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TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Monthly Current Affairs
🎯 To The Point
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May 2025

Contents

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

India-France Inter-Governmental Agreement on Rafale-M Jets for Indian Navy

Context: India has officially signed a **64,000 crore Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** with **France** for the procurement of **26 Rafale-Marine (Rafale-M)** fighter jets. This deal is a **Government-to-Government (G2G)** arrangement, ensuring a direct and strategic defence partnership without intermediaries.

Key Highlights of the Rafale-M Agreement:

- **Total Aircraft**: 26 **Rafale-M** jets tailored for **carrier-based operations**.

- **Delivery Timeline**: Starts in **mid-2028**, with completion by **2030**.

- **Training Provisions**: Comprehensive training for **crew members in both France and India**.

- **Support for IAF Fleet**: The agreement also includes **spares and equipment** for the **existing Indian Air Force Rafale jets**.

- **Transfer of Technology (ToT)**:

  o Integration of **Astra BVR (Beyond Visual Range) missile**, an indigenous air-to-air missile.

  o **Establishment of a production facility** for **Rafale fuselages in India**.

  o Creation of **Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul (MRO)** infrastructure for **engines, avionics, and weapons systems**.

Boost to Indian Industry & Economy:

- Expected to generate **thousands of jobs**.

- Will benefit **numerous MSMEs** (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises).

- Strengthens India's push for **self-reliance in defence manufacturing** under **'Make in India'** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** initiatives.

Modernising the Indian Navy's Air Power:

- **Current Carriers**:

  o **INS Vikramaditya** (Russian-origin)

  o **INS Vikrant** (Indigenous; commissioned in 2022)

- **Current Fighter Fleet**: 45 **MiG-29K** aircraft

  o Facing **low availability** and **end-of-service-life issues**

- **New Acquisition Need**: Rafale-M chosen to address urgent carrier-based combat requirements.

Rationalising Fleet Strength:

- Initial plan: **54 jets**

- Revised to **26 jets** due to:

  o Development of **Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF)** by **DRDO**

  o Aim to support **indigenous defence innovation**

Other Major Defence Procurement: MQ-9B Sea Guardians

- India will procure **31 MQ-9B HALE RPAS** (High Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems) from the **United States**.
  - o **15 for Navy**
  - o **8 each** for the **Army** and **Air Force**
- Deliveries scheduled from **January 2029 to September 2030**.
- Enhances India's **maritime domain awareness** and **long-range surveillance capabilities**.

Strategic Significance:

- Strengthens the **India-France defence partnership**, one of the oldest and most trusted.
- Enhances India's ability to **project power in the Indo-Pacific region**.
- A critical step in preparing for **future naval warfare**, integrating **cutting-edge technology** and **multilateral partnerships**.

Did You Know?

- The **Rafale-M** is the **naval variant** of the combat-proven Rafale fighter, capable of operating from **short runways and aircraft carriers**.
- India becomes the **first country outside France** to operate both **Air Force and Navy variants** of the Rafale.
- The **TEDBF**, India's upcoming indigenous carrier jet, is expected to take its first flight by **2026** and be inducted by **2032**.

US-China 90-Day Tariff Truce: Key Highlights, Origins, and Global Impact

Context: In a major move aimed at de-escalating trade tensions, the **United States and China** have agreed to a **90-day tariff truce** after two days of high-level diplomatic talks in **Geneva**. Both nations have decided to **temporarily suspend high tariffs and non-tariff barriers** imposed since early April, with the aim of paving the way for broader trade negotiations.

Backdrop: The Origins of the US-China Tariff War

What Sparked the Trade Dispute?

- The conflict gained momentum when the **US began imposing tariffs** on Chinese imports from **February 1**, citing the **illicit export of fentanyl**—a deadly synthetic opioid—as a primary concern. This marked the beginning of a trade spiral that rapidly intensified.

April 2: "Liberation Day" Tariff Surge:

- Labelled as **"Liberation Day"** by then-President Donald Trump, **April 2** saw the US raise tariffs dramatically—**an additional 34%** on all Chinese goods, aimed at countering what the US called "unfair trade practices."

China's Retaliation:

China quickly hit back with **its own counter-tariffs**, diverging from the measured responses of other trading partners. What followed was a rapid **escalation**:

- **By April 10**, US tariffs on Chinese goods had surged to **145%**

- China imposed **125% tariffs** on US imports

For instance, a Chinese product priced at $100 would now cost **$245** in the US due to tariffs alone.

Beyond Tariffs: China's Non-Tariff Responses

China also employed several **non-tariff barriers**, including:

- **Export restrictions** on **rare earth minerals**, crucial for US tech industries
- **Regulatory probes** and **investigations** into major US corporations operating in China

Why Tariffs? Understanding the US Rationale

Trade Deficit Concerns:

- The **US Trade Representative** pointed to a staggering **$1.2 trillion trade deficit** as justification. The US imports significantly more than it exports, particularly from China.

Accusations of Unfair Practices:

The Trump administration accused China of:

- **Subsidizing domestic firms**
- **Shielding them from global competition**
- **Blocking foreign market access for US companies**

With the **trade deficit rising by over 40%** since 2020, the administration claimed **tariffs were the only viable tool** after diplomatic efforts failed.

Post-Truce Trade Landscape: What's Changing?

Reduction in Tariff Rates:

After the truce:

- **Base tariffs** on each other's goods were **reduced to 10%**
- However, the **US maintains an additional 20% tariff** on Chinese goods **linked to fentanyl concerns**

Effective US tariff on Chinese goods: 30%

Effective Chinese tariff on US goods: 10%

Non-Tariff Measures Lifted:

- In a goodwill gesture, **China has suspended all non-tariff restrictions** imposed after April 2, easing pressure on American companies operating within its borders.

Why the Truce Now? Driving Factors Behind the Decision

Consumer Impact Outweighing Producer Gains:

- While **tariffs were meant to protect domestic industries**, they significantly **increased consumer prices**, causing widespread discontent. The benefits were concentrated among a few producers, while **consumers bore the economic burden**.

Price Surge Across Sectors:

- Retailers, including giants like **Walmart**, reported **rising prices and supply chain disruptions**. The result was increased pressure on household budgets and inflationary trends across the board.

Economic Contraction and Recession Fears:

- The **US economy contracted in Q1 2025**, even before the full effects of the tariff regime could be realized. Economists warned of a looming **recession**, defined by two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth.

Stagflation on the Horizon:

- A dangerous combination of **rising inflation and stagnating economic growth**—known as **stagflation**—emerged as a real threat, prompting urgent policy re-evaluations.

Conclusion: A Fragile Pause, Not a Resolution

While the **90-day truce** signals a **positive shift in tone**, it is by no means a **comprehensive trade agreement**. The **origin of the Geneva talks remains unclear**, underscoring the **deep mistrust** that persists between the two powers.

The **upcoming negotiations** are expected to be **difficult, complex, and high-stakes**, with **no guaranteed resolution** at the end of the 90-day window.

India Extends $50 Million Treasury Bill to Support Maldives' Economy

Context: In a significant move to reinforce regional cooperation, **India has extended the maturity of a $50 million Treasury Bill** to aid the **Maldives**, offering timely economic relief to its financially stressed island neighbor. The **State Bank of India (SBI)** facilitated this extension, signaling India's continued commitment to regional stability despite occasional diplomatic strains.

What Are Treasury Bills?

Treasury Bills (T-Bills) are **short-term debt instruments** issued by governments to address **immediate fiscal needs**. Rolling over a T-Bill implies **postponing its maturity**, allowing the borrowing nation—in this case, the Maldives—to defer repayment without defaulting.

Why This Move Matters:

- The **Maldives is facing mounting economic pressure**, aggravated by debt and global economic uncertainties.

- India's assistance comes **amid fluctuating bilateral ties**, but reinforces India's long-term vision of maintaining peace and stability in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.

- The support aligns with India's foreign policy frameworks—**Neighbourhood First** and **Vision MAHASAGAR** (**Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions**).

