



Weekly Current Affairs



To The Point

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New Draft E-Commerce Guidelines: Key Highlights and Implications

Context: The Indian government has introduced draft guidelines titled ‘**E-commerce – Principles and Guidelines for Self-Governance**’, prepared by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**. These guidelines aim to establish a fair, transparent, and consumer-friendly e-commerce ecosystem.



India's E-Commerce Market: A Booming Sector:

- **Market Projection:** India's e-commerce market is expected to reach **\$363.30 billion by 2030**.
- **Retail Share:** Currently, e-commerce constitutes approximately **7%** of India's total retail market.
- **Online Shopper Base:** By 2030, India is projected to have the **second-largest online shopper base** globally, with nearly **500 million shoppers**.
- **Growth Drivers:** Factors such as **increased internet penetration, rising affluence, and affordable data prices** have fueled the sector's growth.

Key Provisions of the Draft Guidelines:

1. Pre-Transaction Verification:

- **Mandatory KYC:** E-commerce platforms must conduct **Know Your Customer (KYC)** checks for all sellers, especially third-party vendors.
- Verification includes **seller identity, legal entity name, contact details, and business address** to ensure authenticity.

2. Comprehensive Product Listings:

- Sellers are required to provide **detailed product information**, including:
 - **Titles and images.**
 - **Specifications.**
 - **Shipping modes.**
- This ensures consumers can make informed decisions.

3. Transparent Contract Terms:

- Clear disclosure of:
 - **Product descriptions.**
 - **Price breakdowns.**
 - **Return policies and safety warnings.**

4. Secure Payment Mechanisms:

- Implementation of **encryption** and **two-factor authentication** to safeguard consumer data.
- Platforms must offer diverse payment options, such as:
 - **Credit/Debit cards.**
 - **Mobile payments.**
 - **E-wallets and bank transfers.**

5. Timely Refunds and Returns:

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- Establishing clear timelines for:
 - Refunds.
 - Replacements.
 - Exchanges.
 - Provisions to address **counterfeit product complaints**.
- 6. Consumer Reviews and Ratings:** Adherence to **IS 19000:2022 standards** for collecting, moderating, and publishing consumer reviews and ratings.
- 7. Data Protection:**
- Ensuring compliance with **data protection regulations**.
 - Consumer data should be used only for **transaction facilitation** and **disclosed purposes**.
- 8. No Preferential Treatment:**
- Prohibiting **preferential treatment** of sellers or service providers to maintain a **level playing field**.
 - Policies to prevent the sale of **counterfeit products** and ensure **impartial operations**.

E-Commerce Models in India:

1. Business to Consumer (B2C): Platforms like **Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra**.

2. Business to Business (B2B):

- Relevant for industries such as **manufacturing** where businesses procure raw materials.
- Platforms like **Udaan** and **Alibaba** facilitate bulk transactions.
- **100% FDI** is allowed in B2B e-commerce.

3. Consumer to Consumer (C2C): Platforms like **OLX** and **Quikr** enable peer-to-peer transactions.

4. Business to Administration (B2A) & Consumer to Administration (C2A): Platforms like the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** enable public procurement and government-related transactions.

Other Government Initiatives Supporting E-Commerce:

- **Digital India Program:** Encouraging digital transformation across sectors.
- **Goods and Services Tax (GST):** Streamlining the taxation framework for e-commerce.
- **Draft National E-Commerce Policy, 2019:** Focused on:
 - Data localization.
 - Consumer protection.
 - Intellectual property rights.
 - Competition issues.
- **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC):** A decentralized online platform aimed at reducing business costs for retailers.
- **Government e-Marketplace (GeM):** Enhancing transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness for SMEs in e-commerce.

Concluding Remarks:

The **draft e-commerce guidelines** prioritize **self-regulation, consumer protection, and transparency**, addressing critical challenges in this rapidly growing sector.

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Estimation and Measurement of India's Digital Economy

Context: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has published a report titled '**Estimation and Measurement of India's Digital Economy**', presenting comprehensive insights into the growth, impact, and potential of India's digital ecosystem.



About the Report:

- **Global Standards:** The methodologies are based on frameworks developed by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** and the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**.
- **Objective:** This is the **first credible, comprehensive, and current estimate** of India's digital economy.

Major Highlights:

1. Economic Contribution:

- **Current Share:** India's **digital economy** contributed **11.74% of the national income** in 2022-23.
- **Projected Growth:** The share is expected to rise to **13.42% by 2024-25** and could account for **one-fifth of the national income by 2029-30**.
- **Sectoral Dominance:** Within six years, the digital economy's contribution will surpass that of agriculture or manufacturing in India.

2. Employment Generation:

- In 2022-23, the digital economy supported **14.67 million workers**, comprising **2.55% of the national workforce**.
- The digital economy is expanding beyond **ICT industries**, influencing various sectors across the economy.

Key Facts about India's Digital Economy:

1. Mobile Subscriptions:

- India ranks **second globally**, after China, in mobile cellular subscriptions among the **8.36 billion users worldwide**.

2. 5G Deployment:

- By the end of 2023, **10% of India's population** subscribed to 5G services.
- India became the **second-largest market for 5G smartphones** in early 2024, trailing China.

3. Digital Payments:

- India recorded **1644 billion digital transactions** in FY 2023-24, the **highest volume globally**.

4. ICT Service Exports:

- India's ICT service exports were the **second highest globally** in 2023, after Ireland.

5. AI Projects:

- India contributes **23% of AI-related projects** on GitHub, the **highest in the world**, ahead of the US (14%).



6. **Unicorns:** As of April 2024, India had the **third-largest number of homegrown unicorns**, following the US and China.

Recommendations for Accelerating Digital Economy Growth:

1. **Reduce Regulatory Uncertainty:** Ensure **consistent and predictable regulations** for digital platforms and intermediaries.
2. **Enhance Digital Literacy and Skills:** Promote **collaborative efforts** for digital skilling and literacy to ensure broader participation in the digital economy.
3. **Ease of Doing Business:** Simplify policies to attract investments and **facilitate innovation** in the digital sector.
4. **Strengthen Cybersecurity:** Focus on **enhancing trust and resilience** through robust cybersecurity frameworks.
5. **Build Resilient Networks:** Invest in **fixed-line broadband infrastructure** to complement mobile coverage and ensure nationwide connectivity.

Conclusion:

India's digital economy is poised to be a significant driver of national growth, outpacing traditional sectors in terms of contribution to GDP and employment generation. The government's efforts, along with strategic investments in **infrastructure, cybersecurity, and digital skilling**, will be critical in achieving the full potential of this digital revolution.

By fostering innovation, building trust, and addressing regulatory challenges, India can position itself as a **global digital powerhouse** in the coming years.

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Cabinet Approves 6% Hike in Jute MSP for 2025-26 Marketing Season

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved a **6% increase** in the **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for raw jute for the marketing season **2025-26**, aiming to support farmers and boost the jute industry.

Key Highlights:

- **Nodal Agency:** The **Jute Corporation of India (JCI)** will act as the nodal agency for price support operations. Any losses incurred will be **fully reimbursed by the Union Government**.
- **Purpose of MSP:** MSP serves as a market intervention tool by the government to **protect agricultural producers** against price drops during surplus production.

**Crops Covered under MSP:**

- **Kharif Crops (14):** Paddy, jowar, bajra, maize, tur/arhar, moong, urad, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, niger seed, cotton, and ragi.
- **Rabi Crops (6):** Wheat, barley, gram, lentil (masur), rapeseed, mustard, and safflower.
- **Commercial Crops (2):** Jute and copra.

Jute Production in India:

- **Golden Fiber:** Jute is valued for being **natural, renewable, biodegradable, and eco-friendly**.
- **Global Leader:** India is the **largest producer** of jute, followed by **Bangladesh and China**.
 - However, Bangladesh dominates **global exports**, accounting for **three-fourths of total trade**, while India's share is **7%**.
- **Domestic Consumption:** Around **90% of India's jute production** is consumed domestically due to high market demand.
- **Employment:**
 - Provides **direct employment** to about **4 lakh workers**.
 - Supports the livelihood of nearly **40 lakh farm families**.
- **Regional Contribution:** **West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam** contribute **99% of India's jute production**.

Ideal Conditions for Jute Cultivation:

- **Temperature:** Mean maximum temperature of **34°C** and minimum of **15°C**.
- **Rainfall:** Requires **150-250 cm** annually.
- **Soil:** Best suited for **loamy alluvial soils**, though it can grow in clay and sandy loam soils.

Challenges in India's Jute Industry:

1. **Competition from Synthetic Fibers:** Synthetic fibers like polypropylene and polyester are more **versatile and cost-effective**.
2. **Lack of Innovation:** Limited product **innovation** and **diversification** hamper growth.
3. **Quality Concerns:**



- Retting of jute (a process for extracting fibers) is often done in **unclean or stagnant water**, affecting quality.
- 4. **Issues in Jute Mills:** Outdated machinery, mismanagement, labor shortages, and dependence on government support.
- 5. **Price Volatility:** Jute prices are affected by **climate conditions** and **supply-demand imbalances**, creating instability in the industry.

Government Initiatives for Jute Sector:

1. Legislative Support

- **Jute Packaging Material (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987:** Mandates **100% reservation for food grains** and **20% for sugar** to be packed in jute materials.

2. National Jute Development Program (NJDP):

Implemented for 2021-26, it includes:

- **Improved Cultivation and Retting (Jute ICARE):** Promotes scientific cultivation methods.
- **Jute Resource cum Production Centre (JRCPC):** Trains artisans in jute diversification.
- **Jute Raw Material Bank (JRMB):** Supplies raw jute at mill-gate prices.
- **Jute Design Resource Centre (JDRC):** Develops innovative jute products for domestic and export markets.

3. Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:

- Encourages jute mills and MSMEs to produce and export **cost-competitive jute diversified products (JDPs)**.

4. Market Development:

- **Jute Mark Logo:** Certifies high-quality JDPs.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Popularizes the use of eco-friendly jute products.

Conclusion:

Jute is a cornerstone of India's agricultural and industrial landscape, providing **sustainable livelihoods** and **environmentally friendly products**. The **6% MSP hike**, coupled with government initiatives like NJDP and PLI, will strengthen the sector, boost exports, and improve farmer incomes.

To overcome challenges, India must focus on **modernizing jute mills**, **enhancing quality control**, and **promoting innovation** to maintain its global competitiveness.

10 Years of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)

Context: India marks the **10th anniversary** of two landmark initiatives—**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** and **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)**—with celebrations from **22nd January 2025 to 8th March 2025** (International Women's Day). These programs have significantly contributed to **gender equality, girl child empowerment, and improvement in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR)**. The occasion also saw the launch of the **Mission Vatsalya Portal** (for child welfare) and the **Mission Shakti Portal** (for women's safety and empowerment).



About Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP):

- **Launch Date:** 22nd January 2015 in Haryana, responding to the low CSR of **918 girls per 1,000 boys** (2011 Census).
- **Objectives:**
 - Improve the **Child Sex Ratio (CSR)**.
 - Promote **gender equality** and **women empowerment**.
 - Prevent **gender-biased sex-selective elimination**.
 - Ensure **survival, protection, and education** of the girl child.
- **Implementation:**
 - Fully funded by the **Central Government**.
 - No provision for **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**.
- **Ministries Involved:**
 - **Women and Child Development**.
 - **Health and Family Welfare**.
 - **Education** (formerly Human Resource Development).

About Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY):

- **Purpose:** Secure the **financial future of girl children** through tax-saving, high-return savings accounts for education and welfare.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Families with **girl children under 10 years**.
 - Only **resident Indians** can participate (NRIs are excluded).
- **Mechanism:**
 - Accounts opened in the **girl's name** under **Sukanya Samriddhi Account (SSA)**

Achievements Over the Decade:

1. **Improved Child Sex Ratio (CSR)**
 - CSR increased from **918 (2014-15)** to **933 (2022-23)**.
 - Enforcement of the **Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994** helped curb gender-biased sex-selective practices.
2. **Boost in Female Enrollment in Schools:**
 - **Free/subsidized education, Swachh Bharat toilets, and scholarships** reduced dropout rates.



- Initiatives like **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas** improved **primary and secondary enrollment**.
- 3. **Economic Empowerment of Women:**
 - **Women-led MSMEs:** 2.3 crore businesses now led by women.
 - **PM Mudra Yojana:** Women availed **70% of total loans**.
 - **Jan Dhan Yojana:** Over **30 crore women** gained access to banking.
 - Initiatives like **Lakhpati Didi** enabled **1 crore women** to earn ₹1 lakh+ annually.
- 4. **Inspiring Campaigns and Social Awareness:**
 - Campaigns like **Selfie with Daughter** and **National Girl Child Day** mobilized societal participation.
 - **Panchayati Raj institutions** and grassroots organizations combated gender stereotypes and celebrated the birth of girls.
- 5. **Growth in Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY):** Families increasingly adopted SSY, prioritizing **education** and **financial security** for girls.

Challenges:

1. **Deep-Rooted Patriarchy:** Societal norms favoring **male children** persist, hampering efforts for gender equality.
2. **Implementation Gaps:** Uneven execution of BBBP across districts highlights governance weaknesses.
3. **Resource Allocation Issues:** Excessive focus on **awareness campaigns** led to limited allocation for **education, healthcare, and welfare schemes**.

Recent Developments:

1. **Mission Vatsalya Portal:** Focuses on **child welfare** and **protection** initiatives.
2. **Mission Shakti Portal:** Aims to strengthen **women's safety** and **empowerment**.

Road Ahead:

1. **Strengthening Grassroots Programs:** Expand **community-driven initiatives** to address regional disparities in gender equality.
2. **Enhancing Education Infrastructure:** Improve facilities for **secondary and higher education**, with a focus on **scholarships** for girls.
3. **Addressing Violence Against Women:** Integrate BBBP with schemes tackling **domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking**.
4. **Holistic Resource Allocation:** Balance funding between **awareness campaigns, education, and healthcare** to ensure long-term impact.
5. **Innovative Financial Tools:** Enhance SSY by integrating it with **digital platforms** for easier access, transparency, and tracking.

Conclusion:

The **10th anniversary** of BBBP and SSY celebrates a decade of transformative change in empowering girls and women across India. While achievements like improved CSR, economic empowerment, and educational access highlight progress, addressing persistent **patriarchy** and **resource gaps** will be crucial. Strengthening grassroots efforts, improving education, and leveraging financial tools can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive future.

India Becomes Kenya's Largest Tea Importer

Context: India has emerged as the **largest importer of tea from Kenya**, with imports increasing by **288%**, from **3.53 million kg (January-October 2023)** to **13.71 million kg** in the same period of 2024.



India's Tea Industry: Current Status:

1. Global Position:

- **2nd Largest Tea Producer:** India accounts for **21%** of global tea production, ranking just after China.
- **4th Largest Exporter:** Contributes **12%** of global tea exports.

2. Export Statistics:

- Exports rose from **184.46 million kg** (January-October 2023) to **209.14 million kg** during the same period in 2024.
- **Top Export Destinations:** UAE, Russia, Iran, U.S., and U.K.

3. Domestic Consumption: 80% of production is consumed domestically, supported by India's widespread tea-drinking culture.

4. Regional Production:

- **Assam:** Produces **55%** of India's tea, making it the largest tea-producing state.
- **2024 Decline:** Total tea production dropped by **50 million kg**, with Assam alone losing **20 million kg**.

Significance and Potential of Indian Tea:

1. Economic Contributions:

- Provides **extensive employment opportunities**, particularly in rural regions.
- Generates **foreign exchange** and significant government revenue.

2. Global Reputation:

- Known for **strong geographical indications** (e.g., Darjeeling Tea).
- Equipped with **advanced processing facilities** and innovative products that enhance global competitiveness.

