



Weekly Current Affairs



To The Point

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Iran Declines to Resume Nuclear Deal Negotiations with the U.S.

Context: Iran has **refused to re-enter negotiations** with the United States regarding its nuclear program. This decision follows years of tension, especially after the U.S. withdrawal from the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** in 2018.



Reasons Behind Iran's Decision:

- The Trump administration imposed **harsh sanctions** on Iran, particularly targeting its **oil industry**, as part of a “**maximum pressure**” strategy.
- Former President Trump **demanding negotiations**, warning of possible **military action** if Iran refused.
- Iran's **Foreign Minister** declared that Iran would only negotiate with the **remaining JCPOA members** (Europe, Russia, and China) but **not with the U.S.**

Understanding the JCPOA (2015):

Participants:

- **Iran**
- **P5+1:** The five **permanent members** of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the U.S.) plus **Germany**
- **European Union** (Participated in negotiations)

Iran's Commitments Under the JCPOA:

- **Nuclear Restrictions:** Iran agreed **not to produce highly enriched uranium or plutonium** for nuclear weapons. Its **nuclear facilities** (Fordow, Natanz, Arak) were restricted to **civilian purposes**.
- **Centrifuge Limits:** Iran limited its **centrifuges** and reduced its **enriched uranium stockpile**.
 - **5% enrichment:** For nuclear power.
 - **20% enrichment:** For research or medical use.
 - **90% enrichment:** For nuclear weapons (not allowed under JCPOA).
- **Monitoring & Verification:** Iran allowed **unrestricted access** to **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors**, ensuring compliance.
- **Joint Commission Oversight:** A commission was set up to **monitor implementation** and resolve disputes.

Commitments from Other Signatories:

- **Sanctions Relief:** The EU, UN, and U.S. **lifted nuclear-related sanctions** but kept restrictions on Iran's **ballistic missile program, support for terrorism, and human rights abuses**.
- **Oil & Financial Transactions:** The U.S. **partially lifted sanctions** on Iran's **oil exports** but kept financial restrictions.
- **UN Arms & Missile Ban:** Lifted after **five years**, provided **IAEA confirmed Iran's compliance**.
- **Violation & Sanctions “Snapback”:** If Iran violated the deal, the **UN Security Council** could vote to **reinstate sanctions**.

Breakdown of the Deal & Rising Tensions:

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- **Trump's Withdrawal (2018):** The U.S. **exited the deal**, prompting Iran to **resume nuclear activities**.
- **Iran's Escalation (2023):** Iran enriched uranium **to near weapons-grade levels**, alarming the international community.
- **Expiration of Key Provisions (2023-2024):** Several JCPOA restrictions began **to expire**, raising concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Goals of the JCPOA:

- **Delay Nuclear Weapon Development:** The agreement aimed to **extend Iran's "breakout time"** (the time needed to build a nuclear weapon) from **a few months to at least a year**.
- **Prevent Regional Conflict:** The deal sought to avoid a **military response from Israel** or a **nuclear arms race in the Middle East**.

Challenges to Renegotiation:

- **Deep Mistrust:** Decades of **hostility** and past **diplomatic failures** have made **trust-building difficult**.
- **Conflicting Goals:** The U.S. seeks a **broad, stricter agreement**, while Iran wants a **return to the original JCPOA**.
- **Domestic Political Pressure:** **Hardliners in both Iran and the U.S. oppose compromise**, making diplomatic progress difficult.

Conclusion:

Iran's refusal to negotiate with the U.S. underscores **worsening diplomatic relations** and a **growing nuclear threat**. With key JCPOA provisions **expiring**, the risk of a **regional crisis** looms larger than ever.

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Seagrass Conservation: A Key to Global Biodiversity

Context: A recent study in *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* warns that **seagrass ecosystems are declining at an alarming rate of 1-2% per year** due to human activities. These vital marine habitats play a **crucial role in climate action, biodiversity conservation, and coastal protection**, yet they remain highly vulnerable.

**What Are Seagrasses?**

Seagrasses are **underwater flowering plants** that form **dense marine meadows**. They evolved from terrestrial plants, adapting to life in saltwater. Unlike **seaweed (which is algae)**, seagrasses have **roots, stems, leaves**, and can produce **flowers and seeds**.

Why Seagrass Ecosystems Matter**1. Climate Action & Carbon Sequestration:**

Seagrasses act as the **“lungs of the sea”**, absorbing **carbon up to 35 times faster** than tropical rainforests, making them **essential in combating climate change**.

2. Marine Biodiversity & Wildlife Protection:

- Provide **nursery habitats** for commercial fish species.
- Offer **shelter to endangered marine species**, including sea turtles and seahorses.

3. Coastal Protection:

- Act as **natural barriers**, reducing coastal **erosion and storm impact**.
- Help **stabilize shorelines**, protecting coastal communities.

4. Economic Significance:

Seagrass meadows contribute **\$6.4 trillion annually** to the global economy by:

- Supporting **fisheries** and **sustainable tourism**.
- Enhancing **livelihoods of coastal communities**.

Seagrass Ecosystems in India:

With a **coastline of 11,098 km (2023-24)**, India has **extensive seagrass meadows** in:

- **Gulf of Mannar**
- **Palk Bay**
- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**
- **Lakshadweep Islands**
- **Gulf of Kutch**

Threats to Seagrass Ecosystems:

1. **Human Activities:** **Urbanization, pollution, and agricultural runoff** degrade seagrass beds.
2. **Weak Law Enforcement:** Lack of strict regulations hampers **conservation efforts**.
3. **Biodiversity Loss:** **Unregulated fishing, boating, and dredging** destroy seagrass meadows.

Global and Indian Conservation Efforts:

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**Global Success Stories:**

- **Seagrass Watch:** A citizen science program that trains volunteers and NGOs to **monitor and conserve** seagrass habitats.
- **Blue Carbon Initiative:** Focuses on **carbon sequestration** in coastal ecosystems, including seagrasses, mangroves, and salt marshes.

Indian Conservation Initiatives:

- **National Policy on Marine Fisheries (2017):** Recognizes **seagrass meadows** as **essential ecosystems**, along with **mangroves and coral reefs**.
- **Climate Resilience Project:** Implemented in **Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha**, with funding from the **Global Climate Fund (GCF)**.
- **Seagrass Restoration in Gulf of Mannar & Palk Bay:** Focuses on **ecosystem recovery and protection**.

Conclusion:

Seagrass conservation is **vital for biodiversity, climate stability, and economic sustainability**. Strengthening **protection policies, restoration projects, and global collaboration** is essential to **reverse seagrass decline and safeguard marine ecosystems** for future generations.

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U.S. Withdrawal from the Loss and Damage Fund: A Setback for Climate Justice

Context: The United States has withdrawn from the board of the **Loss and Damage Fund (LDF)**, a move that raises concerns over global climate finance and accountability.

Trump Administration's Climate Disengagement:

This decision aligns with the Trump administration's **pattern of withdrawing from international climate agreements**, including:

- **Exiting the Paris Agreement**
- **Halting U.S. scientists' participation** in the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**
- **Cancelling contributions** to the **Green Climate Fund**



What is the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF)?

- **Established at COP27 (2022)** under the **UNFCCC** framework.
- Provides **financial support** to regions facing **climate-induced economic and non-economic losses**.
- Covers disasters such as **extreme weather events** (hurricanes, floods) and **slow-onset changes** (rising sea levels, desertification).
- **Governed by a Board** that allocates funds, with the **World Bank** serving as an **interim trustee**.

Objectives of the LDF:

- **Aid vulnerable developing nations** in coping with **climate-related disasters**.
- Bridge the financial gap between **climate adaptation, mitigation, and recovery efforts**.

Concerns Over the LDF's Effectiveness:

- **Slow Fund Disbursement:** Climate funds often **fail to reach affected communities immediately**, particularly at the **sub-national level**.
- **Growing Climate Crisis:** Without **aggressive emission reductions**, more countries will **suffer irreversible climate impacts**, increasing the need for **mitigation, adaptation, and financial aid**.
- **U.S. Withdrawal Undermines Climate Justice:** As one of the **world's largest historical polluters**, the U.S. **must be held accountable** for its role in climate-induced damage.

India's Climate Finance Approach:

- India faced **\$56 billion in weather-related damages (2019-2023)** but has focused more on **mitigation than adaptation**.
- India's **Union Budget 2024** introduced a **climate finance taxonomy**, raising hopes for **better access to global climate funds**.
- However, **lack of clear guidelines** on accessing LDF funds may leave **vulnerable communities exposed**.

Conclusion & The Way Forward:

- The **Loss and Damage Fund must address** inefficiencies in existing climate finance institutions like the **Green Climate Fund**.
- Tackling the **root cause of climate change—carbon emissions—is crucial** for long-term solutions.
- India needs a **comprehensive legal and policy framework** to **streamline climate finance** for **adaptation and loss & damage**, ensuring **locally led adaptation strategies** benefit the most affected communities.

**Boosting Value Addition in Spices: Path to Achieving \$10 Billion Export Target by 2030**

Context: Despite being the largest producer and exporter of spices, India holds only a 0.7% share in the global seasoning market, which is valued at \$14 billion in 2024. The World Spice Organisation (WSO) has stressed the need for enhanced value addition in the spice industry to help the Spices Board of India achieve its ambitious \$10 billion export target by 2030.

**India's Spice Export Landscape:**

- India exports 1.5 million tonnes of spices annually, valued at \$4.5 billion, covering 25% of the global spice market (worth \$20 billion).
- **Global Competition:**
 - China holds 12% of the global seasoning market.
 - The U.S. holds 11% of the global seasoning market.
- **Current Value Addition:**
 - Only 48% of Indian spice exports consist of value-added products, while the rest are exported as raw whole spices.
 - To reach the \$10 billion export target, the value-added share must rise to 70%.
- **New Market Opportunities:**
 - Nutraceutical and pharmaceutical applications for spices can unlock diverse, high-value export avenues beyond culinary use.

Growing Global Competition:

- Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil, and China are emerging as major players in the global spice trade.
- African nations have also entered the spice production sector, intensifying market competition.
- Domestically, new spice-producing regions are emerging in North-Eastern India, Odisha, and Jharkhand, boosting overall production capacity.

Spices Board of India:**Overview:**

- **Established:** 1987 under the Spices Board Act, 1986.
- **Ministry:** Operates under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.
- **Headquarters:** Kochi, Kerala.

Key Responsibilities:

- Promotion of spice exports.
- Quality control & certification of Indian spices.
- Research & development in spice cultivation.
- Farmer training and capacity building.
- Implementation of schemes supporting farmers and exporters.

Notable Initiatives:[Download Our Application](#)



- **Spice Parks:** Provide processing & value-addition infrastructure.
- **e-Spice Bazaar:** A digital marketplace connecting farmers and buyers.
- **State-of-the-art Testing Laboratories:** Located in Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Tuticorin, Kandla, and Guntur for quality assurance in spice exports.

World Spice Organisation (WSO):

- **Established:** 2011.
- **Affiliation:** Technical partner of the **All-India Spices Exporters Forum (AISEF)**.
- **Focus Areas:** Sustainability, food safety, and value addition in spices.

Key Objectives:

- Promoting sustainable spice farming.
- Ensuring food safety & quality standards.
- Educating farmers on pesticide management & organic cultivation.
- Collaborating with international regulatory bodies to standardize spice trade regulations.

Way Forward: Strengthening India's Spice Sector:

1. **Increasing Value Addition:** Expanding spice processing, packaging, and branding to enhance global competitiveness.
2. **Investment in R&D:** Developing spice-based nutraceuticals, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics to diversify exports.
3. **Strengthening Supply Chain Infrastructure:** Expanding Spice Parks and boosting digital platforms like e-Spice Bazaar.
4. **Farmer Empowerment:** Providing training and incentives for organic and sustainable farming practices.
5. **Global Market Expansion:** Strengthening trade ties with new export destinations and aligning with international quality standards.

By enhancing value addition and innovation, India can solidify its leadership in the global spice trade and achieve the ambitious \$10 billion export target by 2030.

Empower Women by Strictly Enforcing the Law – Supreme Court

Context: The Supreme Court of India has reiterated that **women do not need sympathy but empowerment**, emphasizing the **strict implementation of laws** to ensure justice. The observation was made by **Justice Bela Trivedi** on the eve of **International Women's Day**.

Justice Trivedi is one of **only two women judges** currently serving in the **Supreme Court**, alongside **Justice B.V. Nagarathna**.



Courtroom Exchange on Women's Empowerment:

Statement on "Ladies at Home":

- A **senior advocate** remarked that "**ladies at home**" need empowerment.
- **Justice Trivedi** clarified that **empowerment is necessary for all women**, not just homemakers.