India–Maldives Bilateral Relationship: An Overview

Strategic and Diplomatic Ties:

India views the **Maldives as a vital maritime neighbor** and a **strategic pillar** in maintaining balance in the Indian Ocean. Both nations are founding members of:

- **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

- **South Asian Economic Union**

- **South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)**

Economic Cooperation:

- A **bilateral trade agreement**, signed in 1981, enables **export of essential commodities** to the Maldives.

- **Bilateral trade milestones**:
  - **$300 million** in 2021
  - **$548 million** in 2023

- India is among the **top investors** in the Maldives and a key partner in **infrastructure and development projects**.

Defense and Security Partnership:

- Since the **1988 attempted coup**, **defense collaboration** has remained a cornerstone.

- Joint patrols, capacity building, and training of security forces are part of ongoing cooperation.

Connectivity and Tourism:

- The **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)** links **Male to Thilafushi** and is a flagship Indian-funded infrastructure initiative.

- In **2023**, India was the **largest source of tourists** to the Maldives, holding an **11.8% share**.

- The **Open Skies Agreement** (March 2022) further boosts tourism and air connectivity.

Why Maldives Matters to India:

Geostrategic Location:

- Situated at a **strategic crossroads** in the **Indian Ocean**, the Maldives is crucial for **India's maritime security** and trade.

- Nearly **50% of India's external trade** and **80% of its energy imports** pass through nearby sea lanes.

Countering China's Influence:

- The Maldives provides a key platform for **India to counterbalance China's rising presence** in the region, which includes **large infrastructure investments** and **debt-driven diplomacy**.

Regional Diplomacy and IOR Leadership:

- Strong ties with the Maldives enhance India's **leadership role** in regional platforms like the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.

Challenges in the India-Maldives Relationship:

Political Volatility:

- **Frequent regime changes** in the Maldives create **uncertainty in long-term projects**, sometimes reversing previous diplomatic commitments.

Rising Chinese Footprint:

- China's **economic influence** continues to grow, challenging India's **traditional strategic space** in the Maldives.

Security Threats:

- **Non-traditional threats** like piracy, drug trafficking, and terrorism require close cooperation.

- **Religious extremism and radicalization** remain serious security concerns, needing sustained **counter-radicalization efforts**.

Trade Imbalance:

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- The **unbalanced trade relationship**, with India exporting far more to the Maldives than it imports, has led to **calls for diversification** in Maldivian economic circles.

The Road Ahead: Towards a Stronger Partnership

The evolving India–Maldives relationship is shaped by **shared geography, strategic priorities, and economic interdependence**. While challenges exist, **India has consistently shown willingness to support** the Maldives, even under complex diplomatic climates.

By addressing mutual concerns and **building trust through cooperation**, the two countries can **forge a resilient, future-ready partnership** anchored in **peace, prosperity, and shared regional goals**.

India Raises Concern Over Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal

Context: In a recent development, **India's Defence Minister** has raised serious concerns over the **security and accountability** of **Pakistan's nuclear arsenal**, urging that it be placed under the watch of the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**. This move reflects growing regional and global anxieties about **nuclear safety** and the risk of **proliferation**.

Pakistan's Nuclear Posture: A Threat Without Restraint

Unchecked Expansion:

Pakistan became a **declared nuclear power in 1998**, following India's own nuclear tests. Since then, it has **rapidly expanded** its nuclear capabilities, with an estimated **170 nuclear warheads** today.

Unlike India, which adheres to a **No-First-Use (NFU) policy**, **Pakistan has no such declared restraint**, making its nuclear doctrine **opaque and unpredictable**.

Outside Global Norms:

Pakistan remains **outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, raising red flags globally, particularly because of:

- Past **nuclear proliferation links**, including the A.Q. Khan network.
- Lack of formal commitment to **disarmament principles** or **international verification mechanisms**.

NPT: A Framework Pakistan Rejects

The **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**, signed in **1968** and in force since **1970**, aims to:

- **Prevent nuclear weapon spread**.
- Promote **peaceful nuclear energy**.
- Facilitate **nuclear disarmament**.

Only five nations are recognized as **Nuclear Weapon States (NWS)** under this treaty. **India, Pakistan, Israel**, and **North Korea** have **not signed** the NPT, citing its **discriminatory nature**.

IAEA: Global Nuclear Watchdog

About the IAEA:

The **International Atomic Energy Agency**, established in **1957**, is the world's foremost body promoting **safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear energy**.

Headquarters: Vienna, Austria

- **Members**: 180 countries (as of November 2024)
- **Motto**: *"Atoms for Peace and Development"*

Core Functions:

- **Safeguards & Verification**: Ensures that **nuclear materials are not diverted for weapons**.
- **Nuclear Safety & Security**: Supports nations in improving **nuclear standards** and countering **nuclear terrorism**.
- **Technical Cooperation**: Helps developing countries harness **nuclear technology** for health, agriculture, and energy.

The IAEA plays a vital role in **non-proliferation diplomacy**, especially in **inspections and monitoring** (e.g., in Iran's case).

India's Commitment to Responsible Nuclear Conduct:

India, though not an NPT signatory, has taken several steps to demonstrate **nuclear responsibility and transparency**:

- **Ratified the Additional Protocol (2014)**: Allows greater IAEA access to **India's civil nuclear program**.
- **Signed item-specific safeguards agreements** with the IAEA.
- **Joined key export control regimes**:
    o **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** – Joined in 2016.
    o **Wassenaar Arrangement** – Joined in 2017.
    o **Australia Group** – Joined in 2018.

India has also aligned its export controls with the norms of the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**, although it remains **outside the group**, alongside Pakistan and Israel.

India-Pakistan Nuclear Installation Agreement:

In an effort to reduce nuclear risks, India and Pakistan signed the **Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement (NAA)** in **1988**, effective from **1991**.

Key Provisions:

- **Annual exchange** of nuclear facility locations.
- Prevents **attacks on each other's civilian nuclear installations**.

However, this agreement:

- **Does not mandate** transparency in terms of **activities or capabilities**.
- **Lacks depth** in preventing broader military confrontations.

India has repeatedly called for **expanding the agreement** to include **civilian and economic infrastructure**, but **Pakistan has consistently refused**.

Why India is Concerned:

- **Strategic Instability**: Pakistan's lack of a **No-First-Use policy** heightens the risk of a **nuclear first strike** in a crisis.
- **Nuclear Brinkmanship**: Islamabad often uses its nuclear capability as a **deterrent** to **offset India's conventional military edge**.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
NEWS

- **Terror Risks**: Concerns persist about **internal security** in Pakistan, raising fears that **non-state actors** could potentially access nuclear materials.

Conclusion: A Call for Oversight and Dialogue

India's demand for **IAEA supervision** over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is not just about bilateral rivalry—it is a **global call for accountability**. In an age where **nuclear risks** are rising due to **geopolitical tensions** and **terror threats**, greater **transparency, dialogue, and regional arms control** are essential for **long-term peace** in South Asia.

Virtual Capacity Building Session on Digital Transformation in BRICS: India Takes the Lead

Context: India recently spearheaded a **Virtual Capacity Building Session** focused on **Digital Transformation** within the BRICS framework. The event brought together key representatives from the **BRICS nations — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**, along with newly inducted members like **Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Ethiopia** — to deliberate on collaborative approaches for digital innovation and inclusion.

Accelerating Digital Growth Across BRICS:

The **BRICS bloc**, comprising some of the world's fastest-growing economies, has made significant strides in building robust **digital economies**. With over **40% of global internet users**, BRICS countries contribute around **30% to global ICT goods** and **11% to digitally deliverable services**. Their collective influence has only grown following the group's **expansion in 2024**, enhancing their share of **global exports** and **digital consumers**.

Today, BRICS represents:

- **45.2% of the world's population**
- **36.7% of global GDP**
- **23.3% of global merchandise trade**

India's Digital Innovations: Leading by Example

India took center stage by showcasing several of its landmark **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** initiatives:

- **Sanchar Saathi**: A user-centric platform designed to safeguard mobile users from **fraud**, promote **transparency**, and improve **accessibility** to mobile services.