3. Growth Potential:

- Expanded **product mixes** and **value-added tea** offerings (e.g., organic, flavored tea).
- Increased focus on **premium international markets**.

Challenges Facing India's Tea Industry:

- Stagnant Prices and Oversupply:** Demand-supply imbalances have led to **price stagnation**, reducing profitability.
- Cheaper Imports:** Influx of low-cost teas has caused **quality concerns** and a **decline in export appeal**.
- Rising Input Costs:** Higher costs of fertilizers, labor, and logistics have strained tea estates, leading to closures or dependence on subsidies.



About Tea:

1. **Botanical Background:** Tea comes from an **evergreen flowering plant**, prized for its leaves and buds.
2. **Cultivation Requirements:**
 - **Soil:** Well-drained with high organic content and a pH of 4.5–5.5.
 - **Climate:** Thrives in **tropical and subtropical regions**.
3. **History in India:** Introduced by British colonists about **three centuries ago**.
4. **Geographic Spread:**
 - Primarily grown in **Northeast India** and **West Bengal**.
 - Other tea-growing regions: **Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh**.
 - **Darjeeling Tea:** India's first **Geographical Indication (GI)** product.

Tea Board of India:

1. **Overview:**
 - A statutory body under the **Ministry of Commerce**, established through the **Tea Act of 1953**.
 - Replaced the **Central Tea Board** and the **Indian Tea Licensing Committee**.
2. **Composition:** Comprises **31 members**, including a Chairman, MPs, tea producers, brokers, consumers, and trade unions.
3. **Functions:**
 - **Domestic & International Promotion:** Boost Indian tea's global footprint.
 - **Regulation:** Ensures compliance with international standards like the **International Tea Agreement**.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Indian Tea Industry:

1. **Boost Exports:** Focus on **value addition** to attract premium buyers and increase revenues.
2. **Technology Integration:**
 - Leverage **blockchain** for **supply chain transparency**.
 - Invest in **research and development** to improve yields and product quality.
3. **Global Marketplaces:** Develop a **global e-marketplace** to connect tea growers with buyers directly.
4. **Sustainable Practices:** Promote **eco-friendly cultivation** and **organic farming** to ensure long-term viability.
5. **Policy Support:** Provide **targeted subsidies, financial incentives, and skill development programs** to sustain tea estates.

Conclusion:

India's emergence as Kenya's largest tea importer underscores the dynamic nature of the global tea market. While the Indian tea industry holds a strong position globally, addressing challenges like stagnant prices, rising input costs, and quality concerns is vital. By leveraging technology, enhancing exports, and promoting sustainability, India can strengthen its tea sector and secure long-term growth.



Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures

Context: The **UNICEF report**, *Prospects for Children 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures*, highlights an era of escalating crises adversely impacting children. It underscores the urgent need for global action to protect children's rights, ensure their welfare, and secure their futures.

**Key Highlights of the Report:****1. Children in Conflict Zones:**

- **473 million children** (1 in 6 globally) now reside in conflict-affected areas.
- The proportion of children living in conflict zones surged from **10% (1990s)** to **19% today**, marking the highest global conflict levels since World War II.

2. Debt Crisis and Children:

- Approximately **400 million children** live in countries under severe debt distress, risking further degradation of their basic rights.
- Without fiscal reforms, this figure is expected to grow.

3. Climate Crisis:

- Only **2.4%** of multilateral climate finance is **child-responsive**, despite children being disproportionately affected by climate disasters.
- Issues such as food insecurity, displacement, and health impacts from extreme weather events worsen vulnerabilities.

4. Digital Inequality:

- Internet access for youth is nearly universal in high-income countries but stands at **53% in Africa**.
- **Adolescent girls** and children with disabilities face severe exclusion, with **90% of young women in low-income countries** offline.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1. National Policies and Planning:** Governments should integrate **children's needs and vulnerabilities** into **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** to address climate change.
- 2. Climate Financing:** Redirect climate funds to be more **child-focused**, addressing **loss and damage** affecting children.
- 3. Business Regulation:**
 - Incorporate **child-specific risks** into **Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG)** frameworks.
 - Legal frameworks should prioritize **intergenerational equity** and the right to a **sustainable future** for children.
- 4. Technology Access:** Invest in closing the **digital divide**, particularly for children in rural areas, girls, and children with disabilities.

Steps Taken by India for Children:

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**1. Legal Frameworks:**

- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:** Focuses on protecting children from exploitation and conflict.
- **POCSO Act, 2012:** Provides safeguards against sexual abuse and exploitation.

2. Rehabilitation Initiatives: Operation Smile & Operation Muskaan: Rescue and rehabilitate missing and vulnerable children.**3. Financial Support: PM CARES for Children:** Assists orphans of the COVID-19 pandemic with education, healthcare, and living support.**4. Education and Empowerment:**

- **Right to Education Act, 2009:** Ensures free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** Promotes education and empowerment for adolescent girls.

5. Digital Inclusion: Digital India Initiative: Improves internet connectivity to reduce the digital divide, especially in rural areas.**Way Ahead:**

The future of children in 2025 depends on robust, resilient systems that protect their rights and address systemic vulnerabilities.

Key Focus Areas:

- Investment in Children:** Prioritize **education, healthcare, and digital inclusion** to create equitable opportunities for all children.
- Climate Action:** Strengthen **child-focused climate financing** and involve children in shaping sustainable policies.
- Conflict Mitigation:** Focus on **peace-building efforts** to protect children in conflict zones.
- Digital Equity:** Bridge the **digital divide** to ensure access to education and opportunities for all children.

By safeguarding children's futures, nations not only uphold human rights but also ensure a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous world.

India and Indonesia: Strengthening Bilateral Relations

Context: Indonesian President **Prabowo Subianto's visit to India** as the chief guest for India's **76th Republic Day celebrations** marks a significant milestone in the bilateral relationship, reflecting the strong and evolving partnership between the two nations.



Historical and Cultural Bonds:

1. Ancient Connections:

- India and Indonesia share over **2,000 years of cultural and historical ties**, shaped by the spread of **Hinduism, Buddhism**, and later **Islam** from India to Indonesia.
- The **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** continue to influence Indonesian art, culture, and folklore.

2. Post-Independence Collaboration:

- Both nations emerged as independent states with shared goals of **political sovereignty, economic self-reliance**, and a commitment to the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**.

Strategic and Diplomatic Engagements:

High-Level Visits and Agreements:

1. 2018 Milestone:

- PM **Narendra Modi's visit to Jakarta** resulted in the signing of a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** and a shared vision for **Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation**.

2. 2024 Engagements:

- PM Modi and President **Prabowo Subianto** held talks during the **G20 Summit**, focusing on **economic cooperation, regional stability**, and **security frameworks**.

Defense and Security Cooperation:

1. Joint Exercises:

- Garuda Shakti** (Army), **Samudra Shakti** (Navy), and coordinated patrols (**IND-INDO CORPAT**) enhance military collaboration.

2. Defense Industry Collaboration:

- The **India-Indonesia Defense Industry Exhibition (2024)** showcased opportunities in **defense technology** and **manufacturing**, emphasizing regional security in the **Indo-Pacific**.

Economic and Trade Relations:

Bilateral Trade:

1. Trade Volumes:

- In **2023-24**, bilateral trade stood at **\$29.4 billion**, making Indonesia India's **second-largest trading partner in ASEAN**.
- Major Imports:** Coal, crude palm oil, rubber.
- Major Exports:** Refined petroleum, telecommunications equipment, agricultural products.

Investments and Connectivity:

1. Indian Investments:

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- Over **\$1.56 billion** invested in **mining, textiles, and infrastructure**.

2. Connectivity:

- Direct flights between cities like **Mumbai-Jakarta** and **Delhi-Bali** boost **tourism** and **people-to-people ties**.

Cultural and Educational Collaboration:

Cultural Initiatives:

1. **Indian Cultural Centers:** Operate in **Jakarta** and **Bali**, promoting **yoga, classical dance, and music**.
2. **Shared Celebrations:** Joint events like **International Yoga Day** and heritage conferences strengthen cultural exchanges.

Educational Cooperation:

1. **Scholarships:**
 - Indian programs like **ITEC** and **ICCR** support Indonesian students, fostering **academic partnerships**.
2. **Future Collaboration:** Discussions on **MoUs** in higher education aim to deepen ties in **knowledge sharing**.

Multilateral Cooperation:

India and Indonesia collaborate in platforms like:

- **G20, ASEAN, and IORA**, focusing on:
 - **Maritime Security:** Securing the Indo-Pacific region.
 - **Sustainable Development:** Addressing climate and resource challenges.
 - **Regional Stability:** Tackling shared geopolitical concerns.

Future Prospects:

1. **75 Years of Diplomacy:**
 - Celebrations in **2024** highlighted the nations' shared history and future aspirations.
2. **Strengthened Collaboration:**
 - Enhanced **trade, defense, and cultural partnerships** are crucial for growth and stability in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

Conclusion:

The **India-Indonesia relationship** is a testament to deep historical ties and forward-looking strategic collaboration.

As vibrant democracies and emerging economies, their partnership plays a pivotal role in shaping regional and global dynamics, ensuring peace, prosperity, and sustainable growth.

**Appointment of Retired High Court Judges on an Ad Hoc Basis to Tackle Case Backlog**

Context: To address the growing backlog of cases in High Courts, the **Supreme Court** has recently proposed appointing **retired High Court judges** on an **ad hoc basis**, citing the need to revisit its 2021 decision, which restricted such appointments to specific circumstances.

**Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework:****Article 224A of the Constitution:****1. Provisions:**

- Enables the **Chief Justice of a High Court** to appoint retired judges to act as ad hoc judges.
- Requires the **President's consent** for such appointments.

2. Key Features:

- Retired judges have **full jurisdiction, powers, and privileges** equivalent to sitting judges.
- They are, however, not considered **permanent judges** of the court.

3. Appointment Process:

- Governed by the **1998 Memorandum of Procedure (MOP)**:
 - The retired judge's consent is obtained.
 - The Chief Justice sends recommendations to the **state's Chief Minister**, who forwards them to the **Union Law Minister**.
 - The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** is consulted, whose advice is submitted to the **Prime Minister** for Presidential approval.

Supreme Court Guidelines and Criteria for Appointment**2021 Lok Prahari Case:**

1. The Supreme Court clarified the detailed process for invoking **Article 224A**, emphasizing its use in exceptional situations.
2. **Guidelines for Appointments:**
 - The recommendation must go through the **Supreme Court Collegium**, comprising the **CJI** and two senior-most judges.
 - Ad hoc judges are to be appointed when **less than 20% of vacancies** in the High Court have been filled.

Trigger Points for Appointments:

1. Ad hoc appointments may be initiated when:
 - High Court vacancies exceed **20%** of sanctioned strength (excluding pending proposals).
 - More than **10% of pending cases** are over **5 years old**.
 - **Regular appointments** are delayed or insufficient to tackle the backlog.

Panel of Retired Judges:



1. Each High Court Chief Justice should maintain a **panel of retired or soon-to-retire judges** for ad hoc appointments.
2. Appointments are recommended for a term of **2-3 years**, with **2-5 ad hoc judges** per High Court.

Challenges Addressed by Ad Hoc Judges:

1. Case Backlog:

- India's High Courts are burdened by **over 4 million pending cases**.
- Around **40% of judge positions** remain vacant in several High Courts.

2. Efficiency:

- Experienced retired judges can swiftly adjudicate long-pending matters, especially **criminal cases**.

3. Judicial Accessibility:

- Ad hoc appointments can ensure timely justice delivery in under-resourced courts.

Historical Instances of Ad Hoc Appointments:

Despite the provision's existence, Article 224A has been invoked only three times in India's history:

1. **Justice Suraj Bhan (1972)**: Appointed to the **Madhya Pradesh High Court** to hear election petitions.
2. **Justice P. Venugopal (1982-1983)**: Appointed to the **Madras High Court**, with his term renewed.
3. **Justice O.P. Srivastava (2007)**: Appointed to the **Allahabad High Court** to hear the **Ayodhya title suits**.

Since the **2021 Lok Prahari case**, there have been **no recorded ad hoc appointments** under Article 224A.

Way Forward:

Revisiting the 2021 Decision:

The Supreme Court's proposal to re-evaluate the **2021 ruling** may relax the restrictions on ad hoc appointments, making Article 224A more accessible.

Enhancing Regular Appointments:

Ad hoc judges should supplement—not replace—efforts to fill **regular judicial vacancies**.

Periodic Reviews:

1. Regular reviews of pending cases should ensure the judicious use of ad hoc appointments.
2. Transparent reporting mechanisms can track the impact of ad hoc judges on case disposal rates.

Legislative and Policy Support:

1. Streamlining the **MOP process** can ensure timely ad hoc appointments.
2. Additional incentives, such as **honorariums** or extended tenures, can attract experienced retired judges.

Conclusion:

The appointment of ad hoc High Court judges under **Article 224A** offers a pragmatic solution to India's mounting judicial backlog. While the provision has historically been underutilized, revisiting the framework and enabling its efficient application can strengthen the judiciary and ensure timely justice for all.

**Cabinet Approves 6% Hike in Jute MSP for 2025-26 Marketing Season**

Context: The Maharashtra Food & Drugs Administration (FDA) recently allowed **homeopathic practitioners** with a **certificate course in modern pharmacology** to prescribe **allopathic medications**. This directive has sparked debates on the legality, safety, and ethics of crosspathy in India.

**Understanding Crosspathy:****Definition:**

Crosspathy refers to the practice of medical professionals trained in one system of medicine—like **Ayurveda**, **Homeopathy**, or **Unani**—prescribing medicines or performing treatments from another system, primarily **Allopathy** (modern medicine).

Prevalence in India: Crosspathy is widespread, particularly in **rural areas**, where there is a critical shortage of qualified allopathic doctors.

Legal and Regulatory Framework for Crosspathy:

1. **Permissibility:** Crosspathy is **illegal** unless explicitly allowed by state laws or government directives.
2. **Judicial Rulings:**
 - The **Supreme Court of India** has ruled that practicing outside one's field of expertise amounts to **medical negligence** unless authorized by law.
 - Several crosspathy practitioners have faced penalties under the **Indian Medical Council Act** and state medical regulations.
3. **State-Specific Policies:**
 - Maharashtra's **2014 law** expanded the definition of a "registered medical practitioner" to include homeopaths with pharmacology training.
 - In contrast, states like **Kerala** maintain stricter boundaries between medical systems.

Rationale Behind Crosspathy in India:

1. **Doctor Shortages:**
 - India faces an acute shortage of allopathic doctors, especially in rural areas.
 - As of **2022-23**, there was an **80% shortfall of specialists** in rural Community Health Centres (CHCs).
2. **Rural Accessibility:** AYUSH practitioners are often the only available medical resource for underserved populations.
3. **Cost Factors:** Low-income patients often prefer AYUSH practitioners due to affordability compared to allopathic doctors or urban hospitals.
4. **Policy Adjustments:** To mitigate gaps, some states (e.g., **Goa, Maharashtra**) have permitted **limited crosspathy**, despite opposition from the medical community.

Recent Developments in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra FDA Directive: The **2024 order** allows homeopaths who have completed a **certificate course in modern pharmacology** to prescribe allopathic medicines. This clarifies the 2014 law's provisions and resolves confusion over chemists honoring such prescriptions.

Government's Justification:

- Addressing the **shortfall of doctors** in rural areas.
- Utilizing **5.65 lakh AYUSH practitioners** alongside India's **13 lakh allopathic doctors** to expand healthcare access.



Challenges and Criticisms:

1. Patient Safety Concerns:

- Critics argue that a short pharmacology course cannot substitute for the **extensive training** MBBS doctors receive.
- Risks include **misdiagnosis**, improper prescriptions, and **complications** arising from inadequate medical knowledge.

2. Legal Ambiguity:

- Conflicts with previous **Bombay High Court (2017)** and **Supreme Court** rulings that limit crosspathy practices.
- The directive may face **judicial challenges**, creating regulatory uncertainty.

3. Opposition from Medical Associations:

- The **Indian Medical Association (IMA)** strongly opposes the move, labeling it as a **dilution of healthcare standards**.
- They argue that this undermines the integrity of medical practice.

4. Regulatory Challenges:

Ensuring proper oversight of crosspathy practitioners in rural areas is difficult, leading to potential misuse or **unethical practices**.

Implications of the Move: For Patients

- **Risks:** Increased likelihood of substandard care, particularly in underserved areas.
- **Benefits:** Improved access to basic medical services where allopathic doctors are unavailable.

For the Healthcare System:

- **Pros:** Alleviates immediate doctor shortages in rural regions.
- **Cons:** Weakens healthcare standards and complicates medical regulation.

Way Forward:

1. **Strengthen Oversight:** Establish robust regulatory mechanisms to monitor crosspathy practices and ensure patient safety.
2. **Improve Rural Healthcare:**
 - Increase incentives for MBBS graduates to serve in rural areas.
 - Expand public health facilities to reduce dependence on crosspathy.
3. **Refine Crosspathy Policies:**
 - Define clear guidelines for permissible cross-system practices.
 - Align state laws with national healthcare standards to avoid regulatory conflicts.
4. **Focus on AYUSH Integration:** Utilize AYUSH practitioners in areas where their systems excel, like **preventive care**, rather than substituting modern medicine.

Conclusion:

Maharashtra's decision to allow homeopaths to prescribe allopathic medicine reflects an attempt to address critical gaps in India's healthcare delivery system. While the move may improve accessibility in the short term, it raises significant concerns about patient safety, medical ethics, and healthcare standards. A balanced approach that combines structural reforms, regulatory clarity, and capacity building is essential to ensure sustainable and equitable healthcare for all.

**RG Kar Rape Case: Not a Rarest of Rare Case**

Context: Sanjoy Roy, convicted for **raping and murdering a doctor** at RG Kar Medical College in Kolkata, was sentenced to **life imprisonment** by a sessions court.

Despite strong arguments for the **death penalty** from the CBI and public outcry, the court followed the Supreme Court's principle of applying the death penalty only in “**rarest of rare**” cases, as established in the **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980)** judgment.

**Understanding the "Rarest of Rare" Doctrine:****Bachan Singh Case (1980):**

- The Supreme Court in **Bachan Singh** upheld the death penalty but restricted its imposition to “**rarest of rare**” cases where the offender is beyond the possibility of reform.
- It did not define an exact standard for **rarest of rare** but listed **aggravating** and **mitigating circumstances** to guide decisions.

Aggravating and Mitigating Circumstances in Death Penalty:**1. Aggravating Circumstances (Favoring Death Penalty):**

- **Premeditated and Brutal Acts:** Murder that is pre-planned, violent, and shows extreme brutality.
- **Exceptional Depravity:** Crimes that display extraordinary cruelty.
- **Targeting Public Servants:** Killing of law enforcement officers or public servants.

2. Mitigating Circumstances (Discouraging Death Penalty):

- **Mental or Emotional Disturbance:** Offender acted under severe stress or disturbance.
- **Age of the Accused:** Very young or elderly offenders may not be sentenced to death.
- **Possibility of Reform:** Potential for the offender's rehabilitation and reintegration into society.
- **Mental Impairment:** Offender unable to understand the nature of their crime due to mental illness.

Evolution of Aggravating and Mitigating Factors Post-Bachan Singh:**1. Age of the Accused:**

- **Young Age as a Mitigating Factor:** In cases like **Ramnaresh v. State of Chhattisgarh (2012)**, young age (under 30) was seen as a factor indicating the possibility of reform.
- **Inconsistent Application:** The Law Commission's 262nd Report (2015) highlighted inconsistencies in considering age as a mitigating factor in death penalty cases.
- In **Sanjoy Roy's case**, he is **35 years old**, which may weigh against age being a mitigating factor.

2. Nature of the Offense:

- The **Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983)** case established that the death penalty can be imposed if the crime is so shocking that it **stirs society's collective conscience**.
- However, this approach primarily considers the nature of the crime and may not fully evaluate the offender's **potential for reform**.

3. Possibility of Reform:

- The **Bachan Singh Principle** stresses that death sentences should only be handed out when the state can prove **irredeemable criminality**.
- The **Santosh Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra (2009)** ruling emphasized that the evidence must be **clear and convincing** to prove that reform is not possible.



Stage of Trial: Impact on Aggravating and Mitigating Circumstances:

1. Separate Sentencing Trial:

- In **Bachan Singh**, the SC ruled that a **separate trial** after conviction is necessary to present arguments on whether the death penalty should be imposed.
- The **Dattaraya v. State of Maharashtra (2020)** case showed that if this separate hearing does not provide a **real, effective, and meaningful hearing**, the death penalty can be commuted to life imprisonment.

2. Issues with Same-Day Sentencing:

- The SC highlighted the lack of fairness in **same-day sentencing**, where aggravating and mitigating circumstances are considered together without allowing a proper defense for the convict.
- The **2022 suo motu proceedings** questioned whether **same-day sentencing** meets the required standard for a **meaningful hearing**, suggesting the need for uniform guidelines.

Challenges in Death Penalty Sentencing:

1. Imbalance Between Aggravating and Mitigating Factors:

- Aggravating circumstances are part of the **case record**, making them readily available to judges, whereas **mitigating factors** are usually presented **only after conviction**, creating a potential imbalance.

2. Judicial Concerns:

- The SC raised concerns about the **subjective** application of the “rarest of rare” doctrine and recommended the creation of **uniform guidelines** for evaluating **mitigating circumstances** in death penalty cases.

Key Observations:

- **Evolving Legal Framework:** Over time, courts have refined the factors that influence death penalty decisions, aiming for a more **objective** and **consistent** approach.
- **The Role of Age, Mental Health, and the Nature of the Crime:** Age and mental health are critical considerations in death penalty cases. These factors must be weighed carefully, as they affect the offender’s likelihood of reform.
- **Need for Uniform Guidelines:** The **Supreme Court** is pushing for uniform guidelines to ensure fairness and consistency in death penalty hearings, particularly for assessing mitigating circumstances.

Conclusion:

The **RG Kar rape case** reflects the complexities surrounding the **death penalty** and the “**rarest of rare**” doctrine. Despite public demand for the death penalty, the court adhered to the principle that the death sentence should only apply when there is **no possibility of reform**. This decision highlights the need for a **balanced approach** in sentencing, considering both **aggravating and mitigating factors** to ensure **fairness** and **justice** in capital punishment cases.



Electoral Trusts Surge After Ban on Electoral Bonds

Context: Following the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in February 2024, which scrapped the electoral bonds scheme, India has witnessed a significant surge in donations to political parties through electoral trusts. This shift highlights the growing preference for transparent political funding, offering fresh insights into the evolving landscape of electoral donations.



What Exactly Are Electoral Trusts?

Electoral trusts are **non-profit entities** designed to promote **transparency** in the political funding process in India. These trusts collect **voluntary contributions** from **individuals** or **companies** and then distribute the funds to **registered political parties**.

- Eligible Companies to Establish Electoral Trusts:** Any company registered under **Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956** can apply for approval to establish an electoral trust.
- Creation of Electoral Trusts:**
 - The concept was introduced under **Section 13B of the Income Tax Act, 1961**, offering **tax benefits** to donors.
 - The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** ensures that these trusts follow the guidelines laid out in the **Electoral Trusts Scheme, 2013**.
- Who Can Contribute:** **Indian citizens** and **domestic companies** are allowed to contribute to electoral trusts, with the obligation to disclose both their **identity** and the **amount donated**.
- Who is Excluded?:** **Foreign entities**, including **foreign companies or individuals**, **government companies**, and entities prohibited under the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, cannot donate.

The Key Benefits of Electoral Trusts Over Electoral Bonds:

1. Transparency in Political Donations:

- Electoral trusts** are legally required to **disclose donor names** and the **amounts donated** to the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.
- In stark contrast, **electoral bonds** allowed for **anonymous donations**, making it challenging to trace the **source of funds** and raising concerns about the **lack of transparency**.

2. Greater Accountability for Political Parties:

- Electoral trusts ensure that **political parties disclose** the funds they receive, fostering a transparent system where the public is informed about the **contributions received** by each party.
- In contrast, **electoral bonds** do not require such **disclosures**, which significantly limits **accountability**.

3. Robust Regulatory Oversight:

- Electoral trusts** are governed by the **Electoral Trusts Scheme, 2013**, and their activities are **closely monitored** by the **Election Commission of India**.
- Electoral bonds**, however, are **managed by banks**, with minimal **regulatory scrutiny**, making them susceptible to concerns over **oversight and transparency**.



4. Minimizing Foreign Influence:

- **Electoral trusts** explicitly prohibit **foreign donations**, helping to reduce the risk of **foreign interference** in India's political process.
- Meanwhile, **electoral bonds** have **no explicit restrictions** on **foreign-controlled entities** registered in India, raising concerns about **foreign influence** on political funding.

The Surge in Donations via Electoral Trusts:

Since the **scrapping of electoral bonds** by the Supreme Court in **February 2024**, **corporate political donations** have seen a dramatic shift towards **electoral trusts**. The **Electoral Trust**—which has been the largest contributor—has witnessed a sharp increase in donations, highlighting the growing preference for a **more transparent** system of political funding.

Transparency: Electoral Trusts vs. Electoral Bonds:

- **Electoral Trusts** stand out by being **transparent**—they are legally required to disclose **donor names** and the **amounts** distributed to political parties. However, they do not reveal **how much individual corporations contribute** to specific parties.
- On the other hand, **electoral bonds** allow for **anonymous donations**, making it nearly impossible to trace **who is funding whom**, which raised concerns about the integrity of the system.

Conclusion: A Step Towards Cleaner Political Funding

The recent surge in donations through **electoral trusts** marks a significant shift in India's political funding landscape. While **electoral trusts** offer better **transparency** and **accountability**, questions still remain about the **exact allocation** of funds to political parties. However, the **ban on electoral bonds** and the rise of electoral trusts is a positive move towards **cleaner** and **more transparent political financing**, ensuring that corporate donations are **more traceable** and **less prone to undue influence**.

**Abetment of Suicide in India: Legal Framework, Punishments, and Judicial Guidelines**

Context: In recent legal developments, the **Supreme Court of India** has highlighted the importance of **sensitizing investigating agencies** and **courts** when handling cases under **Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, which pertains to **abetment of suicide**. The Court emphasized that while the **law** should be applied in genuine cases, it should not be misused in an attempt to appease grieving families, urging careful adherence to the **legal standards** laid out.

**Understanding Abetment of Suicide Under Indian Law:****What is Abetment?**

According to **Section 107 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)** (also equivalent to Section 45 of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**), **abetment** involves the following:

- **Instigating** someone to take a particular action.
- **Conspiring** with others to carry out a particular act.
- **Intentionally aiding** an act either through direct action or **inaction**.

To secure a conviction for **abetment of suicide**, it must be proven that the accused **directly instigated** or **aided** the deceased in taking their own life.

Punishment for Abetment of Suicide:

Under **Section 306 of the IPC** (also reflected in **Section 108 of the BNS**), the punishment for abetment of suicide is:

- **Imprisonment:** Up to **10 years**.
- **Fine:** The imposition of a **monetary penalty** in addition to the sentence.

This is a **cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable** offense, meaning the accused can be arrested without a warrant, and the case cannot be settled through a private agreement.

Conviction Rate for Abetment of Suicide:

According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022**:

- **Conviction rate for Section 306 IPC:** **17.5%**.
- **Conviction rate for all IPC crimes:** **69.8%**.
- **Conviction rate for cognizable offenses** (including abetment of suicide): **54.2%**.

These statistics reveal that the **conviction rate** for **abetment of suicide** is significantly lower than for other criminal offenses, indicating challenges in securing a conviction in such cases.

Key Legal Standards for Abetment of Suicide:**Supreme Court's Judgment on Workplace Suicide Cases**

In **October 2024**, the **Supreme Court** quashed an **abetment of suicide** case involving a salesperson who allegedly took their life due to workplace harassment regarding a **voluntary retirement scheme**. The Court's observations include:

- **Higher standard of proof** is required in workplace-related suicide cases, especially in official relationships (e.g., **employer-employee**).



- Evidence must clearly demonstrate that the accused **intended** to cause the suicide.
- The prosecution must show that the accused's actions led to **direct and alarming incitement** to suicide.

Important Supreme Court Precedents on Abetment of Suicide:

1. M Mohan v. The State (2011):

- In this case, the Court clarified that **proof of active or direct involvement** by the accused is essential. The accused's actions must have left the deceased with no choice but to **commit suicide**.

2. Ude Singh v. State of Haryana (2019):

- The Court held that **indirect incitement** can be considered as abetment if the continuous actions of the accused **create a situation** where the deceased feels no other option than to take their life.

Key Takeaways: Legal Guidelines for Abetment of Suicide Cases

1. **Need for Evidence:** Proving **direct incitement or encouragement** is crucial in abetment of suicide cases. The prosecution must present **solid evidence** to show that the accused played a direct role in pushing the deceased towards suicide.
2. **Avoiding Misuse of the Law:** The **Supreme Court** has stressed that cases under **Section 306 IPC** should not be used to **appease grieving families**, especially in the absence of clear evidence that the accused directly caused the suicide.
3. **Cautious Approach in Workplace Cases:** In cases of **workplace harassment** or other official relationships, a **higher bar of proof** is required, and courts must be cautious in not allowing **baseless prosecutions**.

Conclusion: A Delicate Balance in Suicide Cases

The legal provisions concerning **abetment of suicide** under **Section 306 IPC** strike a delicate balance between ensuring justice for victims and preventing **misuse of the law**. As **court precedents** highlight, it is imperative to **carefully assess the evidence** and avoid wrongful prosecutions, ensuring that genuine cases are properly adjudicated while protecting individuals from unfounded legal actions.

Is France's Influence in West Africa Coming to an End?

Context: In recent developments, **Chad**, **Ivory Coast**, and **Senegal** have called for the **withdrawal of French troops** from their territories. This marks a potential turning point in **France's historical influence** over its former colonies in West Africa, raising questions about the future of the region's political landscape.



Why Are These Countries Requesting the Withdrawal?

- 1. National Sovereignty: A Call for Autonomy:** Since gaining independence, many **West African countries** have grappled with the heavy presence of **French influence**, particularly through **colonial pacts** such as '**Francafrique**'. France's military footprint, including **Operation Barkhane**, has been prominent in **Senegal** and **Ivory Coast** since 2014, and **Chad's defense pact** has lasted for decades. However, many view this continued military presence as a challenge to their **national sovereignty**, calling for a reevaluation of these longstanding ties.
- 2. Public Frustration with French Military Efforts:** Despite **French military involvement** aimed at curbing insurgent groups aligned with **Al-Qaeda** and the **Islamic State (ISIS)**, instability in the region has persisted. **Public sentiment** has soured, with increasing frustration toward the **French forces** and their failure to stabilize the situation. This has led to growing **anti-French sentiments** among the local populations.
- 3. Shifting Alliances and the Influence of Russia:** Countries in the region, including **Mali** and **Niger**, have begun to seek alternative forms of support, notably from **Russian mercenaries**. These new alliances, characterized by security assistance without the "**baggage**" of **democratic values** associated with Western powers, are seen as a possible shift away from traditional French influence.

Implications for West African Countries:

- 1. The End of France's Longstanding Influence:** Should **French troops withdraw**, the resulting **political vacuum** could drastically shift the **power dynamics** in the region. Countries that have long relied on France for military and economic support may now look to forge new **regional or global alliances** to secure their futures.
- 2. Continued Instability Despite New Alliances:** While countries like **Mali**, **Niger**, and **Burkina Faso** are turning to **Russian mercenaries**, their success in quelling insurgencies has been limited. **Military-led governments** in these nations, despite their alignment with Russia, have yet to effectively stabilize the region, showing that the solution may not lie in simply replacing one foreign influence with another.
- 3. Formation of New Alliances in the Sahel:** With **French departure**, countries like **Chad**, **Senegal**, and **Ivory Coast** could find themselves aligning with the **Alliance of Sahel**—a coalition of **military-led governments** in the region. This could bring about a new **regional bloc** of nations focused on security, though their ability to maintain stability remains uncertain.

Geographic Overview of Key Countries Involved:

- Chad:** A **landlocked** country bordered by **Libya**, **Sudan**, **Central African Republic**, **Cameroon**, **Nigeria**, and **Niger**. Its capital is **N'Djamena**.



- **Senegal:** Located on the **Atlantic Ocean**, it shares borders with **Mauritania, Mali, Guinea**, and **Guinea-Bissau**. Its capital is **Dakar**.
- **Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire):** Situated along the **Gulf of Guinea**, bordered by **Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia**, and **Guinea**.

Conclusion: A New Era for West Africa?

The **request for French troop withdrawals** signals a fundamental shift in **West Africa's geopolitics**. With countries seeking greater autonomy and forming new alliances, the future of **France's influence** in the region hangs in the balance. As local populations demand more control over their affairs, the next chapter in **West African politics** could be defined by shifting allegiances and the rise of new power centers.



Unspent 70,744-Crore Fund for Workers' Welfare: A Missed Opportunity

Context: In a recent **Right to Information (RTI)** response, the **Union Labour Ministry** revealed a concerning statistic: **State welfare boards for building and other construction workers** have not yet utilized a staggering **70,744.16 crore** of the cess collected from employers. These funds, meant for the welfare of construction workers, have remained largely **untapped**.



Understanding the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act, 1996

Purpose of the Act:

The **BOCW Act** was designed to regulate the **employment, working conditions**, and overall **welfare of construction workers**. The law mandates the establishment of **Construction Workers' Welfare Boards** by **State governments**, which are tasked with implementing various welfare initiatives.

Cess Collection for Worker Welfare:

Under the **BOCW Act**, welfare boards are authorized to impose a **cess** ranging from **1% to 2%** of the construction costs incurred by employers. This cess is crucial for funding essential **welfare measures**, including:

- **Temporary accommodation**
- **Drinking water and sanitation**
- **Social security benefits** for workers

Who Can Benefit?

Workers aged between **18 and 60** years, engaged in construction activities for at least **90 days** in the last year, are eligible for registration with **State Welfare Boards** as beneficiaries.

Current State of Cess Collection and Usage

Funds Collected: A Staggering 1.17 Lakh Crore

Since 2005, a total of **1,17,507.22 crore** has been **collected** as cess from construction employers across India. However, a significant portion of these funds remains **unutilized**:

- **67,669.92 crore** has been allocated to workers, but a massive **70,744.16 crore** remains unused.

Key Issues in Implementation

Underutilization of Funds

Despite the vast amounts of cess collected, only a fraction has been put to use, leaving workers without the **statutory benefits** they are entitled to.

Cess Evasion:

There are growing concerns about **cess evasion**, with allegations suggesting that **builders and employers** are underreporting construction costs, resulting in a significant shortfall in collected cess.

- **Example:** In **Maharashtra**, estimates suggest **construction worth 1 lakh crore** annually, yet the reported cess collection is far lower, indicating possible evasion.

Failure to Support Workers During COVID-19



The **COVID-19 lockdowns** in 2020 exposed a glaring flaw in the welfare system, as millions of construction workers were left stranded. The **lack of adequate support** during this crisis highlighted the ineffectiveness of both **State and Central governments** in utilizing the collected funds for the workers' welfare.

Conclusion: Time for Action

With over **70,000 crore** lying unused, it's imperative for **State governments** to act swiftly in utilizing these funds for the benefit of **construction workers**. The funds are meant to provide essential support to workers who have long been neglected, and it's high time they received the welfare benefits they are rightfully owed.





Is Poverty in India Being Underestimated

Context: In recent months, the **Indian government** released the **2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)**, which indicated a **decline in poverty** levels across both **urban and rural areas**. While the report paints a hopeful picture, **policymakers** and **academics** have raised concerns about **incomparable data**, **data unavailability**, and the very definition of an **adequate consumption basket** used to determine the **poverty line**.



Poverty Estimation in India: The Evolving Methodologies

India has undergone several revisions in how it measures poverty. Over the years, various **committees** have offered new approaches to ensure more accurate estimations:

Y.K. Alagh Committee (1979):

- **Methodology:** Defined the poverty line based on **minimum calorie intake** requirements for both **rural and urban areas**.

Lakdawala Committee (1993):

- **Methodology:** Introduced **state-specific poverty lines** and **price indices** to estimate poverty, considering regional disparities.

Tendulkar Committee (2009):

- **Shift in Focus:** Moved beyond **calorie consumption** and broadened its focus to **spending patterns**.
- **Methodology:** Introduced the **Mixed Reference Period (MRP)**, considering both **food** and **non-food** expenditures.

Rangarajan Committee (2014):

- **New Poverty Line:** Proposed higher thresholds for poverty estimation.
- **Methodology:** Modified consumption baskets to better reflect **rising living standards** and the realities of the Indian economy.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (2021):

- **Launched by NITI Aayog:** It moved beyond income-based poverty lines and included **12 indicators** like **access to bank accounts** and **maternal health**.
- **Improvement in Methodology:** The **URP** (Uniform Reference Period) evolved into **MRP** and eventually into **MMRP** to better capture expenditure habits.

Recent Developments: A Shift Towards More Accurate Data

To enhance the **accuracy** of poverty estimations, the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)** has started conducting **multiple household sittings**, which allows respondents to recall their expenditures more accurately. This improvement has led to better data **reliability** and has sparked optimism about more informed poverty policies in the future.

Decline in Poverty: A Glimpse into the Latest Statistics



The **2023-24 HCES factsheet** has reported a **sharp decline in poverty**, with estimates showing a reduction of **17-18%** in poverty levels since **2011-12**. Some estimates for **2022-23** put poverty levels at around **10%** using the **Rangarajan line**. This decline is attributed to several factors:

- High **GDP growth**
- Flagship **government programs**
- Improved **public delivery systems**

Key interventions like the **National Food Security Act** have played a pivotal role in ensuring **sustained low poverty levels**.

Urban vs. Rural Poverty: Shifting Dynamics

One of the key findings of the **HCES** is the **narrowing gap** between **rural** and **urban consumption patterns**. Rural areas are showing more **diversified consumption** trends, signaling progress in addressing rural poverty. However, the classification of rural areas is based on **2011 Census data**, which may not fully capture the **urbanization trends**, as many rural areas today are more **urban** or **peri-urban** in nature.

Conclusion: Are the Numbers Truly Reflective of Poverty in India?

While the decline in poverty levels reported by the **2023-24 HCES** is encouraging, there remain concerns about whether **poverty** is being **underestimated** in India. **Data gaps, methodology limitations**, and the evolving nature of **urbanization** suggest that a more nuanced approach is required to truly understand the complexities of poverty in India.

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India's Rice Exports: Resilience Amidst 2024 Export Restrictions

Context: In 2024, India's rice exports have shown remarkable resilience despite facing **temporary curbs** earlier in the year. The surge in **premium basmati rice** shipments effectively balanced the drop in **non-basmati rice exports**, allowing India to retain its status as the **world's largest rice exporter**.



India, which accounts for more than **40%** of global rice exports, had imposed **restrictions** on rice shipments in **2023** to address **domestic price rises** and ensure **food security**. After lifting the curbs in **September-October 2024**, exports rebounded, ending the year on a positive note.

Key Highlights of Rice Exports in 2024:

- **Total Exports:** India exported **17.8 million metric tonnes (MMT)** of rice in 2024, slightly lower than 2023's 17.86 MMT, demonstrating strong but slightly reduced exports.
- **Basmati Rice Exports:** Basmati rice exports soared by **16.3%**, reaching a **record 5.7 MMT**. Major Buyers: **Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE** contributed significantly to this growth.
- **Non-Basmati Rice Exports:** Exports of **non-basmati rice** declined by **6.9%** to **12.1 MMT**. Countries like **Bangladesh, Cameroon, Djibouti, and Gambia** reduced their imports, primarily due to **high prices**.

Lifting of Export Restrictions: A Turning Point

India lifted most restrictions on both **non-basmati** and **premium basmati rice** in **September-October 2024**, allowing rice exports to recover strongly in the final quarter of the year.

Impact on Global Rice Markets:

- **Global Price Stabilization:** India's continued rice exports helped stabilize **global rice prices**, which had spiked during the restrictions.
- **Reduction of Domestic Surplus:** By exporting more, India was able to reduce its **record-high domestic rice stockpile** from an excellent harvest, helping prevent oversupply in the local market.

India's Strong Domestic Rice Production:

India's **bumper rice harvest** ensured sufficient rice availability for both **domestic needs** and **global markets**. Despite the **temporary curbs**, the government managed to balance **food security** concerns with **export demands**, showcasing its strategic handling of rice exports.

Why Were Export Restrictions Imposed in the First Place?

- **Domestic Food Security:** Restrictions were primarily imposed to ensure enough rice remained in the country for **food security**, especially amidst rising **domestic prices**.
- **Rising Domestic Prices:** The government had to control rising **rice prices** and ensure that domestic availability was prioritized.
- **Monsoon Uncertainty:** The uncertainty surrounding the **monsoon** season also prompted caution in rice exports to ensure adequate stock for the country's needs.

Global and Domestic Significance of India's Rice Export Performance:

- **Global Impact:** India's continued rice shipments helped stabilize **global rice markets**, providing much-needed relief to import-dependent countries, even as rice prices remained high.



- **India's Dominance:** India maintained its **dominance** in the global rice market, with record **basmati shipments** strengthening its ties with important trading partners in the **Middle East**.

Conclusion: India's Resilient Export Story

India's ability to weather export restrictions and maintain strong **rice export performance** in 2024 highlights its resilience in navigating complex global and domestic challenges. The country's proactive policies and its surplus rice production have ensured that it continues to be a key player in **global food security**.



LID-568: A Black Hole That Defies Astrophysical Norms

Context: A team of international researchers using NASA's **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)** and the **Chandra X-ray Observatory** has uncovered an extraordinary black hole known as **LID-568**. This discovery challenges established **astrophysical theories** and provides groundbreaking insights into the **formation** and **rapid growth** of **supermassive black holes**.



What is LID-568?

LID-568 is a **low-mass supermassive black hole** that existed just **5 billion years** after the **Big Bang**. Discovered through complementary observations from JWST and Chandra, this black hole is feeding on surrounding matter at a rate that far exceeds the established theoretical limit known as the **Eddington limit**—by nearly **40 times**.

This unusual behavior suggests a **faster growth mechanism** for black holes than previously thought possible, pushing LID-568 into the category of **super-Eddington accretion**.

What is the Eddington Limit?

The **Eddington limit**, named after **Sir Arthur Eddington**, represents the theoretical maximum luminosity a star or accretion disk can achieve. At this limit, the **outward radiation pressure** from the object balances the **inward gravitational force**, preventing the further accretion of matter.

If an object exceeds this limit, it generates excessive **radiation pressure**, which could potentially blow away the outer layers of the star or accretion disk, ensuring a self-regulating mechanism to maintain stability.

Super-Eddington Accretion: A New Frontier

When an object, such as a **black hole**, exceeds the **Eddington limit** and accretes matter at an **unprecedented rate**, it is said to be in a **super-Eddington accretion** phase. In this state, the object emits more **luminosity** than the theoretical Eddington limit, challenging the traditional models of **radiation pressure balance**.

The discovery of **LID-568** demonstrates **super-Eddington accretion** at a level previously thought impossible. At just **1.5 billion years** after the Big Bang, LID-568 was consuming material at over **40 times** the Eddington limit, offering a glimpse into how **supermassive black holes** grew rapidly in the early universe.

Key Concepts of Black Holes:

- **Black Holes:** A black hole is a region in space where gravity is so intense that even light cannot escape. They typically form when massive stars collapse under their own gravity after exhausting their nuclear fuel.
- **Event Horizon:** The **event horizon** marks the boundary of a black hole. Once matter or light crosses this threshold, it cannot escape and is inevitably pulled towards the singularity.
- **Singularity:** At the core of a black hole lies the **singularity**, a point where the gravitational force is infinite, and the laws of physics break down.
- **Accretion Disk:** An **accretion disk** is a disk-like structure formed by gas and dust spiraling into the black hole. The material heats up due to friction, emitting **radiation** that can be detected in **X-rays**.



- **Spaghettification:** As objects approach a black hole, they experience extreme tidal forces that stretch and elongate them, a phenomenon known as **spaghettification**.
- **Supermassive Black Holes:** These black holes, like **Sagittarius A*** at the center of the **Milky Way**, can grow to billions of times the mass of the Sun.

The Role of the Chandra X-ray Observatory:

The **Chandra X-ray Observatory** played a crucial role in identifying **LID-568**, detecting its exceptional brightness in **X-rays**, even though it was invisible in **optical** and **near-infrared wavelengths**. The black hole's remarkable X-ray emissions provided key insights into its behavior and growth patterns.

Why This Discovery Matters:

The discovery of **LID-568** opens up new possibilities in our understanding of black hole growth. It not only challenges the **Eddington limit** but also sheds light on how **supermassive black holes** can grow so rapidly in the early universe. As astrophysics continues to explore the mysteries of black holes, discoveries like LID-568 could revolutionize our understanding of the **cosmic evolution** and the **mechanisms driving black hole formation**.



Tamil Nadu: The Birthplace of the Iron Age – A Groundbreaking Discovery

Context: A groundbreaking study has uncovered that the **Iron Age in Tamil Nadu** began as early as **3,345 BCE**, drastically altering the previously understood timeline of iron usage in the region by over **1,000 years**. This new evidence challenges prior historical assumptions and underscores Tamil Nadu's pivotal role in early metallurgical advancements. The study was authored by **K Rajan** (Pondicherry University) and **R Sivanantham** (Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology).



Iron Age in India: A Transformative Era

The **Iron Age** in India marked a period of significant advancement, especially in the use of **iron tools and weapons**. These innovations played a vital role in the **growth of agriculture, warfare, and social structures**. Traditionally, the Iron Age was believed to have begun around **1500 to 2000 BCE**, but new evidence from **Tamil Nadu** has revealed iron usage as early as **3345 BCE**, pushing the timeline back by more than a millennium.

Technological Breakthroughs: Advancements in Metallurgy

The **Iron Age** was a leap forward in **metallurgy**, following the **Copper-Bronze Age**. Iron smelting required the use of **advanced furnaces** capable of reaching temperatures as high as **1534°C**, showcasing the remarkable technological prowess of the era.

Archaeological Evidence: Key Discoveries in Tamil Nadu

- **North India:** Iron usage in sites like **Hastinapur, Kausambi, and Ujjain** is linked to the **Painted Grey Ware (PGW)** culture.
- **Central India and Deccan:** Sites like **Nagda, Eran, and Prakash** reveal evidence of **iron-bearing Black and Red Ware (BRW)**.
- **South India:** Iron artifacts date back to the **Neolithic and Megalithic phases**, indicating early iron use in Tamil Nadu.

Iron Age's Role in Agriculture and Urbanization:

Iron tools, including **axes** and **ploughs**, were essential in clearing forests and expanding agricultural activities. This facilitated the **second urbanization** in the **Ganga valley (800-500 BCE)**, bringing about **increased agricultural productivity and urban growth**.