Case Details: Sexual Harassment & Strangulation Attempt:

- The case, from **Tamil Nadu**, involved **allegations of sexual harassment and molestation**.
- The accused had been **in custody for seven months**.
- The **defense argued** that the case involved only a "**simple injury**", not an **attempt to murder**.

Court's Stand on the Injury:

- **Justice Trivedi rejected** the claim of a "simple injury."
- The injury was due to **strangulation with a nylon rope**, highlighting the **seriousness of the crime**.

Final Decision:

- The **Supreme Court issued a notice** to the **State government**, considering a **re-evaluation of the sentence**.
- However, it strongly emphasized the **need for strict enforcement of laws** to protect women.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions for Women's Empowerment:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 14** – Guarantees **equality before the law**.
- **Article 15(3)** – Allows the State to make **special provisions for women and children**.
- **Article 16** – Ensures **equal opportunities** in public employment.
- **Article 39(a)** – Promotes **equal livelihood opportunities** for men and women.
- **Article 42** – Directs the State to ensure **just and humane working conditions** and **maternity relief**.
- **Articles 243D & 243T** – Reserves **one-third of seats for women** in **Panchayati Raj institutions** and **urban local bodies**.

Key Legal Provisions for Women's Rights:

- The **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** – Shields women from **domestic abuse**.
- The **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** – Bans the practice of **dowry**.



- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013** – Protects women from harassment at workplaces.
- **The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 2017)** – Provides maternity leave and financial support.
- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** – Prevents child marriages.
- **The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005** – Grants equal property rights to daughters.

Government Schemes for Women's Empowerment:

Social Welfare & Protection:

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** – Promotes girl child education and prevents female foeticide.
- **One Stop Centre Scheme** – Provides legal, medical, and psychological support to women affected by violence.
- **Mahila Shakti Kendra** – Offers skill development and employment opportunities.
- **Women's Helpline (181)** – Provides immediate assistance to women in distress.

Economic & Financial Support:

- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** – Grants financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women.
- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana** – Encourages savings for a girl child's education and marriage.
- **NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)** – Supports women entrepreneurs.

Healthcare & Safety:

- **Ujjwala Scheme** – Provides free LPG connections to reduce health hazards from traditional cooking fuels.

Institutional Mechanisms for Women's Welfare:

- **National Commission for Women (NCW)** – Handles grievances and advocates for women's rights.
- **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)** – Implements policies for women's welfare and protection.

Way Forward: Ensuring Real Empowerment for Women

- **Strict Law Enforcement:** Implementing existing laws effectively to ensure swift justice for crimes against women.
- **Judicial Sensitization:** Courts must prioritize gender-sensitive interpretations of legal provisions.
- **Economic Independence:** Enhancing women's participation in entrepreneurship, workforce, and leadership roles.
- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Introducing stricter penalties for crimes like sexual harassment, domestic violence, and dowry-related offenses.
- **Raising Awareness:** Promoting legal literacy and awareness among women about their rights and available protections.

Women's empowerment goes beyond policy discussions—it requires real action, legal enforcement, and societal change. The Supreme Court's stance reinforces the urgent need for strict legal implementation to ensure true gender equality in India.



Tahawwur Hussain Rana Extradition Case

Context: The **United States Supreme Court** has rejected **Tahawwur Hussain Rana's** plea against **his extradition to India**. Rana had filed an **"Emergency Application for Stay"** after former US President **Donald Trump approved his extradition**. With this ruling, India is now set to **bring him to trial** for his alleged role in the **2008 Mumbai terror attacks**.

**Background: Rana's Involvement in 26/11 & Other Terror Cases**

- **Rana, a Pakistani-origin Canadian national**, is accused of **providing logistical support** for the **2008 Mumbai terror attacks**, which killed **166 people**.
- He allegedly helped his associate **David Coleman Headley** in **conducting reconnaissance** for the attack.
- **2009 Arrest (Chicago):**
 - Arrested for involvement in the **Mumbai attacks** and a **foiled attack on the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten**.
 - Convicted in 2013 for **supporting Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)** and sentenced to **168 months (14 years) in prison**.
 - Released on **compassionate grounds** in **2020**, but **immediately faced an extradition request from India**.

Legal Battle Over Extradition:

- **December 2019:** India formally **requested Rana's extradition** under the **India-US Extradition Treaty (1997)**.
- **Rana's Defense Argument:**
 - Claimed **"double jeopardy"**, arguing that he had **already been acquitted** of charges related to India.
- **US Magistrate's Ruling (May 2023):**
 - **Rejected his plea**, stating that the **Indian charges were legally distinct** from those in the US.
- **Subsequent Legal Challenges:**
 - Rana **appealed unsuccessfully** to the **US District Court**, the **Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals**, and finally the **US Supreme Court**, all of which **dismissed his petitions**.

India-US Extradition Treaty (1997):

The treaty allows extradition for **offenses punishable by more than one year of imprisonment** in both countries.

Extraditable Offenses:

- **Terrorism, hijacking, and crimes against protected persons** are extraditable.
- The **dual-criminality clause** ensures that an act must be a **crime in both countries** for extradition.

Non-Extraditable Offenses:

Political offenses are not extraditable, except for:



- **Murder or violent crimes against a Head of State/Government.**
- **Aircraft hijacking & sabotage.**
- **Crimes against internationally protected persons.**
- **Hostage-taking.**

The US government found "probable cause" that Rana committed **extraditable offenses under this treaty.**

US Position on Indian Extradition Requests:

Only two alleged terrorists have been extradited from the US to India:

- **Charanjeet Singh Cheema (2005)**
- **Kulbeer Singh Kulbeera (2006)**

Extradition History (2002-2018):

- **11 extraditions, mostly for financial fraud cases.**
- **65 Indian extradition requests remain pending with the US.**

Key Extradition Denials:

- **David Coleman Headley (Mumbai attacks planner) – Not extradited due to a plea bargain.**
- **Warren Anderson (Union Carbide CEO, Bhopal Gas Tragedy) – Rejected citing "insufficient evidence".**

Conclusion: What's Next for Rana?

With the **US Supreme Court rejecting his plea**, Rana's **extradition to India is imminent**. Once in India, he will **stand trial** for his alleged role in **26/11**.

This case underscores the **complexities of international extradition**, the **diplomatic challenges between India and the US**, and the **long legal battle** involved in bringing accused terrorists to justice.

India Expands U.S. Oil & LNG Imports, Strengthening Energy Partnership

Context: India is set to significantly **increase crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports** from the U.S., reinforcing energy cooperation between the two nations. This decision follows discussions between **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump**, aiming to strengthen energy security and expand trade relations.



According to a **Reuters report**, U.S. crude oil exports to India **reached 357,000 barrels per day (bpd) in February**, a sharp increase from **221,000 bpd last year**.

India's Commitment to U.S. Energy Imports:

As the **world's third-largest oil consumer**, India is heavily dependent on imports, fulfilling **85% of its crude oil needs** through foreign sources. Expanding U.S. energy imports serves multiple objectives:

- **Enhancing Energy Security:** Reducing reliance on a single region for crude oil.
- **Boosting Bilateral Trade:** Contributing to the goal of **doubling U.S.-India trade to \$500 billion** in the next five years.
- **Diversifying Energy Supply:** Strengthening resilience against **price fluctuations and geopolitical risks**.

Currently, trade between the two nations favors India, with a **\$45.7 billion trade surplus in 2024**, marking a **5.4% increase from 2023**.

Expanding U.S. Energy Supply to India:

India is actively working to establish the **United States as a key supplier of crude oil, petroleum products, and LNG**. The partnership also includes:

- **Increased hydrocarbon trade** covering crude oil, petroleum products, and ethane.
- **Growing investments** in oil and gas infrastructure.
- **Stronger collaboration** between energy companies from both countries.

Additionally, discussions have included **civil nuclear energy cooperation** and **U.S. support for India's full membership in the International Energy Agency (IEA)**.

India's Soaring Oil & Gas Demand:

In the **2023-24 financial year**, India imported **234.26 million tonnes of crude oil**, with import dependence rising to **87.8%**. Meanwhile, domestic production remained stagnant at **29.36 million tonnes**, meeting less than **13% of total demand**.

- Despite stable import volumes, **India's crude oil import bill fell to \$133.37 billion**, down from **\$157.53 billion in 2022-23**, due to lower global oil prices.
- India spent **\$22.93 billion on petroleum imports**, including **LPG and fuel oil**.
- The country imported **31.80 billion cubic meters (bcm) of LNG**, an increase from **26.30 bcm in the previous fiscal year**.

Strategic Push for Natural Gas & Clean Energy:

India aims to **increase natural gas consumption from 6% to 15% of its energy mix**, making LNG imports crucial for its energy transition. This aligns with **U.S. interests** in securing long-term LNG buyers, especially if **European demand shifts away from American gas in the future**.

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India's Diversified Energy Strategy:

While India is strengthening its energy ties with the U.S., it continues to **diversify its oil suppliers**, engaging with **Brazil, Argentina, Suriname, Canada, and Guyana**.

Russia's Growing Role in India's Energy Market:

Since the **Ukraine war**, India has significantly increased **Russian crude oil imports**, benefiting from **discounted prices** amid **G7-imposed sanctions**.

- **India purchased €49 billion worth of Russian crude in the third year of the conflict.**
- **Russian oil now accounts for 40% of India's total crude imports, compared to less than 1% before the war.**

Despite this shift, **India maintains a balanced approach**, ensuring energy security while exploring better pricing options.

India's Rising LNG Demand & Supply Challenges:

India's natural gas demand is projected to **reach 103 billion cubic meters (bcm) annually by 2030**. The demand has surged **over 10% annually in both 2023 and 2024**, signaling a new growth phase.

Challenges & Key Growth Drivers:

- **Domestic production met only 50% of gas demand in 2023**, though it's expected to **rise to 38 bcm by 2030**.
- **Three key factors** drive India's gas market transformation:
 1. **Rapid infrastructure expansion** in LNG terminals and pipelines.
 2. **Recovering domestic production**, reducing supply constraints.
 3. **Global LNG market stabilization**, improving affordability.

To stay competitive in a **price-sensitive energy market**, India is focusing on **long-term contracts, supply diversification, and strategic planning**.

Conclusion: India's Path to Energy Security:

India is **actively working to reduce its energy import dependency** through multiple strategies:

- **Expanding clean energy initiatives**, including **ethanol, compressed biogas, and biodiesel**.
- **Investing in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure** to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Securing long-term LNG partnerships**, particularly with the U.S.

By balancing **global energy partnerships**, increasing **domestic production**, and **investing in alternative fuels**, India is shaping a **resilient and sustainable energy future**.



India Backs Mauritius' Sovereignty Over Chagos Archipelago Key Highlights

Context: During his visit to Mauritius, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** will strengthen India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties with the island nation.

Ahead of the visit, **Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri** reiterated **India's full support for Mauritius' sovereignty** over the **Chagos Archipelago**. This aligns with India's **consistent stand on decolonization**, emphasizing the need for historical injustices to be corrected.



Chagos Archipelago: A Historical Overview:

The **Chagos Archipelago** is a chain of over **60 islands** in the **Indian Ocean**, located about **500 km south of the Maldives**. It forms the southernmost part of the **Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, an underwater mountain range.

Colonial History of Chagos::

- **1715-1810:** Controlled by **France** as part of its Indian Ocean territories.
- **1814:** **France ceded the islands to the UK** under the **Treaty of Paris**.
- **1965:** **The UK separated Chagos from Mauritius**—three years before granting Mauritius independence—to form the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)**.
- **1970s-Present:** **Diego Garcia**, the largest island, was leased to the **U.S. and UK** for a **joint military base**, which remains operational.

The **forced displacement of Chagos' native population** and continued British control have been long-standing points of contention.

Negotiations Over Chagos Sovereignty:

Mauritius and the UK have been engaged in **prolonged negotiations** over the **sovereignty of Chagos**.

- **The UK and U.S. have reached a political agreement to maintain Diego Garcia as a strategic military base**, while returning the **remaining Chagos islands** to Mauritius.
- On **October 3, 2024**, the **UK announced that a treaty** was being drafted to formalize this arrangement.

India's **strong backing of Mauritius** in this dispute underscores its **support for international law and post-colonial justice**.

India-Mauritius Relations: A Strong and Historic Bond:

India and Mauritius share **deep-rooted ties**, shaped by **history, culture, and economic cooperation**.

- **70% of Mauritius' population** is of **Indian origin**, making India a natural ally.
- **Mauritius was among the first countries with which India established diplomatic ties in 1948**, even before Mauritius gained independence in **1968**.
- Both nations enjoy **robust cooperation in maritime security, trade, capacity building, and cultural exchanges**.

Key Aspects of India-Mauritius Ties:

- **First Responder in Crises** – India has always supported Mauritius, including during the **COVID-19 pandemic** and **Wakashio oil spill disaster**.