- **AADHAAR**: The world's largest biometric ID system, highlighted as a cornerstone for **digital identity** and **inclusive public service delivery**.

- **Sangam Digital Twin Initiative**: A next-generation project harnessing **AI-native, federated digital platforms** for **smart infrastructure planning** and **real-time governance**.

India, alongside Brazil, also shared insights on **cyber resilience**, underscoring the importance of safeguarding digital assets in an increasingly interconnected world.

China's Technological Contributions:

China provided a comprehensive overview of its **digital infrastructure evolution**, emphasizing its progress with **Digital Twin technologies**, which simulate real-world environments to aid in planning, management, and optimization.

Digital Technologies for Sustainable Development:

The session reinforced BRICS's commitment to the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, emphasizing digital technology as a critical tool for:

- **Inclusive economic growth**
- **Improved governance through e-services**
- **Financial inclusion**
- **Global technological partnerships**

Emerging technologies such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **big data**, and **cloud computing** were identified as key drivers of innovation and progress.

Particular emphasis was placed on **agritech** and **digital agriculture** to:

- Enhance **agricultural productivity**
- Increase **farmers' income**
- Support **sustainable food systems**

Challenges in the Path of Digital Transformation:

Despite the progress, BRICS acknowledged several pressing challenges:

- The persistent **digital divide** among and within countries
- Growing **cybersecurity threats** and **data privacy concerns**
- Risks of **technology misuse**
- **Rotating leadership** and differing national priorities
- Occasional **internal disagreements** impacting decision-making

A Closer Look at BRICS:

- The term **BRIC** was coined by economist **Jim O'Neill** in 2001.
- The first **formal BRIC Summit** was held in **2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia**.
- **South Africa** joined in **2010**, making it **BRICS**.
- In **2024**, **Iran, UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia** became new members.
- **Argentina** was initially invited but declined to join.

One of the major institutional successes of BRICS is the **New Development Bank (NDB)**, established in **2015**, with headquarters in **Shanghai**. The NDB finances **infrastructure** and **sustainable development** projects across BRICS and other emerging economies.

Conclusion: A Roadmap for a Digitally Empowered Future

This capacity-building session reaffirms the strategic importance of **digital cooperation** within BRICS. As these nations continue to leverage technology to achieve **sustainable growth**, the emphasis remains on building **inclusive**, **secure**, and **resilient digital ecosystems** that can serve as models for the **Global South**.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
NEWS
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

India–Maldives Hold 2nd High-Level Core Group Meeting

Context: In a key diplomatic engagement, the **Foreign Minister of Maldives** arrived in **New Delhi** to participate in the **2nd High-Level Core Group (HLCG) Meeting**. The discussions aim to review the progress made under the **India–Maldives Vision Document** for a **Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership**, jointly adopted by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and the **President of Maldives** last year.

Core Areas of Cooperation: Vision for a Shared Future

The meeting reflects a shared ambition to **strengthen bilateral ties** with a **people-first and future-ready** approach. The partnership spans across multiple domains:

1. **Bilateral Commitment and Financial Support:** India has reaffirmed its regional priority under the **'Neighbourhood First' policy** and **Vision SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region). In a show of economic solidarity:

   - India provided **emergency financial aid** through:
     - **Rollover of $100 million in Treasury Bills**
     - **Currency swap worth $400 million**
     - **30 billion in budgetary support**

This support underlines India's role as a **reliable development partner** for Maldives in times of financial stress.

2. **A Framework for Comprehensive Economic & Maritime Security Partnership:**

The newly structured framework envisions:

   - A **strategic, stabilizing force** in the **Indian Ocean Region**
   - A focus on **mutual prosperity**, security, and resilience
   - A **people-centric** approach to ensure long-term development

3. **Development and Infrastructure Cooperation:** India has stepped up its commitment to **nation-building projects** in Maldives, including:

   - **Ports, roads, airports, hospitals, housing, and schools**
   - Major initiatives like the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**, worth **USD 530 million**, will connect **Male to Thilafushi, Villingili, and Gulhifalhu**, and act as a **major catalyst for Maldivian economic development**.

4. Trade and Economic Partnership:

Efforts are underway to explore:

   - A potential **Bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**
   - **Local currency trade settlement** to reduce dollar reliance
   - Encouragement of **private investments** and improved **ease of doing business**
   - Support for **economic diversification**, particularly in:
     - **Blue economy**
     - **Fisheries**

    o   **Ocean-based research and innovation**

5. **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**

India is sharing its expertise in **digital transformation**, including:

- Expansion of **UPI**, **RuPay**, and **Digital ID systems**
- Support for fintech ecosystems and **digital governance tools**
- Collaboration in implementing platforms like **Gati Shakti**

6. **Clean Energy and Environment:** Both countries are aligning on sustainability through:

- **Renewable energy projects**, especially **solar power**
- Participation in India's **One Sun One World One Grid** initiative
- Joint research, training, and investment in **energy efficiency**

7. **Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals:** India continues to be a **key healthcare partner** for the Maldives:

- Access to **affordable Indian healthcare services**
- Export and availability of **generic medicines** through **Jan Aushadhi Kendras**
- **Recognition of Indian Pharmacopoeia**, improving drug regulation standards

8. **Maritime and Regional Security Cooperation:**

Both sides agreed to bolster:

- **Maritime domain awareness**
- Coordination through the **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)**
- Cooperation in **multilateral fora** to uphold **regional peace and stability**

India remains Maldives' **primary security partner**, but with an approach that respects **Maldivian sovereignty and preferences**.

Institutional Mechanism for Implementation:

To ensure effective execution of all agreements and frameworks:

- A **High-Level Core Group (HLCG)** has been established
- The group includes **senior officials** from both nations and will **monitor progress** across all sectors

Significance of the India–Maldives Relationship:

Regional Importance:

- Maldives is strategically located in the **heart of the Indian Ocean**, making it vital to India's **maritime security and trade routes**.

Economic Leadership:

- In **2023**, India emerged as Maldives' **largest trading partner**.
- India is a **top investor** and source of **tourism**, contributing to over **11.8% of tourist arrivals** in 2023.

Defense Cooperation:

- India has been Maldives' defense partner since **1988**, providing:
  - o **Training for over 70% of Maldivian defence personnel**
  - o Support under the **2016 Defence Action Plan**

Connectivity Boost:

- The **Open Skies Agreement (2022)** has enhanced **air links**, facilitating trade, tourism, and people-to-people ties.

The Road Ahead: Towards MAHASAGAR Vision

Maldives remains a **core maritime neighbour** under India's strategic **MAHASAGAR vision** — **Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions**.

Moving forward, the emphasis will be on:

- **Balancing strategic autonomy with shared interests**

- Deepening cooperation in **climate resilience**, **tech innovation**, and **blue economy**

- Ensuring **maritime safety**, economic growth, and **regional stability**

Conclusion: A Relationship Anchored in Trust and Shared Goals

The 2nd HLCG Meeting has further strengthened the **India–Maldives partnership**, laying the groundwork for **mutually beneficial cooperation** across sectors. As the Indian Ocean becomes increasingly geopolitically significant, this **dynamic and evolving relationship** stands as a **model of regional diplomacy**, resilience, and responsible leadership.

Cabinet Approves Caste Enumeration in the Upcoming Census

Context: The **Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA)**, chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, has approved the inclusion of **caste enumeration** in the forthcoming **decennial Census**, marking a **major policy transformation** in the way India collects demographic data.

Caste-Based Enumeration: A Historical Overview

- **Last Full Caste Census**: Conducted in **1931** during British rule, documenting **4,147 distinct castes**.

- **1941 Census**: Caste data collected but **not published** due to **World War II**.

- **Post-Independence**: Only **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)** have been officially counted.

- **1961 Directive**: States were permitted to conduct surveys to identify **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**.

- **2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)**: Captured socio-economic data but did **not classify or publish caste data** comprehensively.

