



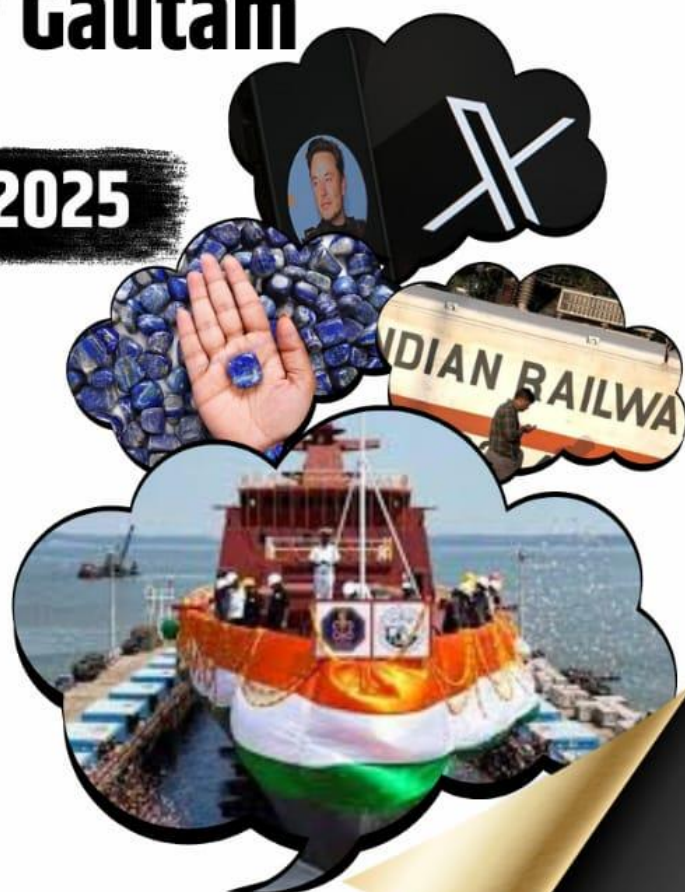
Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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Parliamentary Panel Recommends Boosting Fertilizer Subsidy and Domestic Production

Context: A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilizers has recommended that the **Union Fertilizers Ministry** seek additional funds to ensure the **seamless implementation** of fertilizer subsidy programs for farmers.

Key Recommendations of the Committee:

Increased Budget Allocation:

- The panel urged the Ministry to request **additional funds** at the **revised estimate stage** to prevent any adverse impact on farmers.
- The initial budget allocation for the **Department of Fertilizers (2025-26)** was ₹1,84,704.63 crore, but the **Ministry of Finance** reduced it by 7.38% to ₹1,71,082.44 crore.
- This budget cut has impacted crucial schemes such as the **Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme** and the **Urea Subsidy Scheme**.



Expansion of Nano Fertilizer Production:

- The panel advocated for **scaling up production** of **Nano Urea** and **Nano DAP (Diammonium Phosphate)** to meet increasing demand.
- It emphasized **speedy establishment of production units** to ensure the timely availability of these fertilizers.
- Popularization among farmers is necessary, as studies show **Nano Urea significantly boosts crop yield** (e.g., **peas saw a 6.14%–14.82% increase in yield, sugarcane 1.65%–4%**).

Achieving Self-Sufficiency in Fertilizer Supply:

- While India imports **fertilizers and raw materials**, the panel criticized the lack of **mining lease agreements** for domestic exploration.
- It urged the **Central Government** to **secure mining leases** for essential raw materials to reduce dependency on imports.
- A **combined investment** from **Government, Public, and Private sectors** is necessary for **self-reliance in fertilizer production**.

Addressing Underutilization of Funds:

The panel pointed out **significant underutilization** of allocated funds in **2024-25**, affecting key fertilizer categories:

- 20%** unutilized under **indigenous Phosphorus & Potassium (P&K) fertilizers**.
- 12%** unutilized under **imported P&K fertilizers**.
- 14.76%** unutilized under **indigenous Urea**.
- 59.57%** unutilized under the **Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme**.
- It recommended **full utilization** of budgetary allocations for the **effective implementation of subsidy schemes**.

Continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme:

- Recognizing **urea's crucial role in food grain production**, the panel stressed the need to **continue the Urea Subsidy Scheme**.
- It also highlighted that **Nano DAP** could **reduce dependence on conventional granular DAP**, offering a sustainable alternative through **seed treatment and foliar application**.

Government Initiatives in Fertilizer Subsidy and Soil Health Management:

Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme:

- Implemented on April 1, 2010**, the NBS scheme covers **Phosphatic & Potassic (P&K) fertilizers**.
- Under this scheme, a **fixed subsidy is provided** based on the **nutrient content**, including **Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP)**.



- P&K fertilizers are **decontrolled**, allowing companies to **set the Market Retail Price (MRP)** under government monitoring.

Urea Subsidy Scheme:

- Urea is supplied at a fixed MRP of 242 per 45 kg bag (excluding neem coating and taxes), unchanged since March 1, 2018.
- The government covers the cost difference between market price and MRP through subsidies.

Special Package for DAP (2024-25):

- To tackle **geopolitical disruptions in fertilizer procurement**, the Government approved a **one-time special package** for DAP subsidies.
- An **additional subsidy of 3,500 per MT** was granted from **April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025**, beyond NBS rates.
- This measure aims to **keep DAP prices affordable** while ensuring **adequate supply**.

Impact of Long-Term Chemical Fertilizer Use and Recommendations

Findings from ICAR Study:

- **No harmful effects** on soil fertility if fertilizers are used **judiciously and in balanced proportions**.
- However, **imbalanced fertilizer use** can lead to:
 - **Nutrient deficiencies** and declining **soil health**.
 - **Overuse of nitrogenous fertilizers (urea)** resulting in **lower crop yields** over time.
 - **Even balanced NPK fertilization** failing to **prevent secondary and micronutrient deficiencies**.
- **Drip irrigation (fertigation)** enhances **water and nutrient efficiency**, reducing fertilizer consumption.

Soil Health Management Recommendations (ICAR):

- Farmers should adopt **soil test-based integrated nutrient management**.
- **Balanced use of:**
 - **Inorganic fertilizers (NPK)**.
 - **Organic sources** like **manure and bio-fertilizers**.
- **Training and awareness programs** are essential for farmers.

Promotion of Organic Fertilizers under GOBARdhan Initiative:

- The **Market Development Assistance (MDA)** scheme provides **1,500 per MT** for organic fertilizers.
- Organic manure production is linked with:
 - **SATAT scheme** (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas) for biogas production.
 - **Waste-to-Energy Program** (Ministry of New & Renewable Energy).
 - **Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural)**.
- The Government has **allocated 1,451.84 crore (2023-26)**, including **360 crore** for research in organic fertilizers.

Conclusion:

The **Parliamentary Panel's recommendations** focus on **boosting fertilizer subsidies**, **increasing domestic production**, and **ensuring long-term soil health**. Government initiatives like the **NBS Scheme**, **Urea Subsidy**, and **GOBARdhan program** aim to:

- **Ensure affordable fertilizer availability**.
- **Reduce dependency on imports**.
- **Promote sustainable agricultural practices**.

A **balanced fertilizer approach**, integration of **organic alternatives**, and adoption of **efficient irrigation methods** are critical for **sustaining soil fertility and food security**.

2 Meghalaya's Railway Debate: Opposition, Economic Prospects, and Connectivity Hurdles

Context: Despite decades of **opposition from Khasi pressure groups**, the Indian Railways has decided to **halt railway projects** to Byrnihat and Shillong. This decision leaves **Shillong as the only state capital in India without rail connectivity**.

Meanwhile, **new protests have erupted** in the Jaintia Hills against the **proposed railway line to Jowai**, the largest town in the region.



Current Railway Connectivity in Meghalaya:

Meghalaya has only **one operational railway station** at **Mendipathar in North Garo Hills**, which has been functional since **2014**. This station offers **daily passenger train services to Guwahati** and recently received its **first freight shipment**.

Beyond this, the **Northeast Frontier Railways (NFR)** had planned **three additional railway projects**, but all have been met with **strong opposition**.

Proposed Railway Projects in Meghalaya:

1. Tetelia-Byrnihat Railway Line (Sanctioned in 2010):

- A **21.5 km rail link** between **Tetelia (Assam)** and **Byrnihat (Meghalaya)**.
- Work on the **19 km Assam portion** is **complete**, but local resistance has stalled progress on the **Meghalaya side**.
- The Railways is now considering **terminating the project at the Assam border**.

2. Byrnihat-Shillong Railway Line (Sanctioned in 2011):

- A **108.76 km railway project** with **10 proposed stations**, connecting Byrnihat to Shillong.
- In **2017, 209.37 crore** was allocated for **land acquisition**, but **protests by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU)** have prevented progress.
- With no resolution in sight, the **Railways has requested the Meghalaya government to return the unused funds**.

3. Chandranathpur-Jowai Railway Line (Approved in 2023):

- A planned railway **link between Chandranathpur (Assam) and Jowai (Meghalaya)**.
- The project is currently in the **survey phase**, but **Jaintia organizations have already opposed it**.

Overall Outlook:

Despite growing demand for improved infrastructure, **widespread resistance from pressure groups has stalled all railway expansion efforts**. As a result, **Shillong remains the only state capital without a railway connection**.

Why Are Railway Projects Facing Opposition in Meghalaya?

1. Fear of Large-Scale Migration:

- The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) has been **opposing railway expansion** in the Khasi Hills since the **1980s**.
- Their biggest concern is that **railways will lead to an influx of outsiders**, threatening the indigenous **Khasi and Garo populations**.

2. Demand for Inner Line Permit (ILP):

- The **KSU has long pushed for ILP** to regulate entry and stay of non-locals in Meghalaya.
- ILP is already enforced in **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur**.
- Without ILP, they fear an **uncontrolled migration flow**, which could **alter Meghalaya's demographic balance**.

3. Lack of Protective Mechanisms:

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- The KSU has clarified that they are **not against railways in principle** but want **strong legal safeguards like ILP** before any project is approved.
- They argue that **road travel can be monitored**, but **railways would allow unchecked migration**.

4. Resistance Spreading to Jaintia Hills:

- The **Jaintia National Council (JNC)** has also joined the opposition, citing concerns over **protecting local identity and land**.
- JNC leaders believe Meghalaya **lacks a proper system to regulate migrant entry**, making rail expansion a **potential threat** to local communities.

Overall Concern:

Without **legal protections like ILP**, indigenous groups fear that **rail connectivity will trigger a demographic shift**, affecting the **cultural and economic stability of local communities**.

Diverse Perspectives on Rail Connectivity in Meghalaya:

1. Opposition as a Bargaining Strategy for ILP:

- Some believe that opposition groups are **using the railway issue as leverage** to pressure the government into implementing **Inner Line Permit (ILP)**.
- They argue that **the general public is neutral**, and **rail connectivity is crucial for Meghalaya's economic future**.

2. Economic Advantages of Rail Connectivity:

- Meghalaya's economy depends heavily on **small-scale agriculture (75%) and the service sector**.
- **Road transport leads to higher costs**, making goods more expensive.
- **Rail connectivity would lower transportation costs, increase trade, and boost business opportunities**.
- **Chief Minister Conrad Sangma** has openly supported railway expansion, highlighting its **potential to reduce logistics costs and improve commerce**.

3. Support for Railways in Garo Hills:

- Unlike the strong opposition in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, **many Garo leaders support railway expansion**.
- Garo communities see **railways as an opportunity for economic development and better access to markets**.

Overall Perspective:

While **Khasi and Jaintia groups oppose railway expansion**, the **economic benefits are hard to ignore**. In the **Garo Hills**, many leaders and residents **welcome railway projects**, recognizing their **potential to improve trade and connectivity**.

Conclusion:

Meghalaya's railway debate reflects a **clash between concerns over identity preservation and the push for economic progress**.