- **Major FDI Partner** – Mauritius has invested **\$175 billion** into India since 2000, accounting for **25%** of India's total foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows.
- **Strategic Trade Agreement** – The **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)**, signed in **2021**, was India's first trade deal with an African country.

Significance of PM Modi's Visit to Mauritius:

PM Modi's visit to Mauritius in **March 2025** carries **major strategic importance**:

- Mauritius is a **key maritime partner** in the **Indian Ocean region**.
- **Indian Air Force contingents** and an **Indian Navy ship** will participate in the **National Day celebrations**.

Several **bilateral agreements** are expected to be signed, further boosting **trade, security, and development cooperation**.

- This marks **PM Modi's return to Mauritius after a decade**, following his last visit in **2015**.

Conclusion: Strengthening India-Mauritius Ties & Supporting Decolonization

PM Modi's visit underscores India's **commitment to deepening strategic, economic, and diplomatic ties** with Mauritius.

The **Chagos dispute** is a **critical foreign policy issue**, reflecting India's **broader support for decolonization and regional stability**. By backing Mauritius' sovereignty over Chagos, India reinforces its role as a **trusted global partner advocating for historical justice and fair international governance**.

**India's New Income Tax Bill: Digital Spaces Now Under Tax Radar**

Context: The Indian government has introduced the **Income Tax Bill, 2025**, marking a major overhaul of the country's **60-year-old tax framework**.

This bill aims to **streamline tax provisions, eliminate outdated references, and introduce new regulations** to tackle **digital tax evasion**.

**What's New?**

- A **key highlight** is the **explicit inclusion of virtual digital spaces** within the scope of **tax searches and seizures**. This means:
- **Tax officers can now access** digital assets, including **social media, emails, online investments, and crypto holdings**, during tax investigations.
- **Digital records will be treated like physical assets**, allowing tax authorities to track and seize undisclosed income.

Currently under review by the **Parliamentary Select Committee**, the bill is expected to come into force on **April 1, 2026**, once passed.

Key Provisions of the Income Tax Bill, 2025:

The **new bill expands tax authorities' powers**, redefining assets subject to **search and seizure**.

Defining Virtual Digital Space:

The bill formally **defines virtual digital space**, covering **all online platforms where financial activities, transactions, and interactions take place**.

Power to Override Access Codes:

Tax authorities will be empowered to **bypass digital access codes** to enter:

- **Social media accounts**
- **Email servers**
- **Digital trading platforms**
- **Online wallets**

This will allow deeper scrutiny of **undisclosed digital transactions**.

Expansion of Search & Seizure Under Section 247:

While the **Income Tax Act, 1961 (Section 132)** already allows authorities to inspect **electronic records**, the new bill specifically **expands this to virtual digital spaces**.

Digital Documents as Taxable Assets:

Computer systems, encrypted financial records, and digital documents will now be treated as **taxable assets**, just like **money, real estate, and gold**.

Mandatory Cooperation from Account Holders:

Under **Section 132(1)(iib)**, individuals must **provide necessary credentials** for tax audits if asked by tax authorities.

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Why Are These Changes Being Introduced?

Cracking Down on Digital Tax Evasion:

- With the rise of **crypto assets**, **online wallets**, and **offshore transactions**, authorities have struggled to track **concealed income**.
- This bill **closes the loophole** by ensuring **digital assets** are scrutinized like **physical assets**.

Modernizing India's Direct Tax Framework:

- The bill is designed to **simplify India's tax system** while making it more **effective** against **digital financial fraud**.

Aligning with Global Tax Standards:

- Many developed countries already allow tax authorities to **inspect encrypted financial records**. This bill brings **India in line** with **global best practices**.

Potential Concerns & Controversies:

- While the bill strengthens **tax enforcement**, it has sparked **debate over privacy and compliance burdens**.

Privacy & Data Protection Risks:

- Critics argue that **giving tax officials access to personal digital data** could lead to **misuse of private information**.

Increased Compliance Costs for Businesses:

- Companies may need to **enhance their digital record-keeping** and **prepare for stricter tax audits**, increasing **compliance expenses**.

Impact of the New Bill: Who Will Be Affected?

For Individuals:

- **Digital transactions** will be closely monitored.
- People using **crypto platforms**, **offshore accounts**, or **social media trading** will face **greater scrutiny**.

For Businesses:

- Companies must **ensure digital compliance** in financial reporting.
- Legal and **record-keeping costs** may increase.

For Tax Authorities:

- The bill **strengthens enforcement powers**, making it easier to **track hidden digital assets**.
- Aligns **India's tax system** with the **digital economy**.

Conclusion: A Step Forward or a Privacy Concern?

The **Income Tax Bill, 2025**, represents **one of the biggest modernizations** of India's **tax framework**.

While it aims to **prevent digital tax evasion** and **enhance tax transparency**, it also raises concerns over **privacy**, **compliance costs**, and **misuse of power**.

As the bill moves through Parliament, **finding a balance between tax enforcement and privacy rights** will be **key to ensuring fair and transparent implementation**.

North Korea Unveils Its First Nuclear-Powered Submarine: A Game-Changer in Military Strategy

Context: North Korea has officially revealed its **first-ever nuclear-powered submarine**, marking a **major leap in its naval capabilities**. State media released images of what it described as a “**nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine**”, showcasing Pyongyang’s growing military ambitions.



Submarine Specifications: A Stealthy Threat:

Reports indicate that the new **submarine weighs between 6,000 to 7,000 tonnes** and is designed to carry around **10 missiles**. The mention of “**strategic guided missiles**” suggests that the vessel is **equipped for nuclear strikes**, posing a **direct security threat to the United States and South Korea**.

North Korea’s Military Expansion: A Growing Arsenal:

This **submarine development is part of a broader military modernization plan** set forth by **Kim Jong-un in 2021**. North Korea is aggressively working on **advanced weaponry** to counter what it calls “**U.S.-led military threats**”.

Other Key Weapons Under Development:

- **Solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)** for faster, more unpredictable launches
- **Hypersonic missiles** capable of evading missile defenses
- **Spy satellites** for real-time intelligence gathering
- **Multi-warhead missiles** to overwhelm enemy defense systems

Despite being heavily **sanctioned and economically isolated**, North Korea’s ability to build a **nuclear-powered submarine** has raised **global concerns**.

Possible Russian Assistance?

Experts speculate that North Korea may have received **technological support from Russia** in exchange for **military aid in the Ukraine war**. This raises **serious geopolitical concerns**, as it suggests a **strengthening military alliance** between Pyongyang and Moscow.

Security Implications: A Silent and Deadly Threat:

One of the **biggest concerns** surrounding North Korea’s **nuclear submarine** is its ability to **launch missiles from underwater**.

Why This Is a Major Security Threat:

- **Underwater missile launches are difficult to detect in advance**, making it harder for enemies to prepare defenses.
- **Increased risk of surprise nuclear attacks**, complicating security strategies for the **U.S. and South Korea**.
- **Greater mobility and stealth** allow North Korea to **strike from unpredictable locations**, giving it a **huge strategic advantage**.

Conclusion: A New Era of Military Uncertainty

North Korea’s unveiling of a **nuclear-powered submarine** marks a **critical shift in global security dynamics**. As tensions escalate, **regional powers must adapt their defense strategies** to counter this **stealthy and unpredictable threat**.

The **global response to this military development** will be crucial in shaping the future **security landscape in the Indo-Pacific region**.



Muslim Nations Reject Trump's Gaza Plan, Back Alternative Proposal

Context: The **Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** has officially endorsed an **Egyptian-led counterproposal** to U.S. President **Donald Trump's controversial Gaza plan**. This decision comes just days after the **Arab League** ratified the plan at a high-level summit in **Cairo**.



The Egyptian Plan: A Path to Rebuilding Gaza:

- The **Egyptian proposal** prioritizes the **reconstruction of Gaza** under the administration of the **Palestinian Authority (PA)**, ensuring Palestinian self-governance.
- Trump's plan, widely condemned, aimed to **relocate Palestinian residents to Egypt or Jordan** and transform Gaza into a **commercial and tourism hub**.
- The **OIC's endorsement** calls on the **global community** to support the economic and infrastructural revival of Gaza.
- However, the plan faces **strong opposition from the U.S. and Israel**, making its implementation a diplomatic challenge.

The Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC): A Collective Voice

- The **OIC** is the **second-largest intergovernmental organization** after the **United Nations (UN)**, comprising **57 member states**.
- Established in **1969 in Rabat, Morocco**, the OIC works to **protect and promote the interests of the Muslim world** while fostering peace and international cooperation.
- **Headquarters:** Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- **India is not a member** of the OIC, though it has engaged with the organization on various occasions.

The Arab League: Strengthening Regional Unity:

- The **Arab League** was founded in **1945 in Cairo** to promote **independence, sovereignty, and cooperation** among **Arabic-speaking nations**.
- It began with **seven founding members**—**Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria**—and has since expanded to **22 member states** and **four observer nations**.
- Each country has **one vote** in the **Council of the Arab League**, with decisions **binding only for those nations that approve them**.

Global Implications and the Road Ahead:

The **OIC and Arab League's rejection** of Trump's **Gaza plan** signals a growing **regional pushback** against external interventions. The **Egyptian alternative**, though facing **political hurdles**, underscores a **unified effort to ensure Palestinian sovereignty** and **rebuild Gaza's infrastructure**. The coming months will be crucial in determining how the **international community** responds to this diplomatic shift.

**India's 58th Tiger Reserve: Madhav National Park Boosts Conservation Efforts**

Context: India has taken a significant step in **wildlife conservation** by declaring **Madhav National Park** in **Madhya Pradesh** as the **country's 58th Tiger Reserve** on **March 9, 2025**. This move highlights the government's ongoing commitment to protecting **India's tiger population**, which accounts for over **70% of the world's wild tigers**.

**Why Are Tiger Reserves Important?**

A **Tiger Reserve** is a **protected area** designated under **Project Tiger** to ensure the **long-term survival** of tigers and their ecosystems. These reserves function under the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** and operate as per the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.

Key Features of a Tiger Reserve:

- **Core Zone:** A strictly protected area where **no human activities** are allowed.
- **Buffer Zone:** Surrounding areas where **limited human activities** are permitted under eco-sensitive regulations.
- **Strict Protection Measures:** Anti-poaching laws, deforestation control, and habitat preservation are enforced.
- **Scientific Monitoring:** Use of **AI, drones, and camera traps** to track **tiger populations, prey base, and habitat conditions**.

How Does a National Park Gain Tiger Reserve Status?

The process of **designating a Tiger Reserve** involves careful scientific evaluation and government approval:

Step 1: Identification & Proposal

- A **state government** selects a national park or wildlife sanctuary with a **thriving tiger population**.
- A proposal is sent to the **NTCA** for evaluation.

Step 2: NTCA Assessment

- The **NTCA** evaluates the **tiger density, habitat quality, and threats** (such as poaching and human encroachments).
- Conservation measures and potential improvements are analyzed.

Step 3: Recommendation to the Central Government

- If approved, the proposal is sent to the **Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- Experts review the proposal and consult with stakeholders.

Step 4: Official Declaration

- Once all approvals are granted, the **Central Government** issues an **official notification**.
- A **Tiger Conservation Plan** is implemented to ensure scientific management and protection.

India's Expanding Tiger Reserves:

As of **2025**, India has **58 Tiger Reserves**, covering approximately **2.3% of the country's land area**.

Notable Facts About India's Tiger Reserves:

- **State with the Most Reserves:** Madhya Pradesh (9 reserves)
- **Largest Tiger Reserve:** Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem (Andhra Pradesh & Telangana)

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- **Smallest Tiger Reserve:** Bor Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)
- **Tiger Census 2022:** Estimated 3,167 tigers in India, indicating a **steady population growth** due to conservation efforts.

Madhav National Park: India's 58th Tiger Reserve:

On **March 9, 2025**, Madhav National Park in Shivpuri district, Madhya Pradesh, officially became a **Tiger Reserve**.

Key Highlights:

- **Tiger Population:** Five tigers, including **two newborn cubs**.
- **Repopulation Project:** Three tigers reintroduced in 2023 to restore their presence in the park.
- **Government Announcement:** Union Environment Minister **Bhupender Yadav** declared the **Tiger Reserve** status.
- **Significance:** This move strengthens **tiger conservation in Central India** and expands **protected tiger habitats**.

Madhav National Park, known for its **diverse wildlife**, is home to species like **leopards, chinkaras, and sambar deer**, contributing to a **thriving ecosystem**.

Major Challenges in Tiger Conservation:

Despite **significant progress**, India's **tiger conservation efforts** face several challenges:

1. **Habitat Destruction:** Deforestation, urbanization, and infrastructure projects threaten tiger habitats.
2. **Poaching & Illegal Wildlife Trade:** Tiger body parts are still in demand in **black markets**, making poaching a persistent threat.
3. **Human-Tiger Conflicts:** As human settlements expand, **tiger encounters increase**, leading to conflicts.
4. **Climate Change:** Altered **rainfall patterns and rising temperatures** impact the availability of prey and water sources.
5. **Insufficient Funding & Resources:** Some reserves lack **adequate financial and technical support** for effective management.

Future Strategies for Strengthening Tiger Conservation:

The **government and conservation bodies** are focusing on **innovative strategies** to secure the future of India's tigers:

- **Wildlife Corridors:** Creating **safe passageways** between tiger reserves to **prevent genetic isolation**.
- **AI & Drone Monitoring:** Using **artificial intelligence and drone surveillance** to track tigers and identify threats.
- **Stronger Anti-Poaching Laws:** Enforcing **stricter penalties and enhanced patrolling** to combat poaching.
- **Eco-Tourism & Community Involvement:** Encouraging **local communities** to participate in conservation through **sustainable tourism and employment opportunities**.

Final Thoughts: The declaration of Madhav National Park as India's 58th Tiger Reserve marks another **milestone in the nation's conservation journey**. With **scientific advancements, strict laws, and community participation**, India continues to be the **global leader in tiger conservation**. However, sustained **government commitment, international collaboration, and public awareness** will be crucial in ensuring the long-term survival of these majestic big cats.

Bridging the Gender Gap in India's Higher Judiciary

Context: Despite significant progress in **women's representation** across various fields, the **judiciary** continues to lag behind. This disparity reflects **broader societal inequalities** and **systemic barriers** that prevent women from advancing to the highest judicial positions.

Current State of Gender Representation:

According to the **State of the Judiciary Report (2023)**:

- **Women constitute only 14%** of judges in **High Courts**.
- In the **Supreme Court of India**, only **4 out of 34 judges** (9.3%) are women.
- Several High Courts, including those in **Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya, Odisha, Tripura, and Uttarakhand**, have either **no women judges or just one**.



Global Trends in Women's Representation in Judiciary:

- **Worldwide, women make up just over 25%** of judicial officers, with significant variation by region. In some areas, this figure is **below 10%**.
- **OECD countries** have shown more progress, with women comprising **54% of professional judges**, thanks to greater inclusion in legal education and judicial careers.
- The **Global Gender Gap Report** by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** highlights that countries like the **United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada** have made strides in appointing women to the judiciary, but challenges persist at **higher levels**.

Why Gender Diversity in the Judiciary Matters?

- **Diversity of Thought:** Women bring unique perspectives, enriching **judicial decision-making**.
- **Gender-Sensitive Judgments:** Cases related to **sexual violence, workplace harassment, and family law** benefit from a more **inclusive judiciary**.
- **Public Trust:** Greater representation **enhances confidence** in the judiciary, particularly among **women litigants**.

Factors Contributing to the Gender Gap:

1. Collegium System and Bias:

- The **collegium system** favors candidates from **male-dominated** social and professional circles.
- **Implicit biases** and lack of **institutional support** result in **fewer women being considered** for elevation.

2. Systemic Inequality:

- While **many women enter the legal profession**, fewer advance due to **workplace discrimination**, lack of **mentorship**, and societal expectations placing **family responsibilities disproportionately on women**.

3. Lack of Structural Support:

- **Absence of gender-friendly policies**, such as **flexible work hours** and safety measures, make it difficult for women to sustain **long legal careers**.

4. Limited Role Models and Representation:

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- With **fewer women in higher judicial positions**, younger female lawyers **lack inspiration and guidance** to pursue judicial careers.

Recommendations for Bridging the Gap:

1. Judicial Appointment Reforms:

- The **collegium system** must adopt **gender-sensitive policies** to **fairly consider** women for judicial appointments.
- **High Courts** should actively **recommend more women** for elevation to the **Supreme Court**.

2. Mentorship and Leadership Development:

- **Mentorship programs** should be introduced to help **female legal professionals** navigate their careers.
- **Senior judges** must advocate for **institutional gender parity**.

3. Workplace Policy Changes:

- Implement **family-friendly policies** such as **flexible work hours** and **better maternity leave provisions**.
- Conduct **gender-sensitization training** for judicial officers.

4. Encouraging Women in Litigation:

- More **women should be encouraged to take up litigation**, a key pathway to judicial elevation.
- The **government** should introduce **incentives and fellowships** for female advocates pursuing **higher judicial positions**.

5. Role of Supreme Court and High Courts:

- The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** and **High Court Chief Justices** must take proactive steps to **ensure gender inclusivity**.
- The judiciary should **set diversity benchmarks** and **track progress**.

Conclusion: A Call for Urgent Action

The **gender gap in the higher judiciary** mirrors **broader societal inequalities** and demands **urgent action**. By prioritizing **transparency, mentorship, and policy reforms**, India can work towards a **judiciary that is not only more representative but also more just**. **Bridging this gap** is essential to uphold the principles of equality and fairness enshrined in the Constitution.



India's Enduring Legacy in UN Peacekeeping

Context: India has played a **crucial role** in **UN peacekeeping operations**, reinforcing its commitment to **dialogue, diplomacy, and international cooperation** as key aspects of its **foreign policy**.

Understanding UN Peacekeeping:

- **UN Peacekeeping** is a key initiative by the **United Nations** to maintain **global peace and security**.
- It works in conjunction with **conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding** efforts.
- **UN Peacekeepers**, often called **Blue Helmets**, derive their name from the **light blue color** of the **United Nations flag**.



India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping:

A Brief History of UN Peacekeeping:

- **UN Peacekeeping** began in **1948** with the creation of the **United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)** in the **Middle East** to monitor ceasefires.
- During the **Cold War**, peacekeeping missions were limited due to geopolitical tensions.
- The **1990s** saw a **major expansion** in the **scope and scale** of peacekeeping operations following the Cold War's end.

India's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping:

- **India's involvement** in UN peacekeeping began in **1953** during the **Korean War**.
- Over the years, India has deployed more than **290,000 peacekeepers** in over **50 UN missions**, making it one of the **largest contributors** to global peace.
- **Currently, more than 5,000 Indian peacekeepers** are stationed in **nine active missions**, operating in **challenging conflict zones** to ensure stability.
- India's commitment to **peacekeeping** is deeply rooted in its ancient philosophy of "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**" (The World is One Family).

Women in UN Peacekeeping: India's Leadership

- In **2022**, **women constituted 7.9%** of all **uniformed peacekeeping personnel**, a significant rise from just **1% in 1993**.
- Women comprised **5.9% of military contingents, 14.4% of police forces, and 43% of justice and corrections roles**. Among **civilian personnel, 30% were women**.
- The **UN's Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy** aims to increase **female representation to 15% in military contingents and 25% in police units by 2028**.

India's Trailblazing Role in Women's Peacekeeping:

- India pioneered **female participation** in UN peacekeeping by deploying **women medical officers to Congo in the 1960s**.
- In **2007**, India made history by deploying the **first-ever all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) to Liberia**.



- As of **February 2025**, India has over **150 women peacekeepers** serving in **six critical missions**, including:
 - **Democratic Republic of Congo**
 - **South Sudan**
 - **Lebanon**
 - **Golan Heights**
 - **Western Sahara**
 - **Abyei**

India's Achievements in UN Peacekeeping:

- In **2023**, India was honored with the UN's highest peacekeeping award, the **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal**, posthumously awarded to:
 - **Shishupal Singh**
 - **Sanwala Ram Vishnoi**
 - **Shaber Taher Ali (civilian UN worker)**
- **Major Radhika Sen** was named the **UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023**.
- The **Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)**, established by the **Indian Army** in **New Delhi**, serves as the **primary hub** for UN peacekeeping training.
- In **February 2025**, CUNPK hosted the '**Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South**' at the **Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi**.

Conclusion: India's Commitment to Global Peace

India's **strong participation** in UN **peacekeeping missions** reflects its unwavering **dedication to global stability, security, and multilateralism**. From its **first mission in Korea** to its **ongoing deployments worldwide**, India continues to uphold the **principles of the UN Charter**, reinforcing its status as a **champion of peace and diplomacy**.

EAM's Visit to the United Kingdom (UK): Strengthening India-UK Relations

Context: India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) embarked on an official visit to the United Kingdom, reinforcing bilateral ties and discussing key areas of cooperation.

Key Discussions and Outcomes:

- The visit focused on **India-UK relations**, particularly the **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, technology collaboration, people-to-people ties, and global challenges such as the **Ukraine conflict**.
- Progress on **Roadmap 2.0**—aimed at strengthening the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**—was reviewed.
- The visit reaffirmed **political, economic, and cultural cooperation** in an evolving global landscape.



India-UK Relations: A Strategic Partnership:

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:

- **Upgraded in 2021**, featuring a **10-year Roadmap** for enhanced engagement.
- India and the UK maintain a **2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue**, promoting closer diplomatic and security ties.

Trade and Economic Cooperation:

- **India is the UK's 11th largest trading partner**, while the UK ranks **14th for India**.
- **Bilateral trade stands at GBP 42 billion**, with India enjoying a **trade surplus of GBP 8.3 billion (2023)**.
- **FTA negotiations began in 2022**, aiming to **double bilateral trade by 2030**.

Defence and Security Collaboration:

- The UK accounted for only **3% of India's defence imports** over the last decade.
- India seeks to **reduce dependence on Russian defence imports** and **boost indigenous defence manufacturing**.
- The UK's **Open General Export Licence (OGEL) (2022)**—its **first for an Indo-Pacific nation**—facilitates military technology exports to India.
- **Key Joint Military Exercises:**
 - **Ex Ajeya Warrior** (Army)
 - **Exercise Konkan** (Navy)
 - **Ex Cobra Warrior** (Air Force)

Multilateral Cooperation:

- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** (India – Member, UK – Dialogue Partner)
- **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)** (Both India & UK – Members)
- **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** (India & UK co-lead the **Maritime Security pillar**)
- The UK supports India's bid for a **permanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC)**.



- **Collaboration in the G20** on global trade, economic stability, and climate action.

People-to-People Ties:

- **Indian-origin politicians** have gained prominence in the UK's political landscape.
- The **British Indian community (1.6 million people, 2.5% of the UK's population)** is regarded as a "**model minority**", excelling in business, academia, and healthcare.

Challenges in India-UK Relations:

FTA Negotiation Hurdles:

- **India's Demands:**
 - **Greater mobility and visa access for skilled professionals.**
- **UK's Demands:**
 - **Lower tariffs on automobiles and alcohol.**
 - **Increased access to India's services sector.**
- **Additional concerns:**
 - **UK's carbon tax policies vs India's regulatory framework and FDI restrictions.**

Geopolitical Differences:

- **India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine war vs the UK's strong opposition to Russia.**

Khalistan & Extremism Concerns:

- **Attacks on the Indian High Commission in London (2023)** raised security concerns.

Visa & Immigration Issues:

- **Strict UK visa policies** affect **Indian professionals and students.**
- **Illegal immigration concerns:** Over **100,000 undocumented Indian immigrants** in the UK remain unresolved due to the absence of a migration agreement.