Legal & Constitutional Basis:

- **Union Subject**: As per **Article 246** and the **Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution, **Census operations** are the **exclusive domain of the Union Government**.

- **Census Act, 1948**: Governs all Census activities, including **data collection, procedures, responsibilities**, and **penalties** for non-compliance.

- The current move ensures **national uniformity**, **legal backing**, and **transparency** in caste data collection.

Significance of the New Caste Enumeration:

Digital Census for a Digital India:

- The **upcoming Census** will be conducted **digitally**.

- Respondents can use a **mobile application** to fill out their data.

- A new **caste column** with a **drop-down code directory** will make selection **streamlined and standardized**.Data-Driven Governance

- Reliable caste data enables **evidence-based policymaking** in:

  o **Education**

  o **Employment**

  o **Welfare and Reservation Programs**

- Will assist in the **implementation of the 33% women's reservation** in **Parliament** and **State Assemblies**.

- Helps tailor **development initiatives** to address **socio-economic inequalities**.

Judicial Support:

- The **Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney judgment** mandates that any declaration of a group's "backwardness" must be based on **objective, data-driven analysis**.

- A robust caste enumeration aligns with this directive.

Concerns and Challenges:

Political Exploitation:

- There is a risk that caste data could be **manipulated** for **electoral gains**.
- Critics cite **past instances** where caste surveys lacked **transparency** and were driven by **political motivations**.

Social Fragmentation:

- Emphasis on caste identities could **exacerbate social divisions**, rather than promote **inclusivity**.
- May intensify **debates around caste-based reservations**, leading to **public unrest or tension**.

Implementation Difficulties:

- Ensuring **accurate and scientific classification** of castes is **complex**.
- There is a need for **methodological clarity**, **training of enumerators**, and **technological safeguards** to prevent **data misrepresentation**.

Conclusion: Towards Inclusive Development

The decision to include **caste enumeration** in the **next Census** is a **landmark policy move** that could reshape India's **socio-economic architecture**. While it brings promise for **inclusive growth**, **targeted policymaking**, and **social equity**, it must be handled with **caution, scientific rigor**, and **political neutrality**.

The **success of this exercise** will depend not only on **technical execution** but also on the **integrity of its purpose**—to **uplift**, **empower**, and **unify**, not to divide.

Bridging the Digital Divide: Key Highlights of the Landmark Verdict

Context: In a historic move, the **Supreme Court of India** has ruled that **digital access** is an intrinsic part of the **fundamental right to life and liberty** under **Article 21** of the Constitution. This judgment significantly impacts India's approach to digital infrastructure, marking digital inclusion as a constitutional obligation for the state.

Key Highlights of the Verdict:

- **Constitutional Provisions Invoked**:
    - **Article 21**: Right to life and dignity.
    - **Article 14**: Right to equality.
    - **Article 15**: Prohibition of discrimination.
    - **Article 38 (DPSP)**: The state's duty to promote welfare and reduce inequalities.

- **Digital Access as a Constitutional Right**:
    - The Court recognized **digital access** as an **"instinctive component"** of the **right to life** under Article 21.
    - The right to digital access is now viewed as a **constitutional imperative**, essential for participating in governance, accessing education, healthcare, essential services, and economic opportunities in today's digital age.

- **Substantive Equality Principle**:

  o The Court stressed the importance of ensuring that digital transformation is **inclusive** and **equitable**, addressing the varying needs of society.

Bridging the Digital Divide: A Constitutional Responsibility

- Despite rapid digital growth in India (through initiatives like **Aadhaar**, **online platforms**, and **net banking**), significant sections of the population—particularly rural areas, senior citizens, economically weaker sections, linguistic minorities, and persons with disabilities—continue to face **systemic exclusion** due to lack of digital access.

- **Inclusive Digital Infrastructure**: The judgment emphasizes that it is not merely a policy choice, but a **constitutional responsibility** to ensure that everyone has access to digital services, protecting their **dignity, autonomy**, and the ability to participate fully in public life.

Political Background and Relief Granted:

- The verdict came in response to petitions by **two acid attack survivors** who faced barriers in completing the **digital KYC** process due to their inability to take a live photograph by blinking, an essential requirement for online identity verification.

- **Directions by the Court**:

  o The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** and other governmental bodies have been instructed to revise **KYC norms** to accommodate **visually- and hearing-impaired** individuals.

  o Develop accessible alternatives such as **Braille**, **voice-enabled**, and other user-friendly digital interfaces.

  o Provide alternative modes to verify "liveness" for KYC purposes, and allow **paper-based KYC** as an accessible option.

Implications for Governance and Policy:

- **Inclusive Digital Governance**: The Court's verdict calls for a proactive approach from the state in designing digital ecosystems that include **diverse needs** and ensure **no one is left behind**.

- **Future of Technology**: The Court's directive reaffirms the principle that **technology** should never be a barrier to essential services, and inclusive design is vital to ensuring **true participation** in the digital world.

This ruling paves the way for a more **inclusive digital ecosystem** in India, ensuring that **technology** serves everyone, leaving no one behind. The Supreme Court has not only protected an individual's **right to digital access** but also emphasized the importance of **equality and inclusivity** in an increasingly digital world.

President Highlights the Role of Mediation in Reducing Judicial Burden

Context: At the **first National Mediation Conference** organized by the **Mediation Association of India (MIA)**, the **President of India** strongly emphasized the growing importance of **mediation** as a tool to resolve disputes, reduce litigation costs, and ease the **overburdened court system**.

What is Mediation?

Mediation is a **voluntary, confidential, and non-adversarial** process where a **neutral third party** (mediator) assists disputing individuals or parties in arriving at a **mutually acceptable solution**.

It is one of the key pillars of **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**, alongside:

- **Arbitration**
- **Conciliation**
- **Negotiation**

India's Judicial Backlog: A Crisis in Numbers

The Indian judiciary is currently struggling under a **mountain of pending cases**:

- **5.1 crore+ total pending cases** (as of 2024)
    - **71,000** in the **Supreme Court**
    - **60 lakh** in **High Courts**
    - **4.5 crore** in **District and Subordinate Courts**
- Judge Vacancy: Out of ~25,000 sanctioned judges, only ~20,000 are in place (**~20% shortfall**)
- **Judge-to-population ratio**: Only **21 judges per million**, far short of the **Law Commission's recommendation** of **50 per million**

Why Mediation Matters:

Mediation offers a practical, humane, and sustainable approach to dispute resolution:

- **Reduces Court Pendency**: Ideal for minor **civil**, **commercial**, and **family** disputes
- **Time-Efficient**: Resolutions are often reached within **a few sessions**
- **Cost-Effective**: Cuts down on **legal fees** and **court expenses**
- **Relationship-Friendly**: Preserves **personal and business ties**
- **Empowering**: Parties retain **control over the outcome**, rather than having a solution imposed

Legal and Institutional Support:

Mediation in India is supported by several key **laws and frameworks**:

- **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**: Created **Lok Adalats** using mediation-like techniques
- **Section 89, Civil Procedure Code (1908)**: Courts **mandated** to refer cases for ADR
- **Mediation Act, 2023** (Landmark legislation)
    - **Mandatory pre-litigation mediation** in civil & commercial matters
    - Formation of the **Mediation Council of India (MCI)** for:
        - Standardizing training & accreditation
        - Regulating mediation institutions
        - Monitoring mediator conduct and case outcomes

Mediation in Current Legal & Commercial Disputes:

- **Commercial Courts Act, 2015**: Fast-tracks commercial cases above ₹3 lakh and promotes **pre-litigation mediation**
- **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996** (with 2015, 2019, 2021 amendments): Encourages **binding arbitration**, both **ad hoc** and **institutional**

- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**: Emphasizes **mediation** as a primary dispute resolution tool
- **Singapore Convention on Mediation**: India's participation paves the way for **cross-border enforcement** of mediated settlements

The Way Forward:

To make mediation a **mainstream judicial tool**, India must:

1. **Strengthen Legal Infrastructure**: Ensure **uniform and effective implementation** of the Mediation Act, 2023
2. **Boost Awareness**: Launch nationwide **mediation literacy campaigns**
3. **Train Mediators**: Scale up **capacity building** with standardized **certification**
4. **Judicial Backing**: Encourage **active referrals by judges** to mediation centers
5. **Go Digital**: Promote **Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)** for convenience and speed
6. **Track Progress**: Build **national databases** to assess mediation outcomes and their impact on court backlog

Conclusion:

The President's address underscores a **pivotal shift** in India's legal landscape. **Mediation is not merely an alternative**—it is an **essential path** to **accessible**, **timely**, and **empathetic justice**. As India advances, a **robust mediation ecosystem** can transform how we resolve conflicts, preserve relationships, and uphold the rule of law.

