



Weekly Current Affairs



To The Point

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Cabinet Approves Revised Waqf Bill (2024) with Key Reforms

Context: The Union Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister of India, has approved the **Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024**, incorporating key recommendations from the **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)**. The bill aims to **improve the regulation and administration of waqf properties**, ensuring greater transparency and efficiency.

Background:

The **Waqf Act, 1995**, governs the management of **waqf properties**, which are **charitable endowments made by Muslims for religious, educational, or philanthropic purposes**.

The **Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024**, has been introduced to:

- Address challenges in regulating waqf properties.
- Curb encroachments and prevent misuse of waqf lands.
- Enhance governance and increase accountability in waqf boards.

Key Amendments in the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024:

1. Strengthening Regulation of Waqf Properties:

- Tightens legal measures to **prevent illegal encroachments** and **unauthorized use** of waqf land.
- Aims to **streamline administration** and **improve governance** of waqf institutions.

2. Administrative Reforms:

- The **Survey Commissioner's functions** will now be carried out by the **Collector or an officer of Deputy Collector rank** for waqf property surveys.
- This change is expected to **speed up the survey process** and **reduce bureaucratic delays**.

3. Increased Government Oversight:

- Expands the role of **central and state governments** in **supervising waqf boards**.
- May introduce measures to **address inefficiencies** in waqf management.

4. Promoting Transparency and Accountability:

- Enhances the role of waqf boards in **record-keeping and governance**.
- Introduces **mandatory digitization** of waqf property records to **minimize corruption**.

Key Changes Recommended by the JPC:

1. Inclusion of Women and OBC Members:

- Mandates the inclusion of **two Muslim women** in both:
 - **State Waqf Boards (Section 14)**
 - **Central Waqf Council (Section 9)**
- This move aims to **empower women** and **ensure their participation** in waqf management.
- Additionally, **one Muslim OBC member** will now be part of **State Waqf Boards**.

2. Special Waqf Boards for Aghakhani & Bohra Communities:





- Allows states to set up **separate waqf boards** for the **Aghakhani and Bohra communities** to address **their unique concerns**.

3. Protecting Women's Inheritance Rights:

- Ensures that in **family waqfs (Waqf Alal Aulad)**, **women's inheritance rights** are **safeguarded**.
- The **waqif (donor)** can **only dedicate property** after ensuring that **female heirs receive their rightful share**.

4. Faster Dispute Resolution:

- District collectors** will now **handle disputes** over whether a property belongs to **waqf or the government**.
- This aims to **speed up dispute resolution** and **prevent unnecessary legal delays**.

5. Integration of Technology:

- Emphasizes **technology-driven governance** in managing **waqf records**.
- All waqf property details** must be uploaded to a **centralized online portal** within **six months** for **better transparency**.

Understanding the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC):

- A **temporary parliamentary body** created for the **detailed scrutiny** of a specific bill or issue.
- Includes **members from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha**, representing **both ruling and opposition parties**.
- It is **dissolved** once its assigned task is completed.

Concerns and Challenges:

1. State vs. Central Authority Over Waqf Properties:

- Some fear **excessive centralization** may **reduce the autonomy** of **state waqf boards**.

2. Potential Legal & Constitutional Issues:

- If the bill **contradicts existing property laws** or **religious rights**, it could lead to **judicial challenges**.
- Questions may arise over **compensation for landowners** affected by **waqf claims**.

3. Reactions from Minority Communities:

- Since waqf plays a crucial role in **Muslim religious and social institutions**, any perceived **government control** may **spark opposition** from religious groups.

4. Bureaucratic Hurdles:

- While reforms aim to **curb corruption**, increased **government oversight** could **slow down decision-making** and create **administrative delays**.

Conclusion:

The **Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024**, introduces **major reforms** to **enhance transparency, governance, and women's participation** in waqf institutions. However, concerns remain over **centralization, legal challenges, and minority rights**.

If implemented effectively, these changes can help **modernize waqf administration, protect waqf assets, and empower underrepresented communities**.



India Needs Tariff Cuts & Reforms to Attract Investments: World Bank

Context: The World Bank, in its latest report "India Country Economic Memorandum," has emphasized the need for **accelerated reforms** to help India achieve an **average annual growth rate of 7.8%** and attain **high-income status by 2047**.



India's Economic Progress:

- Since **2000**, India's **real GDP** has **quadrupled**, and **GDP per capita** has **nearly tripled**.
- The country's **global economic share** has **doubled** from **1.6% in 2000** to **3.4% in 2023**.
- India is now the **world's fifth-largest economy** and continues to **outpace global growth trends**.

Key Insights from the World Bank Report:

1. Pathway to High-Income Status by 2047:

- Achieving this goal requires **ambitious economic reforms** and **consistent growth** (building on the **6.3% average growth rate from 2000-2024**).
- **Global Case Studies:** Countries like **Chile, South Korea, and Poland** successfully transitioned to **high-income status** through **deep global economic integration**.

2. Growth Scenarios for 2047:

To sustain **rapid and inclusive economic growth**, India must:

- **Increase total investment** from **33.5% to 40% of GDP by 2035**.
- **Raise labor force participation** from **56.4% to over 65%** (current levels remain low compared to **Vietnam (73%)** and **Philippines (60%)**).
- **Accelerate productivity growth** across key sectors.
- **Boost Gross National Income (GNI) per capita** nearly **eightfold**, requiring a **higher and sustained growth rate**.

3. Harnessing the Demographic Dividend:

- Investing in **human capital development** is crucial.
- **Creating high-quality jobs** is essential to absorb India's large workforce.
- **Female labor force participation** needs to increase from **35.6% to 50% by 2047** to unlock India's full economic potential.

Key Policy Actions for Accelerated Growth:

1. Boost Investments:

- Strengthen **financial sector regulations** to improve stability.
- **Ease credit access** for **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**.
- **Simplify Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policies** to attract global investors.

2. Job Creation for Inclusive Growth:

- Focus on **job-rich industries** such as **agro-processing, hospitality, and tourism**.
- Invest in **skilling programs** to align with evolving job market demands.

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- Foster an **innovation-driven economy** to create **high-value jobs**.

3. Structural Economic Transformation:

- **Shift labor and resources** from low-productivity sectors to **high-growth industries** like manufacturing and services.
- Enhance **infrastructure development** to support **business expansion**.
- **Streamline labor regulations** to promote a more **efficient and dynamic workforce**.

4. State-Level Growth Acceleration:

- **Tailored policies** for different states:
 - **Less-developed states** should focus on **basic infrastructure and institutional reforms**.
 - **More developed states** should concentrate on **advanced economic policies and integration into Global Value Chains (GVCs)**.
- **Federal Support Mechanisms**:
 - Programs like the **Urban Challenge Fund** should be expanded to **incentivize economic transformation** in low-income states.
 - **Improve public expenditure efficiency** to maximize growth benefits.

Conclusion:

India is on a **strong growth trajectory**, but achieving **high-income status by 2047** requires **bold reforms, increased investments, and structural transformations**. By focusing on **labor force expansion, economic integration, and digital innovation**, India can solidify its position as a **global economic powerhouse**.

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Aditya-L1 Captures Groundbreaking Solar Flare Insights

Context: Aditya-L1, India's first space-based **solar observatory**, has achieved a **major breakthrough** by capturing the **first-ever image of a solar flare 'kernel'** in the **lower solar atmosphere** (photosphere and chromosphere). This discovery provides **unprecedented insights** into the Sun's dynamic activity.



About Aditya-L1:

- Launched in **September 2023** aboard ISRO's PSLV C-57 rocket.
- Successfully placed in a **halo orbit around the Earth-Sun Lagrange Point (L1)** in January 2024.
- Positioned **1.5 million km from Earth**, facing the **Sun**—about **1% of the total Earth-Sun distance**.
- Unlike other missions, it will **not land on or move closer to the Sun** but will observe its **outer atmosphere** from a stable vantage point.

Did You Know?

- The name "**Aditya**" means "**Sun**" in Sanskrit, while "**L1**" refers to **Lagrange Point 1** in the **Sun-Earth system**.
- **L1** is a unique point where the **gravitational pull** of the Earth and the Sun balances, allowing Aditya-L1 to remain stable.
- This strategic position enables **continuous solar observation** without any **eclipses or obstructions**.

Scientific Instruments & Their Role:

1. Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT):

- Captures **high-resolution images** in **11 different Near Ultraviolet (NUV) bands**.
- Helps in studying **multiple layers** of the Sun's atmosphere.

2. Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS) & High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS):

- Monitor **solar X-ray emissions**.
- Detect and analyze **solar flare activities** in real-time.

Significance of the Discovery:

- The mission has **validated long-standing theories** about **solar flare physics**.
- It confirms the **link between localized brightening in the lower atmosphere** and a **rise in plasma temperature in the solar corona**.
- This breakthrough could improve **space weather predictions** and enhance our understanding of **solar storms**, which impact **satellite operations, GPS systems, and power grids** on Earth.

Conclusion:

With **Aditya-L1's** latest findings, **India has taken a giant leap in solar research**, contributing valuable data to the **global scientific community**. This mission is set to **unlock more secrets of the Sun**, paving the way for **future space explorations and advancements in astrophysics**.

India Achieves Milestone: 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) Established

Context: The Union Government has successfully met its ambitious goal of setting up **10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)** under its **flagship scheme**. Marking this achievement, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** inaugurated the **10,000th FPO** in **Bhagalpur, Bihar**, focusing on key crops such as **maize, banana, and paddy**.



About the Scheme:

- Launched in **2020**, the **Central Sector Scheme for the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs** aims to **strengthen small and marginal farmers** by encouraging collectivization.
- The scheme has a **budget outlay of 6,865 crore**, covering support until **2027-28**.
- **Over 30 lakh farmers** are now associated with FPOs, with **women making up 40%** of the beneficiaries.

Objectives of the Scheme:

- **Support & Handholding:** Each FPO receives **assistance for up to five years** to ensure sustainability.
- **Capacity Building:** Farmers are trained in **entrepreneurship, modern farming techniques, and market strategies** to improve productivity and profitability.

What Are FPOs?

A **Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)** is a **legally registered collective** of farmers who come together to improve production, processing, and marketing of agricultural goods.

- Registered under **Part IXA of the Companies Act** or **state-specific Cooperative Societies Acts**.
- The **Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)**, under the **Ministry of Agriculture**, plays a vital role in supporting FPO formation.

Why Are FPOs Needed?

India's agriculture is dominated by **small, marginal, and landless farmers**, who face multiple challenges:

- **Limited access** to quality seeds, fertilizers, and technology.
- **Financial constraints** prevent investment in mechanization and modern farming.
- **Weak market negotiation power**, leading to low selling prices.
- **Lack of infrastructure** for storage, transport, and logistics.

FPOs help solve these problems by **collectivizing small farmers**, increasing their **bargaining power**, and giving them access to **better resources, financial support, and direct market linkages**.

Key Services Provided by FPOs:

- **Supply of Inputs:** Providing quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides at affordable rates.
- **Access to Machinery:** Renting modern equipment like **cultivators, tillers, and harvesters** to reduce production costs.
- **Value Addition & Processing:** Cleaning, sorting, grading, and packing agricultural produce.
- **Logistics Support:** Offering storage, transportation, and loading/unloading facilities.



- **Better Market Access:** Aggregating produce to negotiate **higher prices** from buyers and ensure fair compensation.

Challenges Faced by FPOs:

- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Complex compliance and registration processes.
- **Weak Infrastructure:** Lack of storage, processing, and transport facilities.
- **Farmer Participation Issues:** Some FPOs struggle with **low engagement** and internal governance problems.
- **Limited Technology Adoption:** Need for greater **digital integration** in farming operations.
- **Climate & Market Risks:** Vulnerability to **weather changes and fluctuating market prices**.

The Road Ahead:

The establishment of **10,000 FPOs** marks a **transformational moment** for Indian agriculture. By promoting **collectivization, enhancing market access, and providing financial support**, this initiative has **empowered millions of small and marginal farmers**, including **women and economically weaker sections**.

Moving forward, **strengthening infrastructure, increasing digital adoption, and ensuring policy support** will be key to making FPOs a **sustainable and long-term success story** in India's agricultural sector.

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Rahul Gandhi Slams Centre Over Vacancies in National SC Commission

Context Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has strongly criticized the BJP-led Union government for the persistent vacancies in the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC). He labeled it as "proof of the BJP government's anti-Dalit mentality." In a social media post, he accused the government of deliberately neglecting the NCSC, leaving key positions unfilled for over a year. He urged the Prime Minister to take immediate action to fill the vacancies.



Vacancies in the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC):

The 7th National Commission for Scheduled Castes was established on March 9, 2024, yet critical posts remain vacant:

- **Vice-Chairperson** – Not appointed.
- **One Member** – Position still unfilled.

As per the Constitution, the NCSC must have a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and three Members.

The last time all positions were fully occupied was during the 5th Commission (2017-2020) under Ram Shankar Katheria.

Other Key Vacancies in NCSC:

- **Law Officer for the Legal Cell** – Position remains empty.
- **Several Section Officer Posts** – Yet to be filled.

An NCSC official stated that the Commission is unable to comment on vacancy-related issues.

Vacancies in Other National Commissions:

National Commission for Other Backward Classes (NCBC):

- **Vice-Chairperson** – Position vacant.
- **At least two members missing.**

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST):

- **Vice-Chairperson** – Yet to be appointed.

Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities

- **Position unfilled for over five years.**
- **Disability Department Secretary handling additional charge.**

National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK):

- **Until January 2025, four out of five positions were vacant.**
- **Currently has Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and two members.**
- **Requires five members as per mandate.**

Governance and Constitutional Concerns:

These commissions play a vital role in safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities.

- **Persistent vacancies weaken their effectiveness** and delay critical policy decisions.



- Reflects **administrative neglect** and raises questions about **governance efficiency**.
- The issue was flagged in **Parliament (December 2024)** but remains **unresolved**.
- About the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)

Introduction:

- **The NCSC is a constitutional body** established under **Article 338** of the Indian Constitution.
- It is responsible for **protecting the rights and interests of Scheduled Castes (SCs)**.

Composition:

- **Chairperson**
- **Vice-Chairperson**
- **Three Members**

All members are **appointed by the President of India**.

Functions and Powers:

- **Monitor & Investigate Issues** – Related to SCs' constitutional safeguards.
- **Handle Complaints** – Inquire into **violations of SC rights**.
- **Policy Advisory Role** – Participate in **policy planning** and recommend measures for SC welfare.
- **Report to the President** – Present **annual and special reports** on SC conditions.
- **Suggest Development Measures** – Recommend strategies for **socio-economic upliftment** of SC communities.