The Way Forward: Strengthening Bilateral Ties

- **Fast-tracking the Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** to unlock economic opportunities.
- **Finalizing a Migration and Mobility Agreement** for smoother workforce movement.
- **Expanding Indo-Pacific cooperation** for regional stability and security.
- **Enhancing defence collaboration**, including **technology transfers** and **joint military projects.**

Conclusion: A Path Toward Deeper Engagement

The EAM's visit underscores the **growing India-UK partnership**, with both nations working to overcome challenges and **strengthen trade, security, and cultural ties.** By addressing **FTA roadblocks, geopolitical differences, and immigration issues**, India and the UK can build a **more resilient and forward-looking alliance.**

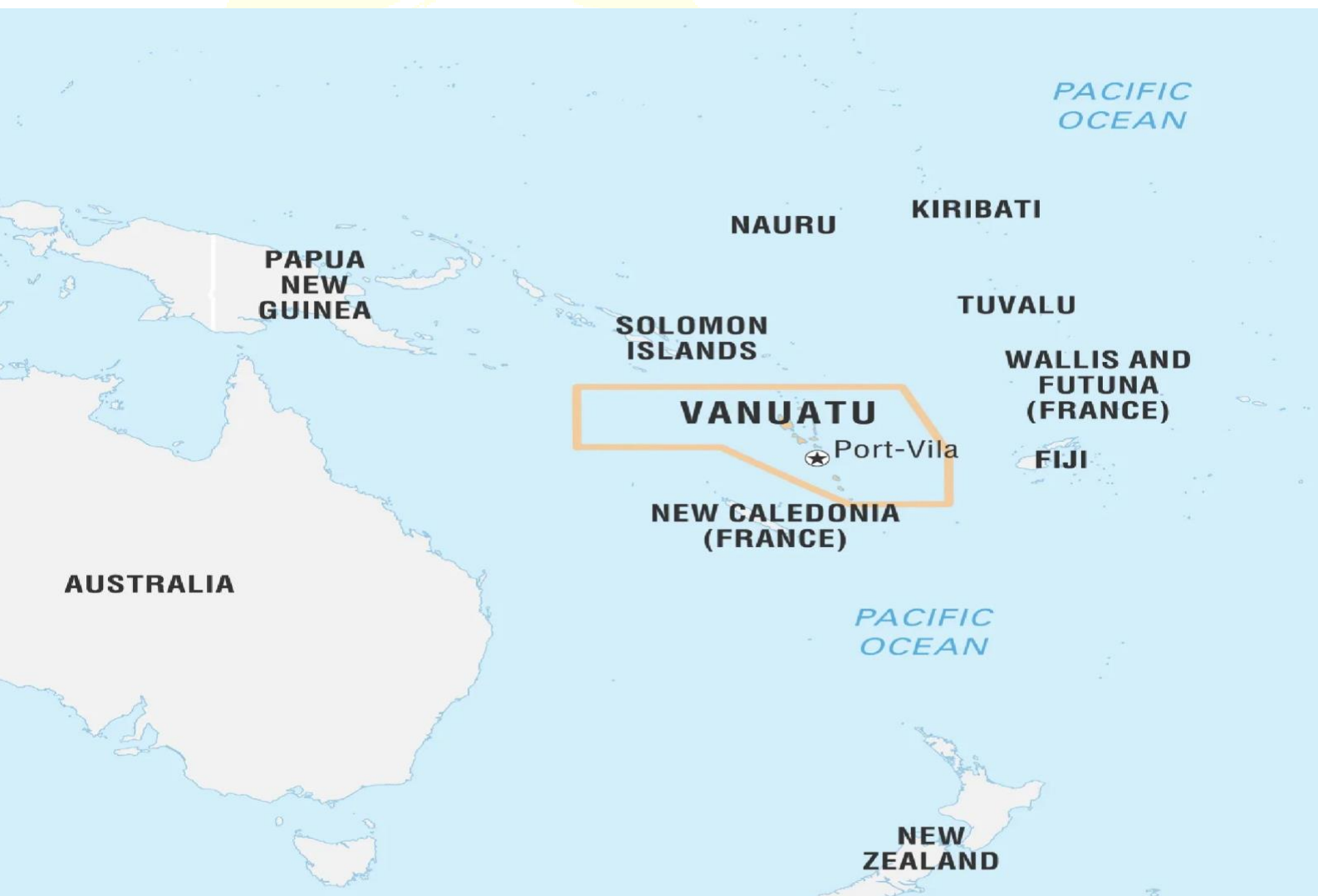
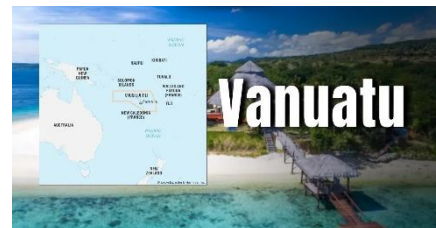
**Vanuatu in the News: Citizenship, Geography & Economy**

Context: Fugitive former IPL chief, Lalit Modi, recently applied to surrender his Indian passport at the Indian High Commission in London. He has acquired citizenship of Vanuatu, a small island nation in the South Pacific Ocean.

About Vanuatu:

Geographical Overview:

- **Island Nation:** An archipelago of 83 islands, of which only 65 are inhabited.
- **Location:**
 - North of New Zealand, east of Australia, and midway between Australia and Fiji.
 - The islands stretch 400 miles (650 km) north-south in an irregular Y-shape.
- **Diverse Landscape:**
 - Rugged mountains, high plateaus, rolling hills, coastal terraces, and coral reefs.
 - Home to several active volcanoes, including Mount Yasur, one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes.





- **Capital:** Port Vila, located on Efate Island.
- **Currency:** Vatu (VUV).
- **Population:** 94% indigenous Melanesian.

Language & Government:

- **National Language:** Bislama (a Creole language).
- **Official Languages:** Bislama, English, and French.
- **Government:**
 - **Type:** Parliamentary democracy.
 - **Independence:** July 30, 1980.

Economic Landscape:

- **Key Sectors:**
 - **Agriculture, tourism, fishing, and offshore financial services.**
 - **Kava exports** play a significant role in the economy.
- **Tax Benefits:**
 - **No income tax, withholding tax, capital gains tax, inheritance tax, or exchange controls.**
 - Revenue is generated through **VAT, tourism, and agricultural exports.**
- **Citizenship-by-Investment Programme:**
 - Foreigners can acquire **Vanuatu citizenship** for approximately **\$150,000 USD**.
 - The **Vanuatu passport** allows **visa-free travel to 56 countries**, making it a **highly attractive option**.
 - Citizenship-by-investment provides a **major source of government revenue**.

Conclusion:

Vanuatu, known for its **pristine beaches, active volcanoes, and tax-friendly policies**, is gaining global attention due to its **citizenship-by-investment programme**. With **Lalit Modi acquiring Vanuatu citizenship**, the country's **role as a tax haven and investment hub** has come into focus once again.

**Gig and Platform Workers to Register on e-Shram Portal for Formal Recognition**

Context: The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has urged **gig and platform workers** to register on the **e-Shram portal** to gain **formal recognition** and access **benefits** under the **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)**.



- The **Union Budget 2025-26** has introduced key provisions, including:
 - **Registration of online platform workers** on the **e-Shram portal**.
 - **Issuance of identity cards** for gig workers.
 - **Healthcare coverage** under **AB-PMJAY**.

About Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY:

- **Healthcare Coverage:** Provides **5 lakh per family per year** for **secondary and tertiary care hospitalization**.
- **Network:** Available at **31,000+ public and private empanelled hospitals** across India.

Understanding the Gig and Platform Economy:**What is the Gig Economy?**

- A **labour market** based on **short-term, flexible jobs** where workers are hired on a **contractual or freelance basis** instead of full-time employment.
- Gig workers take up **on-demand tasks (gigs)** without **long-term job commitments**.

What is the Platform Economy?

- A **subset of the gig economy** where **digital platforms** (apps like **Zomato, Ola, Swiggy, Urban Company**) connect **workers with customers or employers**.

Growth Projections:

- **NITI Aayog estimates** that the **gig economy** will employ:
 - **1 crore workers by 2024-25**.
 - **2.35 crore workers by 2029-30**.
- **Trend:** **Medium-skilled jobs** are decreasing, while **low-skilled and high-skilled jobs** are rising.

Challenges Faced by Gig Workers:

- **Lack of Job Security:** No fixed salary or long-term contracts.
- **Limited Social Security:** Excluded from **EPFO, ESIC, or other welfare schemes**.
- **No Benefits:** No **health insurance, paid leave, or retirement support**.
- **Unregulated Work Conditions:** Long hours, inconsistent pay, potential exploitation.
- **Algorithm Dependency:** Earnings and visibility depend on **platform policies**.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Gig & Platform Economy:**1. Boosting the Platform Economy:**

- Launch **"Platform India"** initiative to support **funding, skilling, and financial inclusion**.



- **Integrate street vendors and small businesses** into digital platforms.

2. Financial Inclusion:

- **Provide collateral-free loans** for gig workers.
- **Offer priority lending** for first-time gig entrepreneurs.

3. Skill Development:

- **Government and platform collaboration** for skill training.
- **Certification programs and career growth opportunities** for gig workers.

4. Social Security Measures:

- **Health insurance, accident coverage, and paid sick leave.**
- **Retirement savings plans and income support** during low work periods.

Conclusion:

The **e-Shram portal registration** is a **crucial step** toward **formal recognition and social security** for gig workers. As **India's gig economy expands**, ensuring **fair wages, social protection, and sustainable growth** will be key to a **balanced and inclusive workforce**.

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TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Surge in India's Cotton Imports

Context: India's cotton imports have seen a **sharp rise**, reaching **\$184.64 million** in January 2025, compared to just **\$19.62 million** in January 2024. In August 2024, imports were **\$104 million**, reflecting a **steady increase** in demand.

Reasons for Rising Cotton Imports:

- **Weak Global Cotton Prices:** Lower international prices make imports more attractive.
- **Higher Domestic Cotton Prices:**
 - Indian cotton costs **80-85 cents per pound**.
 - Brazilian cotton costs **60-65 cents per pound**, making it a **cheaper alternative**.
- **Rising Export Demand:**
 - Over **60% of India's textile exports** are **cotton-based garments and home textiles**.
- **Import Despite Duty:**
 - Mills continue importing despite an **11% import duty**, as international prices remain lower.



Key Facts About Cotton Cultivation:

About Cotton:

- A **crucial commercial crop**, contributing **25% of global cotton production**.
- Referred to as "**White Gold**" due to its **economic importance**.

Growing Conditions:

- Requires **uniformly high temperatures (21°C – 30°C)**.
- Best suited for **rainfall between 50-100 cm**.
- **Major Cotton-Growing Regions:**
 - **Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and Rajasthan** (Irrigated areas).
 - **Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka** (Rain-fed regions).
- **Soil Types:**
 - **Alluvial soils** (Northern India).
 - **Black clayey soils** (Central India).
 - **Mixed black and red soils** (Southern India).

India's Cotton Scenario:

- India is the **only country** that grows **all four species of cotton**:
 1. **Gossypium arboreum** (Asian Cotton)
 2. **Gossypium herbaceum** (Asian Cotton)
 3. **Gossypium barbadense** (Egyptian Cotton)
 4. **Gossypium hirsutum** (American Upland Cotton)



- **Major Cotton-Producing States:**
 - Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana contribute **65% of India's total cotton production**.
- **Hybrid & Bt Cotton:**
 - **Hybrid Cotton:** Crossbred from two parent strains for higher yields.
 - **Bt Cotton:** **Genetically modified**, pest-resistant variety designed to **combat bollworms**.

Significance of Cotton:

1. Economic Contribution:

- A **major cash crop**, providing **livelihoods to millions** of farmers.
- Backbone of **India's textile industry**, a key **export sector**.

2. Global Position:

- **World's largest cotton producer**, playing a crucial role in **global cotton trade**.

3. Employment Generation:

- The **cotton industry** supports **millions of jobs** in:
 - **Farming**
 - **Textile manufacturing**
 - **Trade and exports**

4. Cultural Importance:

- Cotton is deeply **embedded in Indian tradition**, shaping textiles, clothing, and crafts.

Government Initiatives – Cotton Mission 2025:

- The **Union Budget (February 2025)** launched a **Cotton Mission** to:
 - **Improve productivity**.
 - **Address challenges** faced by cotton farmers.
 - **Enhance research and innovation** in cotton cultivation.

Conclusion:

India's **surge in cotton imports** highlights **price disparities** between domestic and global markets. The **government's Cotton Mission** aims to **enhance productivity** and **reduce dependence on imports**, ensuring **long-term sustainability** for Indian cotton farmers.



Farm Lending Crisis: Surge in Kisan Credit Card Bad Loans

Context: Recent data reveals a **42% surge in bad loans** under the **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme** over the past four years, reflecting severe financial distress in the agricultural sector.

Understanding the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme:

Introduction:

Launched in **1998** based on recommendations from the **R.V. Gupta Committee**, the **KCC scheme** provides **short-term credit** to farmers for agriculture and allied activities.

Key Features:

- **Issued by:** Commercial banks, cooperative banks, and regional rural banks
- **Purpose:** Covers costs related to **crop production**, including seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides
- **Additional Uses:** Supports **working capital** needs for dairy, poultry, fisheries, and farm machinery
- **Post-Harvest Expenses:** Can be used for **irrigation, storage, and other post-harvest activities**
- **NPA Classification:** A **KCC loan** is considered a **non-performing asset (NPA)** if unpaid within three years

What Are Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)?

Definition:

NPAs refer to loans where the **principal or interest remains overdue for more than 90 days**.

Types of NPAs

1. **Substandard Assets:** Loans overdue for **up to 12 months**
2. **Doubtful Assets:** Loans overdue for **more than 12 months**
3. **Loss Assets:** Loans **deemed unrecoverable** by the bank or RBI

RBI Guidelines for Agricultural NPAs:

- **Short-term crop loans** are classified as NPAs if unpaid for **two crop seasons**
- **Long-term agricultural loans** become NPAs after **one crop season**

Current Trends in Agricultural NPAs:

- As per **RBI data**, **outstanding NPAs** in KCC accounts of **scheduled commercial banks** (excluding regional rural banks) **jumped from ₹68,547 crore (March 2021) to ₹97,543 crore (December 2024)**.
- The sharp increase highlights **growing challenges in loan repayment** among farmers.

Major Causes Behind Rising NPAs in Agriculture:

1. Unpredictable Weather & Climate Change:

- **Erratic rainfall, droughts, floods, and temperature shifts** significantly impact crop yields.
- **Limited insurance coverage** forces farmers into **loan defaults after crop failures**.