Social and Economic Impact of the Iron Age:

The spread of **iron technology** enabled **forest clearance**, enhanced **agriculture**, and led to urbanization, resulting in **socio-economic stratification**. This era also saw the rise of **chiefdoms, states**, and the formation of **trading networks**, laying the foundation for the formation of the **Mauryan Empire** and the integration of diverse regions.

Key Findings of the Study: Revising the Iron Age Timeline

The report, '**Antiquity of Iron: Recent Radiometric Dates from Tamil Nadu**', offers conclusive evidence that **iron technology** in Tamil Nadu dates back to as early as **3345 BCE**. Using **Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS)** and **Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL)** methods, the study redefines the global history of **iron metallurgy**.

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Archaeological Sites Studied: Confirming Early Metallurgical Practices

- **Sivagalai:** Charcoal and potsherd samples date iron technology to **2953–3345 BCE**, with a paddy sample from a burial urn dated to **1155 BCE**.
- **Mayiladumparai:** Samples from this site, dating to **2172 BCE**, surpass earlier benchmarks for the region.
- **Kilnamandi:** The discovery of a **sarcophagus burial** dating to **1692 BCE** is the earliest of its kind in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu: A Leader in Early Metallurgy

This study positions **Tamil Nadu** as a pioneer in **early metallurgy**, with evidence of **smelted iron** dating back to the **middle of the 3rd millennium BCE**. The research suggests that the **Copper Age** in **North India** and the **Iron Age** in **South India** occurred simultaneously, reflecting distinct but parallel cultural trajectories.

Advanced Iron-Smelting Techniques in Tamil Nadu:

Archaeologists identified three distinct iron-smelting furnaces at:

- **Kodumanal:** Circular furnaces that could reach **1300°C**, enough to produce **sponge iron**.
- **Chettipalayam** and **Perungalur:** These sites demonstrated further innovative **smelting techniques**, highlighting Tamil Nadu's sophisticated knowledge of **pyro-technology**.

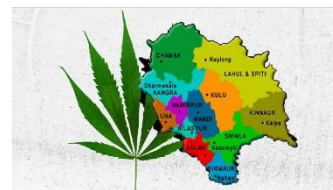
Significance of the Study: A New Chapter in Indian Archaeology

- **Iron Age Timeline Revised:** The discovery of **radiometric data** from **Sivagalai** places the use of iron in Tamil Nadu as early as **3345 BCE**, making it the earliest evidence of iron technology globally.
- **Global Implications:** This finding challenges the widely accepted **Hittite Empire (1300 BCE)** as the birthplace of the Iron Age.
- **A Turning Point in Archaeology:** This discovery marks a monumental shift in the history of **Indian archaeology**, positioning Tamil Nadu at the forefront of **global metallurgical innovation**.

This **groundbreaking study** not only rewrites the history of the **Iron Age** in India but also elevates Tamil Nadu as a key player in the **evolution of metallurgy**, offering new insights into the technological advancements of ancient civilizations.

Himachal Pradesh's Pilot Project for Controlled Cannabis Cultivation

Context: The Himachal Pradesh government has approved a **pilot project** for the **regulated cultivation of cannabis**, aiming to unlock its **medicinal and industrial** potential. This initiative positions Himachal Pradesh as the **fourth Indian state** to permit cannabis cultivation, following **Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir**.



Why This Initiative?

Background & Legal Framework:

- Cannabis grows **naturally** across Himachal Pradesh, yet its cultivation was banned under the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985**.
- Recent **amendments** to the NDPS Act now allow states to regulate cannabis cultivation for **medicinal and industrial** applications under strict **licensing and regulatory conditions**.
- The project aims to **identify suitable cannabis strains** with a focus on **non-narcotic uses** like **textiles, paper, food, cosmetics, and biofuel**.

Global Cannabis Market & Himachal Pradesh's Potential

Cannabis: A Trillion-Dollar Industry

- Countries such as **Canada, the USA, France, Italy, China, Australia, and Denmark** lead in **hemp cultivation** and the manufacture of cannabis-based products.
- Cannabis has been dubbed a "**Trillion-Dollar Crop**" due to its **wide-ranging applications** across multiple industries.
- With over **25,000 known industrial applications**, Himachal Pradesh aims to **tap into this lucrative market** while ensuring **strict regulatory compliance**.

Industrial & Medicinal Potential of Cannabis:

Understanding Cannabis Sativa L. (Industrial Hemp):

- Cannabis contains over **100 cannabinoids**, of which **Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** and **Cannabidiol (CBD)** are the most significant.
- THC** is **psychoactive**, while **CBD** is **non-psychoactive** and offers multiple **therapeutic benefits**.

Applications Based on THC Content:

- Industrial Use (THC < 0.3%):**
 - Used in **textiles, paper, biofuel, cosmetics, food supplements, and animal feed**.
- Medicinal Use (THC > 0.3%):**
 - THC** is used for treating **chronic diseases** such as **Multiple Sclerosis, Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's, cancer, and chronic pain**.
 - CBD** has shown **potential therapeutic effects** in treating **psychosis, epilepsy, inflammation, and neurodegenerative diseases**.

Legality of Cannabis in India:

Key Legal Provisions:

- International Conventions:**

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- India follows the **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**, which classifies cannabis alongside **hard drugs** like heroin.

2. Indian Constitutional & Legal Framework:

- Article 47** (Directive Principles of State Policy) advises against **harmful drugs and intoxicants**.
- NDPS Act, 1985** prohibits cannabis cultivation and use.
- Section 14 of the NDPS Act** allows the **government** to permit **cannabis cultivation** for **horticultural and industrial purposes**.
- Bhang**, made from cannabis leaves, is **not prohibited** under the NDPS Act and falls under **state jurisdiction**.

Controlled Cultivation & Economic Benefits:

Ensuring Responsible Cultivation:

- Only **low-THC hemp varieties** (<0.3% THC) will be cultivated to prevent **misuse**.
- The **focus** will be on **industrial** and **medicinal** applications rather than recreational use.
- Hemp's **stalks, leaves, and seeds** will be processed into **textiles, food, cosmetics, paper, and biofuel**.

Economic & Revenue Impact:

- The project is expected to **generate an annual income of ₹500 crore** for Himachal Pradesh.
- Aligns with global trends, where **countries like the US, Canada, and Germany** have successfully leveraged **regulated cannabis cultivation** for **economic growth**.

Challenges & Roadblocks:

Regulatory & Implementation Concerns:

- Ensuring Compliance:**
 - Strict **quality control measures** must be implemented to **prevent illegal diversion**.
- Market & Infrastructure Development:**
 - Need for **strong supply chains** to support cannabis-based industries.
- Public Perception & Awareness:**
 - Overcoming **societal stigma** and raising **awareness about the non-narcotic uses** of cannabis.

Conclusion: A Step Toward Innovation & Economic Growth

Himachal Pradesh's **controlled cannabis cultivation initiative** marks a **progressive shift** toward **harnessing the economic, medicinal, and industrial potential** of cannabis. If implemented **effectively and responsibly**, it could position the state as a **leader in the global cannabis industry**, driving **economic growth, job creation, and industrial development** while ensuring **strict regulatory oversight**.

**RBI's Liquidity Boost: Key Measures to Stabilize the Banking System**

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced **enhanced liquidity measures** to address the **liquidity crunch** in the **banking system**. These steps aim to **inject liquidity**, counter **rupee depreciation**, and stabilize **monetary conditions**.

**Key Liquidity Measures by RBI:****1. USD/INR Swap Auction:**

- RBI will conduct a **six-month USD/INR buy/sell swap auction** worth **\$5 billion** on **January 31, 2025**.
- Under this, banks will **sell US dollars** to RBI in exchange for **rupee liquidity**, which will be **reversed after six months** with a **premium**.

2. Open Market Operations (OMO) Purchases:

- The RBI will conduct **Open Market Operation (OMO) purchases** of **Government Securities (G-Secs)** worth **60,000 crore**.
- This will happen in **three tranches** of **20,000 crore** each on **January 30, February 13, and February 20, 2025**.

3. Variable Rate Repo (VRR) Auction:

- A **56-day Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auction** for **50,000 crore** will be conducted.
- This marks the **first time** RBI is conducting such a **long-tenor VRR auction**.

Why These Measures?**Addressing the Liquidity Deficit:**

- These steps will **inject approximately 1.50 lakh crore** into the banking system between **January 30 and February 20, 2025**.
- The **liquidity shortfall** is due to:
 - **Rupee depreciation**
 - **Limited government spending**
 - **Tax outflows**
- The current **liquidity deficit** is estimated at **3 lakh crore**, necessitating **immediate intervention**.

Challenges in Liquidity Management:

1. **Government Over-Borrowing**
 - Excessive **government borrowing** and **investing surplus cash** can disrupt **liquidity balance**.
2. **Weak Cash Management**
 - **Poor cash flow planning** can lead to **prolonged liquidity imbalances**, affecting RBI's ability to **manage debt and monetary policy**.

The Way Forward:**Stronger Coordination Between RBI & Government**

- A **coordinated fiscal approach** is crucial to **prevent liquidity shocks**.

Flexible & Agile Liquidity Management

- RBI remains **committed to dynamic liquidity management** to ensure **financial stability**.

Market Monitoring & Policy Adjustments

- RBI will **continuously monitor** liquidity trends and take **further action if needed** to maintain **orderly market conditions**.

Conclusion

The **RBI's proactive liquidity measures** highlight its **commitment to stabilizing the financial system**. By ensuring **adequate liquidity**, these steps will **support economic stability**, counter **liquidity shortages**, and **strengthen financial markets**.

India's Own AI Revolution: Developing a Homegrown Large Language Model (LLM)

Context: The Indian government has embarked on an ambitious mission to develop its own **Large Language Model (LLM)** as part of the ₹10,370 crore **IndiaAI Mission**. This initiative aims to build a **homegrown AI ecosystem** tailored to India's **diverse languages, culture, and needs**.

Key Highlights of India's AI LLM Project:

1. Indigenous AI Model Development:

- The project focuses on creating an **India-specific AI system** that truly represents the country's **linguistic and cultural diversity**.
- The development of the **foundational model** is expected to take **4-8 months**.
- The **government's AI compute facility** will be among the **most cost-effective** globally.



2. Infrastructure & GPU Supply:

- **10 companies** have been selected to supply **18,693 high-end GPUs (Graphics Processing Units)**, which are **crucial for training AI models**.
- GPUs are used for **large-scale data processing, machine learning, and deep learning** applications.
- Plans are in place to set up **AI data centers in Odisha**, fostering **AI-driven research and innovation**.
- By making **high-performance GPUs available**, students and researchers will have the tools to **develop large-scale AI models** rather than working in **fragmented, ad-hoc setups**.

IndiaAI Mission: Transforming AI Development:

Key Initiatives Under IndiaAI Mission:

Over the next five years, the mission will support:

- **IndiaAI Compute Capacity**
- **IndiaAI Innovation Centre (IAIC)**
- **IndiaAI Datasets Platform**
- **IndiaAI Application Development Initiative**
- **IndiaAI FutureSkills Program**
- **IndiaAI Startup Financing**
- **Safe & Trusted AI Framework**

Objective:

The mission aims to:

- Foster **India's leadership in AI** globally.
- Promote **technological self-reliance**.
- Ensure **ethical and responsible AI deployment**.
- Make **AI benefits accessible** across all sections of society.



What Are Large Language Models (LLMs)?

LLMs are **advanced AI models** designed to **understand and generate human language** using **deep learning techniques**.

Applications of LLMs:

- **Text Generation**
- **Language Translation**
- **Summarization & Content Creation**
- **Conversational AI (Chatbots, Virtual Assistants)**

Why India Needs Its Own AI Model?

1. **Reducing Dependence on Foreign AI:** Developing an **indigenous AI model** will help India **reduce reliance on foreign tech** and boost **self-sufficiency**.
2. **Enhancing Data Security & Privacy:** A **domestically built AI** ensures **better control over data**, minimizing risks associated with **data privacy and misuse**.
3. **Supporting India's Linguistic Diversity:** The LLM will be **designed to support multiple Indian languages**, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.
4. **Eliminating Biases in AI:** India's AI model will be trained to **reflect the country's true diversity**, eliminating **cultural or ideological biases** found in foreign AI systems.

Conclusion:

India's move to develop its **own AI-powered Large Language Model** marks a **game-changing shift** in its **technological landscape**. With **cutting-edge infrastructure**, **government support**, and a **focus on innovation**, this initiative will position India as a **global leader in AI**, driving **economic growth**, **digital transformation**, and **technological independence**.



SC Bans Manual Scavenging in Six Major Cities – A Historic Verdict

Context: The Supreme Court of India has issued a landmark ruling, prohibiting manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning in six metropolitan cities. This decision comes in response to a writ petition aimed at eradicating this inhumane practice across the country.

**What is Manual Scavenging?**

Manual scavenging refers to the dangerous and degrading practice of manually cleaning and disposing of human excreta from dry latrines, open drains, septic tanks, and sewers. This hazardous occupation disproportionately affects marginalized communities, especially Dalits.

Current Status of Manual Scavenging in India

Despite being legally banned, manual scavenging continues due to loopholes and poor enforcement. Alarming Statistics (2018-2023):

- 443 deaths reported due to manual scavenging (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment).
- Delhi alone recorded 94 deaths over the last 15 years, yet only one conviction was made.
- Caste Disparity:
 - 97% of manual scavengers belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs):
 - 42,594 from SCs
 - 421 from Scheduled Tribes (STs)
 - 431 from Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

Challenges and Issues:**Continued Existence Despite Ban:**

- Workers are often hired informally under contractual arrangements, bypassing legal restrictions.
- Lack of mechanization forces workers to clean sewers manually, exposing them to toxic gases and fatal accidents.
- Rehabilitation efforts under the 2013 Act have been poorly implemented.
- Deep-rooted caste discrimination keeps Dalits trapped in this degrading occupation.

Laws & Regulations Against Manual Scavenging:**Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**

- Bans manual scavenging in all forms.
- Criminalizes the employment of manual scavengers.
- Mandates mechanization of sewer cleaning.

Supreme Court Interventions:

- 2014 (Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India) – SC ordered 10 lakh compensation for the families of deceased manual scavengers.
- 2020 – SC directed stricter implementation of mechanized sewer cleaning.

**Constitutional Provisions:**

- **Article 17** – Abolishes untouchability.
- **Article 21** – Guarantees **right to life and dignity**.
- **Article 23** – Prohibits forced labor.
- **Article 42** – Ensures **humane working conditions**.

Government Initiatives to Eliminate Manual Scavenging:**NAMASTE Scheme (2023):**

- Focuses on **mechanizing sewer cleaning**.
- Provides **skill training** and **alternative employment opportunities**.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:

- Aims to **replace dry latrines** with **modern sanitation facilities**.
- Promotes **mechanized cleaning equipment** to eliminate human involvement.
- **Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS)**
- Provides **40,000 financial aid** to former manual scavengers.
- Offers **skill training** for alternative livelihood options.

Way Forward: Eradicating Manual Scavenging for Good:

- ✓ **Strict enforcement** of the **2013 Act** with **heavy penalties** for violators.
- ✓ **Accelerate the adoption** of **mechanized cleaning methods** using **robots and advanced machines**.
- ✓ **Ensure full rehabilitation** of manual scavengers through **financial support and employment training**.
- ✓ **Raise awareness** to eliminate the **caste-based stigma** attached to sanitation work.

This **Supreme Court ruling** marks a **crucial step** toward **eradicating manual scavenging** and ensuring **dignity, safety, and justice** for all workers.

**National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)**

Context: The **Union Cabinet** has approved the launch of the **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)** with an estimated expenditure of **16,300 crore**. This mission aims to accelerate the regulatory approval process for **critical mineral mining projects** in India.

**Mission Objectives:**

The **NCMM** is designed to cover the entire **value chain** of critical minerals, including:

- **Exploration**
- **Mining**
- **Beneficiation**
- **Processing**
- **Recovery from end-of-life products**

Key Features:

- Establishment of **mineral processing parks** to support the **recycling of critical minerals**.
- Encouraging **research in critical mineral technologies** by setting up a **Centre of Excellence on Critical Minerals**.
- Development of a **strategic stockpile** of critical minerals within the country.
- Promoting Indian **PSUs and private sector companies** to acquire **critical mineral assets abroad** and strengthen trade with **resource-rich nations**.

What Are Critical Minerals?

Critical minerals are essential for **economic development and national security**. They are crucial for technological advancements in various industries, including:

- **High-tech electronics**
- **Telecommunications**
- **Transportation**
- **Defense sector**

Challenges in Supply Chain:

Due to the **limited availability** and **geographical concentration** of these minerals, supply chain vulnerabilities have emerged. This necessitates the development of **value chains** for minerals critical to India's growth.

Applications of Critical Minerals:

1. **Clean Energy Technologies:**
 - **Zero-emission vehicles**
 - **Wind turbines**
 - **Solar panels**
2. **Advanced Manufacturing:**
 - **Batteries (Cadmium, Cobalt, Lithium)**



- Semiconductors (Gallium, Indium, Selenium)
- Permanent magnets and ceramics

3. Defense & Electronics:

- New-age technologies (Beryllium, Titanium, Tungsten, Tantalum)
- Medical devices and cancer treatment (Platinum Group Metals - PGMs)

India's List of Critical Minerals:

India has identified **30 critical minerals**, including: **Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, Phosphorous, Potash, Rare Earth Elements (REE), Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium, and Cadmium.**

Global Collaboration: Minerals Security Partnership (MSP):

India is a member of the **Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)**, which includes **23 global partners** such as **the US, EU, Japan, Australia, Canada, and others.** This partnership aims to facilitate **public and private investments** in critical mineral supply chains worldwide.

India's Initiatives to Secure Critical Minerals:

1. **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:** Amended in **2023** to promote **exploration and mining** of critical minerals.
2. **Geological Survey of India (GSI):**
 - Conducted **368 exploration projects** in the past three years.
 - **195 projects** currently underway in **FY 2024-25.**
 - Plans for **227 new projects** in **FY 2025-26.**
3. **KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd.):** A joint venture under the **Ministry of Mines**, acquiring **15,703 hectares** in **Argentina's Catamarca province** for **Lithium exploration.**
4. **Custom Duty Reforms:** The **Union Budget 2024-25** eliminated **custom duties** on most **critical minerals**, encouraging the **establishment of processing facilities** in India.

Future Roadmap:

India is actively collaborating with **resource-rich countries** to secure its mineral supply:

- **Tanzania – Niobium, Graphite**
- **Zimbabwe – Lithium**
- **Congo & Zambia – Copper, Cobalt**

With India's commitment to **energy transition** and achieving **net-zero emissions by 2070**, securing a **steady supply of critical minerals** will be pivotal for **sustainable economic growth** and **technological advancement.**

Liquid Propulsion Systems of ISRO

Context: Recently, ISRO appointed M. Mohan as the Director of the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) in Thiruvananthapuram.

Understanding Liquid Propulsion Systems:

Liquid propulsion systems utilize **liquid propellants**, such as **Liquid Oxygen (LOX)** and **Liquid Hydrogen (LH₂)**, to produce **thrust**. These systems offer several advantages over solid propulsion, including:

- Higher efficiency
- Better controllability
- Capability to restart multiple times

ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC):

The LPSC is a key ISRO facility dedicated to the **design, development, and implementation** of liquid propulsion stages for **launch vehicles**. It operates through two major centers:

- **Thiruvananthapuram (Valiamala)** – Focuses on **rocket propulsion**
- **Bengaluru** – Specializes in **satellite propulsion systems**

Recent Developments in Liquid Propulsion:

1. Gaganyaan Mission:

- ISRO has incorporated **advanced liquid propulsion** in the **Crew Module** for the first **uncrewed mission** of Gaganyaan.
- The **Crew Module Propulsion System (CMPS)** is a **bi-propellant-based Reaction Control System (RCS)** that ensures **precise three-axis control (pitch, yaw, and roll)** during **descent and re-entry**.

2. Cryogenic Upper Stage for GSLV:

- ISRO has **indigenously developed** a **cryogenic upper stage** for the **Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)**.
- This development has significantly **boosted India's capability** to launch **heavier payloads into space**.

3. Satellite Propulsion Systems:

- The LPSC is also responsible for the development of **propulsion systems for satellites**.
- This includes **monopropellant thrusters** and **components for satellite control and maneuvering**.

Conclusion:

India's advancements in **liquid propulsion technology** have bolstered its **space exploration** capabilities, making ISRO a global leader in **rocket and satellite propulsion**. The LPSC continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing **India's space missions** with cutting-edge **propulsion technologies**.



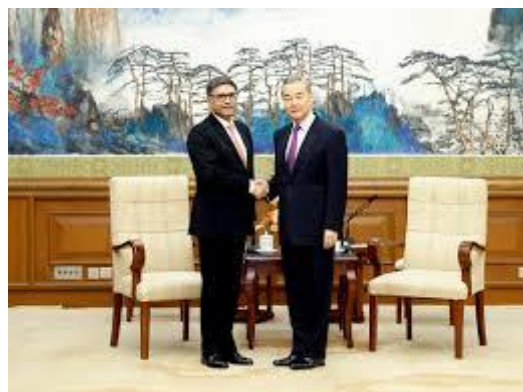
India-China Relations: 75 Years of Diplomatic Ties

Context: In a notable development, **India and China** have announced the **resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra** this summer, aligning with the **75th anniversary** of their diplomatic relationship.

Historical Evolution of India-China Relations

Early Diplomatic Engagement

- India was one of the **first nations** to recognize the **People's Republic of China** in **1950**, officially establishing diplomatic ties on **April 1, 1950**.
- The relationship initially thrived on mutual goodwill, symbolized by the famous slogan '**Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai**' (India and China are brothers).



Key Milestones in Bilateral Relations

- Panchsheel Agreement (1954):** The five principles of **peaceful coexistence** laid the foundation for future diplomatic interactions.
- Sino-Indian War (1962):** The border conflict led to a severe breakdown in relations.
- Normalization Efforts (1988-1993):** Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi's** visit to China in **1988** marked a thaw, leading to agreements promoting **peace and stability** along the border.
- Trade Boom (2000s):** Bilateral trade surged, making **China one of India's largest trading partners**.
- Border Clashes (2017 & 2020):** The **Doklam standoff (2017)** and **Galwan Valley clashes (2020)** reignited tensions.
- Recent Diplomatic Engagements (2023-2024):** Both nations have sought to manage differences through **ongoing diplomatic dialogues**.

75th Anniversary: Recent Developments & Diplomatic Talks

Foreign Secretary's Visit to China (2025)

- Border Stability:** Agreement to maintain **peace and order** along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.
- Economic Cooperation:** Discussions on **enhancing trade and investment** ties.
- Cultural Exchanges:** Plans to **resume cultural programs** and **educational collaborations**.

China's Call for Stable Ties

- China stressed the need for **constructive conflict resolution** to ensure a stable relationship.
- The **Chinese Foreign Ministry** underscored the importance of **de-escalation** along the **LAC**.

Restoring Air Connectivity

- India and China agreed to **resume direct flights** after a five-year hiatus.



- This move aims to **boost people-to-people interactions** and **enhance mutual understanding**.

Challenges in India-China Relations

Border Disputes

- Despite continued **diplomatic talks**, unresolved issues in **Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh** remain a **major concern**.
- The **2020 Galwan clashes** are a stark reminder of persistent **border tensions**.

Trade Imbalance

- Bilateral trade surpassed **\$125 billion in 2024**, reflecting a **1.9% growth** year-on-year.
- However, **India's trade deficit** with China remains a challenge.
- India is pushing for **greater market access** for its **IT and pharmaceutical sectors**.

Geopolitical Rivalry

- India's increasing collaboration with the **QUAD alliance (US, Japan, Australia)** is viewed with suspicion by China.
- China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** remains a contentious issue, conflicting with India's **regional connectivity vision**.

Path Forward: Opportunities for Cooperation

Boosting Economic Ties

- Strengthening collaboration in **renewable energy, digital technology, and infrastructure development** can benefit both nations.
- Addressing **trade imbalances** through mutually beneficial agreements is essential.

Enhancing Cultural & Educational Exchanges

- Encouraging **student exchanges, tourism, and academic collaborations** can bridge cultural gaps.

Sustained Diplomatic & Military Dialogue

- **Regular engagement** between military and diplomatic channels is crucial to preventing conflicts.
- Implementing **confidence-building measures (CBMs)** along the **LAC** can foster trust.

Conclusion

As **India and China** commemorate **75 years of diplomatic ties**, their relationship remains a blend of **cooperation and competition**.

- While challenges persist in **border disputes and trade**, avenues for **economic and diplomatic collaboration** continue to grow.
- The future of **India-China relations** will depend on how effectively both nations can **balance strategic differences** with economic and cultural engagement.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024

Context: The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a nationwide, citizen-led household survey that provides a snapshot of **schooling and learning levels in rural India**. The survey assesses both **enrolled and out-of-school children**, making it a comprehensive tool for understanding India's education landscape.

- **Meaning of ASER:** The term 'aser' means 'impact' in Hindustani.
- **Coverage:** Tracks children aged **3-16** for **enrollment status** and tests **5-16-year-olds** for **basic reading and arithmetic skills**.
- **Conducted by:** ASER Centre in collaboration with the **Pratham network**.
- **Survey Frequency:**
 - **2005-2014:** Conducted annually.
 - **2016 onwards:** Shifted to an **alternate-year model**.
 - **Gap Years:** Focused on specific age groups or new aspects of learning.

Assessing reading levels

The table shows the percentage of children in Classes 3 and 5 able to read a Class 2 text in government schools

Class 3: % children reading at Class 2 level

2018 20.9

2022 16.3

2024 23.4

Class 5: % reading at Class 2 level

2018 44.2

2022 38.5

2024 44.8



SOURCE: ASER(RURAL) 2024

Previous ASER Surveys

- **ASER 2017:** Focused on **youth (14-18 years)**, assessing their activities, abilities, and aspirations.
- **ASER 2019:** Studied **early childhood learning (4-8 years)**, focusing on cognitive and numeracy skills.
- **ASER 2023:** Assessed **digital literacy** among **14-18-year-olds**.
- **ASER 2024:** Returned to the '**basic**' survey format, covering almost all **rural districts in India**.

Key Findings of ASER 2024

1. Learning Improvements

- **Class 3 Students (Government Schools):** The proportion of students who could read a **Class 2-level text** rose to **23.4% in 2024**, up from **16.3% in 2022**.
- **Arithmetic Skills:**
 - **Class 3:** Two-thirds of students **struggled with subtraction**.
 - **Class 5:** Only **30.7%** could solve division problems.
 - **Class 8:** **45.8%** showed mastery in basic arithmetic.

2. Regional Variations

- **States with Notable Gains:** **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Odisha** showed significant improvements in reading levels.
- **Uttar Pradesh** had the **largest rise**, with a **15-percentage-point** improvement in reading skills.



3. Government vs Private Schools

- **Government schools** have seen a **stronger learning recovery** post-pandemic.
- **Private schools** continue to lag behind their **pre-pandemic performance**.
- Despite progress, **30% of children** still **struggle with reading a Class 2-level text**.

4. School Enrolment Trends

- **Overall School Enrolment (Ages 6-14): 98.1%**, nearly back to **pre-pandemic levels**.
- **Government School Enrolment:**
 - **2022: 72.9%**
 - **2024: 66.8%** (decline post-pandemic recovery)
- **Underage Children in Class 1:** Dropped to **16.7%**, the **lowest ever recorded**.

5. Digital Literacy and Smartphone Use

- **Smartphone Ownership (Rural Households): 84% in 2024**, a **significant increase**.
- **Teenagers Using Smartphones for Education: 57%**, while **76% use them for social media**.
- **Gender Gap:** Boys report **higher smartphone ownership and usage** than girls.

Driving Factors Behind Learning Trends

- **NEP 2020 and Nipun Bharat Mission:** Played a **crucial role** in **enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy**.
- **Digital Tools:** **Smartphones and online resources** have helped **continue education post-pandemic**.

Challenges and Recommendations

1. Persistent Learning Gaps: While improvements are evident, **significant literacy and numeracy gaps remain**, particularly in **government schools**.

2. Unequal Access to Educational Resources: **Regional disparities** and **limited access to digital tools** hinder educational progress.

3. Need for Stronger Digital Literacy Initiatives

- **Smartphone usage for education is increasing**, but a **gender gap** in digital access persists.
- **More structured digital literacy programs** are needed to **maximize learning outcomes**.

4. Enhancing School Readiness Programs: Programs that focus on **early childhood learning** can **help bridge foundational learning gaps**.

Conclusion

The **ASER 2024** report highlights **remarkable improvements in learning outcomes** but also underscores the **need for sustained efforts** to **address literacy gaps, digital access inequalities, and enrollment shifts**. **NEP 2020 and digital education tools** have played a **key role** in driving progress, yet **more targeted interventions** are required to **ensure equitable and effective learning for all children in rural India**.



Union Budget of India: A Blueprint for Economic Growth

Context: The **Union Budget** serves as the Government's **financial roadmap**, detailing **expenditure plans**, **tax policies**, and **fiscal strategies** that directly influence the nation's economy and its citizens' lives. It is referred to as the **Annual Financial Statement** under **Article 112 of the Indian Constitution**.

Key Facts About the Budget

- The Budget must be **passed by Parliament** before it takes effect on **April 1**, marking the beginning of India's financial year.
- The **Railway Budget** was **merged** with the Union Budget in **2017** following the recommendations of the **Bibek Debroy Committee**.
- In **2019**, **Nirmala Sitharaman** became the **second woman** to present the Union Budget, after **Indira Gandhi**.



Major Components of the Union Budget

The Budget is primarily composed of **three key elements**: **Expenditure**, **Receipts**, and **Deficit Indicators**.

1. Expenditure

It is categorized into two types:

- Capital Expenditure:** Involves spending on assets with a long-term impact, such as **building schools, hospitals, and infrastructure**.
- Revenue Expenditure:** Covers **day-to-day expenses** such as **wages, subsidies, and interest payments**, which do not create new assets.

2. Receipts

Government earnings are divided into three categories:

- Revenue Receipts:** Includes **tax revenues (income tax, GST, corporate tax)** and **non-tax revenues (dividends, fees, etc.)**.
- Non-Debt Capital Receipts:** Consists of **loan recoveries and disinvestment proceeds** that do not add liabilities.
- Debt-Creating Capital Receipts:** Comprises **borrowings and liabilities**, requiring future repayments.

3. Fiscal Deficit

- Fiscal Deficit** represents the shortfall between **total expenditure and the sum of revenue receipts and non-debt receipts**.
- A **high fiscal deficit** indicates excess government spending over earnings, leading to **increased borrowing and debt burdens**.



Impact of the Union Budget on the Economy

1. Economic Growth: The Budget drives economic expansion through public investments in infrastructure, industry, and welfare schemes, fostering private sector participation.

2. Inflation Control: By adjusting subsidies, taxation policies, and debt management, the Budget plays a crucial role in controlling inflation and maintaining price stability.

3. Fiscal Deficit and Public Debt

- A rising fiscal deficit results in higher borrowing and increased interest rates, impacting economic stability.
- Fiscal discipline ensures sustainable financial health.

4. Taxation and Economic Reforms

- Changes in tax policies affect business investments, consumer spending, and government revenues.
- Reforms like GST and direct tax rationalization enhance efficiency and compliance.

5. Employment Generation: Government allocations for infrastructure development, skill enhancement programs, and social welfare contribute to job creation and poverty reduction.

6. Foreign Investments: Investor-friendly policies attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), boosting economic competitiveness and ease of doing business.

7. Social Welfare and Inclusivity

- Increased spending on healthcare, education, and social security enhances living standards and reduces inequality.
- Subsidies on essential goods and services support vulnerable populations.

8. Stock Market & Business Sentiments: The Budget's tax policies, industry incentives, and economic outlook shape investor confidence and stock market performance.

9. Sustainability and Green Growth

- Emphasis on renewable energy, climate resilience, and eco-friendly projects ensures long-term environmental sustainability.
- Investment in green infrastructure promotes sustainable economic development.

Conclusion

The **Union Budget** is more than just a financial document—it is a **strategic tool** that defines India's economic priorities and sets the course for **sustainable growth, fiscal stability, and national development**. Its impact resonates across industries, households, and global markets, making it a **critical pillar** in shaping the country's future.

ISRO's Historic 100th Launch from Sriharikota

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully marked its **100th launch** from the **Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh**, by placing the **NVS-02 satellite** into **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)** using the **GSLV-F15 launch vehicle**.



GSLV-F15: The Launch Vehicle

- **Three-Stage Rocket:** The **Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F15)** is a **three-stage launch vehicle**, featuring a **CUS 15 cryogenic engine** in its **third stage**.
- **Payload:** The mission carried **NVS-02**, the second satellite in the **NVS series**, which is part of India's **Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)** system.

NavIC: India's Own Navigation System

What is NavIC?

NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) is India's **regional navigation satellite system**, previously known as the **Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)**, developed by **ISRO**.

NavIC Network

- The system consists of a **constellation of 7 satellites**.
- **3 satellites** are placed in **geostationary orbit**, while **4 satellites** are positioned in **inclined geosynchronous orbit**.

NavIC Services

- **Standard Position Service (SPS):** Available for **civilian users**.
- **Restricted Service (RS):** Dedicated for **strategic applications**.

Coverage & Accuracy

- **Coverage:** India and regions extending up to **1,500 km beyond** its boundaries.
- **Accuracy:**
 - **Positioning Accuracy:** Better than **20 meters**.
 - **Timing Accuracy:** Better than **40 nanoseconds**.

Interoperability with Global Systems

- NavIC's **SPS signals** are **interoperable** with other **Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS)** like:
 - **GPS (USA)**
 - **GLONASS (Russia)**
 - **Galileo (European Union)**
 - **BeiDou (China)**



About ISRO: India's Space Pioneer

- **Established:** August 15, 1969
- **Origin:** Initially founded as the **Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR)** in **1962**, under the vision of **Dr. Vikram Sarabhai**.
- **Headquarters:** Bengaluru
- **Mission:** To develop and apply **space technology** for India's progress.
- **First Launch:** The **first experimental flight of SLV-3** (carrying the **Rohini Technology Payload**) was launched in **1979** under the leadership of **Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam**.



TEAM Initiative to Empower MSMEs in Digital Commerce

Context: The Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME), in partnership with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), has introduced the MSME Trade Enablement and Marketing (TEAM) Initiative to boost digital commerce for small businesses.

Key Highlights

- **Budget:** ₹277.35 crore over **three years** (FY 2024-25 to FY 2026-27)
- **Target Beneficiaries:** 5 lakh Micro & Small Enterprises (MSEs), with **50% women-led enterprises**
- **Implementation Partner:** National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)
- **Focus Areas:**
 - Onboarding MSEs onto ONDC
 - Developing digital storefronts, integrated payment solutions & logistics support
 - Providing financial aid for seller onboarding, catalog creation & account management
 - Conducting 150+ workshops in Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities, prioritizing SC/ST & women entrepreneurs
 - Strengthening ties with PM Vishwakarma & Digital MSME schemes



Why TEAM Initiative?

- **Bridging MSMEs with Digital Commerce:** ONDC integration helps small businesses expand their **market reach** and lower operational hurdles.
- **Formalizing MSMEs:** Enables the creation of **digital transaction histories**, boosting **credibility & trust** among customers and financial institutions.
- **Empowering Startups & Tech Enablers:** Facilitates **innovation** by allowing startups to develop solutions using the **ONDC network**.
- **Enhanced Visibility:** A strong **digital presence** increases **brand awareness** and attracts **new customers**.
- **Improved Credibility:** Establishing **formal operations** enhances trust and **credibility** among consumers.

What is ONDC?

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) is an initiative by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), under the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. It aims to democratize digital commerce by reducing the dominance of a few large e-commerce platforms and



creating an **open, decentralized network** where buyers and sellers can seamlessly interact across multiple platforms.

Key Features of ONDC

- **Interoperability:** Unlike **traditional marketplaces (Amazon, Flipkart, etc.)**, ONDC allows **cross-platform transactions**, enabling buyers and sellers to interact **without platform restrictions**.
- **Decentralized Network:** Instead of being a single platform, **ONDC connects multiple e-commerce applications**, allowing **businesses & individuals** to trade seamlessly.
- **Inclusivity for MSMEs & Startups:** Small businesses can join **ONDC without needing their own website or app**, helping them **expand their reach**.
- **Competitive Pricing:** Eliminates **middlemen & high commission structures**, enabling sellers to offer better prices.
- **Multi-Sector Support:** Initially focused on **retail & food delivery**, ONDC is now expanding into **logistics, mobility, wholesale trade, and more**.

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Shifting of Earth's Magnetic North Pole: A Dynamic Phenomenon

Context: Scientists have unveiled a new model tracking the **Magnetic North Pole**, revealing that it has moved closer to **Siberia** and continues to drift towards **Russia**. This shift highlights the dynamic nature of **Earth's magnetic field** and its ever-changing behavior.

Understanding Earth's Magnetic Poles

What Are Magnetic Poles?

The **Magnetic Poles** are the points on Earth's surface where the **planet's magnetic field** is directed vertically downward. These poles are not fixed and are influenced by movements deep within the Earth.

Why Do They Move?

Unlike the **Geographic North Pole**, which remains constant, the **Magnetic North Pole** shifts due to changes in **Earth's molten core**. The first recorded position of the **Magnetic North Pole** was in 1831 by explorer **James Clark Ross**, located near **Canada's Arctic islands**. Over the past century, it has traveled more than **400 km** towards **Russia**.

Why Is the Magnetic North Pole Shifting?

Several key factors contribute to this movement:

1. Core Fluid Dynamics

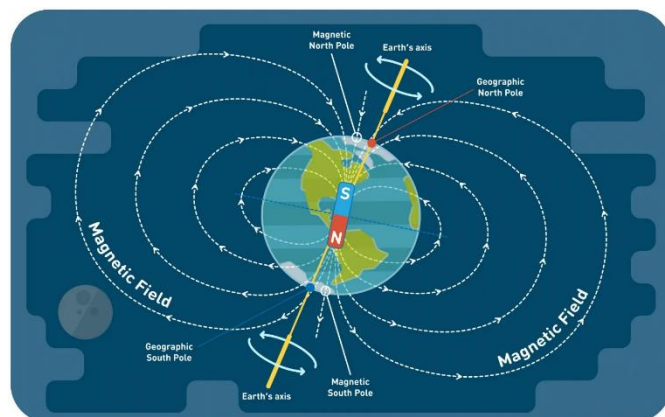
- The **Earth's outer core** is composed of **molten iron and nickel** that move in turbulent patterns.
- These **fluid motions** generate the **Earth's magnetic field** and directly influence the **position of the poles**.

2. Geomagnetic Anomalies

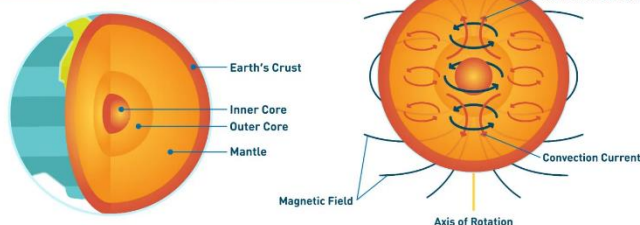
- The **South Atlantic Anomaly**, a region where Earth's magnetic field is weaker, suggests **instability** in the magnetic field.
- Such anomalies contribute to the **irregular movement** of the **Magnetic North Pole**.

3. Earth's Magnetic Reversal Cycle

- The Earth undergoes **geomagnetic reversals**, where the **north and south poles switch places** every few hundred thousand years.
- The last reversal, the **Brunhes-Matuyama Reversal**, occurred around **780,000 years ago**.
- While the current shift does not confirm an **imminent reversal**, it signals long-term **geomagnetic changes**.



Earth's Inner Core Currents





Earth's Magnetic Field and Its Importance

How Is the Magnetic Field Generated?

- The **Earth's outer core** produces the **magnetic field** through the movement of molten iron and nickel.
- This field extends into space, forming a **protective shield** around the planet.

Role of the Magnetosphere

The **magnetosphere** is Earth's **first line of defense** against harmful **solar wind** and **cosmic radiation**.

- It **deflects high-energy particles**, protecting life on Earth.
- It traps charged particles in the **Van Allen Belts**, forming a **protective barrier**.
- Variations in the **solar wind** can cause **geomagnetic storms**, impacting **satellites, power grids, and navigation systems**.

Consequences of the Magnetic North Pole's Shift

The shifting **Magnetic North Pole** has several **critical implications**:

1. Impact on Navigation

- **Aviation and maritime industries** rely on **magnetic navigation** for precise direction-finding.
- Frequent updates to the **World Magnetic Model (WMM)** are required to maintain **accurate navigation**.

2. Disruptions to Animal Migration

- Many species, including **birds, turtles, and marine animals**, use the **Earth's magnetic field** for navigation.
- Changes in the **magnetic field** may disrupt their **migration patterns**, affecting **ecosystems**.

3. Increased Vulnerability to Solar Storms

- The weakening of the **magnetic field** makes the Earth **more exposed** to solar storms.
- This could **disrupt communication systems, GPS technology, and power grids**.

4. Scientific Insights: The shifting **Magnetic North Pole** offers an opportunity for **scientists** to study the **Earth's geodynamo** and predict **future changes** in the **magnetic field**.

Conclusion:

The continued movement of the **Magnetic North Pole** highlights the **dynamic nature** of **Earth's interior**. While it does not indicate an **imminent disaster**, understanding these shifts is **crucial** for **navigation, wildlife conservation, and technological security**. Scientists will continue monitoring these **changes** to better predict their **long-term effects** on our planet.

Classifying Denotified Tribes: A Turning Point for Reservation and Welfare Policies

Context: In a historic development, the **Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)**, in collaboration with **Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)**, has successfully categorized **268 denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes** across India for the first time. Out of these, **179 communities** have been recommended for inclusion in the **Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC)** lists. This monumental effort addresses long-standing classification gaps, ensuring these tribes gain rightful access to crucial benefits.



Historical Background: Why Classification is Critical

Denotified tribes were once labeled as "**criminal**" under the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1924**, which was eventually repealed in **1949**. However, subsequent efforts by various commissions such as the **Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1955)**, the **Mandal Commission (1980)**, and the **Renke Commission (2008)**, among others, failed to provide a comprehensive classification. In **2017**, the **Idate Commission** identified **1,200 tribes** needing classification, with **267 communities** still unclassified. This sparked the formation of a **Special Committee under NITI Aayog** in **2019**, tasking **AnSI** and **TRIs** with the ethnographic study.

Key Findings: A New Chapter for Denotified Tribes

- **268 communities classified:** This marks the first **systematic documentation** of these tribes.
- **179 communities recommended for SC/ST/OBC inclusion:** Ensuring these tribes access reservation benefits like **education, employment, and social welfare**.
- **63 communities untraceable:** These tribes may have merged with others or migrated, complicating the identification process.
- **Political and legal implications:** The classification has sparked debates on **reservation policies** and the **special status** of these tribes.

Impact on Reservation and Welfare Policies:

The inclusion of **denotified tribes** in the **SC, ST, and OBC** categories will allow them to access critical **government welfare schemes**, including **education, job opportunities, and social security**. However, this initiative has sparked political discussions, with two major viewpoints emerging:

Support for Inclusion in SC/ST/OBC Lists:

- Grants access to **essential benefits** such as education, employment, and social welfare schemes.
- Provides **legal recognition** and identity to these historically marginalized communities.

Demand for a Separate Reservation Category:

- Some argue that these tribes should have their **own separate category**, similar to **SCs and STs**, to avoid **diluting reservation benefits** for other communities.
- Concerns over whether **merging these tribes** with existing categories could **diminish their entitlement** to benefits.

Challenges and Concerns:



- **Political Controversies:** Activists in states like **Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat** are questioning the validity of this classification, fearing it could disrupt existing reservation systems.
- **Delays in Implementation:** Despite several commissions advocating for the classification, **government action has been slow**, delaying the much-needed welfare benefits for these communities.
- **Historical Misclassification:** Previous census errors in categorizing tribes as castes have led to **confusion** over their **legal identity** and **status**.

The Road Ahead: Looking at Future Prospects:

The **AnSI** and **TRIs** have submitted their **final report** to the Special Committee under **NITI Aayog**, which is now reviewing the recommendations. If these recommendations are approved:

- **State governments** will find it easier to include these tribes in **reservation lists**.
- New **welfare policies** could be introduced to address the **socio-economic challenges** faced by these communities.
- The **debate** on creating a **separate category** for **denotified tribes** may gain momentum, further influencing future policies.

Conclusion: A Critical Step Toward Social Justice

The classification of **denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes** is a significant milestone in addressing the **historical injustices** they have faced. While the implementation of this classification is complex, the government's final decision will play a pivotal role in reshaping India's **reservation policies** and ensuring these marginalized communities finally receive the **support** and **recognition** they deserve.

Denotified Tribes Classification FAQs

(Feel free to add any FAQs you may have, addressing common questions about the classification process, its impact, and its future trajectory.)

SEBI's "When-Listed" Mechanism: Regulated Trading of IPO Shares Before Official Listing

Context: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is set to launch a groundbreaking **"when-listed"** platform that will allow trading of shares from companies that have completed their **initial public offering (IPO)** but are yet to be listed on official stock exchanges. This move aims to formalize trading during the gap between IPO closure and stock exchange listing.



What is the "When-Listed" Platform?

This new platform will provide a **regulated trading environment** for shares between the time of IPO allotment and the official listing, addressing concerns surrounding **unregulated markets** and promoting transparency in the IPO trading process.

Eliminating Grey Market Activity:

Currently, the **grey market** allows **unofficial** and **unregulated** trading of IPO shares based on **demand and supply** before listing. This market operates in cash, with no actual delivery of shares, and is often used by **retail investors** to gauge IPO investments through **grey market premiums**.

By introducing the **"when-listed"** platform, SEBI aims to reduce reliance on the grey market and provide a **regulated alternative** for investors to trade shares safely before official listing.

Key Benefits of the "When-Listed" Facility for Investors:

- 1. Regulated Trading:** Investors who receive **IPO allotments** can now trade their shares in a **regulated market** instead of resorting to the unregulated grey market, ensuring **safeguards** and **transparency**.
- 2. Reducing Market Volatility:** The grey market often distorts market sentiment, leading to **volatility** and **instability**. By moving trading to a regulated platform, SEBI intends to **control market fluctuations** and ensure **stability** in the market.
- 3. Protecting Retail Investors:** The grey market can be risky, particularly for **retail investors** who may lack the resources to navigate unregulated environments. SEBI's initiative aims to **protect retail investors** by formalizing pre-listing trading and providing them with a safer trading environment.

Current Timeline for IPO Listings:

Currently, after an IPO bidding closes, shares are expected to be listed on stock exchanges within **three working days (T+3)**. Investors are allotted shares on **T+1** day, creating a window of uncertainty during the gap between **allotment** and **listing** when grey market trading occurs. SEBI's **"when-listed"** platform aims to bridge this gap and reduce unregulated trading.

Grey Market Trading in IPOs: How It Works

What is Grey Market Trading?

When an IPO is announced, **investors**, especially those with low chances of allotment, often turn to the **grey market**. **Brokers** in this market trade shares with a **premium** added to the IPO price band. For example, if the IPO price range is **Rs 90-100 per share**, a **premium** of **Rs 10-30** might be added.

Settlement in the Grey Market:



The settlement of grey market trades is determined by the **official opening price** on the listing day:

- If the stock **opens higher** than the grey market price, the operators pay the difference.
- If the stock **opens lower**, the investor faces a **loss**.

Conclusion: A Shift Toward Formalized IPO Trading

SEBI's "**when-listed**" platform is set to revolutionize the way IPO shares are traded, offering **investors a safer, regulated environment** while addressing the **risks** associated with the grey market. This initiative will contribute to a more **transparent** and **stable** market, benefiting both **retail investors** and the **overall financial ecosystem**.

SEBI When-Listed Mechanism FAQs:

(Feel free to add any relevant FAQs addressing common questions regarding the "**when-listed**" platform, its **benefits, implementation**, and how it will affect IPO trading.)



Paris AI Summit 2024: Governance, Innovation, and Global AI Leadership

Context: Global leaders will convene in **Paris** on **February 10, 2024**, for the **AI Action Summit**, where the focus will be on **regulating AI** while ensuring its **innovation** isn't stifled. This pivotal summit builds on previous global efforts, including the **2023 AI Safety Summit** in **Bletchley Park** and the **2024 AI Seoul Summit**.



2023 Bletchley Declaration: Setting the Stage for AI Safety:

The **2023 AI Safety Summit** in **Bletchley Park** marked a key milestone in global AI regulation. The **Bletchley Declaration**, signed by **28 countries** and the **EU**, underscored AI's immense potential and risks. It called for alignment with **human intent**, safeguarding **rights**, and ensuring **ethics, safety**, and **accountability** in AI development. The declaration also emphasized the **role of civil society** and the responsibility of **developers** to test and mitigate AI risks.

2024 AI Seoul Summit: Building a Shared Global Vision

Held in **May 2024**, the **AI Seoul Summit** was co-hosted by the **Republic of Korea** and the **UK government**. The summit laid the groundwork for global discussions on **AI safety, innovation**, and **inclusivity**, while agreeing on **minimum guardrails** and a **roadmap** for ensuring AI safety across nations.

About the Paris AI Summit: France Takes the Lead

Initiated by **French President Emmanuel Macron**, the **Paris AI Summit 2024** is a cornerstone event focused on **global AI governance**, innovation, and advancing the **public interest**. **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi** will co-chair the summit, adding further weight to the discussions.

Key Objectives of the Summit:

The summit seeks to address the growing **concentration of power** within the AI market, particularly the dominance of foundational AI models controlled by tech giants such as **Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon**, and **Meta**.

Event Structure: A Platform for Multilateral Collaboration

- **February 10 – Multistakeholder Forum:** This day will feature conferences, roundtables, and presentations by global representatives from **governments, businesses, civil society**, and **researchers**.
- **February 11 – Summit of Heads of State and Government:** **World leaders** will gather at the **Grand Palais** to chart out key collaborative actions for AI governance and regulation.

Paris Summit and Europe's AI Challenge: Bridging the Gap

The **Paris AI Summit** holds particular significance for **Europe**, as it faces growing concerns about being overshadowed by **American tech giants** and **Chinese state power** in the **AI race**. Despite regulatory barriers hindering Europe's growth, **President Macron's initiative** represents an effort to ensure Europe does not fall behind in AI development.

US AI Ambitions:



The summit comes on the heels of the **Stargate Project**—a **\$500 billion initiative** in the **US** involving companies like **OpenAI, SoftBank, Oracle, Microsoft, and Nvidia**, aimed at strengthening the nation's **AI infrastructure** and capabilities over the next four years.

China's Rapid AI Advancements:

Despite efforts to curb China's AI progress, companies like **DeepSeek** and **Alibaba** have demonstrated the **competitive edge** of Chinese AI models, showing that China is a formidable player in the global AI landscape.

Diverse Global Approaches to AI Regulation:

As AI continues to evolve, global policymakers are grappling with how to **regulate AI** without hindering its potential. Different regions are adopting varying approaches based on local priorities and concerns:

- **European Union:** **Strict, use-based regulation** that categorizes AI based on its **use case**, invasiveness, and risks, signaling Europe's cautious approach to AI governance.
- **United Kingdom:** A **light-touch approach** that encourages innovation with minimal regulatory barriers, allowing for a **growth-friendly** environment.
- **United States:** A **balanced approach**, positioned between strict regulation and fostering innovation, though the regulatory stance could shift in the future.
- **China:** Structured regulatory measures ensuring AI development is aligned with **state interests**, while balancing innovation with oversight.
- **India:** Focus on ensuring **safety, trust, and ethical use** of AI, while addressing concerns like the **weaponization** of technology.

Conclusion: The Road Ahead for Global AI Governance

The **Paris AI Summit 2024** stands as a pivotal moment for **AI governance**, bringing together **global leaders, innovators, and policymakers** to shape the future of AI in a way that balances **innovation, ethics, and public safety**. With **competing global powers** shaping the AI landscape, the outcomes of the summit could be instrumental in determining the trajectory of **AI regulation**, ensuring it serves both technological progress and **global well-being**.



Debate on the Governor's Role in University Governance

Context: The position of **Governor as Chancellor** of state universities has sparked significant **debate** and **controversy** in recent years. This role, inherited from **British colonial rule**, is not enshrined in the **Indian Constitution**, yet continues to shape the governance of **higher education** in India.



The Governor's Role in Universities: An Inherited Legacy

The office of the **Governor as Chancellor** of universities was initially designed to **restrict university autonomy**. During the colonial era, the **Governor** held power over universities, particularly in the areas of appointing **Vice-Chancellors** and approving **decisions** of the institution, giving them significant control over educational matters.

Key Issues and Concerns with Governor's Role:

Politicization and Loss of Neutrality:

The role of the Governor in universities became more **politicized** after **1967**, as Governors increasingly acted as agents of the **Central Government**. This shift led to a **compromise in the neutrality** of the office, with many Governors being former **politicians**. Consequently, their involvement in university affairs was often seen as **biased**, undermining the **independence** of academic institutions.

The Dual Role of Governors:

Governors possess powers under **Article 163** (with **ministerial advice**) and independently as **Chancellor**. This dual authority gives them the power to bypass **state governments**, particularly in states controlled by opposition parties, creating tensions and administrative gridlocks.

Governor vs. President: A Contrast in Governance

Unlike the **President of India**, who consults with the **Ministry of Education** and **Parliament**, Governors often **act unilaterally**, bypassing state authorities. This stark difference raises questions about the **transparency** and **accountability** in the appointment of **Vice-Chancellors** and the oversight of **university activities**.

Challenges Faced by Governors in University Governance:

- **Lack of Academic Expertise:** Many Governors, by virtue of their political careers, lack the necessary **academic qualifications** to effectively lead universities.
- **Administrative Paralysis:** The **dual authority** model has created **bottlenecks** in decision-making processes, leading to delays and inefficiencies.
- **Undue Central Influence:** The Governor's role in universities has also been criticized for undermining the **federal** nature of the Indian state by increasing **Central government** influence in **state matters**.

Insights from Commissions: A Call for Reform:

Several **commissions** have critiqued the Governor's role, urging for changes to ensure greater autonomy for universities:

- **Rajamannar Commission**



- Sarkaria Commission
- Venkatachaliah Commission
- Punchhi Commission

These commissions have recommended reforms such as promoting **political neutrality**, clearer roles for the Governor, and granting universities **greater autonomy**. The **Punchhi Commission** specifically suggested that **Governors should avoid statutory roles** like Chancellor to protect the **dignity** of the office.

Exploring Alternative Models for University Governance

There have been discussions around **alternative models** for governance that could ensure **autonomy** for universities and reduce the **political influence** of Governors:

1. **Ceremonial Governor as Chancellor:** In some states like **Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra**, the Governor's role as Chancellor is purely **ceremonial**, without any executive authority.
2. **Chief Minister as Chancellor:** States like **West Bengal and Punjab** have proposed a **Chief Minister-led governance** model, where the **Chief Minister** holds the **Chancellor** position, though it is still awaiting **Presidential assent**.
3. **State-Appointed Chancellor:** In **Telangana**, the state government has adopted a model where a **ceremonial Chancellor** is appointed from among **distinguished academics** or public figures, further distancing the position from political influence.
4. **Elected Chancellor:** In some global universities like **Oxford and Cambridge**, **elected chancellors** are chosen by the **university community**. This model enhances **institutional autonomy** and **transparency**.
5. **Chancellor Appointed by University Executive Council:** Similar to models in the **UK, Canada, and Australia**, a **university executive council** can appoint a Chancellor, ensuring that the **university's interests** take precedence over political or governmental influence.

Conclusion and Way Forward: Reforms for a New Era of University Governance

Reforming the Governor's role in universities is crucial for upholding **academic freedom**, ensuring **accountability** to **elected state governments**, and allowing universities to function with **greater autonomy**.

While some states have already passed **reforms**, many others are still waiting for **Presidential assent**, demonstrating the need for a more **impartial** and **progressive approach** from the **Central Government**. It is vital to dismantle **colonial-era governance structures** and adopt more **modern, transparent** models that align with **global best practices** for **higher education governance**.

U.S. Suspends Foreign Aid: A Shift in Global Diplomacy and Development Assistance

Context: The **United States** has announced the **suspension of foreign aid**, marking a significant policy shift under **President Donald Trump's executive order**. This decision aligns with the "**America First**" agenda, which seeks to prioritize **U.S. national interests** over traditional international financial commitments. The U.S. has long been one of the world's largest donors, distributing **\$45 billion in foreign aid in 2023** alone, benefiting **158 countries** worldwide.



What is Foreign Aid?- Foreign aid encompasses **financial, technical, or material assistance** provided by one country to another, typically to:

- **Promote economic development**
- **Provide humanitarian relief**
- **Achieve geopolitical goals**

This assistance often comes in the form of **grants, loans, or in-kind contributions** such as **food, medicine, or infrastructure development**.

Significance of Foreign Aid: Why It Matters

Foreign aid plays a pivotal role in shaping global development and diplomacy:

- **Promotes Development:** Helps nations improve **infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities**.
- **Humanitarian Relief:** Provides essential support during **crises, such as natural disasters or conflicts**, saving countless lives.
- **Fosters Diplomacy:** Strengthens relationships between **donor and recipient countries**, promoting international cooperation.
- **Geopolitical Strategy:** Expands influence, secures alliances, and advances **national interests** in strategically important regions.
- **Global Stability:** Addresses pressing challenges like **poverty, climate change, and pandemics**, fostering a more stable global order.

Global Implications: The Ripple Effects of U.S. Aid Suspension

Impact on Aid-Dependent Countries:

Countries that heavily rely on U.S. aid—such as **Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh**—may experience significant **financial shortfalls** and setbacks in **developmental goals**. This reduction in assistance could jeopardize ongoing **healthcare and education** projects, as well as efforts to combat **poverty**.

Shift in Global Alliances:

As the U.S. steps back from its foreign aid commitments, **recipient countries** may turn to alternative sources of funding, such as **China**. **China's Belt and Road Initiative** has already provided infrastructure support in many developing nations, which could lead to a **shift in geopolitical alliances**. However, concerns about **China's debt trap diplomacy**, where countries fall into unsustainable debt due to large loans, have raised **sovereignty** concerns in many regions.

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Role of Other Donors:

Countries like **China** and **Russia** could fill the void left by reduced U.S. aid. China's growing influence through economic assistance could reshape the development landscape, although some nations remain wary of the long-term implications of accepting large loans.

Global Stability and the Balance Between Humanitarian Aid and Strategy:

Foreign aid often serves a dual purpose, balancing **humanitarian** objectives with **strategic** goals. The suspension of U.S. aid may exacerbate challenges in vulnerable regions, potentially **undermining global stability** and worsening **poverty** and **instability**.

Social Impact: A Growing Concern

The suspension of foreign aid could lead to dire **social consequences** for the most vulnerable populations in recipient countries. **Humanitarian crises** could worsen, affecting millions of lives, and the reduction in support could reverse years of progress in health, education, and poverty alleviation efforts.

Conclusion: A Shift in Global Power Dynamics

The suspension of U.S. foreign aid is a significant development with far-reaching **political, economic, and social consequences**. While it may lead to a reshaping of global alliances and a reduction in U.S. influence, the shift also underscores the increasing role of **emerging powers** like **China** in the realm of international aid. As the world adapts to these changes, the balance between **humanitarianism** and **geopolitical strategy** will remain at the heart of the global discussion on foreign assistance.

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TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

**India-Oman FTA Agreement Talks: Strengthening Bilateral Trade and Strategic Cooperation**

Context: The **Commerce and Industry Minister** of India is set to travel to **Oman** to provide “further impetus” to the ongoing talks on the **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**. These discussions aim to boost trade and investment relations between the two nations, with a focus on advancing the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, a strategic initiative to deepen bilateral economic cooperation.

**What is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?**

A **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** between two trading partners aims to:

- **Significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties** on a wide range of traded goods.
- **Ease norms** for trade in services and promote **investment** flows.

These agreements create opportunities for mutual growth by eliminating trade barriers and fostering economic ties between nations.

India-Oman Bilateral Trade and Economic Ties:

Oman stands as a key trading partner for India within the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**. Some key highlights of their relationship include:

- **Trade Relations:** Oman is India's **30th largest trading partner** with a total trade volume of **US\$ 8.947 billion** in FY 2023-2024.
- **India's Oil Imports:** India is the **4th largest market** for Oman's crude oil exports as of 2023.

This visit underlines India's commitment to enhancing these ties and its focus on **increasing bilateral trade** with Oman.

Defence and Maritime Cooperation:

India and Oman have a robust **defence cooperation** framework, which includes:

- **Bilateral Exercises:**
 - **Army Exercise:** Al Najah
 - **Air Force Exercise:** Eastern Bridge
 - **Naval Exercise:** Naseem Al Bahr
- **Maritime Cooperation:** Oman's strategic location at the gateway to the **Strait of Hormuz** is vital for India, as **one-fifth of India's oil imports** pass through this route.

Additionally, the **Duqm Port** in Oman, which India gained access to in **2018**, enhances its maritime connectivity and regional presence, especially in proximity to Iran's **Chabahar Port**.

About the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):

The **GCC** is an economic and political alliance of **six Middle Eastern countries**: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Established in **1981**, it aims to strengthen unity among members based on common objectives rooted in **Arab and Islamic cultures**. The presidency of the council rotates annually.

The Way Ahead: Strategic and Economic Convergence

India's growing ties with Gulf countries, particularly Oman, are driven by **realpolitik** and strategic interests. Both sides are willing to overlook ideological differences in favor of **economic and security cooperation**.

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Key areas of focus for future cooperation include:

- **Defense Industrial Cooperation:** India and Gulf states will likely see increased collaboration in defense technology and industrial partnerships.
- **Technology Transfers:** Long-term strategic cooperation could revolve around technology exchange, further integrating India into the Gulf's military and technological ecosystem.

In conclusion, the **India-Oman FTA** and strategic partnership are poised to be a cornerstone for **military diplomacy** and economic growth in the region, fostering **mutual benefit** and enhancing **regional stability**.

