



# Daily Current Affairs



## To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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## 1 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.

## 2 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**.

## 3 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.**

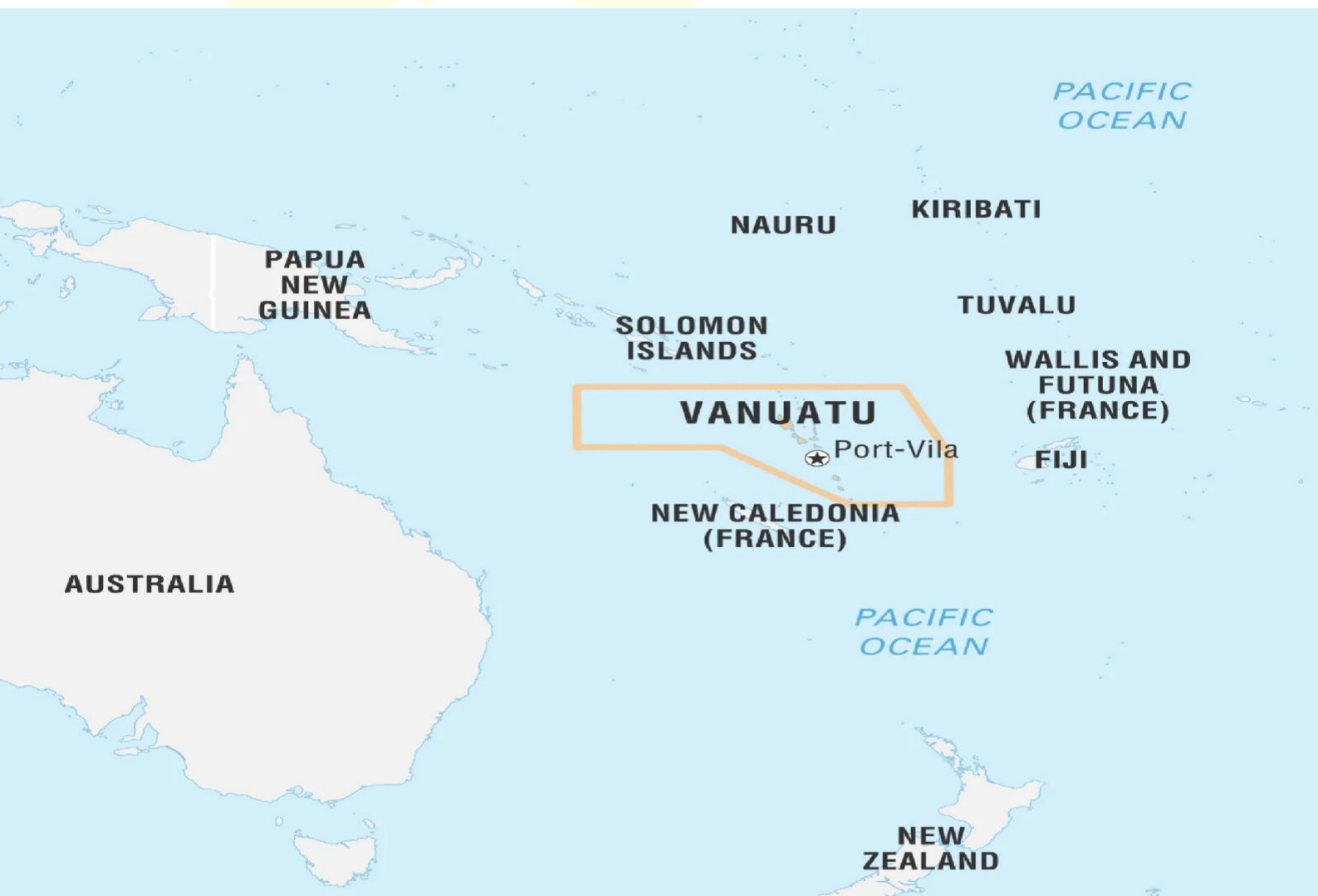
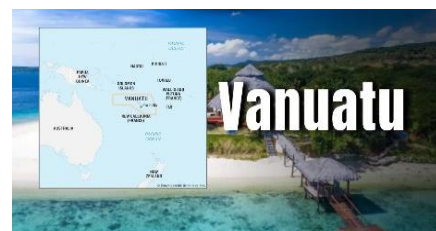
## 4 Vanuatu in the News: Citizenship, Geography & Economy

**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.

## 5 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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## 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)

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- **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.