2. Low Farm Income & Market Volatility:

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- **Low productivity, unremunerative prices, and unstable market rates** leave farmers struggling financially.
- **Lack of assured MSP (Minimum Support Price) for all crops** leads to **irregular income**.

3. Loan Waiver Policies & Moral Hazard:

- **Frequent government loan waivers** encourage **willful defaults**, as farmers anticipate future relief.
- This practice **erodes repayment discipline** and **weakens financial stability**.

4. Poor Risk Management by Banks:

- **Banks sanction loans without adequate risk assessment**, increasing chances of **defaults**.

5. Structural Weakness in Agricultural Finance:

- **86% of India's farmers** are small and marginal, with **limited institutional credit access**.
- **Dependence on informal lenders** leads to **debt traps and repayment struggles**.

6. Delays in Crop Insurance Payouts:

- The **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** faces **delays in claim settlements**, leaving farmers with **no financial backup** to repay loans.

Implications of Rising Agricultural NPAs:

1. Stress on the Banking Sector:

- **High NPAs restrict fresh loans**, slowing down **agricultural credit growth**.
- **Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Cooperative Banks** face **financial instability**.

2. Increased Fiscal Burden:

- **Government bailouts** for banks due to loan waivers **strain public finances**.
- Resources get diverted from **productive rural investments**.

3. Rising Economic & Social Distress:

- **Indebtedness is a major cause of farmer suicides**, particularly in **Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Punjab**.
- **Rural distress worsens**, impacting **employment and food security**.

4. Credit Crunch for Genuine Farmers:

- Due to **higher default rates**, banks **tighten lending norms**, making **credit inaccessible to honest borrowers**.

Conclusion:

The sharp rise in **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) NPAs** signals a **deepening financial crisis in Indian agriculture**. Addressing this challenge requires **structural reforms, better risk management, and policy interventions** to ensure a **sustainable agricultural credit system**. Empowering farmers through **credit access, financial literacy, and climate-resilient practices** will be key to **reducing loan defaults and ensuring long-term stability**.

**Space-Tech for Good Governance: Transforming Administration Through Innovation**

Context: India's **space technology** is playing a crucial role in **revolutionizing governance**, as highlighted by the **Minister of Science and Technology** at the **Good Governance Conclave**. With advancements in **satellite communication**, **remote sensing**, and **geospatial data**, space technology is becoming a key enabler for **efficient planning**, **monitoring**, and **policy implementation**.

**What is Space Technology?**

Space technology refers to **scientific advancements** and **technological applications** developed for activities beyond Earth's surface. These include:

- **Earth observation** for environmental monitoring
- **Satellite communication** for seamless connectivity
- **Navigation systems** for precision mapping
- **Exploration missions** to expand human reach in space

Governments utilize **satellite data**, **geospatial analytics**, and **remote sensing** to enhance **governance**, **development planning**, and **disaster management**.

India's Space Economy: Growth & Future Prospects:**Rapid Growth in the Space Sector:**

- India's **space economy** is expanding rapidly, with its **budget tripling** and over **300 space startups** emerging.
- The sector's **market value** is projected to grow from **\$8 billion to \$44 billion**, positioning India as a **leading global space power**.

Ambitious Space Missions:

- **Gaganyaan Mission:** India's **first human spaceflight** trials are set to begin by **end of 2025**.
- **Moon Exploration:** India plans to **send an astronaut to the Moon by 2040**.
- **Bharat Antariksh Station:** Aiming to establish India's **own space station by 2035**.

Applications of Space Technology in Governance:**1. Disaster Management & Response:**

- The **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** provides **satellite imagery** to track **floods**, **cyclones**, and **landslides**.
- The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** uses satellite data for **real-time disaster response** and **relief efforts**.

2. Agriculture & Rural Development:



- **FASAL (Forecasting Agricultural Output using Space, Agrometeorology, and Land-based Observations)** leverages satellite data to **predict crop yields**, helping farmers make **informed decisions**.
- **Remote sensing** assists in **soil health assessment** and **precision irrigation**, boosting farm productivity.

3. Land Management & Governance:

- The **Swamitva Yojana** uses **satellite-based land mapping** to create **digital land records**, ensuring **transparency and easy verification** in land ownership.

4. Environmental Monitoring:

- **Bhuvan (ISRO's web-based GIS platform)** provides **real-time environmental data**, aiding in **land use planning and conservation efforts**.
- **Oceansat satellites** monitor **sea surface temperatures**, **rising sea levels**, and **coastal erosion**, supporting **climate adaptation policies**.

5. National Security & Defense:

- Satellites enhance **border surveillance** and **monitor strategic locations**, strengthening **national security**.

6. Administrative Efficiency & Digital Governance:

- **Satellite data** supports the **Digital India initiative**, improving access to **e-governance services**, **smart city planning**, and **rural connectivity**.

Challenges in Implementing Space Technology for Governance:

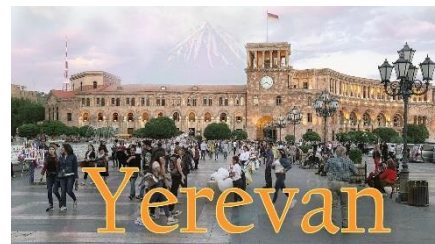
1. **High Costs:** **Satellite development, launch, and maintenance** require significant financial investment.
2. **Infrastructure & Technical Gaps:** **Limited ground infrastructure** and a shortage of **trained personnel** in remote areas hinder space technology's full potential.
3. **Data Interpretation & Accuracy:** **Complex satellite data** needs precise analysis—**errors in interpretation** can lead to flawed decision-making.
4. **Privacy & Security Concerns:** Increased use of **satellite surveillance** raises concerns over **citizen privacy and data security**.
5. **Environmental Impact & Space Debris:** Frequent **satellite launches** contribute to **space debris**, posing risks to **future missions and Earth's orbital environment**.

Conclusion:

India's **space technology** is reshaping **governance and public administration**, enabling **efficient disaster response**, **agricultural planning**, **environmental monitoring**, and **security**. By addressing **technical challenges**, **expanding infrastructure**, and **promoting sustainable practices**, India can **harness space-tech** for **inclusive development and good governance**.

Armenia: A Land of Ancient Heritage & Strategic Partnerships

Context: Armenia, with its capital Yerevan, is a **landlocked nation** located in the **Transcaucasian region**, nestled between **Europe and Asia**. Known for its **rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and strategic geopolitical position**, Armenia continues to strengthen its international ties, including a recent **MoU with India on medical product regulation**.



Geopolitical Overview:

Location & Political Boundaries:

Armenia is a **landlocked country** in the **South Caucasus**, bordered by:

- **Azerbaijan** to the east
- **Turkey** to the west
- **Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic** (an exclave of Azerbaijan) to the southwest
- **Georgia** to the north
- **Iran** to the south

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Historic Dispute:

- **Nagorno-Karabakh**, an **ethnic Armenian enclave** within **Azerbaijan**, has been a source of **conflict** since 1988.
- Recent peace agreements have led to a **resolution**, bringing **stability** to the region.

Geographical Features:

- **Highest Peak:** **Mount Aragats (Alaghez)**, standing at **4,090 meters**, is the tallest mountain in Armenia.
- **Landscape:** Dominated by **mountains, plateaus, and volcanic terrain**, Armenia is often referred to as the "**Land of Stones**" due to its rocky topography.
- **Rivers & Lakes:** The **Sevan Lake**, one of the **largest freshwater high-altitude lakes in the world**, is a major source of water and biodiversity.

India-Armenia Relations: Strengthening Ties:

Recent MoU on Medical Products Regulation:

- India and Armenia have signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to enhance **cooperation in the regulation of medical products**.
- This agreement will **improve healthcare collaboration**, ensuring **quality control, safety, and innovation** in pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

Broader Diplomatic & Economic Engagement:

- **Defense Cooperation:** Armenia has been **expanding defense ties** with India, including **military equipment agreements**.
- **Trade & Connectivity:** Bilateral trade is growing, with Armenia serving as a **potential gateway for India's engagement in the Eurasian region**.

- **Cultural & Historical Ties:** Armenia has one of the **oldest Christian civilizations** and shares **centuries-old historical connections** with India, including an **Armenian community in Kolkata** dating back to the Mughal era.

Conclusion:

Armenia's **strategic location, historical depth, and growing international partnerships** make it a key player in the **South Caucasus region**. With **India and Armenia strengthening ties in healthcare, defense, and trade**, the future holds promising opportunities for deeper collaboration and regional stability.





Rising Consumer Credit in India: A Double-Edged Sword

Context: India's consumer credit market is **expanding at an unprecedented pace**, bringing both **opportunities and challenges** for the economy. The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, in its latest **Financial Stability Report (FSR) 2024**, has expressed concerns over the **rising household debt**, particularly the increasing trend of borrowing for **consumption rather than asset creation**. If not managed carefully, this shift could lead to **financial instability** in the long run.



Financial Stability Report 2024: Key Takeaways

The **FSR 2024** has raised alarms over the **rising household debt-to-GDP ratio**, which has surged from **36.6% in June 2021 to 42.9% in June 2024**.

- **India's household debt remains lower** than that of most emerging economies.
- The concern, however, lies in the **changing borrowing patterns**, with more loans being used for **daily consumption rather than investment in assets** like homes and businesses.
- This shift poses a **macro-financial risk**, particularly for **lower-income groups**, who are **increasingly dependent on unsecured credit**.

Changing Borrowing Trends: A Shift Towards Consumption Debt

The Evolving Consumer Credit Market:

The **RBI's report** highlights **two contrasting trends** in India's credit market:

- **Positive Development:** More loans are being taken by **prime and super-prime borrowers**, who primarily use credit for **asset creation**.
- **Area of Concern:** A significant rise in **borrowing for consumption**, particularly among **low-income borrowers**, who often rely on **unsecured credit like credit cards and personal loans**.

Breakdown of Loan Utilization:

- **Super-Prime Borrowers:** **64% of their loans** are directed towards **asset creation** (homes, vehicles, education).
- **Subprime Borrowers:** Nearly **50% of their loans** are being used for **consumption instead of investments**.
- **Lower-Income Households** (earning below 5 lakh annually):
- **Highly dependent on unsecured credit** (credit cards, personal loans, and Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) schemes).
- **Facing rising default rates**, suggesting a **struggle to manage debt repayments**.

This trend implies that many households are **borrowing not to build wealth but to sustain their daily expenses**, raising concerns about **financial distress and long-term economic sustainability**.

Rising Consumption Loans: A Threat to Economic Stability?

The increasing reliance on loans for **daily expenses rather than long-term investments** creates **several economic risks**:

- **Increasing Financial Burden:** Defaults on **personal loans and credit card debt** are on the rise, indicating that many borrowers **struggle to meet their repayment obligations**.



- **Declining Disposable Income:** As loan EMIs consume a significant portion of earnings, households have less money to spend on essentials, potentially slowing down overall economic growth.
- **Debt Trap Risk:** Continuous borrowing for non-productive consumption could push vulnerable households into a cycle of debt, affecting the financial health of banks and NBFCs.

The Macroeconomic Impact of Rising Household Debt:

The impact of household debt on economic growth is complex.

- **Positive Impact:** If used for productive purposes, such as buying homes or starting businesses, debt stimulates economic activity and wealth creation.
- **Negative Impact:** If used for daily consumption, excessive borrowing can reduce long-term financial stability and slow down GDP growth.

Key Questions to Consider:

- Is rising consumer credit a result of post-pandemic income insecurity?
- Are financial innovations like BNPL encouraging unsustainable borrowing?
- Will increasing household debt limit the effectiveness of future economic policies such as tax cuts or interest rate adjustments?

RBI's Response: Regulating Unchecked Credit Growth:

Recognizing the risks associated with excessive consumer borrowing, the RBI has introduced several measures since September 2023 to curb unsecured credit growth:

- **Stricter Lending Norms:** Higher risk weights on personal loans and credit card borrowings to discourage excessive lending.
- **Encouraging Responsible Lending:** Banks are advised to prioritize lending to prime borrowers to reduce the risk of defaults.
- **Enhanced Supervision:** The RBI is closely monitoring financial institutions to prevent reckless lending practices.

These measures have slowed down the growth of consumer credit, but systemic risks remain, requiring continuous policy adjustments.

Conclusion: Striking a Balance Between Growth and Prudence

The rapid rise in consumer credit presents a double-edged sword:

- On one hand, increased access to credit fuels economic activity and supports businesses.
- On the other hand, excessive borrowing for consumption, especially among lower-income groups, could destabilize the financial system.

Way Forward for Policymakers:

- **Encourage financial literacy** to ensure that borrowers understand the risks of excessive debt.
- **Strengthen credit regulations** to prevent reckless lending and ensure responsible credit expansion.
- **Develop targeted support programs** for low-income groups to reduce dependence on high-interest loans.

