked sixth in the Climate Risk Index 2025, reinforcing its position as one of the most climate-vulnerable nations.
- The top five most affected countries ahead of India in the rankings include:
  - Dominica
  - China
  - Honduras
  - Myanmar
  - Italy

### Climate Disasters and Their Impact on India:

- India has suffered from more than 400 extreme weather events over the last three decades.
- These events caused financial losses of \$180 billion and resulted in at least 80,000 deaths.
- Major climate-related disasters include:
  - Severe floods in 1993, 1998, and 2013.
  - Devastating heatwaves in 2002, 2003, and 2015.
  - Frequent and intense cyclones along the coasts.

### The Growing Climate Crisis:

The latest Climate Risk Index report reinforces the urgent need for climate resilience strategies, disaster preparedness, and sustainable policies in India.

As extreme weather events become more frequent, India must focus on strengthening climate adaptation measures, improving early warning systems, and promoting sustainable development to mitigate the devastating impacts of climate change.

[Download Our Application](#)



Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam