



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

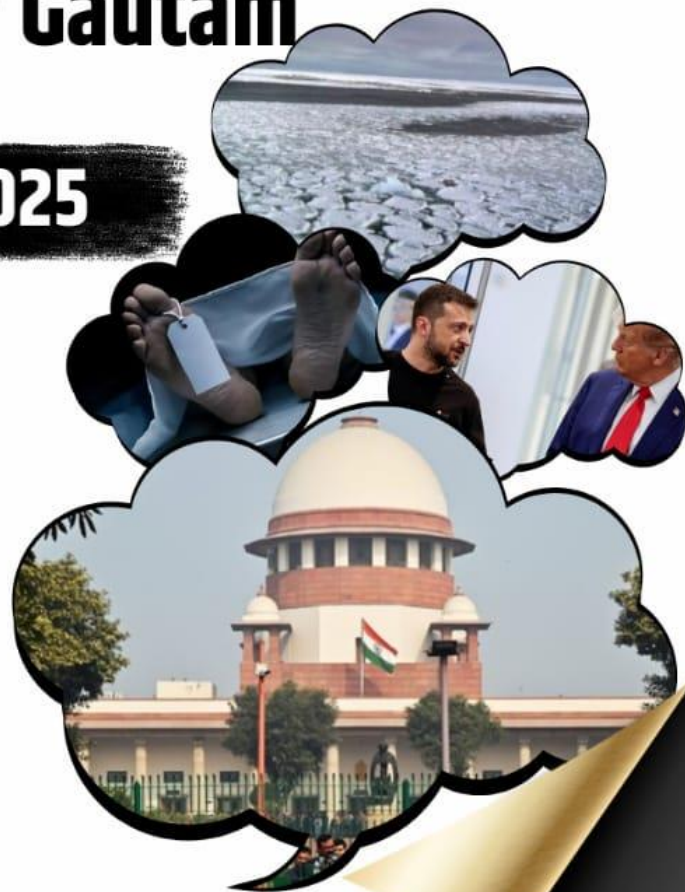
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Table Of Content 22 Feb 2025

1. **Peatlands: The Overlooked Guardians of Carbon Storage**
2. **Global Sea Ice Cover Plunges to Record Low**
3. **SC Ruling on Remission**
4. **SEBI's Proposal for Fast-Track Follow-On Offers for REITs & InvITs**
5. **Ukraine's Mineral Wealth**
6. **India Sees Over 30% Drop in Suicide Rates from 1990 to 2021**

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1 Peatlands: The Overlooked Guardians of Carbon Storage

Context: A recent study has raised alarms over the **severe lack of protection** for **peatlands**, warning that their continued degradation could **threaten global climate goals**.

Understanding Peatlands:

Peatlands are **unique wetland ecosystems** that consist of **partially decomposed organic matter**, accumulated over **thousands of years**.



Key Features:

- In **cooler climates**, peatland vegetation mainly consists of **Sphagnum mosses, sedges, and shrubs**, which play a major role in peat formation.
- In **warmer climates**, **graminoids (grass-like plants)** and **woody vegetation** contribute most to the organic matter.

Global Distribution of Peatlands:

- Peatlands exist across **all climatic zones and continents**, covering approximately **4.23 million km²**, which accounts for **2.84% of the Earth's land surface**.
- The countries with the **largest peatland areas** include:
 - **Canada, Russia, Indonesia, the United States, Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, China, Peru, Finland, and the Republic of the Congo.**
- The **top five** peatland-rich nations contain **70% of the world's peatlands**.

A Massive Carbon Storehouse:

- Peatlands **hold around 600 billion tonnes of carbon**, more than all the forests in the world combined.
- However, **only 17% of peatlands are currently protected** worldwide:
 - **Boreal peatlands: 11% protected**
 - **Temperate and tropical peatlands: 27% protected**

Major Threats to Peatlands:

1. **Agriculture and Forestry** – Large-scale **farming** and **logging operations** drain peatlands, **releasing carbon** into the atmosphere.
2. **Mining and Infrastructure Projects** – **Peat extraction** for fuel and horticulture **destroys** these fragile ecosystems.
3. **Climate Change** – Rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns **worsen degradation**, increasing the risk of **wildfires and carbon emissions**.

Conservation Efforts:

Role of Indigenous Communities:

- **Indigenous territories** account for **27% of global peatlands**.
- Traditional conservation practices have played a **crucial role in peatland protection**.

Global Initiatives for Peatland Protection:

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Page No

2



- **The Brazzaville Declaration (2018)** – Signed in the **Republic of the Congo**, this agreement aims to **preserve and manage the Congo Basin peatlands**, home to the **world's largest tropical peatland complex**.
- **Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI)** – Led by **UNEP**, this initiative promotes **peatland conservation on a global scale**.
- **Ramsar Sites** – These **wetland conservation areas** account for **20% of protected peatlands globally** and **40% of those in the tropics**.

The Way Forward:

1. Strengthening Legal Protections:

- Countries should **integrate peatland conservation into national laws** and enforce **Ramsar site protections**.
- **Peatland conservation should be included in:**
 - **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** under the **Paris Agreement**.
 - **Action plans** under the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**.

2. Supporting Indigenous Stewardship:

- **Recognizing and empowering indigenous communities** will **greatly enhance peatland protection**.

Conclusion:

Peatlands are **indispensable carbon reservoirs** and **vital for climate stability**. Despite their **immense ecological importance**, they remain **underprotected and at risk**. Urgent **global action**, **stronger legal frameworks**, and **sustainable management** are essential to **safeguard these critical ecosystems** for the future.

2 Global Sea Ice Cover Plunges to Record Low

Context: As per the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), the combined Arctic and Antarctic sea ice extent hit a historic low of 15.76 million sq km in February 2025.

Understanding Sea Ice:

- Sea ice refers to the **floating ice** that forms in **polar regions**.
- It **expands in winter** and **melts in summer**, but some portions remain throughout the year.
- Sea ice differs from **icebergs, glaciers, ice sheets, and ice shelves**, which originate on land.
- It plays a **vital role in regulating global temperatures** by **reflecting sunlight** and **preventing oceanic heat** from warming the atmosphere.



Why is Global Sea Ice Shrinking?

1. Rising Global Temperatures:

- The Arctic is **warming four times faster** than the global average.
- **Warmer ocean temperatures** delay freezing and **accelerate melting**.
- The **ice-albedo feedback effect** worsens the situation:
 - **Less ice → More exposed dark ocean → Higher heat absorption → Faster melting.**

2. Shifts in Wind Patterns and Storms:

- **Arctic storms** have broken apart ice in the **Barents Sea** (near Norway & Russia) and the **Bering Sea** (between Alaska & Russia).
- **Antarctic sea ice**, being surrounded by ocean rather than land, is **thinner and more mobile**, making it even more vulnerable.

Consequences of Declining Sea Ice Cover:

1. **Intensified Climate Change:** **Less ice → More ocean exposure → Greater heat absorption → Faster temperature rise.**
2. **Disruption of Ocean Currents:** **Melting ice releases freshwater**, slowing down **global ocean circulation**, impacting weather patterns worldwide.
3. **Rising Sea Levels:** While **sea ice itself does not raise sea levels**, its disappearance **exposes glaciers and ice sheets** to warmer waters, accelerating **land ice melt** and **sea level rise**.
4. **Collapse of Marine Ecosystems:** **Krill, seals, and polar bears** rely on sea ice for survival. Its decline **threatens food chains** and disrupts **entire marine ecosystems**.

The Way Forward:

1. **Strengthening Climate Commitments:** Countries must **adhere to Paris Agreement targets** to limit global temperature rise to **1.5°C**.



2. **Expanding Scientific Monitoring:** More satellite data and polar expeditions are needed to track sea ice changes effectively.
3. **Enhancing International Protection of Polar Regions:** Stronger marine conservation agreements and biodiversity protection policies are crucial.
4. **Regulating Human Activities in Polar Regions:** Industrial operations, fishing, and resource exploitation in the Arctic and Antarctic must be strictly controlled.

Conclusion:

The record **decline in sea ice** serves as a **critical warning** about the **accelerating impact of climate change**. Without **immediate global intervention**, we risk **crossing irreversible climate tipping points**, threatening the planet's **climate stability, marine life, and human livelihoods**.



3 SC Ruling on Remission: States Must Consider Early Release Automatically

Context: The **Supreme Court of India** has ruled that **states must automatically review the premature release** of eligible prisoners under their **remission policies**, even if the convicts do not apply for it.

- Some categories of convicts are exempt from this benefit.
- The power to grant remission is vested in **state governments** under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)** and the **Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC)**.
- This decision came as part of the **suo motu case** *In Re: Policy Strategy for Grant of Bail* (2021), addressing **prison overcrowding**.
- The ruling **marks a shift from previous Supreme Court judgments (2013)** that required prisoners to apply for remission.



Understanding Remission Laws in India:

What is Remission?

Remission refers to the **reduction of a convict's sentence**, allowing for their early release under specific conditions.

Legal Provisions Governing Remission:

- **Section 473 of BNSS** (formerly **Section 432 of CrPC**) grants **state governments** the authority to **remit a prisoner's sentence** at any time, with or without conditions.
- If the convict **violates conditions**, the **remission can be revoked**, and they may be **re-arrested without a warrant**.

State vs. Constitutional Remission Powers:

- **State Governments** exercise remission powers under **BNSS and CrPC**.
- **The President and Governors** also hold **remission powers** under **Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution**.

Restrictions on Remission:

- **Section 475 of BNSS** (formerly **Section 433A of CrPC**) mandates that **life convicts sentenced for crimes punishable by death** must **serve at least 14 years in prison** before becoming eligible for remission.

Supreme Court's Ruling on Remission:

Past Judgments on Remission:

The SC examined two key **2013 judgments**:

1. **Sangeet & Anr. v. State of Haryana (2013)**: Held that remission **cannot be granted suo motu** and required a **formal application from the convict**.
2. **Mohinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2013)**: Reaffirmed that **courts cannot grant remission on their own initiative**.

Major Shift in Supreme Court's Stance:

- The Court recognized that many **state prison manuals** require **prison authorities** to **initiate remission proceedings**.
- The **2013 rulings did not consider the structured remission policies** that exist in various states.

Why Did the Supreme Court Change Its View?

- The **Sangeet judgment** aimed to **prevent mass or discretionary releases** during festivals or special occasions.

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Page No

6

- However, the SC now acknowledges that when **states have clear remission policies**, failing to consider remission automatically would be discriminatory.

States' Obligation to Consider Remission:

- The SC **directed states to review remission eligibility automatically** to ensure fairness.
- Ignoring this duty **violates Article 14 (Right to Equality)** of the Constitution.

Additional Directives Issued by the Supreme Court:

1. **Mandatory Remission Policies:** States must draft a comprehensive remission policy within two months if they do not already have one.

2. **Conditions for Granting Remission:**

- Following **Mafabhai Motibhai Sagar v. State of Gujarat (2024)**, the SC laid out key considerations:
 - **Nature of the crime, criminal history, and public safety concerns.**
 - **Focus on rehabilitation** while preventing the recurrence of crime.
 - **Conditions must be reasonable**—not overly harsh or impractical.
 - **Clear guidelines** to avoid ambiguity in remission decisions.

3. **Protection Against Arbitrary Revocation:**

- **Minor violations** should **not** automatically lead to **remission cancellation**.
- **Convicts must be given prior notice** explaining the reasons for cancellation.
- **They should have an opportunity to respond** before a final decision is made.

Prison Overcrowding in India: The Bigger Issue:

Alarming Statistics (NCRB Data, 2022):

- **Total prison inmates:** 5,73,220
- **Prison capacity:** 4,36,266
- **Occupancy rate:** 131.4% (indicating severe overcrowding).

Undertrial Prisoners: The Majority:

- **75.8% of inmates** are **undertrials**, awaiting a **final verdict**.
- While the **new remission guidelines** may help **reduce overcrowding**, the **huge number of undertrials** remains a serious concern.

Increase in Premature Releases:

As per the Prison Statistics in India Report (2022):

- **2020:** 2,321 prisoners released prematurely.
- **2021:** 2,350 prisoners released.
- **2022:** 5,035 prisoners released (significant rise).
- However, there is **no official data on the total number of prisoners who have benefitted from remission policies over the years**.

Conclusion:

The **Supreme Court's ruling** marks a **progressive shift** in India's remission policy, ensuring that **eligible convicts are considered for early release without needing to apply**. This decision **reinforces principles of fairness and rehabilitation** while **helping to ease India's prison overcrowding crisis**. With **states now mandated to adopt clear remission policies**, this reform could lead to a **more humane and efficient criminal justice system**.

4 SEBI's Proposal for Fast-Track Follow-On Offers for REITs & InvITs

Context: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has introduced a framework to facilitate **fast-track follow-on offers (FPOs)** for **Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)** and **Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs)**. This initiative is designed to streamline the **fundraising process** for these investment vehicles, making capital raising more **efficient and accessible**.



Key Proposals by SEBI:

Lock-in Period for Preferential Issue of Units:

- **15% of units** allotted to **sponsors and sponsor groups** will be **locked in for three years** from the date of **trading approval**.
- The **remaining units** will be **locked in for one year** from the date of **trading approval**.

Understanding IPOs & FPOs:

Initial Public Offering (IPO):

- **Definition:** The **first-time issuance** of shares by a **private company** to the public, allowing it to be **listed on a stock exchange**.
- **Purpose:** Helps companies raise capital for **expansion, debt repayment, or other corporate needs**.
- **Risk Factor:** **Higher**, as investors do not have prior market performance data for the company.

Follow-on Public Offering (FPO):

- **Definition:** A process where an **already-listed company** issues **additional shares** to raise **extra capital**.
- **Purpose:** Used to finance **growth, acquisitions, or debt repayment** without taking loans.
- **Risk Factor:** **Lower than an IPO**, as the company already has a **trading history and an established market value**.

What is an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT)?

- **Structure:** Functions **similar to mutual funds** but focuses on **infrastructure projects**.
- **Purpose:** Allows **individual and institutional investors** to invest in **infrastructure assets** and earn a **share of the income**.

What is a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)?

- **Purpose:** Invests in **income-generating real estate**, such as **commercial and office spaces**.
- **Structure:** Works like **mutual funds**, offering **liquidity** to real estate investments.
- **Benefits:**
 - Provides **regular income** through **rental earnings**.
 - Helps in **portfolio diversification**.
 - Offers **long-term capital appreciation**.

This proposal by SEBI aims to boost the **investment ecosystem** by making **capital raising quicker and more efficient** for **REITs and InvITs**, ultimately benefiting **investors and developers alike**.

5

Ukraine's Mineral Wealth: US-Ukraine Rare Earth Deal, Geopolitical Significance & Challenges

Context: Former US President Donald Trump has accused Ukraine of **backing out** of an informal deal that allegedly granted the **United States access to 50% of Ukraine's mineral wealth** in exchange for military support against Russia.



Why Are Ukraine's Minerals So Important?

A Treasure Trove of Critical Minerals:

Ukraine is home to **vast reserves of rare and valuable minerals** that play a crucial role in:

- **Defense & Aerospace** – Used in **advanced weapon systems**.
- **Clean Energy** – Essential for **electric vehicles (EVs)** and renewable energy technologies.
- **Electronics & Semiconductors** – Key components in **smartphones, computers, and industrial electronics**.

A Geopolitical Battleground for Resources:

- **China currently dominates the supply** of many critical minerals, giving Ukraine's reserves **huge strategic importance** for the **US and Western nations**.
- The US has long sought **rare-earth elements, titanium, gallium, and other critical materials** to **reduce its reliance on China** and secure **supply chains for military and clean energy sectors**.
- Trump's **interest in acquiring Greenland** was partly driven by its mineral reserves—a strategy similar to the current focus on Ukraine.

Key Categories of Ukraine's Minerals:

- **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** A group of **17 elements** crucial for high-tech industries.
- **Critical Minerals:** Countries define these based on **economic and security needs**.
 - For example, **India identified 30 critical minerals** in 2023.