Conclusion:

The **vacancies in NCSC and other national commissions** highlight a **serious governance gap** in ensuring social justice.

With the **NCSC's mandate to protect Scheduled Castes' rights**, filling these positions must be a **top priority** for the government.

Timely appointments and proper functioning of these commissions are crucial for safeguarding the interests of marginalized communities.

Congress Pushes for 'Bottom-Up Approach' to Reduce Inequality

Context: The Congress Party has emphasized the need for a **policy shift** from **corporate favoritism** to **grassroots economic empowerment** to combat **rising inequality and low consumption** in India. The party argues that **economic policies** should **prioritize rural incomes** rather than catering to **big businesses**.



Key Concerns:

- **Low Consumption Levels** – India's **per capita consumption** stands at **1,493**, which is **less than one-third** of China's.
- **Unequal Consumer Structure** – While **30 million wealthy households (10%)** can afford major purchases, **205 million poor households (1 billion people)** struggle to afford even **basic necessities**.

Congress's Solution: Bottom-Up Economic Growth:

- **Increase Rural Incomes** – Strengthen economic participation of the lower-income groups.
- **Enhance MGNREGA Wages** – Ensure wage hikes **outpace inflation** to sustain rural demand.
- **Focus on Local Growth** – Prioritize small businesses and agricultural sectors over **corporate tax incentives**.

What is Crony Capitalism?

Crony capitalism is an **unfair economic system** where businesses thrive **not due to efficiency or innovation**, but because of **political connections**.

Problems with Crony Capitalism

- **Unfair Market Advantage & Corruption** – Big businesses get preferential treatment, stifling competition.
- **Distorted Market Competition** – Small enterprises face **bureaucratic obstacles** while large corporations flourish.
- **Reduced Innovation & Growth** – Monopoly-like conditions discourage **new ideas and businesses**.
- **Public Distrust** – Economic policies appear **biased towards elites**, creating **social unrest**.

Example: In India, certain **industrialists** have been accused of using **political influence** to secure **land, licenses, and regulatory approvals**, while **small businesses** struggle under heavy bureaucracy.

Trickle-Down Economics: The Flawed Theory:

The **trickle-down theory** claims that **economic benefits given to the wealthy**—such as tax cuts and corporate incentives—will eventually **benefit the entire economy**.

How Trickle-Down Economics Works:

- **Lower Taxes for Businesses & the Wealthy**
- **Increased Investments & Job Creation**
- **Higher Wages & More Consumer Spending**
- **Wealth 'Trickles Down' to Lower-Income Groups**

Why Trickle-Down Fails:

- **Wealth Hoarding** – The rich **accumulate wealth** rather than reinvesting it into the economy.
- **Slow Benefits for the Poor** – Economic gains **rarely reach** the lower-income groups.



- **Widening Inequality** – The rich get **richer**, while the poor **struggle to keep up**.

Example: The **2019 corporate tax cuts** aimed at boosting **production and job creation**, but **failed to drive substantial investment**. Instead, these cuts **reduced government revenue**, limiting funds for **public welfare programs**.

Inclusive Growth: A Sustainable Alternative:

Inclusive growth ensures that **economic benefits are distributed fairly**, particularly among the **poor, marginalized, and disadvantaged communities**.

Key Features of Inclusive Growth:

- **Employment Generation** – Focus on job creation in **small businesses, rural industries, and service sectors**.
- **Access to Quality Education & Healthcare** – Strengthen **public welfare programs**.
- **Infrastructure for All** – Ensure **equitable development** across **rural and urban regions**.
- **Fair Distribution of Resources** – Support **small farmers, MSMEs, and underprivileged communities**.

How Inclusive Growth Works:

- **Government invests in employment, rural development, education, and healthcare.**
- **Support for small businesses & rural economies strengthens economic participation.**
- **Social welfare programs uplift economically weaker sections.**
- **Balanced policies ensure both public and private sectors contribute to growth.**

Benefits of Inclusive Growth:

- **Reduces Inequality** – Ensures **widespread prosperity** instead of concentrating wealth at the top.
- **Boosts Consumer Demand** – Higher rural incomes **increase purchasing power**.
- **Sustainable Economic Growth** – Focuses on **long-term economic stability** over **short-term corporate gains**.
- **Stronger Social Unity** – Reduces economic disparity, **preventing social unrest**.

Example: **MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)** has played a **crucial role in rural job creation**, ensuring **livelihood security** for millions.

Conclusion:

The **Congress Party's advocacy for a 'Bottom-Up Approach'** calls for a **shift away from crony capitalism** towards **inclusive economic policies**. Strengthening **rural incomes, expanding social programs, and ensuring fair economic participation** will **boost consumption, reduce inequality, and drive sustainable growth**.



India-European Commission Partnership: A Strategic Alliance

Context: A high-level delegation led by **European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen** recently visited India to explore a **Security and Defence Partnership**. This visit marks a significant step in strengthening the India-EU relationship across multiple domains, including **trade, security, climate action, and digital transformation**.



The European Commission (EC):

Historical Evolution:

- **1958:** Established as the **European Economic Community (EEC)** following the **Treaty of Rome**.
- **1993:** Strengthened under the **Maastricht Treaty**.
- **2009:** Further consolidated through the **Lisbon Treaty**, making it a key pillar of EU governance.

Structure and Governance:

- **Executive Body of the European Union (EU)**, headquartered in **Brussels, Belgium**.
- **Independent from national governments** of EU member states.
- **27 Commissioners**, one from each member state, serving a **five-year term**.

Key Components:

1. **President of the Commission:**
 - Nominated by the **European Council** and approved by the **European Parliament**.
 - Defines the **political agenda** and appoints **Vice-Presidents**.
2. **Commissioners (College of Commissioners):**
 - Each EU member nominates **one Commissioner**.
 - Handles specific **policy areas** such as **trade, environment, and competition**.
3. **Directorates-General (DGs):**
 - Operate like **ministries**, responsible for **policy-making and implementation**.
4. **High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:**
 - Oversees **EU's diplomatic and security strategies**.
 - Serves as **Vice-President** of the Commission.

Core Functions of the EC:

- **Legislative Initiative**
- **Enforcement of EU Laws**
- **Policy Implementation & Budget Management**
- **International Representation**

India-European Commission (EC) Partnership:

Historical Milestones:

- **1962:** Diplomatic ties established with the **European Economic Community (EEC)**.

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- **1994:** India-EU Cooperation Agreement signed.
- **2004:** Upgraded to a **Strategic Partnership**, deepening collaboration in **trade, security, and global governance**.
- **2020:** Introduction of '**India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025**', expanding cooperation in **digital innovation, climate action, and multilateralism**.

Economic Cooperation:

Trade Relations:

- The EU is India's **second-largest trading partner**, accounting for **11% of India's total trade**, surpassing **China (10.5%)** and almost equal to the **USA (10.8%)**.
- **Bilateral trade (2023):** Approximately **€120 billion**.
- The EU is the **second-largest destination for Indian exports (17.5%)**, after the **USA (17.6%)**, while **China ranks fourth (3.7%)**.

Investment and Business Collaborations:

- The EU is **one of the largest foreign investors** in India, with cumulative **FDI inflows exceeding \$100 billion**.
- Investment sectors include **automobiles, renewable energy, and IT**.

Supply Chain Resilience:

- Both partners aim to **diversify supply chains**, focusing on **semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and critical minerals**.

India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA):

- The **India-EU Broad-Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** has been under negotiation since **2007**.
- Goals: **Enhancing market access, reducing tariffs, and streamlining trade regulations**.

Strategic and Security Cooperation:

- **Maritime Security:** Collaboration between EU's **Global Gateway Strategy** and India's **Indo-Pacific Strategy** to ensure **free and open sea lanes** in the **Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific**.
- **Counter-Terrorism:** **India-EU Counter-Terrorism Dialogue** facilitates **intelligence sharing and counter-radicalization efforts**.
- **Defence Collaboration:** Joint initiatives include **military exercises, cybersecurity cooperation, and technology-sharing agreements**.

Climate Action & Sustainable Development:

- **India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership:** Focuses on **renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green financing**.
- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** The EU actively supports India's ISA to promote **global solar energy deployment**.
- **EU-India Green Hydrogen Partnership:** Aims to accelerate the **use of green hydrogen to reduce carbon emissions** in industrial sectors.

Technology & Digital Transformation:



- **India-EU Digital Partnership:** Strengthening collaboration in **5G, artificial intelligence (AI), and cybersecurity**.
- **Data Protection & Privacy:** Ongoing discussions to align **data protection laws** for a **secure digital ecosystem**.

Research & Innovation:

- India's participation in **Horizon Europe**, the EU's leading **research and innovation program**.
- Joint efforts in **space, biotechnology, and health sciences**.

Geopolitical & Multilateral Engagement:

- **G20:** India hosted the **G20 Summit in 2023**, with strong **EU participation**.
- **United Nations:** India supports the **EU's role in global governance**.
- **World Trade Organization (WTO):** Both advocate for **fair trade practices**.

Challenges in the India-EU Partnership:

- **Trade Barriers:** **Tariff and non-tariff barriers**, especially in **agriculture, automotive, and pharmaceuticals**, hinder **FTA progress**.
- **Human Rights & Labor Standards:** The **EU has raised concerns** regarding **labor rights, environmental standards, and digital governance** in India.
- **Geopolitical Divergences:** India's **neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine war** has led to **diplomatic tensions** with some EU nations.
- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Differences in **data privacy laws, intellectual property rights (IPR), and digital taxation** need further alignment.

Future Prospects:

1. **Greater Indian involvement** in EU-led **global initiatives**, such as the **Global Gateway** and **climate financing projects**.
2. **Potential conclusion** of the long-pending **India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
3. **Expanded defence cooperation**, including **joint defence production and technology sharing**.
4. **Strengthened collaboration** in **space technology and AI-driven innovation**.

Conclusion:

The **India-European Commission partnership** is evolving into a **strong, multifaceted alliance** with **economic, strategic, and technological collaborations** at its core. With **both sides committed** to deepening their relationship, this partnership is set to play a **transformative role** in shaping the **global economic and security landscape** in the coming decades.



Strengthening India's Maritime Sector: Key Initiatives and Future Prospects

Context: India's Ministry of Shipping, Ports, and Waterways has launched several major initiatives to **modernize maritime infrastructure, enhance global trade connectivity, and promote sustainability**. These efforts aim to position India as a **leading maritime power**, leveraging its **strategic location and growing trade potential**.



Major Initiatives to Boost the Maritime Sector:

1. **One Nation-One Port Process (ONOP):** Aiming to **standardize and streamline port operations** across India's major ports, ONOP focuses on **reducing inefficiencies, minimizing operational delays, and cutting costs** to enhance overall productivity.
2. **Sagar Ankalan – Logistics Port Performance Index (LPPI):** A performance assessment tool designed to **boost efficiency and global competitiveness** of Indian ports by evaluating **key metrics such as cargo handling, turnaround time, and logistics efficiency**.
3. **Bharat Global Ports Consortium:** This initiative aims to **expand India's maritime presence globally, strengthening trade resilience and fostering international partnerships**.
4. **MAITRI (Master Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface) App:** A digital trade facilitation tool that simplifies **customs clearances, reduces bureaucratic delays, and enhances ease of doing business** for global traders.
5. **India Maritime Week (October 27-31, 2025):** A bi-annual **global maritime summit** that will bring together **100 countries and over 100,000 delegates** to showcase India's maritime heritage and advancements.

India's Maritime Sector: A Global Trading Powerhouse:

Strategic Importance:

India is positioned along some of the **world's busiest shipping routes**, making it a **crucial global trade hub**. With **95% of trade by volume and 70% by value** moving through its ports, India's maritime sector plays a **vital role in the national economy**.

Rapid Growth and Expansion:

- **Cargo Handling Capacity:** Between 2014-15 and 2023-24, major ports increased their **cargo-handling capacity by 87.01%**.
- **Rising Exports:** India's **merchandise exports surged to USD 451 billion in FY23**, up from **USD 417 billion in FY22**.
- **Global Maritime Ranking:** India ranks as the **16th-largest maritime nation**, with **key international trade routes passing through its waters**.

Future Expansion Plans:

- **Investment of USD 82 billion in port infrastructure by 2035** to modernize and expand facilities.
- **Establishment of a new national shipping company**, aiming to **expand India's merchant fleet by at least 1,000 ships within a decade**.

Challenges Facing the Maritime Industry:

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1. **Infrastructure Limitations:** Many ports still **lack modern infrastructure**, limiting efficiency and capacity.
2. **Port Congestion:** **High traffic volumes** at major ports lead to **delays and reduced operational productivity**.
3. **Environmental Concerns:** **Pollution, emissions from ships, and unsustainable port operations** pose significant challenges to maritime sustainability.
4. **Logistics and Connectivity Issues:** **Poor integration between ports, railways, and roadways** leads to inefficiencies in cargo transportation.
5. **Global Competition:** India faces **rising competition from global maritime hubs** and must continuously invest in **modernization and technological advancements**.

Government-Led Maritime Initiatives:

1. Sagarmala Programme:

- Focuses on **leveraging India's coastline and navigable waterways** to improve logistics and trade.
- Supports **port modernization, coastal infrastructure, and better connectivity**.
- Provides **financial aid for key projects**, including coastal berths, fish harbors, and cruise terminals.

2. Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030):

- Aims to make India **one of the top 10 shipbuilding nations by 2030**.
- Encompasses **150+ strategic initiatives** across ten key maritime sectors.

3. Inland Waterways Development:

- **26 new national waterways** have been identified to provide an **alternative, eco-friendly transport system**, easing road and rail congestion.

4. Green Tug Transition Program (GTTP):

- Aims to replace **fuel-based harbor tugs** with **eco-friendly, sustainable fuel-powered alternatives**.
- Full transition to **green tugs expected by 2040** across all major ports.

5. Sagarmathan Dialogue:

- A **global maritime strategic dialogue** aimed at positioning **India as a center for international maritime discussions**.

6. Maritime Development Fund:

- **25,000 crore fund** to support **long-term financing for modernizing ports and shipping infrastructure**.
- Encourages **private sector investment** in the maritime sector.

7. Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy (SBFAP 2.0):

- **Modernized financial support program** to help **Indian shipyards compete globally**.