- **Opposition groups fear large-scale migration and demand safeguards like ILP** before any railway project proceeds.
- **Supporters argue that better rail connectivity would transform Meghalaya's economy, lowering costs and boosting trade and development**.
- While Khasi and Jaintia organizations remain resistant, **many in the Garo Hills are eager to see railway expansion**.

With no clear resolution, Meghalaya **continues to remain one of the least connected states**, missing out on the **economic and infrastructural benefits of rail networks**.

3 India's Trade Dilemma: Balancing US Tariff Pressure and Chinese Investment Rules

Context: With **border tensions easing**, India is considering **improving economic ties** with China. Policymakers see this as an **opportune moment** to reassess trade barriers.

At the same time, **the US is pressuring India to reduce tariffs and accept Washington's trade terms**. As a result, India faces a critical **balancing act between China and the US**.



India-China Bilateral Trade: Key Insights

- In FY24, **India-China trade** reached **\$118.40 billion**, making China **India's top trading partner once again**.
- **China accounted for 15%** of India's total imports.
- India **imported goods worth \$101.74 billion** from China, out of its total imports of **\$675.42 billion**.

India's Expanding Trade Deficit with China:

India's trade deficit with China **stands at a massive \$83 billion**, primarily due to:

1. **Limited Export Diversification** – India mainly exports **primary commodities**, lacking a strong presence in high-value sectors.
2. **Market Access Barriers** – India faces **restrictions in key sectors** such as **agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and IT/ITeS**, despite having export potential.

China's Low Investment in India:

- China ranks **only 22nd in FDI equity inflows into India**, contributing a modest **\$2.5 billion (April 2000–September 2024)**.
- Despite **rapidly expanding trade volumes**, **Chinese investments in India remain minimal**.
- However, **Beijing is keen to increase investment flows**, signaling **potential changes** in India's approach.

India Considers Easing Trade Barriers on China Amid US Pressure

Relaxing 2020 Trade & Investment Restrictions:

- **Discussions are underway to ease trade restrictions** imposed after the **2020 Galwan clash**.
- Potential measures include:
 - **Lifting tariff and non-tariff barriers.**
 - **Easing visa restrictions** for Chinese professionals.
 - **Reopening access to select banned Chinese apps.**
 - **Allowing targeted Chinese investments** to address the **trade deficit**.

Indian Industry Push for Trade Normalization:

- **SMEs and major industries** have urged the government to **remove trade restrictions** to ensure **uninterrupted supply chains**.
- Key industry demands include:
 - **Easing BIS certification norms** for Chinese imports.
 - **Visa extensions for Chinese workers** in major infrastructure projects.



Balancing US-China Relations:

- Engaging China economically could help counterbalance US tariff pressure.
- A Finance Ministry presentation has advocated for selectively easing trade restrictions, indicating India's flexible approach to global trade.

Cautious Approach to Chinese Investments:

- India is considering gradual approval for Chinese investments, particularly in joint ventures where Chinese firms hold minority stakes.
- The Economic Survey 2023-24 suggested:
 - Encouraging Chinese investments to boost India's industrial capabilities.
 - Discouraging direct imports of finished goods to protect local businesses.

China Plus One Strategy: India's Position:

What is the China Plus One Strategy?

- Many multinational companies are reducing dependence on China by shifting part of their manufacturing and supply chains to other countries.
- Factors driving this shift:
 - Rising labor costs in China.
 - Geopolitical tensions (e.g., US-China trade war).
 - Supply chain disruptions (COVID-19, global conflicts, etc.).

India's Limited Success in Capturing China Plus One:

- A December 2024 NITI Aayog report noted that India has had "limited success" in attracting global companies under the China Plus One strategy.
- Reasons for slow progress:
 - Regulatory hurdles and bureaucratic delays.
 - Infrastructure gaps compared to China.
 - Uncertainty in trade policies.