Supreme Court Judges Publicly Declare Assets – A Milestone in Judicial Transparency

Context: In a landmark move toward **judicial accountability**, **21 sitting judges** of the **Supreme Court of India**, including the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**, have voluntarily disclosed their **financial assets and liabilities** on the apex court's official website.

Background: Evolving Discourse on Judicial Ethics

- **Judicial accountability** has long been debated in India, especially regarding **financial transparency** and **ethical standards**.
- **Judges**, unlike legislators or civil servants, are **not legally required** to publicly declare their assets.
- The current disclosures stem from a **Full Court Resolution**, signaling a commitment to **public confidence** and **openness**.

Timeline of Key Developments:

Year	Event
1997	First **Full Court Resolution** under **CJI J.S. Verma** recommends judges disclose assets to the Chief Justice.
2009	A new Full Court resolution allows **voluntary disclosure** of assets on the Supreme Court website.

2009	The **Delhi High Court** rules that such declarations are "information" under **Section 2(f)** of the **RTI Act, 2005**.
2019	A **Constitution Bench** declares the **CJI a 'public authority'** under the **RTI Act**, supporting the public interest in asset disclosure.
2025	The **Supreme Court** begins **proactively publishing** judges' assets, including familial ties, on its website.

Significance of Asset Declaration:

- **Promotes Transparency**: Demonstrates a commitment to **ethical conduct** and **clean governance**.

- **Builds Public Trust**: Counters perceptions of **elitism**, **opacity**, or **bias** in the judiciary.

- **Upholds Constitutional Morality**: Reflects the values of **integrity**, **accountability**, and **responsibility** in line with the **Preamble** and **Directive Principles** (Part IV) of the Indian Constitution.

Why Judicial Integrity Matters:

Guardian of the Constitution:

- The judiciary safeguards **fundamental rights**, ensures **rule of law**, and maintains **institutional checks and balances**.

Ensuring Accountability:

- Lack of transparency may lead to **judicial corruption**, **delays**, or **misuse of authority**.

- Asset declarations help **deter conflicts of interest** and enhance **public scrutiny**.

Institutional Stability:

- In times of **political crisis** or **social unrest**, a **trustworthy judiciary** acts as a **pillar of democracy** and reinforces **national unity**.

Concluding Thoughts:

Transparency and ethical conduct are **not optional** in a democracy—they are the **lifeblood of judicial legitimacy**. The Supreme Court's move to disclose judges' assets is a **progressive step** toward a **more accountable, inclusive, and respected judiciary**.

A **strong and transparent judiciary** isn't just a constitutional ideal—it is a **moral imperative** for **democratic governance** and **societal harmony**.

Appointment to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

Context: A **high-level committee** led by the **Prime Minister of India** recently convened to select the next **Director of the CBI**. However, due to the **lack of consensus**, the **incumbent director** is likely to receive a **one-year extension**.

About the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):

Overview:

The **CBI** is India's premier **investigative agency**, tasked with probing high-profile crimes, corruption cases, economic offenses, and matters related to **national security**.

Origins & Evolution:

- Traces its roots to the **Special Police Establishment (SPE)** formed in **1941**, aimed at probing corruption in **wartime procurement**.

- Officially established in **1963** through an **executive order** based on the **Santhanam Committee's** recommendations.

- **Not a statutory body** — not created by an Act of Parliament.

Functioning:

- Operates under the **Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)**, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

- Derives investigative authority from the **Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946**.

- **Exempt from the Right to Information (RTI) Act** for sensitive cases.

Jurisdiction:

- CBI requires **state government consent** to investigate within state jurisdictions.

- **Supreme Court and High Courts** can direct CBI to investigate anywhere in India **without state consent**.

- CBI can **suo moto** investigate cases **only in Union Territories**.

Organizational Structure:

Director of CBI:

- Appointed by the **Central Government** on the recommendation of a **high-level selection committee**.

- Holds authority over all operations, policy decisions, and organizational matters.

- Maximum tenure: **5 years**.

Specialized Divisions:

- **Anti-Corruption Division**

- **Economic Offenses Division**

- **Special Crimes Division**

- **Directorate of Prosecution**

- **Policy & Coordination Division**

- **Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL)**

Regional Offices: Located across India and headed by **Joint Directors** or **Additional Directors**.

International Role: Acts as the **nodal agency** for **Interpol**, handling **cross-border investigations**.

Appointment Process of the CBI Director:

Selection Committee Composition:

1. **Prime Minister of India** (Chairperson)

2. **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

NEWS

FREEDOM UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

3. **Leader of the Opposition (LoP)** in Lok Sabha

Legal Basis:

- Governed under the **DSPE Act, 1946**.
- Appointment is approved by the **Appointments Committee of the Cabinet**.

Key Concerns and Challenges:

Jurisdiction & Consent Issues:

- Many states have **withdrawn general consent**, weakening the CBI's capacity for **independent investigations**.
- Frequent **legal disputes** over its jurisdiction.

Supervision and Political Interference:

- Reports to **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** and the **DoPT**.
- The **Supreme Court** once described CBI as a **"caged parrot"**, indicating its lack of autonomy.

Delays in Investigations: Bureaucratic red tape and legal complexities often cause **delays in high-profile cases**.

Manpower Shortage: Around **16% vacancies** in sanctioned posts; challenges in recruitment and **deputation** from state services.

Deputation Issues:

- States are often **reluctant to release personnel** for CBI duty, particularly at the **sub-inspector level**.

Way Forward: Recommendations from the Parliamentary Committee

- **New Legislation:** Enact a **dedicated law** to define CBI's **powers, structure, and functions**, replacing the outdated DSPE Act.

Structured Recruitment Framework:

- Ensure regular **monitoring of recruitment** and fill vacancies swiftly.
- Invest in **advanced forensic and training facilities**.
- **National Security Provisions:** Introduce a **new law** allowing CBI to probe **national security-related offenses** without seeking state consent.

Conclusion: The **CBI** plays a critical role in maintaining **law and order**, **curbing corruption**, and handling **sensitive national cases**. However, concerns related to its **autonomy, jurisdiction**, and **efficiency** remain pressing. Structural reforms, **legal clarity**, and better **manpower planning** are vital to restore the CBI's stature as an **independent and effective investigative agency**.

Jharkhand & the Triple Test for OBC Reservation in Urban Local Bodies

Context: **Jharkhand** has completed **data collection** to implement OBC reservations in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in accordance with the **Supreme Court-mandated "Triple Test"**.

- This paves the way for **constitutionally compliant** OBC quotas in urban governance.

What is the "Triple Test"?

Origin: Laid down by the **Supreme Court** in *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali vs State of Maharashtra (2021)*

3 Mandatory Steps for Valid OBC Reservation in Local Bodies:

1. **Empirical Inquiry:** A **dedicated commission** must conduct detailed, data-based analysis of OBC backwardness in local bodies.

2. **Data-Based Quota:** Reservation quantum should be based on the commission's findings—not arbitrary.

3. **Reservation Cap:** Total quota for **SCs + STs + OBCs** must **not exceed 50%** of seats in ULBs.

Progress in Jharkhand:

- **OBC Commission Formed:** Established in **June 2023**

- **Data Collection Period: Dec 2023 – March 2024**

- **Comparative Approach:** Studied **Madhya Pradesh's** triple test model

- **Delays:** Some districts missed deadlines; final report pending due to **Chairperson's post being vacant**

Next Steps:

- Analysis by institutions like **XLRI**, **XISS**, and **IIMs**

- Final verified report to be submitted to the **state government**

Survey Methodology:

- **Scope:** Urban areas only; not a full caste census

- **Approach:**
  o **Door-to-door** identification of OBC households
  o Political representation review (past 25 years of ULB data)
  o Historical winners (general vs reserved seats)

OBC Population in Jharkhand:

- **Approx. 50%** of the population

- **Main OBC Groups:**
  o **BC-I:** More socially/educationally backward (127 castes)
  o **BC-II:** Relatively better-off (45 castes)

- **Largest Group: Kudmi/Mahato** (~15% of electorate)

Conclusion:

If implemented effectively, Jharkhand's **Triple Test compliance** could:

- Become a **model for other states**

- Promote **data-driven policy**

- Enhance **inclusive representation** in urban governance

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
NEWS

Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal Dispute: A Legal and Political Stalemate

Context: The long-standing **Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal dispute** has once again resurfaced, with the **Supreme Court strongly criticising Punjab** for its unilateral decision to de-notify land acquired for the canal's construction. The apex court termed the move an act of **"high-handedness,"** reiterating its earlier directive to maintain **status quo** on the canal-related land and infrastructure.

What is the SYL Canal and Why is it Controversial?

The **SYL Canal**, proposed to facilitate the **equitable distribution of water** from the **Ravi and Beas rivers**, was intended to address water needs of the states of **Punjab, Haryana**, and **Rajasthan**.

- The planned length of the canal was **214 km**, with **122 km in Punjab** and **92 km in Haryana**.

- However, decades later, the project remains **incomplete** due to legal challenges, political opposition, and inter-state tension.

Timeline of the SYL Canal Dispute:

- **1981 Agreement**: A tripartite agreement between **Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan** laid the foundation for sharing Ravi-Beas waters and constructing the SYL canal.

- **1996**: Haryana filed a suit in the Supreme Court demanding Punjab complete its share of canal construction.

- **2002**: The Supreme Court ruled in **favour of Haryana**, directing Punjab to proceed with the canal.

- **2004**: Punjab passed the **Punjab Termination of Agreements Act**, aiming to annul all prior water-sharing agreements.

- **2016**: A **Constitution Bench** struck down the 2004 Act, declaring it **unconstitutional**.

- **2024–25**: Punjab's latest de-notification of SYL land has triggered fresh judicial scrutiny.

Recent Supreme Court Directions:

- The Supreme Court appointed the **Union Home Secretary**, **Chief Secretary of Punjab**, and **Punjab's DGP** as *Receivers* to manage land-related issues.

- The court stressed the need for **mutual consensus** among Punjab, Haryana, and the Centre.

- If unresolved, the matter will return to the bench on **August 13**.

Legal Framework for Inter-State Water Disputes in India:

Under **Article 262** of the **Indian Constitution**, Parliament is empowered to enact laws to **resolve inter-state river water disputes**, and once a tribunal is formed under this provision, **courts are barred** from intervening.

Key Legislations:

- **River Boards Act, 1956**: Allows the Centre to form river boards with states, though **no board has ever been created**.

- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (ISRWD)**: Provides for formation of tribunals upon states' request; amended in **2002** to mandate:
    - o **Tribunal formation within one year**
    - o **Decision within five years**
    - o **Awards carry the weight of a Supreme Court order**
    - o **Clarification window of 3 months**

Persistent Issues with Tribunals:

- **Delays**: Disputes often drag on for decades. For instance, the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal** took **17 years** (1990–2007).

- **Implementation Gaps**: States resist enforcement of tribunal awards.

- **Judicial Overlap**: Despite constitutional limits, states invoke **Article 136** and **Article 32** to challenge awards in the Supreme Court.

- **Lack of Technical Input**: Tribunals often lack **scientific expertise**, being dominated by judges.

- **Opaque Water Data**: States often **withhold or manipulate hydrological data**, impeding fair judgment.

- **Federal Complications**: **Bureaucratic overlaps** between state and central agencies slow the process.

Proposed Reforms for Speedy and Fair Dispute Resolution:

Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019:

- Proposes a **permanent tribunal** for all inter-state river disputes.

- Introduces a **Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC)** to promote **pre-tribunal negotiation**.

- Recommends inclusion of **hydrologists, ecologists, and engineers** as **technical members**.

- Suggests creation of an **independent water data authority** under the **Central Water Commission (CWC)**.

Emphasis on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):

- Encourages **mediation and negotiation** by **neutral parties** or the **Union Government** as a means of amicable and faster settlement.

The Bigger Picture:

The SYL canal case is more than just a regional infrastructure issue—it embodies the **challenges of federalism, environmental stress, and political mistrust** in water governance. With **climate change** exacerbating water scarcity, resolving such disputes with **science-based, transparent, and time-bound mechanisms** is now more urgent than ever.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

MAY
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

India Sees Remarkable Drop in Maternal Mortality: A Leap Towards Safer Motherhood

Context: India has taken a **significant step forward in maternal healthcare**, as reflected in the latest decline in the **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)**. The country's MMR has reduced to **93 per 100,000 live births** during **2019–21**, compared to **97 in 2018–20** and **103 in 2017–19**, according to data from the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India**. This progress showcases the impact of targeted health policies, greater institutional support, and community-level awareness programs.

What is the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)?

- The **Maternal Mortality Ratio** is a key measure of a nation's **maternal health and healthcare quality**. It represents the number of **maternal deaths per 100,000 live births** within a defined period. A **maternal death** refers to the **death of a woman during pregnancy or within 42 days** of the end of pregnancy, due to complications related to or worsened by the pregnancy itself, as defined by the **World Health Organization (WHO)**.

Global Benchmark: The **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.1** targets an MMR of **below 70 by 2030**. India's current decline marks a **positive trajectory** toward this global target.

Improving Trends but Uneven Progress Across States:

Despite national-level success, **regional inequalities** continue to pose a challenge. Several states are still recording **alarmingly high MMRs**, including:

- **Madhya Pradesh**: 175
- **Assam**: 167
- **Uttar Pradesh**: 151
- **Odisha**: 135
- **Chhattisgarh**: 132
- **West Bengal**: 109
- **Haryana**: 106

Demographic Highlight: The **20–29 years age group** accounts for the **highest number of maternal deaths**, followed by the **30–34 years group**—the most active reproductive age bracket. This signals an urgent need for **targeted maternal health interventions** for young women.

Key Causes Behind Maternal Mortality in India:

Maternal deaths are largely preventable. However, they continue due to a mix of **healthcare system gaps** and **social challenges**:

- **Obstetric complications** during pregnancy and childbirth
- **Unsafe abortions** due to lack of access to proper facilities
- **Delayed medical care** and lack of skilled attendants
- **Inadequate nutrition**, especially in rural and tribal areas
- **Social stigma** and low awareness around reproductive health

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

MAY
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Global Context: Around **700 women die daily** from pregnancy-related complications worldwide, with over **90% of maternal deaths** occurring in **low- and lower-middle-income countries**—India included.

Government Programs Making a Difference:

India's drop in MMR is driven by the success of **key national health missions** and **maternal welfare programs**, including:

- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**: Offers **free quality antenatal checkups** on a fixed day every month.

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)**: Provides **financial incentives** to encourage **institutional deliveries**, especially among underprivileged groups.

- **Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres**: Deliver **comprehensive primary healthcare**, including maternal and neonatal services.

- **POSHAN Abhiyaan**: Focuses on **nutritional enhancement** for mothers and children, especially in high-risk districts.

These programs have boosted **institutional birth rates**, enhanced **access to trained medical staff**, and supported **nutritional care** for expectant mothers.

Persistent Challenges That Need Urgent Focus:

While progress is evident, the journey toward maternal safety for all Indian women still faces critical roadblocks:

- **Poor infrastructure** in remote and economically backward regions

- **Lack of emergency obstetric care** in rural healthcare centers

- **Limited community outreach** and awareness of government programs

- **Cultural barriers** and **early marriages** increasing pregnancy-related risks

Special Concern: Teenage pregnancies, often due to early marriage, remain a **hidden contributor** to maternal deaths. Strengthening laws and awareness around **reproductive rights** is crucial.

Conclusion: Toward Safer Motherhood for Every Woman

India's consistent improvement in the **Maternal Mortality Ratio** is a testament to **robust policy execution**, growing **health infrastructure**, and **empowered communities**. However, achieving the **SDG target of MMR < 70** by 2030 will demand **sustained efforts**, especially in high-burden states.

Future efforts must emphasize:

- **Bridging rural-urban healthcare gaps**

- **Strengthening emergency care systems**

- **Boosting awareness on maternal entitlements and services**

With the right investments, India can ensure that **no woman dies while giving life**.

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To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

NEWS

May
2025

FREEDOM UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

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NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

FREEDOM UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

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India's Total Fertility Rate Holds Steady at 2.0: A Demographic Turning Point

Context: According to the **Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2021**, released by the **Registrar General of India (RGI)**, **India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** remained constant at **2.0** in 2021—unchanged from 2020. This marks a critical juncture in India's demographic journey as the country approaches **replacement-level fertility**.

The report was compiled using data from **8,842 sample units** across all Indian states, covering a population base of approximately **84 lakh people**.

Understanding the Sample Registration System (SRS):

The **Sample Registration System** is India's principal source for **vital statistics** such as **birth rate**, **death rate**, and **infant mortality rate**. Key features include:

- **Dual Record System**: Data is collected via continuous enumeration by part-time enumerators, followed by **six-monthly retrospective surveys** conducted by supervisors.

- **Sample-Based Approach**: Covers **rural villages and urban blocks**, making it **cost-efficient** and **statistically robust**.

What is Total Fertility Rate (TFR)?

Total Fertility Rate refers to the **average number of children** a woman is expected to have during her reproductive years (15–49 years). A TFR of **2.1** is considered the **replacement level**, which ensures a **stable population** in the absence of migration.

Key Findings of the 2021 Report:

1. State-Wise Variation:

- **Highest TFR**: **Bihar** at **3.0**

- **Lowest TFRs**: **Delhi** and **West Bengal** at **1.4**

2. Demographic Shifts (1971–2021):

- **Children (0–14 years)**: Declined from **41.2%** to **24.8%**, indicating a shrinking young population.

- **Working-age Population (15–59 years)**: Increased from **53.4%** to **66.2%**, offering a **demographic dividend**.

- **Elderly Population (60+ years)**: Rose from **6%** to **9%**; **Kerala** has the highest elderly proportion at **14.4%**.

- **Mean Age at Effective Marriage (Females)**: Increased from **19.3 years** in 1990 to **22.5 years** in 2021.

Why It Matters: The Significance of a 2.0 TFR

Population Stabilization:

- India is edging closer to **demographic equilibrium**, reducing future strain on **resources**, **infrastructure**, and the **environment**.

Harnessing the Demographic Dividend:

- With a larger **working-age population**, India is well-positioned for **economic expansion** and increased **labour productivity**, provided that job creation and skill development keep pace.

Improved Health Indicators:

Fewer childbirths per woman and delayed marriages contribute to:

- **Lower maternal mortality**

- **Healthier children**

- **Stronger family well-being**

Empowerment of Women:

- A declining TFR often reflects **higher female literacy**, **employment**, and **autonomy**, reinforcing progress toward **gender equality** and **social development**.

Challenges of a Declining Fertility Rate:

Rising Elderly Burden:

A growing **senior citizen population** means increased pressure on:

- **Pensions and retirement systems**

- **Healthcare services**

- **Social protection schemes**

Risk of Skewed Sex Ratios:

- In areas with **persistent gender bias**, falling fertility without social reforms may **intensify sex-selective practices**, resulting in **imbalanced demographics**.

Interstate Demographic Disparities:

The gap between **high-fertility** and **low-fertility** states may drive:

- **Migration surges**

- **Cultural and linguistic shifts**

- **Resource allocation conflicts**

Global and Historical Perspective:

- **Global Average TFR**: Around **2.4** as of 2020, according to the UN.

- Countries like **Japan (1.3)** and **South Korea (0.72)** now face **population decline** and **economic stagnation**, highlighting the long-term risks of sub-replacement fertility.

- **India's experience mirrors global trends**, but its **diversity across states** requires region-specific responses.

Conclusion: A Critical Window of Opportunity

India's stable **Total Fertility Rate of 2.0** signals the **onset of population stabilization**, a historic demographic transition. However, this milestone brings both **opportunities** and **risks**.

To fully leverage the **demographic dividend** and prepare for an ageing population, India must:

- Invest in **healthcare and social security**

- Strengthen **education** and **employment** avenues

- Promote **gender equality** and reduce **regional disparities**

The road ahead demands a **balanced and forward-looking approach**, ensuring that this demographic shift leads to a **resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future**.

Justice B.R. Gavai Takes Oath as the 52nd Chief Justice of India

Context: Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai was officially sworn in as the **52nd Chief Justice of India (CJI)** on May 14, 2025. The oath was administered by **President Droupadi Murmu** at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Justice Gavai succeeds **Justice D.Y. Chandrachud**, and his appointment is notable not only for his legal acumen but also for his background—he is **only the second Dalit to become the CJI**, following **Justice K.G. Balakrishnan**.

Constitutional Basis for Appointment:

The **Constitution of India** provides the framework for the judiciary but **does not specify a detailed procedure for the appointment** of the Chief Justice of India.

- **Article 124(1)** states: "There shall be a Supreme Court of India consisting of a Chief Justice of India and other judges."

- **Article 124(2)** authorizes the **President** to appoint **Supreme Court judges**, including the CJI.
- However, **no formal mechanism or selection process** is laid out in the Constitution for appointing the CJI.

Established Convention for Appointment:

In the absence of constitutional procedure, **long-standing convention governs the appointment** of the Chief Justice:

- The **outgoing CJI recommends the name of the senior-most judge** of the Supreme Court as their successor.
- **Seniority is determined** not by age but by the **length of service in the Supreme Court**.
- This **convention of seniority** has been consistently followed to maintain the **independence and impartiality** of the judiciary.

Eligibility Criteria for Appointment:

As per **Article 124(3)** of the Constitution, a person is qualified for appointment as a **Supreme Court judge**, and thereby as CJI, if they:

- Are a **citizen of India**; and
- Have been a **High Court judge for at least five years**, or
- Have been an **advocate in a High Court for at least ten years**, or
- Are deemed a **distinguished jurist** in the opinion of the President.

Tenure and Age of Retirement:

- The **Chief Justice of India** does not have a fixed tenure.
- All **Supreme Court judges retire at the age of 65**.
- Justice Gavai, born on **November 24, 1960**, is expected to serve as CJI for **approximately six months**, retiring in **November 2025**.

Removal Procedure for Chief Justice of India:

A **Chief Justice or judge of the Supreme Court** can be removed only through a **rigorous impeachment process**:

- As per **Article 124(4)** and the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**, removal requires:
  o A **motion in Parliament**, supported by **a special majority** in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
  o Grounds for removal include **"proved misbehaviour or incapacity."**
  o No Chief Justice of India has ever been successfully impeached.

Additional Facts: A Milestone in Representation

- Justice Gavai hails from **Maharashtra** and has served as a judge of the **Bombay High Court** before being elevated to the Supreme Court in 2019.
- His elevation is seen as a **step toward greater diversity** and inclusion in the **higher judiciary**.
- His legal career spans over **three decades**, and he is known for his judgments in **constitutional law, criminal justice**, and **public interest litigation**.

Looking Ahead:

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
NEWS
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Justice B.R. Gavai's tenure, though brief, is expected to focus on:

- **Speeding up judicial reforms**
- **Improving case disposal rates**
- **Promoting transparency and digitalisation** in the justice delivery system

His appointment reaffirms the commitment to **upholding constitutional values, judicial independence**, and **social inclusivity** within India's highest court.