By maintaining a balanced approach, India can ensure that consumer credit remains a tool for economic growth rather than a source of financial distress.

Baloch Separatists Hijack Jaffar Express in Balochistan: A Major Security Crisis

Context: The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) carried out a major assault on the Jaffar Express on March 11, 2025, in Balochistan's Bolan district. The train, en route from Quetta to Peshawar, was hijacked by insurgents who claimed responsibility for:

- Taking 182 passengers hostage
- Killing 20 Pakistani military officers
- Shooting down a Pakistani drone



This marks **one of the deadliest attacks** by Baloch insurgents in recent years, signaling escalating unrest in the region.

Who is the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)?

Origins and Objectives:

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) emerged in the **early 2000s** as a **separatist militant group** fighting for **Balochistan's independence** from Pakistan.

- Pakistan banned the BLA in 2006
- The U.S. designated it a global terrorist organization in 2019

Tactics and Armed Wings:

The BLA is known for **targeting Pakistani security forces, government installations, and foreign entities** operating in Balochistan. Its military structure includes:

- **Majeed Brigade** – A notorious **suicide squad** active since 2011 and responsible for the Jaffar Express attack
- **Special Tactical Operations Squad (STOS), Fatah Squad, and Zirab Units** – Key combat divisions involved in insurgency

Rising Threat Level:

- In **2022**, the BLA shocked Pakistan by **attacking army and navy bases**
- It has deployed **women suicide bombers**, including attacks on **Chinese nationals**
- In **October 2024**, the group conducted a **suicide bombing** that killed two Chinese citizens, opposing foreign investments in Balochistan

With recent moves to **unite different Baloch militant factions**, experts warn that **insurgent activities may escalate further**.

Historical Background of the Baloch Insurgency:

A Struggle for Autonomy:

Balochistan, Pakistan's **largest province by area but least populated**, has long been at the center of conflict over autonomy and resource control.

- After **Pakistan's independence**, Balochistan remained independent until **March 1948**
- The **Khan of Kalat**, ruler of key Baloch regions, was forced to **sign the instrument of accession** under pressure.



Grievances and Unrest:

The **ethnic Baloch population** has consistently accused Pakistan's **central government of economic exploitation** and **Punjabi dominance** in governance.

- Despite its **rich natural resources**, Balochistan remains **one of Pakistan's most underdeveloped provinces**
- The Baloch insurgency has witnessed **multiple uprisings**, with each crackdown fueling further **resentment and rebellion**

Foreign Involvement and Accusations:

- **Pakistan accuses India of supporting Baloch insurgents**, but **India denies these claims**
- **China's massive CPEC project** has become a **key target** for militants, who view it as **exploitative and damaging to local interests**

Why is Balochistan Important?

Strategic and Economic Significance:

Balochistan holds **immense geopolitical and economic value**, making it a key battleground in **regional politics**.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):

- **Balochistan is central to China's \$65 billion CPEC project**, a part of **Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**
- The **Gwadar port**, located in Balochistan, is **China's gateway to the Arabian Sea**, making it a **vital economic and military asset**

Resource-Rich Province:

- Home to **Reko Diq**, one of the **world's largest gold and copper reserves**, jointly developed by **Barrick Gold and China**
- Vast deposits of **natural gas, coal, and minerals**, yet the province **remains impoverished**

Security Risks & Instability:

- The **long-running insurgency** has significantly **destabilized Pakistan's plans** for economic expansion in Balochistan
- Frequent **attacks on security forces, Chinese investments, and energy projects** threaten Pakistan's **economic and geopolitical ambitions**

Final Thoughts:

The **hijacking of the Jaffar Express** by the **BLA** is a stark reminder of **Balochistan's ongoing insurgency** and its implications for **Pakistan's national security**. With **militant factions becoming more organized and lethal**, and **CPEC investments under threat**, the **future of Balochistan remains highly uncertain**.

**World Air Quality Report 2024: India Among Top 5 Most Polluted Nations**

Context: The World Air Quality Report 2024, released by Swiss air quality technology company IQAir, highlights severe pollution levels worldwide, with India ranking among the top five most polluted countries.

- **Byrnihat (Assam)** has been declared the **most polluted city globally**.
- **Delhi** remains the world's most polluted capital for the sixth consecutive year.
- **India** ranks 5th in pollution, an improvement from 3rd place in 2023.



With air quality deteriorating in multiple regions, the report underscores the urgent need for stricter pollution control measures.

World Air Quality Report 2024: Key Takeaways**Extensive Global Analysis:**

The report is based on data from over 40,000 air quality monitoring stations across 138 countries, territories, and regions.

IQAir's air quality scientists analyzed the information to identify major pollution trends and hotspots worldwide.

India's Alarming Pollution Levels:**Delhi: The Most Polluted Capital Once Again**

- **Delhi** remains the world's most polluted capital city for the sixth consecutive year.
- While some NCR cities had higher pollution levels earlier, Delhi overtook them as the most polluted urban center in South Asia.
- In 2024, Delhi ranked as the second most polluted city globally.

Byrnihat: The World's Most Polluted City:

- **Byrnihat (Assam)** recorded an annual PM2.5 concentration of $128.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, making it the most polluted city worldwide.
- Six Indian cities ranked among the top 10 most polluted cities globally.

Decline in India's PM2.5 Levels:

- India's average PM2.5 concentration in 2024 was $50.6 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, showing a 7% decline from 2023 ($54.4 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).

Major Causes of Pollution in India:**Extreme Pollution Episodes in Northern India:**

- **January 2024** saw poor air quality in Delhi and Himachal Pradesh.
- **November 2024** experienced severe pollution across Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Himachal Pradesh.

Primary Sources of Air Pollution:

- **Crop stubble burning** – Responsible for 60% of PM2.5 emissions during peak pollution periods.
- **Vehicular emissions** – A major contributor to urban smog.

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- **Industrial discharges** – Unregulated factory emissions continue to worsen air quality.
- **Construction dust** – Rising infrastructure projects lead to massive dust pollution.

Air Pollution: A Widespread Global Threat:

World's Most Polluted Countries (2024 Rankings):

The five most polluted nations, based on annual average PM_{2.5} levels, are:

1. **Chad** – 91.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
2. **Bangladesh** – 78 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
3. **Pakistan** – 73.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
4. **Congo** – 58.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
5. **India** – 50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

Unhealthy Air Quality Across the World:

- **Only 12 regions** worldwide met the **WHO's safe PM_{2.5} limit (5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)**, primarily in **Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania**.
- **Only 17% of 8,954 cities** worldwide complied with WHO's air quality guidelines.
- The **20 most polluted cities**, spanning **India, China, Pakistan, Chad, and Kazakhstan**, exceeded WHO limits by over 10 times.

Challenges in Controlling Air Pollution & The Road Ahead:

Effectiveness of India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

- **Launched in 2019**, NCAP aimed to **reduce air pollution levels significantly**.
- However, the **2024 report highlights serious implementation challenges**, including **weak policy enforcement and lack of proper infrastructure**.

Urgent Need for Stronger Measures:

- **Environmental experts** argue that **Delhi's efforts**, such as **BS-VI fuel standards and advanced transport technology**, have not been effectively enforced.
- **Regulatory gaps and weak governance** continue to allow **uncontrolled emissions**.

A Call for Systematic Change:

- To **achieve long-term air quality improvement**, India needs **stricter pollution control laws, better enforcement, and investment in green technology**.
- Strengthening **NCAP** and ensuring **consistent execution** will be critical in **combating India's persistent air pollution crisis**.

Final Thoughts:

With **India still among the world's top five most polluted nations**, the **2024 Air Quality Report** serves as a **wake-up call for urgent environmental action**.

PM's State Visit to Mauritius: Strengthening Bilateral Ties and Regional Cooperation

Context: The Prime Minister of India recently completed a significant **state visit to Mauritius**, marking his **second visit since 2015**. During this visit, the Prime Minister was invited as the **Chief Guest** at Mauritius' **National Day Celebrations** on **March 12**, an occasion that holds great significance as it commemorates the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's **Dandi March**.



Key Highlights of the Visit:

- **Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) Signed:** The visit resulted in the signing of several **MOUs** aimed at enhancing collaboration between the two nations. Key areas of focus include:
 - **Training for Civil Servants**
 - Support for **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**
 - Development of the **Blue Economy**
 - **Combating Financial Crimes**
 - **Local Currency Settlement for Trade**
- **Indian Rupee Credit Line:** A landmark agreement was made with the announcement of a **487.6 crore INR credit line**, marking the **first-ever INR-based credit line** for **Mauritius**. This line will be utilized for replacing **water pipelines** across the island nation.
- **White-Shipping Agreement:** The two countries signed a **technical agreement** focused on **maritime security** and the exchange of crucial **maritime information**.
- **Prestigious Award Conferred:** During the visit, the Prime Minister received the **Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean**, a prestigious distinction that made him the **first Indian** to receive such an honor.
- **Vision MAHASAGAR Unveiled:** PM Modi introduced the **Vision MAHASAGAR** (Mutual And Holistic Advancement for Security And Growth Across Regions), building on the previous **Vision SAGAR** which focused on **security and growth** for all in the region.

About Mauritius: A Strategic Partner for India:

Location and Population: Mauritius is a strategically located island nation in the **western Indian Ocean**, close to India. Nearly **70% of the population** (around **1.2 million people**) have **Indian origin**, which forms the bedrock of the close ties between the two nations.

Colonial History: Mauritius has a rich colonial history, initially being a **French colony** before coming under **British rule**.

National Day Celebrations: March 12 marks Mauritius' **National Day**, commemorating the date of **Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March**.

India-Mauritius Bilateral Relations: A Strong Partnership:

Diplomatic Relations: India and Mauritius have enjoyed strong diplomatic relations since 1948, making Mauritius a key trading partner in the **Asian continent**.

Commercial Ties: For FY 2022-2023

- Indian **exports** to Mauritius stood at **USD 462.69 million**.
- Mauritian **exports** to India were **USD 91.50 million**.

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- Total trade between the two nations amounted to **USD 554.19 million**.

Key Agreements and Treaties:

- **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (1982)**: Helps in avoiding double taxes for non-resident investors.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)**: Signed in 2021, this was India's first **trade agreement** with an African country.

Defence Cooperation: India is Mauritius' **preferred defence partner**, providing essential platforms and capacity building. Recent agreements have included:

- The transfer of a **Dornier aircraft** and an **Advanced Light Helicopter** (Dhruv) to Mauritius on lease.
- A **\$100 million Line of Credit (LoC)** to Mauritius for **defence equipment** procurement.

Space Cooperation: Both countries have committed to exploring **space research opportunities**, with an **MoU signed in November 2023** for the development of a **joint satellite**.

Indian Migration: India has deep historical ties to Mauritius. Indian workers from **Puducherry** were brought to the island during the **French rule** (1700s), and later, during the **British rule** (1834–1900s), around **half a million Indian indentured workers** arrived, shaping the island's demographics.

Development Partnership: India continues to support development initiatives in Mauritius, including the **Metro Express**, new hospitals, and **infrastructure projects** in **Agaléga Island**.

Humanitarian Assistance: India played a crucial role in providing **humanitarian assistance** to Mauritius during **Cyclone Chido in 2023**, reaffirming India's role as the **"First Responder"** in times of crisis.

Areas of Concern in India-Mauritius Relations:

- **Tax Treaty Misuse**: The **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** has been criticized for enabling **illicit activities** such as **money laundering** and **round-tripping of funds**.
- **Security Concerns**: Given Mauritius' position in the **Indo-Pacific**, security remains a critical issue. Despite strong **defence cooperation**, evolving regional dynamics could present challenges.
- **Economic Challenges**: While trade relations are strong, **economic imbalances** and the need to **diversify trade** and remove barriers remain ongoing concerns.
- **Chinese Presence**: **China's increasing influence** in the Indian Ocean and its **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** with Mauritius (2021) pose significant challenges for India's regional dominance.

Way Forward: Expanding Cooperation:

The relationship between **India and Mauritius** has grown significantly over the years. To further strengthen this partnership, both countries should focus on:

- Expanding **defence and security cooperation**, including **joint training** and **counterterrorism efforts**.
- **Maritime security** and joint **intelligence sharing** will be crucial.
- Both nations can leverage their **strategic position** to enhance **regional stability** and contribute to **global growth**.

Through continued collaboration, **India and Mauritius** are poised to deepen their multifaceted relationship, ensuring mutual growth, peace, and prosperity in the **Indian Ocean region**.

**UN Statistical Commission Adopts New Indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity**

Context: The United Nations Statistical Commission has adopted a **new indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD)** to enhance tracking of global nutrition and food security. This indicator will play a crucial role in **monitoring progress towards SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)** and the broader **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

**About the New MDD Indicator:**

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNICEF serve as **custodians** of this newly introduced Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator on **Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD)**.