Shifting Trends in India-China Trade Relations:

- Recent developments suggest a shift toward a more balanced trade relationship:
 - SAIC Motors reducing its stake in MG Motors India.
 - Shein re-entering India through a partnership with Reliance Retail.
- These moves indicate that India may allow controlled Chinese investments while maintaining trade barriers in sensitive sectors.

Conclusion: A Strategic Balancing Act

India now faces a crucial decision – whether to:

- Ease trade barriers for increased Chinese investment.
- Continue restricting trade and face rising import costs.

While US pressure to cut tariffs grows, India sees an opportunity to leverage its position strategically. Any policy shift will likely be gradual and aligned with long-term economic interests—ensuring self-reliance while keeping trade doors open.

4 Tavasya: India's Fourth Krivak-Class Stealth Frigate Takes to the Waters

Context: India has successfully launched **Tavasya**, the fourth and **final follow-on Krivak-class stealth frigate**, at **Goa Shipyard Ltd. (GSL)**. This marks a **major milestone** in India's naval expansion, strengthening its fleet with advanced warships built under **Russian technology transfer**.



Krivak-Class Frigate Deal: A Strategic Partnership:

- In **October 2016**, India and Russia signed an **Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** for the construction of **four follow-on Krivak-class frigates**.
- **Two of these frigates** were built in **Russia**, while the other **two are being built at GSL** under a **technology transfer agreement**.
- **Tavasya** is the **second frigate** to be constructed in India, showcasing the nation's **growing shipbuilding capabilities**.

India's Krivak-Class Frigate Timeline:

Indian-Built Frigates (Under Construction in Goa Shipyard):

- **INS Tripud** – Launched in **July 2023**, set for **Indian Navy delivery in 2026**.
- **INS Tavasya** – Launched in **March 2025**, final follow-on Krivak-class frigate.

Russian-Built Frigates:

- **INS Tushil** – Commissioned in **December 2024** at **Kaliningrad, Russia**, reached home port **Karwar** in **February 2025**.
- **INS Tamal** – Undergoing advanced sea trials, expected to be **commissioned by June 2025**.

Tavasya: Advanced Warship with Cutting-Edge Technology

Technical Specifications:

- **Class:** Krivak IV (Follow-on **Talwar-class** frigate).
- **Propulsion:** Powered by **Zorya-Mashproekt** gas turbine engines from **Ukraine**.
- **Stealth Technology:** **Reduced radar visibility** for enhanced survivability.
- **Multi-Role Capabilities:**
 - **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW)**
 - **Anti-Aircraft Defense**
 - **Surface Combat Missions**
- **Advanced Weapon Systems:** Equipped with **state-of-the-art sensors and combat systems** for superior operational effectiveness.

A Leap Forward for India's Naval Power:

The **successful launch of Tavasya** highlights **India's growing self-reliance** in warship construction and its **strategic naval collaboration with Russia**. With these stealth frigates, the **Indian Navy strengthens its maritime defense** in the **Indo-Pacific region**, ensuring **superior combat readiness** for future challenges.

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Lapis Lazuli: The Earth's Most Enchanting Blue

Context: Lapis Lazuli is a mesmerizing **deep-blue metamorphic rock**, treasured for its **vibrant color** and **semi-precious gemstone** status. This legendary stone has been admired for **millennia**, gracing jewelry, ornaments, and even ancient pigments.

Origins of the Name:

- **Lapis** (Latin) – meaning "stone."
- **Lazuli** (Persian: **Lazward**) – meaning "blue."



The Unique Composition of Lapis Lazuli

The **rich blue hue** of Lapis Lazuli comes from **lazurite**, which makes up **25-40%** of the stone. The shade of blue varies based on **sulfur content** within lazurite.

Other minerals present include:

- **Pyrite** – Creates **golden flecks**, adding a starry-sky effect.
- **Calcite** – Appears as **white streaks**, reducing the intensity of the blue.
- **Diopside & Sodalite** – Found in smaller quantities, contributing to its unique texture.

Did You Know?

The finest **Afghan Lapis Lazuli** contains minimal calcite and abundant **golden pyrite specks**, making it highly prized.

Where is Lapis Lazuli Found?

The world's most renowned **Lapis Lazuli deposits** are located in:

- **Badakhshan, Afghanistan** – Mined for over **6,000 years**, producing the **highest-quality stones**.
- **Chile, Russia, and the United States** – Other significant sources.

Lapis Lazuli Through the Ages:

Ancient India:

- Imported from **Badakhshan** as early as **1000 BCE**.
- **Indus Valley Civilization** (Mohenjo-daro & Harappa) crafted **lapis ornaments** and jewelry.

Egyptian Royalty:

- Worn by **pharaohs** and **priests** as a symbol of **power and wisdom**.
- Ground into powder for **cosmetic eye shadow** and **ritualistic use**.

European Renaissance:

- Transformed into **ultramarine pigment**, one of the most **expensive and coveted blues** in history.
- Used by **great artists** like **Michelangelo** and **Vermeer** for their masterpieces.

A Gemstone of Legends:

From adorning the **crowns of kings** to being a **prized pigment of painters**, **Lapis Lazuli** has left an indelible mark on human civilization. Its celestial **blue depths**, flecked with golden pyrite, continue to symbolize **wisdom, truth, and divine beauty**.

This version enhances readability, adds historical context, and highlights essential facts in an engaging way. Let me know if you'd like any refinements.

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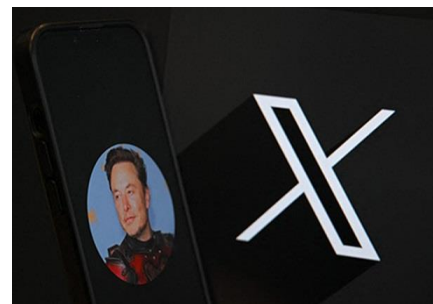
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6 Challenge to Government's Use of Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act

Context: A legal challenge has been raised against the government's interpretation and use of **Section 79(3)(b)** of the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, arguing that it **circumvents due process** and **bypasses safeguards** outlined in **Section 69A**.

Understanding Section 79 & Safe Harbour Protection:

- **Section 79:** Provides **safe harbour protection** to intermediaries (social media platforms, search engines, etc.), shielding them from **liability for user-generated content**.
- **Section 79(3)(b):** Removes this **protection** if an intermediary **fails to act** on government notifications to **block or remove unlawful content**.



Section 69A: The Lawful Route for Blocking Content

- Empowers the **government** to block content **only on specific grounds** laid out in **Article 19(2) of the Constitution**, which allows **reasonable restrictions** on free speech.
- As per the **Shreya Singhal Judgment (2015)**, content **can only be censored** through:
 1. The **procedure provided under Section 69A**, or
 2. A **court order**.

MeitY's 2023 Directive & 'Sahyog' Portal:

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** issued a directive allowing **ministries, state governments, and police authorities** to issue blocking orders under **Section 79(3)(b)**.
- In **2024**, MeitY launched the **'Sahyog' portal**, enabling authorities to **issue and upload blocking orders**, further operationalizing this interpretation.

Key Concerns Raised:

1. Misuse of Section 79(3)(b):

- **Section 79(3)(b)** **does not grant direct blocking powers** to the government. Instead, it merely **defines conditions** under which an intermediary **loses its safe harbour protections**.
- Using it as a **content-blocking tool** **distorts its intended purpose**.

2. Violation of the Shreya Singhal Judgment:

- The **Supreme Court** had **ruled** that content takedowns must follow the **procedure under Section 69A**, ensuring **due process** and **safeguards** against arbitrary censorship.
- **MeitY's directive** **bypasses this legal protection**, allowing content to be removed without **the scrutiny of a judicial or independent authority**.

Why This Matters:

This challenge raises critical **free speech concerns**, highlighting **potential overreach in content regulation**. If **Section 79(3)(b)** is used as a **censorship tool**, it could **weaken legal protections**, allowing content removal without the **checks and balances** established by **law and the judiciary**.

This version is **clear, engaging, and legally structured** while emphasizing key arguments. Let me know if you'd like any refinements