Conclusion: India's maritime sector is on a **transformative journey**, driven by **strategic initiatives, strong policy frameworks, and global collaborations**. The first edition of the Sagarmathan Dialogue has reinforced India's commitment to becoming a **maritime superpower**, focusing on **sustainability, connectivity, and innovation**.



Amir Khusrau: The Melodic Guardian of Sufi Harmony and Ganga-Jamuni Heritage

Context: At the 25th Jahan-e-Khusrau festival, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the event as a reflection of the “fragrance of Hindustan’s soil.”

This three-day global festival unites artists from around the world to celebrate the life and works of Amir Khusrau, fondly known as Tuti-yi-Hind (Parrot of India).



A defining figure in North India’s Ganga-Jamuni culture, Khusrau revolutionized Indian classical music and qawwali, while also shaping Hindavi, a forerunner of modern Hindi and Urdu.

Khusrau: The ‘Indian Turk’:

- **Early Life and Family Background:** Amir Khusrau’s father was a Turkic noble who fled Genghis Khan’s Mongol invasions and settled in India during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish (1211–36). He married an Indian Muslim woman, and in 1253, their son Abu'l Hasan Yamin ud-Din Khusrau was born.
- **A Fusion of Cultures:** Khusrau embraced his Turkic roots while wholeheartedly adopting Indian traditions, embodying a perfect cultural synthesis. He often referred to himself as an “Indian Turk,” showcasing his dual heritage in his poetry.

Where Was He Born?

Although Patiyali (Etah, Uttar Pradesh) is widely considered his birthplace, Khusrau never directly mentioned it in his writings.

The Poet of the Delhi Sultans:

- **A Life Devoted to Poetry:** At just 20 years old, Amir Khusrau became a professional court poet, a position he held until his death. Initially serving nobles and princes, he soon earned a permanent place in the Delhi Sultanate’s royal court.
- **The Power of Praise Poetry:** In medieval Islamic courts, poetry was more than just art—it was a tool for establishing royal prestige and legitimacy. Poets, reliant on royal patronage, often competed fiercely for favor.

Serving Five Delhi Sultans: Over five decades, Khusrau gained recognition under five Delhi Sultans:

- Muizuddin Qaiqabad
- Jalaluddin Khalji
- Alauddin Khalji
- Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah
- Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq

His command over Persian (the court language) and Hindavi made him an irreplaceable literary figure.

Honors and Recognition:

Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji honored him with the prestigious title of ‘Amir’, a mark of immense respect.

The historian Ziauddin Barani documented in Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi that Khusrau held a key position in Jalaluddin Khalji’s court, even serving as the keeper of the Qur’an.

- **His Deep Bond with Nizamuddin Auliya:** Amir Khusrau was more than just a court poet—he was also the dearest disciple of Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya.



- **A Saint's Unwavering Affection:** Nizamuddin Auliya cherished Khusrau so deeply that he once declared:
"He is the keeper of my secrets, and I shall not enter Paradise without him."

A Life Balanced Between the Court and the Khanqah:

Despite being deeply engaged in **both royal courts and Sufi traditions**, Khusrau's loyalty was **never questioned**. As poet **Saifullah Saifi** described: "Neither the king nor the saint doubted him, as he honored both with equal devotion."

A Shared Departure in 1325:

When **Nizamuddin Auliya passed away in 1325**, Khusrau was devastated. His grief was immortalized in a haunting verse: "Beauty sleeps on the bed, her hair across her face. Come Khusrau, let's go home, night has set over this place."

Within months, Khusrau **followed his master in death**, choosing eternal rest beside his beloved mentor.

Enduring Legacy of Amir Khusrau:

A Poet for the Ages:

Even after **seven centuries**, Khusrau's words continue to enchant readers. He explored **royal eulogies, folk songs, riddles, and playful verses**, bridging **literary sophistication with everyday life**.

Champion of Cultural Harmony:

Khusrau was instrumental in **blending Persian, Turkic, and Indian influences**, shaping the unique **Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb**—a harmonious fusion of **Hindu and Muslim traditions**.

His appreciation for Indian thought is evident in his words: "The Brahmans of India have a greater wealth of philosophical thought than what Rumi revealed."

Musical Contributions:

A true pioneer in **Indian classical music**, Khusrau's legacy continues through his famous compositions:

- **Chhaap Tilak**
- **Zehal-e-Maskeen**
- **Sakal Ban Phool Rahi Sarson**

His innovations also influenced:

- The creation of **new ragas**
- The evolution of **Khayal music**
- The invention of **sitar and tabla** (though historical evidence remains debated)

Conclusion: Amir Khusrau was not just a poet, musician, or courtier—he was a **cultural visionary** who helped shape the **soul of Indian heritage**. His works continue to resonate in **Sufi dargahs, Indian classical concerts, and even Bollywood**, proving that his **art and philosophy remain timeless**.

His life's journey—from the **opulence of royal courts** to the **spiritual depths of Sufi mysticism**—cements his status as an **eternal symbol of unity, devotion, and artistic brilliance**.

Colonial-Era Dramatic Performances Act: Its Legacy, Legal Scrutiny, and Repeal in India

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently raised concerns over the continued existence of **colonial-era laws**, citing one that permitted the **arrest of individuals for dancing in public places**.

He was referring to the **Dramatic Performances Act, 1876**, which empowered the **British government** to ban public performances they deemed **scandalous, defamatory, seditious, or obscene**.



Origins and Purpose of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876:

The **British government** introduced this Act to **curb nationalist movements** in India, particularly in response to the **visit of the Prince of Wales (1875-76)**.

It was part of a broader crackdown, which also included:

- **The Vernacular Press Act (1878)** – To suppress **Indian-language newspapers** critical of British rule.
- **The Sedition Law (1870)** – To criminalize any form of **anti-government speech**.

Key Provisions of the Act:

- **Authority to Ban Performances:** The government had the power to **prohibit any play, drama, or pantomime** in public if deemed **seditious, scandalous, or obscene**.
- **Unrestricted Government Discretion:** The ban was based solely on the **government's opinion**, without the need for any **concrete evidence**.
- **Power of Search and Seizure:** Magistrates could **raid venues** suspected of hosting **prohibited performances**.
- **Punishment for Violators:** Those who defied the ban faced **up to three months in jail**, a **fine**, or both.

Status of the Act After Independence:

The **Dramatic Performances Act, 1876**, although no longer in use, remained on the books for decades.

Formal Repeal in 2018:

- The **Modi government** led an initiative to **remove outdated laws**, improving **ease of doing business**.
- Since **2014**, over **2,000 obsolete laws** have been repealed.
- The **Dramatic Performances Act, 1876**, was formally repealed through the **Repealing and Amending (Second) Act, 2017**.

Why It Was Already Invalid:

- The law had effectively **ceased to exist** after **1956**, as it **contradicted the Indian Constitution**.
- Despite this, a **formal repeal** was necessary to remove it from legal records.

State-Level Adaptations:

Even after independence, some **Indian states** enacted **similar laws**, such as:

- **Tamil Nadu Dramatic Performances Act, 1954**
- **Laws in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Delhi**



Many of these state-level acts were eventually **struck down** by courts or repealed by the respective governments.

Judicial Review and Court Rulings:

A Case That Challenged the Act (1953):

- The **Lucknow branch** of the **Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)** planned to stage a play based on **Munshi Premchand's short story *Idgah* (1938)**.
- Initially, they **secured permission**, but the **Lucknow magistrate later revoked it without explanation**.
- A **prohibitory order** was served **mid-performance**, but the **artists continued**, leading to legal action.

Allahabad High Court's Verdict (1956):

- Instead of focusing solely on the case, the court **examined the constitutionality** of the **Dramatic Performances Act, 1876**.
- The court ruled the **Act unconstitutional**, stating it **violated Article 19(1)(a)** of the **Indian Constitution**, which guarantees **freedom of speech and expression**.
- It **failed to meet the "reasonable restrictions"** test under **Article 19(2)**.
- The court also suggested that the **case may have been politically motivated**, reinforcing concerns over its **misuse**.

Other Key Judicial Rulings:

- **Madras High Court (2013)**: Struck down the **Tamil Nadu Dramatic Performances Act, 1954**.

Why Colonial-Era Laws Persist in India:

Continuity Under Article 372:

- According to **Article 372** of the **Indian Constitution**, laws from the **colonial era** would continue unless **specifically repealed or amended**.

No Presumption of Constitutionality:

- Colonial laws are **not automatically assumed to be constitutional**.
- When challenged in court, the **government must justify their validity**.
- In contrast, laws passed by **independent India's Parliament** are **presumed constitutional**, shifting the burden of proof to the **petitioner**.

Government Defenses of Colonial Laws:

Successive **Indian governments** have retained certain **colonial-era laws**, arguing that they serve **modern legal purposes**.

Conclusion:

The **Dramatic Performances Act, 1876**, was one of many **colonial laws designed to suppress dissent**. While the **Allahabad High Court struck it down in 1956**, it took until **2018** for a **formal repeal**.

This case highlights how **colonial-era laws persisted for decades**, often due to **constitutional continuity and government inaction**. However, recent efforts to **repeal outdated laws** mark a significant step toward a **modernized legal framework** that aligns with **democratic values**.

Vice President Dhankhar Criticizes Overuse of Special Leave Petitions Under Article 136

Context Vice President **Jagdeep Dhankhar** has raised concerns over the **extensive use of Article 136** of the **Indian Constitution**, emphasizing its impact on the **arbitration process**.

Speaking at a colloquium on "**International Arbitration: Indian Perspective**", organized by the **India International Arbitration Centre** in **New Delhi**, he pointed out how the original intent of Article 136 has **drastically expanded** beyond its intended scope.



Understanding Article 136 of the Constitution:

Discretionary Power of the Supreme Court:

- **Article 136** grants the **Supreme Court the discretionary authority** to allow appeals against rulings from **any court or tribunal in India**, except those related to the **Armed Forces**.
- This power is not a **litigant's right** but a **privilege granted by the Supreme Court**.

Plenary Jurisdiction:

- The Supreme Court, under Article 136, holds **plenary jurisdiction**, allowing it to hear **appeals against any judgment, decree, determination, sentence, or order** from **any court or tribunal**.
- This power exists **irrespective of other appeal provisions** in the **Constitution or statutory laws**.

Scope of Application:

- Article 136 is meant to be a **residual power**—only to be invoked in cases where there are **substantial legal questions** or **gross miscarriages of justice**.
- It serves as a **critical safeguard** to ensure justice but was originally intended to be **used sparingly**.

Concerns Raised by Vice President Dhankhar:

Article 136 Was Meant to Be a "Narrow-Slit" Provision:

- Dhankhar highlighted that Article 136 was **not intended for frequent use** but has **now become a widely-used legal tool**.
- The **original intention** was to keep it a "**narrow-slit**" intervention—only for **exceptional cases**.

Excessive Use of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs):

- **Special Leave Petitions (SLPs)** are now being used to **challenge decisions at every level**, including:
 - **Magistrate courts**
 - **Sessions courts**
 - **District courts**
 - **High courts**
- This **overuse burdens** the Supreme Court and **prolongs legal proceedings**.

**Adverse Impact on Arbitration:**

- The excessive reliance on **SLPs in arbitration cases** has made the arbitration process **more complex and time-consuming**.
- Instead of providing **efficient dispute resolution**, arbitration is now **bogged down by excessive litigation**.

The Need for Domain Experts in Arbitration:

Vice President Dhankhar also underscored the importance of **domain experts** in arbitration, rather than relying solely on **retired judges**.

Dominance of Retired Judges in Arbitration:

- Former Chief Justice of India **D.Y. Chandrachud** had previously pointed out that arbitration has become an “**old boys’ club**”, dominated by **retired judges**.
- Dhankhar clarified that while retired judges play a **valuable role**, certain **technical fields** require **subject-matter specialists**.

Inclusion of Experts in Specialized Fields:

- He stressed the need for **specialists from diverse sectors** to supplement arbitration panels, such as:
 - **Oceanography**
 - **Aviation**
 - **Infrastructure**
- Having **technical experts** alongside legal experts would ensure **better, faster, and more effective arbitration outcomes**.

Conclusion:

Vice President Dhankhar’s remarks highlight the **urgent need for legal reform** in the use of **Article 136**. Originally designed as a **rare judicial intervention**, it has now become a **common litigation tool**, impacting **judicial efficiency and arbitration processes**.

To ensure arbitration remains **swift and effective**, reforms must **curtail unnecessary appeals** while incorporating **domain experts** to enhance decision-making in **technical disputes**.



CBSE Restores 14 Regional Languages in Draft Policy After Public Outcry

Context: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has decided to **reinstate 14 regional languages**, including **Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Odia, and Assamese**, after widespread protests against their exclusion from the **Class 10 board examination policy**.



The controversy erupted after CBSE's draft policy, released on **February 25**, included **only English and Hindi** as mandatory languages, omitting several **prominent regional languages**, particularly from **southern states**.

NEP 2020 and the Two-Exam System:

The uproar over the language exclusion is tied to the **National Education Policy (NEP 2020)**, which recommended a **revised examination structure** for **Class 10**.

Key Features of the Draft Policy:

- **Two board exams** for Class 10
- **English as Language-1**
- **Hindi as Language-2**
- A list of regional and foreign languages for students to choose from
- **Exclusion of 14 major regional languages**, including **Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Odia, Assamese, and Punjabi**

The omission of these languages sparked **widespread opposition**, particularly in **southern states**, where it was viewed as an **attempt to impose Hindi** at the cost of regional languages.

Language Controversy: A Larger Debate:

The **exclusion of regional languages** is part of a **broader national debate** over language policies in education.

Key Concerns:

- The move was seen as an effort to **promote Hindi and Sanskrit** over **regional languages**, raising fears about **linguistic marginalization**.
- Many states, especially **Tamil Nadu**, have **strongly opposed the three-language formula**, viewing it as a form of **Hindi imposition**.
- Critics argue that such policies **undermine India's linguistic diversity**, making education **less inclusive**.

NEP 2020 and the Three-Language Formula:

The **Three-Language Formula** is designed to **promote multilingualism** and **national integration** by ensuring students learn at least **three languages** during their schooling years.

Key Aspects of NEP 2020's Language Policy:

- Encourages students to **learn three languages**, with at least **two being Indian languages**.
- The choice of languages is **left to states, regions, and students**, ensuring that **no language is imposed**.
- Offers **greater flexibility**, allowing different regions to **prioritize their linguistic needs**.