- **Adoption:** The indicator was officially adopted during the **56th session** of the **United Nations Statistical Commission**.
- **SDG Indicator Framework:** MDD is part of the **2025 Comprehensive Review** of the SDG indicator framework, ensuring a stronger focus on **dietary quality**.

About the United Nations Statistical Commission:

- **Established:** 1946
- **Function:** It serves as the **highest decision-making body** in the **global statistical system**, bringing together **Chief Statisticians from UN member states**.
- **Role:** The commission is responsible for setting **statistical standards**, developing **concepts and methods**, and overseeing their implementation.

Understanding the Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD) Indicator:

The **MDD indicator** measures **dietary diversity** among two key groups:

- **MDD-C (Children's Minimum Dietary Diversity)**
- **MDD-W (Women's Minimum Dietary Diversity)**

Indicator Definition:

- **MDD-W (Women's Dietary Diversity):** A simple **yes/no** measure based on whether a woman has consumed at least **five out of 10** defined food groups in the past **24 hours**.

10 Food Groups Monitored:

1. Grains
2. Pulses
3. Nuts and Seeds
4. Dairy (Milk & Milk Products)
5. Meat, Poultry & Fish
6. Eggs
7. Dark Leafy Vegetables
8. Vitamin A-rich Fruits & Vegetables
9. Other Vegetables
10. Other Fruits

Why Is Dietary Diversity Important?

- **Prevents Malnutrition:** Ensures adequate intake of essential **vitamins and minerals**.
- **Focus on Quality:** The indicator prioritizes **nutritional value over calorie intake**.
- **Policy Guidance:** Helps **governments and organizations** assess and improve **food security programs**.
- **FAO & UNICEF's Role:**
 - **FAO:** Oversees **MDD-W** (Women's Dietary Diversity).
 - **UNICEF:** Oversees **MDD-C** (Children's Dietary Diversity).

Significance of the MDD Indicator:

- **Improving Diet Quality:** Strengthens existing **food security and nutrition** monitoring tools.
- **Policy and Program Impact:** Assists in **target-setting, program evaluation, and tracking** nutritional outcomes.
- **Advancing SDG 2 Goals:** A critical tool in measuring **global progress on Zero Hunger**.
- **Transforming Food Systems:** Ensures dietary diversity is **prioritized in post-SDG diet monitoring** efforts.

India's Progress in Achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):

India has made significant progress in **food security and agricultural productivity**, reflected in its **improving SDG ranking**.

- **Improvement in SDG 2 Score:** India moved from the **Aspirant category** (2020-21) to the **Performer category** (2023-24) in the **SDG India Index**.
- **Coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** **99.01% of beneficiaries** are now covered under the NFSA.
- **Agricultural Productivity Growth:** **Rice and wheat productivity** increased from **2995.21 kg/ha** (2018-19) to **3052.25 kg/ha** (2021-22).
- **Economic Growth in Agriculture:** **Gross Value Added (GVA)** per worker in agriculture **rose from 0.71 lakhs** (2018-19) to **0.86 lakhs** (2022-23) at constant prices.

Conclusion:

The adoption of the **Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD) indicator** marks a significant step in **global nutrition monitoring**. By emphasizing **diet quality** rather than just **food availability**, this indicator will help shape **stronger policies and food security programs**. India's **progress in SDG 2** reflects its commitment to ensuring **better nutrition and sustainable agriculture** for its population.

Starlink Satellite Internet: A Game-Changer for Connectivity

Context: SpaceX, owned by **Elon Musk**, has secured agreements with **Airtel** and **Jio** to distribute **Starlink**, its satellite internet service, in India. However, the final rollout is pending regulatory approvals.

Understanding Satellite Internet:

What is Satellite Internet?

Satellite internet is a **wireless broadband technology** that uses **satellites orbiting the Earth** to provide internet access. Unlike traditional **fiber-optic or mobile networks**, which rely on **ground infrastructure**, satellite internet **beams data from space-based satellites** to user terminals on Earth.



Types of Satellite Internet:

1. **Geostationary Orbit (GEO) Satellites** – Used in traditional **VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal)** services.
2. **Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) Satellites** – Used by **Starlink**, **OneWeb**, and **Amazon's Project Kuiper**.

Starlink: SpaceX's LEO Satellite Internet Service

- **Over 7,000 satellites** already in orbit.
- Operates at an altitude of **550 km**, reducing **latency** and providing **faster internet speeds** than GEO satellites.
- Designed to provide **global high-speed internet**, especially in **remote and underserved regions**.

Benefits of Satellite Internet in India:

1. Bridging the Digital Divide:

- Provides **high-speed internet** to **remote and rural areas**, reducing **urban-rural connectivity gaps**.
- Supports the **Digital India** initiative by **enhancing access** to **e-learning**, **telemedicine**, and **e-governance**.

2. Disaster-Resilient Communication:

- Unlike **fiber-optic or mobile networks**, satellite internet **remains functional** during **natural disasters**.
- **Example:** During the **Turkey-Syria Earthquake (2023)**, Starlink provided **emergency internet** to aid workers in affected areas.

3. Boost to Defence & Strategic Communication:

- Provides **secure, high-speed internet** in **border regions** like **Ladakh**, **Northeast**, and **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**.
- **Example:** Starlink played a **crucial role** in **Ukraine's defense strategy** against **cyberattacks** and **military disruptions**.

4. Alternative to Traditional Internet Service Providers (ISPs):

- **Increases competition** in the **broadband sector**, leading to **better services** and **lower costs**.



- Provides an **alternative for rural businesses**, helping boost **economic activities in non-urban regions**.

5. Support for Emerging Technologies:

- Enables **AI-driven smart agriculture**, **remote monitoring systems**, and **Internet of Things (IoT) applications**.
- Facilitates connectivity for **self-driving vehicles**, **remote education**, and **telehealth solutions**.

Challenges & Concerns:

1. Environmental Concerns:

- **Satellite re-entries release aluminum oxide particles**, which could **harm the ozone layer** and contribute to **atmospheric pollution**.

2. Astronomical Interference:

- **Geomagnetic storms** and **bright light reflections** from thousands of LEO satellites could **disrupt astronomical observations**, affecting **ground-based telescopes** and **space research**.

Conclusion:

The **expansion of Starlink in India** could be a **transformative step** toward **universal internet access**, especially in **remote areas**. While the service offers **several benefits**, addressing **environmental and regulatory concerns** will be crucial for its **long-term success**.

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Pratibimb Module: Strengthening Cybercrime Investigation

Context: The **Pratibimb Module** has significantly strengthened cybercrime investigations, leading to the **arrest of 6,046 accused**, the identification of **17,185 criminal linkages**, and the processing of **36,296 cyber investigation assistance requests**, as recently reported in the **Lok Sabha**.

Understanding the Pratibimb Module:

The **Pratibimb Module** is a **Geographic Information System (GIS)-based software** developed under the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** by the **Union Home Ministry**.

Objective:

To assist **law enforcement agencies (LEAs)**, including **state police forces**, in **real-time mapping of cybercriminals** and dismantling their networks.

Key Features:

- Projects **mobile numbers involved in cybercrimes** across the country onto a **GIS map**.
- Provides a **map view** for LEAs and service providers to track **real-time locations** of mobile numbers used in criminal activities.

Samanvaya Platform: Strengthening Cybercrime Coordination:

The **Samanvaya Platform**, launched by the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, serves as a **centralized coordination system** for **cybercrime data sharing and analytics**.

Key Benefits:

- Offers **advanced analytics** based on **interstate crime linkages**.
- Helps LEAs track **cybercrime complaints across multiple States and UTs** efficiently.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):

The **I4C** operates under the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** to ensure a **comprehensive and coordinated response to cybercrime** in India. Located in **New Delhi**, it plays a crucial role in combating cyber threats.

Primary Functions of I4C:

- Serves as the **nodal point** in India's **fight against cybercrime**.
- Identifies **research needs** for LEAs and collaborates with academia to develop **new technologies and forensic tools**.
- Prevents the **misuse of cyberspace** by **terrorist and extremist groups**.
- Recommends **cyber law amendments** to adapt to **technological advancements** and **international cyber regulations**.
- Coordinates **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs)** with other nations for cybercrime-related legal cooperation.
- Brings together **academia, industry, government, and the public** to enhance **cybercrime detection, investigation, and prosecution**.

Cyber Crime Volunteers Program:

The **I4C Cyber Crime Volunteers Program** aims to unite **citizens passionate about cybersecurity** on a single platform, empowering them to **contribute to the fight against cybercrime**.

The **Pratibimb Module** and **I4C initiatives** mark a **new era in India's cybersecurity framework**, ensuring **enhanced vigilance, rapid investigation, and stronger enforcement** against cybercriminals.



Fuego Volcano Eruption: A Fiery Threat to Guatemala

Context: A powerful eruption of **Volcán de Fuego** in **Guatemala** has caused **strong explosions**, spewing **incandescent material** and triggering **pyroclastic flows**, endangering nearby communities. The eruption has sent **shockwaves across the region**, raising concerns over safety and disaster response efforts.



About Volcán de Fuego:

Volcán de Fuego, meaning "**Volcano of Fire**" in Spanish, is one of **Guatemala's most active stratovolcanoes** and stands tall near the historic city of **Antigua**.

Key Facts:

- Located on the **Pacific Ring of Fire**, Guatemala frequently experiences **seismic and volcanic activity**.
- **Fuego** is one of **Central America's most active volcanoes**, with recorded eruptions dating back to the **16th century**.
- The **deadly 2018 eruption** led to **194 deaths** and **234 missing persons**, highlighting the volcano's destructive potential.
- Its **eruptive style** includes **explosive eruptions, lava flows, and pyroclastic surges**, posing severe risks to surrounding communities.



What is a Stratovolcano?

A **stratovolcano** is a **tall, steep, and cone-shaped volcano**, formed by alternating layers of **lava and pyroclastic materials**.

Characteristics of Stratovolcanoes:



- **Towering Peaks:** Unlike **flat shield volcanoes**, stratovolcanoes have **steep slopes and a crater at the summit**.
- **Explosive Eruptions:** Their lavas (andesite and dacite) are **cooler and more viscous**, allowing **high gas pressure buildup**, leading to **violent explosions**.
- **Subduction Zone Formation:** They are typically found in **volcanically active regions**, such as the **Ring of Fire** that encircles the **Pacific Ocean**.
- **Global Dominance:** Stratovolcanoes make up about **60% of the Earth's volcanoes**, making them a significant geological feature worldwide.

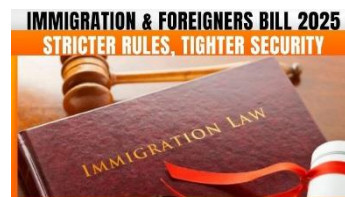
As **Fuego Volcano** continues its **eruption cycle**, authorities remain on high alert, emphasizing **evacuation preparedness and disaster response** to protect nearby communities.





Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025: A New Era of Immigration Laws

Context: In a move to **strengthen national security** and modernize immigration laws, the government introduced the **Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025** in Parliament. This bill aims to **replace outdated colonial-era laws** and create a streamlined, **comprehensive legal framework** for immigration management.



Key Highlights of the Bill:

1. National Security and Sovereignty:

- The bill prioritizes **national security**, ensuring that any **foreigner posing a threat** to India's **integrity** will be **denied entry or residency**.

2. Expanded Powers for Immigration Officers:

- Immigration officers** are empowered to **arrest without a warrant** if they suspect a foreigner is violating immigration laws.
- Authorities can **restrict movement**, prohibit name changes, and impose strict regulations on foreign nationals.

3. Mandatory Registration and Reporting:

- Foreigners must register** upon arrival and report any **changes in movement or identity**.
- Institutions like hospitals, schools, and hotels** must notify authorities if they are accommodating foreign nationals.

4. Stricter Entry and Stay Regulations:

- Every foreigner must possess a **valid passport and visa** to enter or leave India.
- Airlines, ships, and other **carriers are responsible** for ensuring passengers have proper documents; failure to do so **results in fines and transport seizure**.

5. Stringent Penalties for Violations:

Offense	Penalty
No valid documents	Up to 5 years in jail + 5 lakh fine
Using forged documents	2 to 7 years in jail + 1-10 lakh fine
Overstaying	Up to 3 years in jail + 3 lakh fine
Transporting undocumented foreigners	5 lakh fine + Vehicle seizure

6. Handling of Dual Citizenship:

- Foreign nationals holding **dual citizenship** will be treated as **citizens of the country whose passport they used** to enter India.

Conclusion:

The **Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025** represents a **significant overhaul** of India's immigration policies. By enforcing **stricter penalties**, **enhancing security**, and **modernizing entry and stay regulations**, the bill aims to **safeguard India's sovereignty** while ensuring **efficient immigration management**.