US Proposal on Ukraine's Resources: A Controversial Bargain:

- Ukraine sees **mineral trade agreements** as a way to **secure future US support**, while Trump insists the **US deserves compensation** for its past military aid.
- The specifics of the deal remain **unclear**, but Trump claims **Ukraine owes the US \$500 billion** in exchange for previous military and financial assistance.
- This amount **far exceeds the \$69.2 billion** in **military aid** that the **US has provided to Ukraine since 2014**.
- Some **US officials argue** that securing **economic stakes in Ukraine's mining sector** would act as a **security guarantee**, ensuring **long-term US investment in defending its interests**.
- **However, President Zelenskyy prefers direct military and economic guarantees** rather than indirect security through mineral extraction agreements.

Challenges in the US Gaining Access to 50% of Ukraine's Mineral Wealth:

1. Legal Barriers:

- Ukraine's **constitution states that all subsoil resources belong to its people**.



- Any agreement must **comply with Ukrainian laws**, making large-scale foreign ownership of mineral reserves difficult.

2. Uncertainty About Mineral Reserves:

- Much of Ukraine's **geological data is outdated**, with many surveys dating back to the Soviet era (pre-1991).
- The **actual quality and quantity of Ukraine's mineral deposits remain uncertain**, limiting the feasibility of large-scale extraction.

3. Existing EU Agreements:

- Ukraine signed a '**Strategic Partnership on Raw Materials**' with the **European Union (EU) in July 2021**—before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.
- This agreement **already grants the EU preferential access to Ukraine's minerals**, complicating any potential US-Ukraine mineral deal.

4. Russian Occupation of Key Resource Areas:

- A **significant portion of Ukraine's mineral wealth is in Russian-controlled territories**.
- Russia currently occupies one-fifth of Ukraine**, including rare earth element reserves.
- Russian forces are now just 4 miles away from the Shevchenko lithium deposit**, according to media reports.
- This means that even if Ukraine agrees to a **US mineral deal**, much of its resource-rich land may remain **out of its control**.

Conclusion:

Ukraine's **mineral wealth has become a key geopolitical asset**, attracting **global competition between the US, EU, and China**. While **securing US support through mineral trade seems appealing**, legal barriers, **Russian territorial control**, and **existing EU agreements** make such deals extremely complicated. As the **war continues**, Ukraine must **carefully navigate international resource agreements to maximize its strategic and economic interests** while ensuring **sovereign control over its natural wealth**.

6

India Sees Over 30% Drop in Suicide Rates from 1990 to 2021

Context: A recent **Lancet study**, based on data from the **Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2021**, highlights concerning global suicide trends.

- On average, one person dies by suicide every 43 seconds worldwide—a stark reminder of the mental health crisis.



India's Suicide Rate Shows a Significant Decline:

Key Findings for India:

- Suicide death rate has dropped from 18.9 per lakh population in 1990 to 13 per lakh in 2021—a remarkable 30% decline.
- The decline has been more significant among women than men.

Gender-Specific Trends:

- For Women:** Suicide rate decreased from 16.8 per lakh (1990) to 10.3 per lakh (2021).
- For Men:** Declined from 20.9 per lakh (1990) to 15.7 per lakh (2021).

Who Are the Most Vulnerable?

- Educated women recorded the highest suicide rates in 2020.
- Family problems emerged as the leading cause of suicides among women.

What Helped Reduce Suicide Rates in India?

1. Decriminalization of Suicide:

- The **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**, removed the criminal status of attempted suicide, ensuring that individuals receive care instead of punishment.
- The new **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** does not include any equivalent of Section 309 of the IPC, which earlier criminalized suicide attempts.

2. National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022):

- Aims to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.
- Focuses on mental health awareness, early intervention, and crisis support.

3. Global and National Mental Health Initiatives:

- WHO's Mental Health Action Plan (2013-2030)** recognizes mental health as a key factor in overall well-being.
- India's National Mental Health Policy (2014)** promotes better access to mental health care.
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.4** emphasizes mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

4. Helplines and Support Systems:

- Manodarpan and KIRAN toll-free helplines** offer 24/7 mental health support.
- Increased focus on mental health education, awareness campaigns, and workplace support programs.

Conclusion:

India's 30% decline in suicide rates is a positive step forward, driven by progressive policies, decriminalization, and mental health initiatives. However, vulnerable groups, especially educated women, still need stronger support systems. With continued policy efforts, awareness, and better access to mental health care, India can further reduce suicide rates and build a mentally healthier society.

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Page No

11