**Tamil Nadu's Strong Opposition:**

Tamil Nadu has a **long history of opposing Hindi imposition**, dating back to the **Anti-Hindi Agitations** of the **1930s and 1960s**.

Why Tamil Nadu Rejects the Three-Language Formula?

- The state follows a **two-language formula—Tamil and English**—and has resisted including **Hindi** in its curriculum.
- There are concerns that **forcing Hindi** into the system **threatens regional languages and cultures**.
- The controversy over the **CBSE draft policy** further fueled opposition, with political leaders and activists calling it **linguistic discrimination**.

Conclusion:

The **CBSE's decision to restore 14 regional languages** after **nationwide protests** highlights the **sensitivity of language policies in India**.

While the **NEP 2020 aims for linguistic flexibility**, concerns remain over **equitable representation of all Indian languages**. The issue underscores the **need for a balanced approach** that **respects regional identities** while **promoting multilingual education**.

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TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Election Commission Addresses Concerns Over Duplicate Voter ID Numbers

Context: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has acknowledged concerns regarding the issuance of **identical Electors Photo Identification Card (EPIC) numbers** to voters across different states. This issue has raised fears of **bogus voting** and **electoral fraud** in the country.

Understanding the Issue:

Before the introduction of **ERONET**, different states used independent voter registration systems. This led to **duplicate voter entries**, especially due to **migration**. To tackle this, the **ECI is actively working to rectify duplicate EPIC numbers** and is set to implement **ERONET 2.0** for enhanced voter database management.

What is an EPIC Number?

The **Electors Photo Identification Card (EPIC)** is a **10-digit alphanumeric voter ID number** issued by the ECI.

Purpose of EPIC:

- Serves as **proof of identity** for Indian citizens aged **18 and above**.
- Provides **access to electoral services**, such as **voter status checks, information updates, and new applications**.
- Helps prevent **fraudulent voting** and ensures electoral integrity.

What is ERONET?

ERONET (Electoral Roll Management Platform) is a **web-based system** designed to maintain a **centralized and accurate electoral database** across India.

Key Features of ERONET:

- **Unified Electoral Roll** for all **States & Union Territories**.
- Operates in **14 languages & 11 scripts**.
- Generates **Photo Similar Entries (PSE) & Demographic Similar Entries (DSE) Reports**.
- Reduces **duplicate voter registrations** caused by migration.

National Electoral Rolls Purification & Authentication Program (2015):

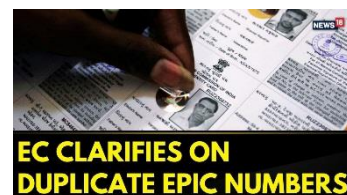
The ECI launched this initiative to remove duplicate voter entries by **linking EPIC data with Aadhaar**.

Benefits of EPIC-Aadhaar Linking:

- Ensures **"One Voter, One Vote" Policy**.
- Enhances **transparency & electoral integrity**. Maintains **clean electoral rolls** free of duplicates.
- Improves **efficient election management**.

Challenges in Aadhaar Linking:

- **Aadhaar Errors** may lead to **wrongful voter deletions**.
- **Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship**, raising concerns about **non-citizens** being added to voter rolls.





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- **Privacy Risks** due to linking sensitive Aadhaar data with electoral rolls.

Way Forward:

- **Public Awareness:** Educate voters on the **benefits and security measures** of EPIC-Aadhaar linking.
- **Address Privacy Concerns:** Assure citizens that the **secrecy of their vote remains protected**.
- **Strengthen Electoral Transparency:** Implement stricter **verification mechanisms** to ensure a **fair and credible** voting process.

By addressing these concerns, the **ECI aims to enhance trust and accuracy** in India's electoral system, ensuring a **transparent and fraud-free democracy**.



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Remote Tribal Village Receives Electricity for the First Time

Context: Recently, a tribal village in Male Mahadeshwara Hills, Karnataka, was electrified for the first time, marking a major step toward inclusivity and socio-economic development. This milestone highlights the government's efforts to extend basic amenities to remote regions.



Government Initiative Behind Electrification:

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) played a crucial role in making rural electrification a reality.

Launched: 2014

Objective: To provide electricity to rural areas, separate feeders for agriculture and households, and strengthen power infrastructure.

Key Features of DDUGJY:

- Electrification of previously **un-electrified villages**.
- **Dedicated power feeders** for households and agriculture.
- **Improved power distribution** to reduce losses and ensure efficiency.
- **Subsidy support:** 60% for general states, **85% for special category states**.

Impact of Electrification:

- **Better Education:** With reliable electricity, students can now use **digital learning tools** and study during **extended hours**.
- **Improved Healthcare:** Health centers now have **proper lighting** and can store medicines with **refrigeration facilities**, improving medical care.
- **Economic Growth:** Access to electricity boosts **local businesses**, supports **irrigation**, and creates **new livelihood opportunities**.
- **Women Empowerment:** Reduced dependency on **kerosene lamps** enhances **safety**, while access to electricity supports **women-led businesses**.

Challenges & The Way Forward:

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Several remote areas still **lack proper transmission infrastructure**, making power supply unreliable.
- **Affordability Issues:** Ensuring **subsidized power and affordable tariffs** is essential for sustainable rural electrification.
- **Renewable Energy Integration:** Expanding **solar microgrids** can provide a **sustainable and long-term solution** to electrify rural communities.
- Bringing electricity to **remote tribal villages** is a step toward bridging the development gap and ensuring **inclusive progress for all**.



New Regulations for National Waterways Development Introduced

Context: The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW) has introduced fresh regulations, formulated by the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)**, to enhance the efficiency and utilization of India's extensive inland waterways network.



Key Highlights of the National Waterways (Construction of Jetties/Terminals) Regulations, 2025

The newly introduced regulations aim to boost private sector participation in the development of inland waterway terminals, ensuring smoother operations and streamlined procedures.

- Any entity, including **private developers**, must secure a **No Objection Certificate (NoC)** from the **IWAI** before constructing or operating an inland waterway terminal.
- The regulations cover **both new and existing terminals**, including **permanent and temporary installations**.
- Permanent terminals** can be operated for a **lifetime** by the developer.
- Temporary terminals** will be **initially granted a five-year term**, with the possibility of extensions.
- Developers and operators are responsible** for the **technical design, construction, and accessibility** of their terminals, aligning them with business requirements.

Role of the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI):

Established in 1986 under the **Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985**, IWAI is responsible for **developing, maintaining, and regulating** the country's **National Waterways (NWs)** under the **National Waterways Act, 2016**.

- Headquarters:** Noida
- Key Objective:** Strengthening and modernizing India's inland water transport system.

Why Inland Waterways Are Crucial:

- Reducing Logistics Costs:** India's **logistics expenses** account for **14% of GDP**, which is **much higher than the global average of 8-10%**. Strengthening inland waterways can **significantly lower** transportation costs.
- Decongesting Roads and Railways:** Encouraging cargo transport via **inland waterways** will help **reduce the burden on congested road and rail networks**.
- Eco-Friendly Transport:** Waterways offer a **fuel-efficient and low-emission mode of transport**, supporting **India's sustainable development goals (SDGs)** and climate action commitments.
- Economic Growth:** Increased cargo movement through **National Waterways** will **boost trade, commerce, and economic activities**, particularly in regions close to major waterways. The **cargo movement on India's waterways** has seen a dramatic rise from **18 million tonnes to 133 million tonnes** in FY 2023-24.

Major Government Initiatives Supporting Waterways Development:

Jalvahak Scheme:

- Provides **direct incentives** to cargo owners using inland waterways for distances exceeding **300 km**.



- Offers **reimbursement of up to 35%** of total operational expenses.

Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP):

- Focused on **modernizing NW-1** with **advanced infrastructure and terminals**.

Sagarmala Project:

- Aims to **integrate inland waterways** with **coastal shipping and major ports**.

Freight Village Development:

- Establishing **logistic hubs** near **key waterways** to enhance **multimodal transport efficiency**.

Conclusion:

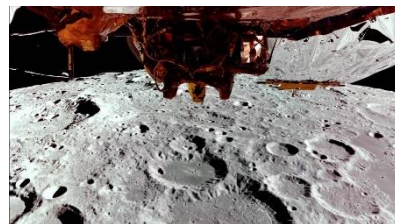
The National Waterways (Construction of Jetties/Terminals) Regulations, 2025 mark a significant step toward **boosting private investment**, **reducing logistics costs**, and **promoting sustainable cargo transport**. With **increased digitization** and **government support**, these regulations will **strengthen India's inland waterway infrastructure**, making it a **competitive and viable transport alternative**.





Historic Moment: Private U.S. Spacecraft Lands Upright on the Moon

Context: For the first time in history, a private U.S. spacecraft has successfully landed upright on the lunar surface. This groundbreaking achievement was accomplished by Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1, making it the second private mission to reach the Moon.



About Blue Ghost Mission 1:

Mission Objective:

The mission aims to deliver ten scientific and technological payloads to the Moon under NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative.

Launch and Landing Details

- **Launch Vehicle:** SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket
- **Launch Site:** Kennedy Space Center, Florida
- **Landing Location:** Mare Crisium, near Mons Latreille on the Moon's northeastern near side

Historic Firsts:

- **First commercial mission to land successfully and remain upright** on the lunar surface.
- The lander is designed to **operate for one lunar day** (approximately **14 Earth days**) to conduct crucial scientific research.

Scientific Experiments and Instruments:

The spacecraft carries advanced instruments to study the Moon's environment, geology, and navigation capabilities:

- **Lunar Regolith Adherence Characterization (RAC):** Examines how lunar dust sticks to surfaces, crucial for future lunar missions.
- **Lunar PlanetVac (LPV):** Collects lunar soil samples for scientific analysis.
- **Lunar Instrumentation for Thermal Exploration with Rapidity (LISTER):** Measures heat flow from the Moon's interior, helping understand its thermal history.
- **Lunar GNSS Receiver Experiment (LuGRE):** Tests whether Earth's Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) signals can be used for lunar navigation.
- **Lunar Environment Heliospheric X-ray Imager (LEXI):** Captures X-ray images of Earth's magnetosphere, offering insights into space weather effects.

Contribution to NASA's Artemis Program:

This mission plays a vital role in supporting NASA's Artemis program, which focuses on returning humans to the Moon and preparing for deep-space exploration. The data collected will provide valuable insights for future human missions.

NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) Initiative:

CLPS is a NASA-led program designed to involve private companies in lunar exploration. The goal is to stimulate a lunar economy, foster innovation, and accelerate scientific discoveries.

Exciting Upcoming Discoveries:



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- **Capturing a Total Eclipse:** Blue Ghost will record **high-definition images** of a total lunar eclipse, when **Earth will completely block the Sun from the Moon's perspective**.
- **Understanding Lunar Dust Levitation:** The mission will investigate how **lunar dust lifts off the surface under solar radiation**, contributing to knowledge of the **mysterious lunar horizon glow**, first observed by **Apollo astronaut Eugene Cernan**.

With this historic success, **Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1** is paving the way for **the next generation of commercial lunar exploration**, bringing us **one step closer to a sustainable human presence on the Moon**.



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Israel Halts Gaza Aid to Pressure Hamas on Ceasefire Agreement

Context Israel has **blocked the entry of all goods and humanitarian supplies** into the **Gaza Strip**, warning of **further consequences** if Hamas does not **accept a new ceasefire proposal**. Hamas has condemned this move, accusing Israel of **weaponizing starvation** to force an agreement and **undermining peace efforts**.



Ceasefire Phase One Ends:

- The **first phase of the ceasefire** concluded on **March 1, 2025**, during which **humanitarian aid surged** into Gaza.
- The **second phase** was expected to include **the release of remaining hostages by Hamas**, an **Israeli military withdrawal**, and discussions on a **permanent peace deal**.
- However, **negotiations stalled**, and no agreement was reached for the **next phase**.

New Ceasefire Proposal by Israel:

Israel has agreed to a **U.S.-backed ceasefire extension plan**, known as the **"Witkoff Proposal"**, which **modifies the terms of the original agreement**:

- **Hamas must release half of the remaining hostages** to secure an **extended truce** and continue peace talks.
- The **temporary ceasefire** would last until **April 20, 2025**.
- **On the first day of the truce extension**, Hamas must **release half of the hostages**, including **both living and deceased individuals**.
- The **remaining hostages will be freed** only if a **permanent ceasefire agreement** is finalized by the end of the truce period.

Hamas Rejects the Proposal:

- Hamas has **rejected the U.S.-Israel proposal**, arguing that it **violates the original ceasefire terms**.
- In response, **Israel has halted all humanitarian aid** to Gaza, further **intensifying pressure on Hamas**.
- With **negotiations deadlocked**, Israel insists that talks **can only resume if Hamas changes its stance**.

Israel's Position and Future Actions:

- **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** has confirmed that Israel is **committed to the hostage deal** but **reserves the right to resume military operations** if negotiations fail.
- If Hamas **violates the terms** of any agreement, Israel has warned of **renewed military action**.

With the situation at a critical juncture, the future of the ceasefire remains **uncertain**, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza **continues to escalate**.



National Board for Wildlife: Key Announcements by PM Modi

Context: India has taken a major step in wildlife conservation, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiling a series of initiatives during his visit to Gir National Park, Gujarat. Chairing the 7th meeting of the National Board for Wildlife, the Prime Minister introduced landmark measures to protect endangered species, restore habitats, and integrate technology into conservation efforts.



Some of the key announcements include:

- India's first-ever riverine dolphin estimation report
- Expansion of the cheetah reintroduction program
- Launch of the National Great Indian Bustard Conservation Action Plan
- Establishment of a National Referral Centre for Wildlife
- Creation of a Centre of Excellence for human-wildlife conflict mitigation

Major Wildlife Conservation Announcements:

First-Ever Riverine Dolphin Estimation:

- India's first riverine dolphin survey recorded 6,327 dolphins across 28 rivers in eight states.
- The survey covered 8,500 km, with Uttar Pradesh leading in dolphin population, followed by Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam.
- PM Modi emphasized community participation in dolphin conservation and proposed educational programs for schoolchildren to raise awareness.

Strengthening Asiatic Lion Conservation:

- The 16th Asiatic Lion Population Estimation will take place in 2025 to monitor conservation progress.
- Barda Wildlife Sanctuary will receive enhanced conservation efforts, including prey augmentation and habitat restoration to facilitate natural lion dispersal.
- PM Modi praised Gir's success in lion conservation and highlighted the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital documentation to replicate similar efforts in other national parks.

Expansion of Cheetah Reintroduction Program:

- India's cheetah reintroduction project will expand to Gandhisagar Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) and Banni Grasslands (Gujarat).
- This move aims to strengthen biodiversity and establish a stable cheetah population in India.

New Wildlife Protection Initiatives:

- National Referral Centre for Wildlife: A facility in Junagadh dedicated to wildlife disease management and health monitoring.
- Centre of Excellence at SACON, Coimbatore: A specialized center to tackle human-wildlife conflict by equipping Rapid Response Teams with AI-driven surveillance and tracking gadgets.
- Use of Remote Sensing & AI: Advanced geospatial mapping, AI, and machine learning will be deployed to prevent forest fires and mitigate human-animal conflicts.

**Strengthening Conservation of Endangered Species:**

- **Gharial Conservation Project:** A nationwide initiative to **revive the critically endangered gharial population** and protect their habitat.
- **National Great Indian Bustard Conservation Action Plan:** A comprehensive strategy to **save the Great Indian Bustard**, one of the most **critically endangered birds in India**.
- **Tiger Conservation Beyond Reserves:** A special scheme to **protect tigers in buffer zones and areas outside protected reserves**, reducing **human-wildlife conflicts**.

Leveraging Technology for Conservation:

- **AI and remote sensing** will be used for **wildlife tracking and conflict resolution**.
- **Forest Survey of India (FSI) and BISAG-N collaboration** will use **space technology** to **enhance forest fire detection and prevention**.
- **Traditional ecological knowledge** will be **digitally documented** to preserve **indigenous conservation practices**.

Role of Local Communities in Conservation:

- PM Modi highlighted a **sixfold increase in community reserves** in the last decade, stressing the **importance of local participation** in conservation.
- **Eco-tourism infrastructure** will be expanded to improve **access to wildlife sanctuaries**, benefiting both **conservation and local economies**.

Conclusion:

These announcements mark a **new era in India's wildlife conservation efforts**, integrating **species protection, habitat restoration, advanced technology, and community involvement**. With a **strong commitment to biodiversity and sustainability**, India is poised to become a **global leader in wildlife conservation**, ensuring a **harmonious coexistence between humans and nature**.

TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

India Launches Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3) to Boost Sustainable Urban Development

Context: India has launched the **Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3)**, a multi-nation alliance aimed at promoting city-to-city collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and private sector partnerships. The initiative was introduced during the **12th Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum in Asia and the Pacific**, held in Jaipur.



Key Highlights of the Event:

- The **Prime Minister of India** emphasized India's commitment to the **Pro-Planet People (P3) approach** and stressed the significance of the **3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) strategy** for sustainable urban growth.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for CITIIS 2.0 (City Investments to Innovate, Integrate, and Sustain)** was signed, involving agreements worth ₹1,800 crore to support **18 cities across 14 states**. These projects will act as **models for other urban centers**.

Background:

The **Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum in Asia and the Pacific** was launched in **2009** to promote regional cooperation for sustainable waste management and circular economy initiatives in rapidly growing urban areas.

Key Developments Over the Years:

- The **Hanoi 3R Declaration (2013-2023)** outlined **33 voluntary goals** for shifting towards a resource-efficient and circular economy.
- The forum has been actively negotiating for a **Global Plastic Treaty** to tackle plastic pollution worldwide.

Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3): A Step Towards a Circular Economy:

What is C-3?

The **Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3)** is an **international alliance** created to help urban areas **adopt circular economy principles** by integrating sustainable practices into **urban planning, waste management, and resource utilization**.

Key Objectives:

- Waste Reduction:** Promoting waste segregation, composting, and upcycling.
- Resource Efficiency:** Encouraging reuse, shared materials, and sustainable production.
- Sustainable Infrastructure:** Integrating eco-friendly solutions into urban development.

Why C-3 Matters for Urban Sustainability?

- Combating Climate Change:** By minimizing waste and optimizing resource use, C-3 plays a crucial role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and tackling environmental degradation.
- Economic Growth and Job Creation:** A circular economy fosters business opportunities in sectors such as recycling, remanufacturing, and waste management, creating employment in renewable energy, eco-friendly construction, and green manufacturing.



3. **Building Resilient Cities:** C-3 helps cities **reduce their dependence on finite resources**, making them **more self-sufficient and resilient** against **economic downturns and supply chain disruptions**.
4. **Enhancing Quality of Life:** Cleaner environments, **better waste management**, and **greener public spaces** contribute to **improved public health and overall well-being** for urban residents.

Circular Economy: Global and Indian Context:

Global Adoption:

Several cities, including **Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Tokyo**, have successfully implemented **circular economy frameworks** under similar initiatives.

India's Efforts Towards Circularity:

In India, **circular economy principles** are gaining momentum through initiatives such as:

- **Swachh Bharat Mission** – Promoting **waste segregation and recycling**.
- **Smart Cities Mission** – Encouraging **sustainable and efficient urban development**.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** – Holding manufacturers accountable for the **entire lifecycle of their products**.
- **GOBAR-Dhan Scheme** – Currently implemented in **67.8% of India's districts**, focusing on **biogas and organic waste utilization**.

Challenges in Implementing Circularity in Cities:

Despite its benefits, implementing a **circular economy model** faces several **obstacles**, including:

- **Lack of Awareness & Technical Expertise** – Many stakeholders are **unfamiliar with circular practices**.
- **High Initial Investment Costs** – Shifting to **sustainable systems** requires **significant financial support**.
- **Resistance to Change** – Businesses and consumers may be reluctant to **adopt new models of production and consumption**.
- **Weak Policy Implementation** – Existing **regulations on waste management and sustainability** are often **poorly enforced**.

Way Forward: Steps to Strengthen Circularity in Urban Areas:

To successfully integrate **circular economy practices**, cities must focus on:

- **Developing and enforcing policies** that make **circular economy principles mandatory**.
- **Investing in research and innovation** for **sustainable materials and production methods**.
- **Raising awareness** through **community education programs on circular living**.
- **Strengthening public-private partnerships** to **scale up circular economy projects**.

Conclusion: The launch of the **Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3)** marks a **significant step** in India's journey toward **sustainable urban development**. By embracing **circular economy principles**, Indian cities can **reduce waste, optimize resources, and create a cleaner, greener future**. The success of C-3 will depend on **strong policies, active participation, and a commitment to sustainability** from all stakeholders.



IRCTC & IRFC Attain Prestigious Navratna Status

Context: The Union Government has conferred **Navratna status** upon the **Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC)** and the **Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC)**. With this recognition, they become the **25th and 26th Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)** to achieve this esteemed classification.



What is Navratna Status?

The **Navratna designation** is a prestigious recognition granted to **high-performing CPSEs**, offering them **greater investment autonomy** and **enhanced operational flexibility**.

- This status is awarded by the **Department of Public Enterprises (DPE)**, which functions under the **Ministry of Finance**.
- The primary goal is to **empower CPSEs** to function more efficiently while reducing government intervention.

Eligibility Criteria for Navratna Status:

To qualify for **Navratna status**, a CPSE must fulfill the following conditions:

- **Miniratna-I Status** – The company must already hold **Miniratna-I classification** and maintain a **positive net worth**.
- **Consistent Performance** – It must receive an **"Excellent" or "Very Good" rating** in its **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) evaluation** for at least **three out of the last five years**.
- **Financial Strength** – A CPSE must score **60+ points** based on key **financial metrics**, such as **net profit, net worth, total cost of manpower, and performance ratio**.
- **Independent Governance** – The firm must have at least **four independent directors** on its board.

How Does Navratna Status Benefit Companies?

1. **Greater Financial Autonomy:** Navratna CPSEs can make **investment decisions up to 1,000 crore or 15% of their net worth** without seeking prior government approval.
2. **Increased Operational Flexibility:** They gain the freedom to form **strategic alliances, joint ventures, and subsidiaries**—both within India and globally—enabling **faster expansion and diversification**.
3. **Stronger Market Credibility:** Achieving **Navratna status enhances corporate reputation**, making companies **more attractive to investors, financial institutions, and business partners**.
4. **Strategic Decision-Making Power:** Navratna firms enjoy greater authority over **capital expenditure, mergers, acquisitions, and human resource management**, allowing them to operate with **efficiency and independence**.

Conclusion: The elevation of **IRCTC and IRFC** to **Navratna status** is a **significant milestone** for India's railway sector. This recognition **empowers them with financial and operational independence**, fostering **greater efficiency, market expansion, and strategic growth**. As these enterprises gain momentum, their contributions will play a **crucial role in shaping India's economic landscape and public sector dynamism**.



Taxation of Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) in India

Context: India's **Income Tax Bill, 2025** has introduced a **comprehensive legal framework** for **Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs)**, bringing the nation's tax policies in line with **global best practices**.



- Countries like the **U.K., U.S., Singapore, and Australia** classify **VDAs** as **property or securities** for taxation purposes.
- The new tax regime aims to enhance **transparency, investor confidence, and regulatory oversight** in India's growing digital asset market.

Understanding Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs):

- VDAs were formally defined in the **Finance Act, 2022**, with the addition of **Clause 47A** to **Section 2 of the Income Tax Act, 1961**.
- The **Supreme Court of India**, in the landmark case **Internet and Mobile Association of India v. RBI**, referred to the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Report**, recognizing **Virtual Currencies (VCs)** as digital units used for:
 - **Medium of exchange**
 - **Unit of account**
 - **Store of value**
- The Court concluded that VDAs could be categorized as **property, commodities, or even a payment method**, treating them as **intangible assets**.

Taxation of VDAs in India:

The **Income Tax Bill, 2025** officially recognizes **crypto assets, NFTs, and other VDAs** as **property and capital assets**, aligning India's tax treatment with nations like the **U.K., Australia, and New Zealand**.

Key Features of VDA Taxation

- **Flat 30% Tax Rate** – Profits from VDA transactions will be taxed at **30%**, with **no deductions** allowed for transaction costs.
- **1% TDS (Tax Deducted at Source)** – Applicable on **all VDA transfers**, including **peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions**.
- **Exemptions for Small Traders** – TDS exemption thresholds are set at **50,000** for small traders and **10,000** for other investors.
- **Capital Gains Tax Rules Apply** – Gains from VDAs will be taxed under **short-term or long-term capital gains provisions**, depending on the **holding period**.
- **Seizure During Investigations** – Tax authorities now have the power to **seize VDAs** during **investigations and tax raids**, similar to assets like **cash or gold**.
- **Mandatory Reporting** – Entities dealing in VDAs (such as **crypto exchanges and wallet providers**) must **report transactions** in a prescribed format.



- **Inclusion in AIS (Annual Information Statement)** – VDA transactions will be **automatically recorded** in taxpayers' financial profiles, ensuring transparency.

Significance of VDA Taxation:

- **Enhanced Transparency** – The requirement to report VDA transactions will help **curb tax evasion** and ensure authorities can **track large crypto transactions**.
- **Encouraging Financial Discipline** – Taxation may influence **investment behavior**, prompting investors to **carefully assess tax implications** before trading.
- **Boosting Investor Confidence** – Establishing a **clear legal framework** for VDAs will **attract foreign investments** and increase **trust in India's digital asset market**.

Challenges and Concerns:

- **Regulatory Gaps** – While taxation has been addressed, challenges remain in **investor protection, market regulation, and enforcement mechanisms**.
- **High Tax Burden** – The **30% tax rate** could **discourage small investors and frequent traders**, making VDAs less attractive compared to traditional investments.

Way Forward:

- **Aligning with Global Standards** – India's move to classify VDAs as **capital assets** follows the regulatory approach of nations like the **U.K. and the U.S.**, strengthening **legal recognition**.
- **Comprehensive Policy Framework** – A well-rounded policy integrating **financial regulations, consumer rights, and technological safeguards** is essential for a **secure and sustainable digital asset ecosystem**.

India's new tax framework for VDAs marks a **significant step** in regulating **digital assets**, but further refinements are needed to ensure a **balanced and investor-friendly environment**.

SEBI Expands Investment Scope in Asset Reconstruction Market

Context: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has granted permission to all Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), including Housing Finance Companies (HFCs), to invest in Security Receipts (SRs) issued by Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs).



- This decision aligns with the SARFAESI Act, 2002, which provides the legal framework for securitization and asset reconstruction in India.
- The move aims to broaden market participation and enhance liquidity in the distressed asset sector.
- ARCs, which are registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), play a key role in handling Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) under this regulatory structure.

Understanding Security Receipts (SRs):

Security Receipts (SRs) are financial instruments issued by ARCs when they purchase bad loans (NPAs) from banks and financial institutions.

How They Work?

- ARCs buy distressed assets at a discounted rate (after applying a haircut).
- Investors in SRs receive returns based on the recovery of these bad loans.
- This mechanism helps in managing NPAs and revitalizing the banking sector.

Impact on the Distressed Asset Market:

- **Wider Participation:** With NBFCs and HFCs now allowed to invest, more institutions can contribute to resolving NPAs, leading to greater capital inflow.
- **Increased Liquidity:** More investment in SRs will create higher demand, making it easier for ARCs to offload distressed assets.
- **Stronger NPA Resolution:** The decision encourages active investment in the recovery of bad loans, improving financial system stability.

Role of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs):

ARCs are specialized financial institutions that focus on purchasing and recovering NPAs from banks.

- **Objectives of ARCs:**
- **Clean Up Bank Balance Sheets** – Helps banks offload bad loans and focus on fresh lending.
- **Acquire Financial Assets** – ARCs purchase NPAs via auctions or negotiated deals.
- **Facilitate Debt Recovery** – Work on restructuring and recovering stressed assets.

Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) and Their Role:

QIBs are large institutional investors with expertise in evaluating and investing in capital markets.

Key Features of QIBs:

- **Recognized by SEBI** – Enjoy exclusive privileges in capital markets.
- **Participate in IPOs and Institutional Placements** – Allowed special access to primary market investments.



- **Invest in Security Receipts (SRs)** – Strengthen the **distressed asset market** by investing in ARC-issued securities.

Conclusion:

SEBI's decision to **expand investment eligibility in SRs** is a **significant step** in enhancing the **distressed asset market** in India. By **encouraging broader participation, improving liquidity, and strengthening NPA recovery**, this move supports the overall **health of the financial sector** and boosts **economic resilience**.



India's First Comprehensive River Dolphin Survey

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unveiled the results of India's first large-scale population survey of riverine dolphins, conducted between 2021 and 2023.

- The survey, covering the **Ganga and Brahmaputra basins**, estimated an average of **6,324 Gangetic dolphins**.
- Alarmingly, only **three Indus River dolphins** were found in the **Beas River, Punjab**.
- The findings highlight **serious threats** to these **endangered species**, including **pollution, habitat destruction, prey depletion, and climate change**.
- Both dolphin species are given **top protection** under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.



Key Findings of the River Dolphin Survey (2021-2023):

This **first-of-its-kind study** provides valuable insights into the status of **India's endangered river dolphins** and emphasizes the need for **strong conservation measures**.

Survey Overview:

- Conducted by the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** under the **Union Environment Ministry**.
- Covered **28 rivers by boat** and **30 rivers by road** across the **Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Beas basins**.
- Surveyed:
 - **7,109 km** of the **Ganga and its tributaries**.
 - **1,297 km** of the **Brahmaputra river system**.
 - **101 km** of the **Beas River**.

Dolphin Population Estimates:

- **Total Gangetic Dolphins: 6,324** (range: 5,977 – 6,688).
 - **Ganga (Main Stem): 3,275**
 - **Ganga's Tributaries: 2,414**
 - **Brahmaputra (Main Stem): 584**
 - **Brahmaputra's Tributaries: 51**
- **Indus River Dolphins: Only 3, found in Beas River, Punjab.**

State-Wise Distribution of Gangetic Dolphins:

- **Uttar Pradesh – 2,397** (highest population).
- **Bihar – 2,220.**
- **West Bengal – 815.**
- **Jharkhand – 162.**
- **Rajasthan & Madhya Pradesh – 95.**
- **Punjab – 3.**

Survey Methodology and Challenges:

Challenges in Dolphin Population Estimation:



- **Difficult to Track:** River dolphins live in **turbid waters** and surface only for **1.26 seconds** before diving for 107 seconds.
- **Observer Errors:** Some surfacing dolphins might be **missed** during counting.
- **Availability Errors:** Some dolphins may **not surface** at all during the survey period.

Survey Techniques:

- **Visual Surveys: Double Observer Method** (for deep & wide rivers) – Two teams scan both sides of the vessel, reducing errors.
- **Tandem Method** (for narrow & shallow rivers) – A boat moves slowly to count visible dolphins.
- **Single Boat Method** (for small channels) – Focused on areas less than **300m wide**.

Acoustic Surveys

- **Hydrophones (Underwater Microphones)** detect **dolphin echolocation clicks**.
- **Dolphins navigate using sound**, so acoustic methods improve detection accuracy.

This **multi-method approach** ensures a **more reliable estimation** of India's **endangered river dolphin population**.

Dolphin 'Hotspots' & 'Coldspots':

Areas with Low or No Dolphin Presence ('Coldspots')

Ganga River:

- **Narora to Kanpur (366 km):** Very **low dolphin count** (0.1/km).
- **Farukhabad-Kannauj Stretch:** Another **major coldspot**.

Other Coldspots:

- **Yamuna River** (Kaushambi-Chitrakoot).
- **Sharda River** (Pilibhit).
- **Rapti River** (Balrampur-Siddharth Nagar).
- **Barak River** (Assam).
- **Subansiri & Kulsi Rivers** (Assam) – **Declining populations**.

Areas with High Dolphin Population ('Hotspots'):

- **Uttar Pradesh:** 0.62 dolphins/km.
- **Bihar:** 1.62 dolphins/km (highest encounter rate).
- **Brahmaputra River:** Deep waters but **low dolphin density**.

Densely Populated Stretches:

- **Chausa-Manihar Stretch (590 km):** 2.20 dolphins/km.
- **Manihari (Bihar) to Rajmahal (Jharkhand):** 2.75 dolphins/km (highest density).

Conclusion: Deeper river sections and **tributary confluences** offer the best habitats for dolphins, making them **priority zones for conservation**.

Final Thoughts:

India's **first-ever river dolphin survey** provides **critical data** for the **conservation of these endangered species**. The findings highlight the **urgent need** to protect their habitats from **pollution, habitat degradation, and climate change**.

With these insights, **targeted conservation programs** can be developed, ensuring that **India's river dolphins thrive** in the coming years.



From Borrowers to Builders: Women Driving India's Financial Growth" Report Released

Context: The report has been jointly published by TransUnion CIBIL, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) of NITI Aayog, and MicroSave Consulting (MSC). It sheds light on the **growing financial participation of women** in India and the challenges they continue to face.

Key Highlights of the Report

Surge in Women Borrowers:

- The number of **women seeking credit** has **tripled** between **2019 and 2024**, signaling a strong **rise in financial inclusion**.

Demographic Trends:

- 60% of women borrowers** come from **semi-urban or rural areas**, showing increasing financial participation beyond metro cities.
- However, **women under 30** make up only **27% of total retail credit**, while men in the same age group account for **40%**.

Regional Insights:

- Southern states** report **higher participation** of women in borrowing compared to **Northern and Central India**.

Growing Awareness:

- 27 million women borrowers** have checked their **credit scores** through CIBIL, indicating a rising awareness of financial health.

Challenges Faced by Women Borrowers:

Credit Aversion:

- Many women **hesitate to take loans** due to **social norms, fear of debt**, and the **complicated loan application process**.

Unfriendly Banking Experience:

- Several financial institutions **lack tailored advisory services** for women, making banking less welcoming.

Limited Institutional Support:

- Women entrepreneurs** are often seen as **high-risk borrowers** due to their **limited credit history** and **lack of formal business experience**.
- Example:** **79% of women-owned businesses** are **self-financed**, while only **7% of MSME credit** is directed towards them.

Barriers to Credit Readiness:

- Many women **struggle to access loans** due to the **lack of proper documentation, collateral**, or a **guarantor**.
- Example:** **22.2% of women-led collective enterprises** are still **not credit-ready**.

Conclusion:

The report highlights **the remarkable progress** women have made in India's financial landscape but also underscores the **existing challenges** that need urgent attention. Addressing these barriers will be key to **empowering more women entrepreneurs** and ensuring **inclusive economic growth**.





IMF Flags Concerns Over NBFCs' Exposure to Power Sector

Context: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised concerns about potential financial instability in India due to the high exposure of Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to the power and infrastructure sectors.

Key Highlights:

IMF Report Findings:

The IMF report titled "India Financial System Stability Assessment" has emphasized the risks associated with power sector loans:

- NBFCs' dependence on bank borrowings has increased since fiscal 2019.
- In fiscal 2024, 63% of power sector loans originated from the top three Infrastructure Financing Companies (IFCs), a specific category of NBFCs.
- This share has risen from 55% in 2019-20, highlighting a growing concentration of risk.

Financial Stability Risks:

The report warns that NBFCs' significant exposure to the power sector, which faces structural challenges, could heighten financial instability risks.

- NBFCs are deeply interconnected with banks, corporate bond markets, and mutual funds. Any financial distress in the sector could amplify stress across the financial system.
- Stress tests revealed that public sector banks (PSBs) may struggle to maintain the minimum Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 9% under a stagflation scenario.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) mandates a CAR of 12% for PSBs and 9% for scheduled commercial banks.

Regulatory Concerns:

- State-owned NBFCs are exempt from large exposure limits, raising regulatory concerns about their risk management.

IMF Recommendations:

To mitigate these risks, the IMF suggests the following measures:

1. Strengthening liquidity regulations for NBFCs, particularly those heavily exposed to infrastructure projects.
2. Enhanced monitoring of NBFCs' lending activities and improving risk management frameworks.
3. Ensuring regulatory parity by subjecting state-owned NBFCs to the same standards as private NBFCs.
4. Improving data sharing on NBFCs' credit exposure for better transparency and risk assessment.
5. Prioritizing financial stability over developmental objectives in the banking sector.

Understanding NBFCs (Non-Banking Financial Companies):

Definition:

A Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) is an entity registered under the Companies Act, 1956, that engages in:

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- Providing loans and advances
- Acquiring shares, stocks, bonds, and debentures
- Investing in **marketable securities** issued by the government or local authorities

What NBFCs Do Not Include:

NBFCs do not primarily engage in:

- Agriculture or industrial activities
- Buying/selling of goods and services
- Construction or sale of immovable property

Special Category: Residuary Non-Banking Companies (RNBCs):

These are firms whose **main business is receiving deposits** through schemes or arrangements (lump sum or installments).

Key Functions of NBFCs:

- Providing financial products to individuals and businesses
- Financing infrastructure and development projects
- Facilitating investments in securities

Regulatory Oversight:

NBFCs operate under the supervision of both the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs** and the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.

How NBFCs Differ from Banks

Feature	Banks	NBFCs
Accept Demand Deposits	Yes	No
Part of Payment & Settlement System	Yes	No
Can Issue Cheques	Yes	No
Deposit Insurance Available	Yes	No

Final Thoughts:

With NBFCs playing a crucial role in financing India's **power and infrastructure sector**, the IMF's warnings **highlight the urgent need for stronger regulatory frameworks**. Addressing these concerns will be essential to **safeguarding financial stability** and **mitigating risks in the banking and financial ecosystem**.



US Report Exposes CCP's Role in Fentanyl Crisis, Calls for Immediate Action

Context: A recent report from the US House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has uncovered alarming details about China's involvement in the fentanyl crisis plaguing the United States.

The committee has urged for urgent measures, including:

- The establishment of a **Joint Task Force**
- **Stronger sanctions** against entities involved
- **Tighter enforcement** to curb the fentanyl epidemic

Recently, **former President Donald Trump** reiterated his commitment to imposing **steep tariffs on Canada, China, and Mexico** for failing to curb the illicit fentanyl trade into the United States.

Key Findings from the Report:

China's Role in the Fentanyl Trade:

- The report highlights that **almost all illicit fentanyl precursors** originate from **Chinese manufacturers**.
- These substances are then **trafficked globally**, with **Mexican cartels** being the primary recipients.
- The cartels **produce and distribute fentanyl** across the **United States**, intensifying the **opioid epidemic** and its devastating impact on public health.

Chinese Government's Involvement:

The investigation found that the **Chinese government** actively **supports and facilitates** the production and export of fentanyl precursors through:

1. **Tax benefits and subsidies** granted to companies involved in fentanyl precursor production, despite the fact that such substances are illegal under both **US and Chinese laws**.
2. **Financial incentives and official recognition** provided to companies engaged in fentanyl manufacturing and distribution.
3. **State-controlled enterprises**, including **government-run institutions such as prisons**, were found to **hold ownership stakes in businesses linked to fentanyl trafficking**.

Obstruction of US Law Enforcement:

- The report **accuses Chinese authorities** of deliberately **interfering with US law enforcement efforts** to tackle fentanyl trafficking.
- In some instances, **Chinese officials allegedly warned fentanyl producers about US investigations**, allowing them to **evade prosecution** and continue their operations.
- Although **China enforces strict laws against domestic drug trafficking**, it has **largely ignored companies exporting fentanyl to the United States** and other nations.

Fentanyl Crisis in the United States:

- **Fentanyl is now the leading cause of death** for Americans aged 18-45.
- The crisis has **exacerbated opioid-related deaths**, overwhelmed **healthcare systems**, and put **immense pressure on law enforcement agencies**.

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Freedom UPSC with **Dhananjay Gautam**

**What is Fentanyl?**

- Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine and heroin.
- It is primarily prescribed for **pain relief in cancer patients** and **post-surgical pain management**.
- **Illegally manufactured fentanyl**, often mixed with **heroin, cocaine, or counterfeit pills**, significantly **increases overdose risks**.
- Many users seek fentanyl for its **strong euphoric effects**, but its **high potency leads to rapid addiction and dependency**.

Conclusion:

The **US House Committee's report** has shed light on **China's deep involvement** in the fentanyl trade and the **urgent need for action**. With **opioid-related deaths soaring**, stricter enforcement, **sanctions**, and **global cooperation** are crucial to tackling this **escalating public health emergency**.



The Wallace Line: A Biogeographical Barrier and Its Importance

Context: The **Wallace Line**, a crucial **biogeographical boundary**, explains the sharp differences in species distribution between **Asia and Australia**. Recent research has provided deeper insights into how **geological history, climate, and evolution** have shaped biodiversity in the **Indo-Malayan region**.



What is the Wallace Line?

- The **Wallace Line** is an **invisible ecological boundary** that separates the **distinct faunal regions** of **Asia and Australia**.
- It runs **between Bali and Lombok**, extending **north between Borneo and Sulawesi**, before curving **south of Mindanao**.
- Proposed by **English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace** in the **19th century**, it was based on observations of **dramatic shifts in species distribution**.
- Wallace noted that **tigers and orangutans** dominated Asia, whereas **kangaroos and cockatoos** were characteristic of Australia.
- **Sulawesi**, located near this boundary, puzzled Wallace as it contained a **unique blend of species from both regions**.

Sulawesi: A Biogeographical Puzzle

- **Location:** Part of **Indonesia**, situated between **Borneo (west) and the Maluku Islands (east)**.
- **Size:** **World's 11th-largest island**, featuring **four peninsulas** separated by the **Gulf of Tomini, Tolo Gulf, and Bone Gulf**.
- **Biodiversity:** Despite being just **20 km from Borneo**, Sulawesi is home to **distinct plant and animal species**, including:

Unique and Endemic Species:

1. **Tarsiers (Tarsiidae family):**
 - **Small nocturnal primates** with **large eyes** for night vision.
 - Found in **Southeast Asia, including Sulawesi and the Philippines**.
 - Renowned for their **extraordinary leaping abilities**.
2. **Lowland Anoa (Bubalus depressicornis):**
 - **Smallest wild buffalo species**, **endemic to Sulawesi**.
 - **Critically endangered** due to **habitat destruction and hunting**.
3. **Mountain Anoa (Bubalus quarlesi):**
 - **Smaller than the lowland anoa**, found in **high-altitude forests**.
 - **Solitary and critically endangered**.
4. **Dwarf Cuscus (Strigocuscus celebensis):**
 - A **marsupial** related to **Australian possums**.



- **Arboreal and nocturnal**, feeding on **fruits and leaves**.

Because of its **mixture of Asian and Australian species**, Wallace struggled to classify **Sulawesi** under either region.

Geological Explanation of the Wallace Line:

- Wallace **theorized** that today's islands were **once connected to the Asian mainland**.
- As **landmasses drifted apart**, species became **isolated**, evolving **independently**.
- **Modern research confirms this**, attributing the biodiversity patterns to **continental drift and sea-level fluctuations** over millions of years.
- A **2023 study analyzing 20,000 species** of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians found:
 - **Asian species migrated south** through **tropical rainforest corridors**.
 - **Australian species struggled to migrate north** due to **climate and habitat differences**.
 - The **Asian migration route** was **older and well-established**, whereas the **Australian migration pathway** was **more recent**, making migration **more difficult**.

Weber's Line: Another Biogeographical Boundary:

- **Weber's Line** was proposed by **Max Carl Wilhelm Weber** to further **define the separation** between **Asian (Oriental) and Australian (Australasian) faunal regions** within **Wallacea**.
- Located **east of Wallace's Line**, it runs through the **Malay Archipelago**, including **Sulawesi**.
- It marks a **transition zone** where **Asian and Australian species intermingle**.

Conclusion:

The **Wallace Line** remains a **key concept in biogeography**, highlighting how **evolution, continental shifts, and climate changes** have influenced species distribution. The presence of **unique species on Sulawesi** further underscores the **complexity of Earth's biodiversity** and the **historical processes** that shaped it.

**SC Orders States & UTs to Submit Complete Forest Land Records Within 6 Months**

Context: The Supreme Court has issued a **firm directive** to all States and Union Territories (UTs) to **identify and document forest lands** within a **six-month deadline**. This move follows **non-compliance** with the **landmark 1996 judgment** in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs Union of India & Others* and subsequent **court rulings** on forest conservation.

**Legal Background:****T.N. Godavarman Case (1996):**

- The **Supreme Court** broadened the definition of 'forest', covering all **statutorily recognized forests**, regardless of ownership.

Van Adhiniyam Rules, 2023:

- **Rule 16(1)** expands **forest protection** to include "forest-like areas" and **unclassified or community forests**.

Challenge to 2023 Forest Act Amendments:**What's Changing?**

The **amendments** to the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** now **limit the definition of 'forest'** to:

- **Notified forests**
- **Areas officially recorded as forests after October 25, 1980**

Why Is This Controversial?

- **Petitioners argue** that this **excludes 1.97 lakh sq. km** of India's total **7.13 lakh sq. km forest cover** from legal protection.
- This could lead to **massive deforestation**, **loss of biodiversity**, and **ecological imbalance**.

Supreme Court's Final Order:

- **States & UTs** must complete the **forest land identification process** in "letter and spirit" within **six months**.
- The **Central Government** is responsible for **submitting a final report** to the **Supreme Court**.

Key Features of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023:**Exemptions for Strategic & Developmental Projects:**

- **Forest land within 100 km of international borders** can be **used for security-related projects**.
- Allows **up to 10 hectares** for development in **Naxal-affected areas**.
- Permits **up to 5 hectares** for **public utility projects** like roads, schools, and hospitals.

Promotion of Afforestation:

- Encourages **reforestation** and **tree plantations** to **increase green cover**.

Redefining 'Forest':

- Narrows the definition to **notified forests** and those **recorded after October 25, 1980**.

Permitted Activities:

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- Allows eco-tourism projects, safaris, and zoos, subject to approved management plans.

Controversies & Legal Challenges:

Environmental Concerns:

- Critics argue the new law eases forest land diversion, which could threaten biodiversity and weaken environmental protections.

Supreme Court's Stand:

- **February 2024 Order:** The SC directed all states to continue following the 1996 TN Godavarman judgment until they finalize forest land records.

Mandatory Reforestation: Any forest land diverted for development must be compensated with afforestation elsewhere.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's latest directive underscores the **urgent need for forest conservation**. While the **new amendments aim to balance development and environmental protection**, concerns remain over forest land diversion and biodiversity loss. The coming months will be crucial as States & UTs work to comply with the SC's orders.

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Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC) is Slowing Down, Scientists Warn

Context: Recent studies indicate that the **Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC)** could weaken by **up to 20% by 2050** if high carbon emissions persist. This could have profound consequences for global climate patterns and marine ecosystems.



Understanding the Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC):

- **Earth's Most Powerful Ocean Current:** The ACC is the largest and strongest wind-driven current, encircling Antarctica in a clockwise direction, propelled by intense westerly winds.
- **A Unique Global Connector:** It is the only ocean current that flows around the entire planet, linking the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans.
- **Crucial for Climate & Ecosystem Balance:**
 - Acts as a **cold-water barrier**, preventing warmer waters from reaching Antarctica.
 - Plays a key role in **absorbing excess heat and carbon dioxide**, helping regulate global temperatures.
 - **Prevents invasive species** (e.g., bull kelp, shrimp, mollusks) from disrupting Antarctica's fragile ecosystem.

Why is the ACC Weakening?

- **Shifts in Ocean Salinity:** The **rapid melting of Antarctic ice shelves** is altering **Antarctic Bottom Water (AABW)**, a deep-sea current crucial to maintaining the ACC's strength.
- **Changing Wind Patterns:** Climate change is **modifying westerly wind flows** in the Southern Hemisphere, impacting ocean circulation.
- **A Dangerous Feedback Loop:** **Reduced sea ice increases warming and freshwater influx**, further destabilizing the ACC in a **self-reinforcing cycle**.

Potential Consequences of a Slower ACC:

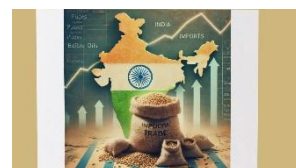
- **Increased Climate Instability:** More **extreme weather events** in different parts of the world.
- **Faster Global Warming:** The ocean's ability to **absorb excess carbon dioxide weakens**, accelerating climate change.
- **Threat to Antarctic Ecosystems:** Invasive species could **disrupt the delicate Antarctic food web**.
- **Disruptions in Global Ocean Circulation:** A weakening AABW could alter major **ocean currents**, affecting marine life and climate worldwide.

The slowing of the ACC is a stark reminder of how **climate change is reshaping Earth's natural systems**. Urgent action is needed to **reduce emissions and mitigate further disruptions** to this critical ocean current.



India's Shrinking Agriculture Trade Surplus: Causes & Implications

Context: India's agriculture trade surplus has declined from **\$10.6 billion (April-December 2023-24)** to **\$8.2 billion** in the same period of the current fiscal year, signaling shifts in global and domestic agricultural trade dynamics.



India's Agricultural Trade Status:

- **Net Agricultural Exporter:** India continues to be a **net exporter** of agri-commodities, with exports consistently surpassing imports.
- **Growth in Agri Exports:** Agricultural exports increased **6.5%**, rising from **\$35.2 billion (April-December 2023)** to **\$37.5 billion (April-December 2024)**—a **1.9% higher growth** compared to overall merchandise exports.
- **Rising Agri Imports:** Farm imports surged **18.7%** from **\$24.6 billion** to **\$29.3 billion** over the same period, **outpacing India's overall goods import growth of 7.4%**.
- **Shrinking Trade Surplus:** The surplus, which peaked at **\$27.7 billion in 2013-14**, fell to **\$8.1 billion in 2016-17**, rebounded to **\$20.2 billion in 2020-21**, and dropped to **\$16 billion in 2023-24**. The current fiscal is witnessing a further decline.

Key Reasons for the Narrowing Surplus:

- **Declining Exports:** Exports fell from **\$43.3 billion (2013-14)** to **\$35.6 billion (2019-20)**, while imports rose from **\$15.5 billion** to **\$21.9 billion**.
- **Plunge in Global Commodity Prices:** The **FAO Food Price Index** dropped from **119.1 (2013-14)** to **96.4 (2019-20)**, making Indian exports less competitive.
- **Increased Competition:** Lower global prices weakened India's export competitiveness and increased vulnerability to cheaper imports.
- **Drop in Marine Exports:** Marine product exports fell from **\$8.1 billion (2022-23)** to **\$7.4 billion (2023-24)**, mainly affecting frozen shrimp exports to the **US (34.5%)**, **China (19.6%)**, and the **EU (14%)**.
- **Political Changes in Key Markets:** **Stricter import policies** under the new US administration could further affect India's seafood exports.
- **Export Restrictions on Sugar & Wheat:** Government-imposed restrictions, driven by **concerns over domestic availability and food inflation**, led to a **sharp decline in sugar exports** from **\$5.8 billion (2022-23)** to **\$2.8 billion (2023-24)**.
- **High Dependence on Imports:**
 - **Edible Oils & Pulses Dominate Imports:** Rising global edible oil prices (due to the **Russia-Ukraine war**) increased India's import bill.
 - **Decline in Domestic Pulse Production:** Pulse imports **could exceed \$5 billion**, marking a record high.



- **Spices Trade Deficit:** India's import of pepper (34,028 tonnes) and cardamom (9,084 tonnes) exceeded its exports of 17,890 tonnes and 7,449 tonnes, respectively.
- **Collapse in Cotton Exports:** Cotton exports declined from \$4.3 billion (2011-12) to \$781.4 million (2022-23) and \$1.1 billion (2023-24) despite India being the largest global producer (23% of total production) and the third-largest exporter (11% share) in 2022.

Way Forward:

- **Promote Value-Added Agricultural Exports:** Boost exports of processed foods, spices, and organic products to enhance revenue.
- **Ensure a Stable Trade Environment:** Help farmers align production with market signals for better returns.
- **Limit Export Restrictions:** Avoid unnecessary bans on processed and organic exports unless crucial for food security.

India needs strategic interventions to revive export growth, improve competitiveness, and ensure a balanced trade policy that benefits both farmers and consumers.

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ISRO Successfully Conducts Power Head Test for Semi-Cryogenic Engine

Context: The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has achieved a significant milestone by successfully conducting the **Power Head Test Article (PHTA)** for its **SE2000 semi-cryogenic engine**. This test is a crucial step in advancing India's space propulsion technology.

Understanding the Power Head Test Article (PHTA):

Purpose of PHTA:

The PHTA serves to **validate the integrated performance** of essential subsystems, including:

- **Gas Generator**
- **Turbo Pumps**
- **Pre-burner**
- **Control Components**

Significance of PHTA:

This test is **critical for the development** of ISRO's **semi-cryogenic engine**, ensuring reliability and efficiency in future space missions.

The Role of Cryogenic Stages in Space Launch Vehicles:

A **cryogenic engine** is the **final stage** of a launch vehicle, utilizing **cryogenic fuels stored as liquids** instead of gases. In space, where oxygen is absent, rockets carry their own **oxidiser** to support combustion.

What is Cryogenics?

Cryogenics involves the study of materials at **extremely low temperatures (below -150°C)** and utilizes **cryogenic fluids** such as:

- **Liquid Nitrogen (LN2)**
- **Liquid Oxygen (LOX)**
- **Liquid Hydrogen (LH2)**

Applications of Cryogenics:

Cryogenics has diverse applications across multiple fields, including:

- **Space Exploration**
- **Medical Technology**
- **Food Preservation**
- **Industrial Gas Production**
- **Superconductivity**

Semi-Cryogenic Engine: A Game-Changer:

Propellants Used:

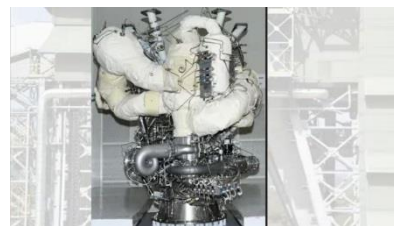
- Utilizes **Liquid Oxygen (LOX)** and **Kerosene**, making it **safer and less toxic** compared to **cryogenic engines** that use **liquid hydrogen**.

Key Advantages:

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- **Higher Thrust:** Delivers a powerful 2,000 kiloNewtons (kN) thrust.
- **Increased Payload Capacity:** Due to the lighter kerosene fuel, it enhances payload capability for launch vehicles.

Cryogenic vs. Semi-Cryogenic Engines: Key Differences

Feature	Cryogenic Engine	Semi-Cryogenic Engine
Propellants	LOX & LH2	LOX & Kerosene
Storage Temperature	-253°C for LH2	Kerosene stored at normal temperature
Thrust	Higher specific impulse, lower density	Higher density impulse, more thrust per volume
Complexity	Complex handling & storage	Easier to handle & store
Reusability	Lower potential	Higher potential due to simpler components

Next-Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV): Paving the Future:

ISRO is developing the **Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV)**, a **human-rated** rocket designed for future space missions, including Gaganyaan.

Key Features of NGLV:

- **High Payload Capacity:** Can carry up to 30 tons to Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
- **Reusable First Stage:** Enhances cost-efficiency and sustainability.
- **Advanced Propulsion:**
 - **First & Second Stages:** Powered by LOX engines.
 - **Upper Stage:** Equipped with a cryogenic engine.

Successful Recovery Tests:

ISRO has successfully demonstrated the **recovery of the first stage** of the NGLV, a crucial step towards developing a **fully reusable launch system**.

Conclusion:

The successful **PHTA test for the semi-cryogenic engine** marks a major leap forward in **India's space capabilities**. With advancements in **semi-cryogenic propulsion and reusable launch technology**, ISRO is positioning itself for **future deep-space exploration and human spaceflight missions**.

Pashu Aushadhi Kendras: Affordable Veterinary Medicines Under LHDCP

Context: The government is set to establish 'Pashu Aushadhi' stores across India to offer **affordable generic veterinary medicines**. This initiative is a crucial part of the revised **Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDCP)**, recently approved by the **Union Cabinet** led by PM Modi.



Inspired by the Success of Janaushadhi Kendras:

Janaushadhi Kendras: A Proven Model

The **Pashu Aushadhi** initiative is based on the successful model of **Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMBJKs)**, which provide **low-cost generic medicines** for humans.

Current Reach of Janaushadhi Kendras:

- Over 10,300 PMBJKs operate across India under the **Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers**.
- **Janaushadhi Diwas** is observed on **March 7**.

Extending Benefits to Animal Healthcare:

While **PMBJKs** cater to human healthcare, **Pashu Aushadhi Kendras** will provide **cost-effective, non-branded veterinary medicines** to support farmers and livestock owners.

Enhancing Livestock Health Through LHDCP:

The **Union Cabinet**, chaired by **PM Modi**, has revised the **Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDCP)** to strengthen animal healthcare and **disease prevention**.

Key Components of LHDCP:

1. **National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP)** – Focuses on eliminating major livestock diseases.
2. **Livestock Health & Disease Control (LH&DC)** – Includes three sub-components:
 - **Critical Animal Disease Control Programme (CADCP)** – Targets severe livestock diseases.
 - **Veterinary Hospital & Dispensary Strengthening (ESVHD-MVU)** – Provides **mobile veterinary services** for doorstep animal healthcare.
 - **Assistance to States for Disease Control (ASCAD)** – Supports state-level disease prevention initiatives.
3. **Pashu Aushadhi Kendras (New Component)** – Enhances access to **affordable veterinary medicines** via **PM-Kisan Samridhi Kendras** and **Cooperative Societies**.

Financial Allocation:

The **total budget** for LHDCP (2024-2026) is ₹3,880 crore, with ₹75 crore earmarked for **Pashu Aushadhi Kendras** to ensure availability of **affordable veterinary medicines**.

Impact and Benefits of LHDCP:

Key Objectives:

- **Disease Prevention** – Controls major diseases like **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**, **Brucellosis**, **PPR**, **Classical Swine Fever**, and **Lumpy Skin Disease** through vaccination and immunization.



- **Enhanced Veterinary Infrastructure** – Strengthens disease surveillance and mobile veterinary services.
- **Economic and Social Growth** –
 - Increases **livestock productivity**
 - **Prevents financial losses** for farmers
 - Generates **rural employment**
 - Encourages **entrepreneurship** in veterinary services

Significance of Pashu Aushadhi Kendras:

India's Vast Livestock Population:

According to the **20th Livestock Census (2019)**, India has a **livestock population of 535.78 million**, including **302.79 million bovines** (cattle, buffalo, mithun, and yak).

Challenges Posed by Livestock Diseases:

Common diseases such as **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**, **Brucellosis**, **Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)**, **Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF)**, and **Lumpy Skin Disease** cause **significant productivity losses**.

Despite vaccination efforts, **farmers still bear high out-of-pocket expenses** on veterinary medicines, highlighting the need for **affordable alternatives** like Pashu Aushadhi Kendras.

Integrating Traditional Veterinary Medicine:

Ethnoveterinary Practices at Pashu Aushadhi Kendras

Apart from generic medicines, **Pashu Aushadhi Kendras** will offer **ethnoveterinary remedies** rooted in **traditional knowledge** for treating livestock ailments.

Compilation of Indigenous Treatments:

The **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)** has documented **traditional herbal formulations** to treat conditions such as:

- **Mastitis**
- **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)** – Treats mouth and foot lesions
- **Fever & Diarrhoea** in livestock

Key Ingredients in Ethnoveterinary Medicine:

Natural formulations include:

oriander, Garlic, Bay Leaves, Pepper, Cumin, Turmeric, Chirata, Betel, Tulsi, Neem, Sweet Basil, Jaggery, and Onions

These ingredients have been traditionally used to **treat infections, fever, and digestive issues in animals**.

Conclusion: The launch of **Pashu Aushadhi Kendras** is a transformative step in **India's veterinary healthcare system**, ensuring **affordable and accessible medicines** for livestock owners. By integrating **modern medicine with traditional remedies**, this initiative will **boost livestock productivity, reduce economic losses, and enhance rural livelihoods**.

USAID Funding Cuts in India: Impact on Health, 5G, and Development Initiatives

Context: US President Donald Trump announced the implementation of reciprocal tariffs on trade partners starting April 2, regardless of their economic status. In his Joint Address to Congress, he criticized both friendly and unfriendly nations, including India, China, and the European Union, for imposing higher tariffs on US products. Trump highlighted India's over 100% auto tariffs and claimed that countries like China and South Korea impose significantly higher duties compared to the US. He argued that these disparities have persisted for decades, despite US military and economic support to some of these nations.

**Current Status of Trade Between India and USA:**

As per U.S. estimates, the U.S. total goods trade with India was an estimated \$129.2 billion in 2024.

- The U.S. goods exports to India in 2024 were \$41.8 billion, up 3.4% (\$1.4 billion) from 2023.
- U.S. goods imports from India totalled \$87.4 billion in 2024, up 4.5% (\$3.7 billion) from 2023.
- The U.S. goods trade deficit with India was \$45.7 billion in 2024, a 5.4% increase (\$2.4 billion) over 2023.

Uncertainty for India Amid US Tariff Plans:

US President Donald Trump reiterated his criticism of India's high tariffs, particularly in the auto sector, where duties exceed 100%. His remarks signal that ongoing trade negotiations may not secure concessions for India, especially on reciprocal tariffs set to take effect from April 2.

Bilateral Trade Agreement at Risk:

India and the US are working on a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), with Indian officials seeking relief from tariffs, including the 25% duty on steel and aluminum. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in the US to discuss the issue with United States Trade Representative (USTR) who is overseeing Trump's tariff policies.

Concerns Over US Commitment to Trade Deals:

Trade experts warn that Trump's tariff decisions, such as the 25% duties on Canada and Mexico, indicate a disregard for WTO norms and existing trade agreements. The imposition of these tariffs raises doubts about America's adherence to future trade deals, including one with India.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the trade deal between the US, Canada, and Mexico, had been in place since January 1994. However, Trump was dissatisfied with its terms and, during his first term, replaced it with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2018-19. Trump's tariffs on Canada and Mexico violate USMCA and highlight his disregard for negotiated trade agreements.

Farm Sector Vulnerability Amid US Tariff Plans:

India's agricultural sector is highly vulnerable to US reciprocal tariffs due to significant differences in tariff rates between the two countries. Farmers' unions continue to push for a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP), adding to the sector's sensitivity.

**High Tariff Disparity Between India and the US:**

According to an ICRIER report, India imposes an average tariff of 17% compared to 3.3% by the US. The gap is even wider in agriculture, where India's simple average tariff is 39% and the trade-weighted rate is 65%, while the US maintains much lower rates of 5% and 4%, respectively.

Auto and Pharma Sectors Face Tariff Risks:

India's automobile and pharmaceutical sectors, among its most successful industries, face potential setbacks due to US reciprocal tariffs. With countries demanding greater access to India's protected markets, these industries may see higher costs and reduced competitiveness in the US.

Strategies for Indian Industries:

A GTRI report suggests that Indian firms should explore alternative export markets such as Europe, Southeast Asia, and Africa, where tariff barriers are lower. Additionally, forming joint ventures with American firms or setting up assembly units in the US could help mitigate the impact of tariffs.

US Challenges WTO's Relevance and Policies:

The US 2025 Trade Policy Agenda, released on March 3, claims that the World Trade Organization (WTO) is losing its relevance and has deviated from its original purpose of promoting open, market-oriented trade.

The document criticizes the WTO's Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions, which allow developing countries like India to access benefits such as extended transition periods, higher tariff bindings, and subsidies. It argues that nations can claim SDT status by self-declaring as 'developing,' without objective criteria.

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AI Kosha: India's Secure AI Data Platform

Context: The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) has launched AI Kosha, a secure AI datasets platform, along with the IndiaAI Compute Portal, to accelerate AI research and development in India.

Announced on the IndiaAI Mission's anniversary, this initiative aims to democratize AI access, enhance AI competency in governance, and support AI startups and researchers by providing seamless access to AI datasets and tools.



What is AI Kosha?

AI Kosha is a centralized and secure AI innovation platform designed to facilitate AI research and development in India. It provides access to high-quality datasets, AI models, and development tools, empowering researchers, startups, and enterprises to build cutting-edge AI solutions.

- **Developed By:** MeitY under the IndiaAI Mission

Key Features of AI Kosha:

AI Dataset Repository:

- Hosts **300+ datasets** and **80+ AI models** to accelerate AI research and development.

AI Sandbox Environment:

- Provides an **integrated development environment (IDE)** with essential tools and tutorials for AI model training.

Content Discoverability:

- Uses **AI-readiness scoring** to help researchers find the most relevant datasets.

Advanced Security & Access Control:

- Implements **data encryption** (both **at rest and in motion**) to ensure secure data handling.
- Offers **API-based secure access** and **real-time malicious traffic filtering** to protect data integrity.

Permission-Based Access:

- Features **tiered access levels** for researchers, startups, and government agencies, ensuring responsible data usage.

Benefits of AI Kosha:

Accelerates AI Research:

- Provides **high-quality datasets** and **pre-trained models**, reducing the time required for AI development.

Enhances AI Innovation:

- Enables **startups, researchers, and enterprises** to build **real-world AI solutions** efficiently.

Strengthens AI Security:

- Promotes **ethically sourced, consent-based datasets**, ensuring **responsible AI development**.

Boosts AI Adoption in Public Sector:

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- Supports AI-driven applications in **governance, healthcare, and education**, improving public services.

Challenges & Limitations:

Limited Dataset Variety:

- Currently, most datasets are sourced from **government and research institutions**, limiting access to **real-world commercial data**.

Access Restrictions:

- Strict **security protocols** may create challenges for **private-sector innovators** seeking seamless data retrieval.

Early-Stage Development:

- AI Kosha is still **evolving**, requiring **greater industry participation** for wider expansion and adoption.

Conclusion:

With **AI Kosha**, India is taking a significant step towards **building a robust AI ecosystem**, fostering innovation, and ensuring **secure and responsible AI development**. As the platform evolves, **collaboration between government, academia, and industry** will be key to unlocking its full potential.

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Protests Halt Basalt Mining in West Bengal

Context: The **basalt mining** activities at the **Deocha-Pachami-Dewanganj-Harisingha (DPDH) coal project** in **Birbhum district, West Bengal**, have been **halted** due to intense **protests by local villagers**. The opposition stems from concerns about environmental degradation and the impact on livelihoods.

Understanding Basalt Mining:

Basalt mining involves the extraction of **basalt rock**, a **dense, durable volcanic stone** used in various **industrial applications**. The primary method of extraction is **quarrying**, which involves digging deep trenches or pits to access **basalt deposits**.

Environmental Concerns:

Mining operations have several **environmental implications**, including:

- **Air Pollution:** Emissions from mining equipment, vehicular movement, and dust from unpaved roads contribute to poor air quality.
- **Soil Degradation:** Continuous quarrying affects soil fertility and landscape stability.
- **Carbon Sequestration Potential:** Interestingly, **basalt naturally absorbs CO₂** from the atmosphere, locking it within its mineral structure. Using basalt in **construction** helps store **CO₂ long-term**, offsetting carbon emissions.

Key Applications of Basalt:

Due to its **hardness and durability**, basalt is widely used in various industries:

- **Construction:** Used in **building blocks, tiles, and slabs**.
- **Agriculture:** **Crushed basalt** acts as a **natural fertilizer**, rejuvenating weathered soils and enhancing plant growth.
- **Infrastructure:** **Geogrid meshes** made from **basalt fibers** reinforce roads, improving stability and extending road lifespan.
- **Insulation:** **Basalt fibers** serve as **thermal and acoustic insulators**, improving **energy efficiency** in buildings.

Major Basalt Zones and Mines in India:

1. **Deccan Traps:** One of the largest **volcanic provinces**, covering most of **west-central India**.
2. **Deocha-Pachami Coal Block:** India's **largest coal reserve**, containing **12.31 billion tonnes** of **coal and basalt deposits**.
3. **Rajmahal Basalts:** Located in the **Rajmahal Hills of Jharkhand**, extending into the **Bengal Basin**.
4. **Bombay Area Basalts:** Found in **Mumbai, Salsette, and Trombay**, belonging to the **Upper Deccan Group**.

The recent protests at **Deocha-Pachami** highlight the ongoing debate between **economic development** and **environmental sustainability**. The future of **basalt mining** in this region will depend on how authorities balance these concerns.





Could Europe's Eutelsat Replace Starlink in Ukraine?

Context: Ukraine has been heavily reliant on **Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet** to maintain **military communications** after its traditional **fixed-line and mobile networks** suffered damage from **Russian airstrikes**. Starlink has also played a crucial role in ensuring **civilian internet access** across the country.



However, concerns over a potential **loss of Starlink access** have fueled discussions about alternative providers, with a strong focus on **Eutelsat**, a European competitor.

Eutelsat: A Viable Alternative?

- **Who is Eutelsat?**

Eutelsat, a **Franco-British satellite company**, has been providing **satellite communication services in Ukraine**. After **merging with OneWeb in 2023**, it became the only other operator with an **active Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite constellation**, apart from Starlink.

- **Network Capabilities:**

- Eutelsat operates around **630 LEO satellites**, complemented by **35 geostationary satellites**.
- While **Starlink offers speeds up to 200 Mbps**, Eutelsat provides speeds of **150 Mbps**.
- Eutelsat's services are **more expensive**, with terminals costing up to **\$10,000**, compared to **Starlink's \$589**, and monthly plans ranging from **\$95 to \$440**.

Other Satellite Internet Alternatives:

- **SES (Luxembourg):**

- SES provides services through its **O3b mPOWER constellation in Medium Earth Orbit (MEO)**.
- While mainly catering to **corporate, government, and military clients**, it **does not offer direct-to-consumer services** like Starlink and Eutelsat.

With **growing geopolitical tensions**, the future of **Ukraine's satellite connectivity** remains uncertain, making **Eutelsat a potential, yet costlier, alternative to Starlink**.

ASI's Underwater Exploration Off Dwarka Coast:

Project Overview:

The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has launched a fresh phase of **underwater exploration** off the **Dwarka coast in Gujarat** to uncover and safeguard **India's submerged cultural heritage**. The **Ministry of Culture** officially announced the initiative.

Expert Team Leading the Mission:

A team of **five archaeologists** is conducting the survey near **Gomati Creek** under the leadership of:

- **Prof. Alok Tripathi** – Additional Director-General (Archaeology)
- **H.K. Nayak** – Director (Excavations and Explorations)
- **Dr. Aparajita Sharma** – Assistant Superintending Archaeologist
- **Poonam Vind and Rajkumari Barbina**

This marks a **historic first** with significant participation of **women archaeologists** in an **ASI-led underwater mission**.

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**Renewed Focus on Underwater Archaeology:**

- The project is part of the **revived Underwater Archaeology Wing (UAW)** of ASI, dedicated to **offshore surveys and underwater excavations** in **Dwarka and Bet Dwarka**.
- Since the **1980s**, the UAW has led several key explorations, including:
 - **Bangaram Island (Lakshadweep)**
 - **Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu)**
 - **Loktak Lake (Manipur)**
 - **Elephanta Island (Maharashtra)**

Collaborations and Previous Discoveries:

- **ASI** has worked closely with the **Indian Navy** and **other research organizations** to protect **submerged heritage sites**.
- **Between 2005 and 2007**, ASI's offshore excavations in Dwarka uncovered **stone sculptures and anchors**, laying the groundwork for further exploration.

Preserving India's Submerged Legacy:

The ongoing **underwater investigations** are crucial in **understanding ancient structures** submerged along the **Dwarka coastline**. The findings from this research could offer **valuable insights** into **India's rich maritime history and cultural heritage**.

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