Presidential Reference to Supreme Court: Clarifying Time Limits on Assent to State Bills

Context: In a landmark constitutional development, **President Droupadi Murmu** has invoked **Article 143** of the Indian Constitution, seeking the **Supreme Court's advisory opinion** on whether the **President and State Governors** must adhere to specific **timelines** while acting on **State Legislature Bills**.

Background: Delay in Assent and the 'Pocket Veto' Dilemma

Traditionally, **Governors** and the **President of India** are **not constitutionally bound** by a strict timeframe to assent to or return a Bill passed by a **State Legislature**. This has often led to **indefinite delays**, a practice informally known as a **"Pocket Veto"**—a term not mentioned in the Constitution but used widely in political and legal discourse.

Recent Supreme Court Verdict:

In a recent judgment, the **Supreme Court** addressed this ambiguity and ruled that **Governors cannot withhold or delay assent indefinitely**, especially after a Bill has been **re-passed** by the State Assembly.

Timelines Set by the Court:

- **One month** to act on **re-passed Bills**.
- **Three months** to act when **withholding assent** contrary to the **State Cabinet's advice**.

This ruling has triggered a deeper debate about the **judicial enforceability** of timelines on constitutional authorities and whether the **Supreme Court**, under **Article 142**, can compel the executive to act within set periods.

Article 142: Ensuring Complete Justice

Article 142 grants the Supreme Court the authority to **pass any decree or order** necessary to ensure **complete justice** in any case before it.

Significance of Article 142:

- Allows the Court to **fill legislative or executive gaps** in the interest of justice.
- Empowers the Court to protect **public interest**, **human rights**, and **constitutional values**.
- Enhances the Supreme Court's position as the **guardian of the Constitution**.

Criticism:

Some experts argue that **Article 142** can potentially **blur the separation of powers**, inviting concerns of **judicial overreach**.

Article 143: Presidential Consultation with the Supreme Court

Article 143 empowers the **President** to seek the **Supreme Court's advisory opinion** on **questions of law or fact** that are of **public importance**.

Key Features of Article 143:

- **Article 143(1)**: President may refer legal questions for the SC's opinion.

- The **Court's response is advisory**—not binding but carries **significant moral and legal weight**.

- Hearings must be conducted by a **Constitution Bench** of at least **five judges** (as per **Article 145(3)**).

Historical Context:

This provision has its roots in the **Government of India Act, 1935**, and has been used by the President **at least 15 times** since **1950**, including in high-stakes cases like:

- **The Ayodhya Land Dispute (1993)**

- **Punjab Termination of Agreements Act (2004)**

Why This Reference Matters: A Federal Turning Point:

This move is **not merely legal**—it is a **constitutional inflection point** for Indian federalism. It raises critical questions:

- Can the **judiciary impose accountability** on **constitutional functionaries**?

- Should there be **defined timeframes** for **executive decisions** on legislative actions?

- How can **democratic mandates** of state legislatures be safeguarded from **executive inaction**?

Conclusion: Shaping the Balance of Power

This Presidential reference to the Supreme Court under **Article 143** could **redefine the contours of executive discretion**, bolster **legislative sanctity**, and reinforce the **judiciary's role** in **upholding democratic processes**.

The **Supreme Court's opinion**, while not binding, could shape future legislation, encourage **governance reforms**, and set a precedent for **time-bound accountability** in state-centre relations.

Supreme Court Orders States to Reclaim Forest Land Illegally Allotted to Private Entities

Context: In a game-changing development, the **Indian government is set to introduce two major amendments** to reshape its nuclear energy sector during the upcoming **Monsoon Session of Parliament**. This move signals a strategic shift — allowing **private and foreign players** to finally participate in the country's nuclear power generation.

A New Era for India's Atomic Energy Sector:

India stands at a critical juncture in its **energy transformation journey**. With increasing electricity demand and global climate commitments, the government is looking to **modernize the nuclear sector** — an area long dominated by **state-run entities** such as the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**.

These reforms follow a significant boost from the **United States**, clearing a longstanding barrier to bilateral civil nuclear cooperation and unlocking long-delayed opportunities from the historic **Indo-US nuclear deal**.

Key Legislative Reforms: Unlocking the Sector:

1. Overhaul of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010):

Currently, the **liability for nuclear accidents** lies heavily with equipment vendors — a major deterrent for companies like **Westinghouse, GE-Hitachi, and Framatome**. The proposed amendment will:

- **Cap the vendor's liability** to the original value of the contract.
- Introduce a **defined liability window**, post which vendors are no longer accountable.

This is designed to **de-risk foreign investment** and address long-standing industry concerns around **financial exposure and legal uncertainty**.

2. Amendment to the Atomic Energy Act (1962):

The second key change would:

- Allow **private Indian players** — and potentially **foreign partners** — to **operate nuclear power plants**.
- Enable **public-private partnerships** in atomic energy.
- Allow **minority equity stakes** for foreign firms in upcoming projects.

These steps would invite **greater investment**, **competition**, and **technology innovation**, catalyzing the next wave of growth in India's nuclear power industry.

US Regulatory Green Light: A Turning Point

In **March 2025**, the **US Department of Energy** granted **Holtec International** permission to **transfer Small Modular Reactor (SMR) technology** to Indian partners, including **Tata Consulting Engineers** and **Larsen & Toubro**. This **Part 810 clearance** is significant because:

- It lifts a **long-standing restriction** on US firms participating in India's nuclear development.
- It enables **technology co-production**, empowering India to **localize SMR manufacturing**.

This move aligns US and Indian strategic interests while enabling India to emerge as a **regional nuclear technology hub**.

Geostrategic and Trade Implications:

These reforms are not isolated. They form part of a broader push to deepen **Indo-US strategic and trade ties**, potentially paving the way for:

- A **comprehensive trade pact** with nuclear energy as a key pillar.
- **Expanded clean energy collaboration**, especially in **climate-resilient technologies**.
- Greater **strategic trust**, solidifying India's role as a **critical partner** in the Indo-Pacific.

India could also become a **key export base** for advanced nuclear technologies, particularly **SMRs**, in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Boosting India's Energy Security and Climate Ambitions:

With a target of **net-zero emissions by 2070**, India's energy basket must shift toward **low-carbon baseload solutions**. Nuclear power provides:

- A **stable, carbon-free alternative** to coal.
- The potential for **large-scale energy deployment** with **minimal land and water footprint**.
- A chance to **decarbonize industrial sectors**, including **steel and hydrogen production**.

India currently lags behind in nuclear capacity — contributing less than **2%** of total electricity generation. These reforms could change that narrative.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Projection: India's electricity demand is expected to **double by 2040**. Nuclear can be a key player in managing peak loads and ensuring grid stability.

The Road Ahead: Challenges to Navigate

While the proposed reforms promise transformation, they face several hurdles:

- **Public safety concerns** and **political resistance**, especially over private participation in sensitive sectors.

- **Legislative delays**, particularly in amending the liability framework.

- Need for **robust safety protocols** and **transparent regulatory oversight** to manage private operations.

Yet, successful implementation could place India among **top-tier nuclear innovators**, leading the charge in **advanced reactor technologies**.

Conclusion: A Strategic Shift With Global Impact

India's decision to **reform its nuclear laws** and embrace **private and foreign participation** marks a **historic policy evolution**. It reflects a forward-looking approach to:

- **Modernize energy infrastructure**

- **Strengthen strategic global alliances**

- **Accelerate clean energy goals**

With **US collaboration**, **industry confidence**, and **parliamentary will**, India is poised to unlock a new era in nuclear energy — not just as a power source, but as a symbol of **technological self-reliance and global leadership**.

Supreme Court Reinstates 3-Year Practice Requirement for Judicial Services Exams

Context: In a significant move, the **Supreme Court of India** has reinstated the **mandatory three-year practice as an advocate** for candidates aspiring to join the **judicial services** at the entry level. This ruling reaffirms the value of **courtroom experience** in shaping competent and mature judicial officers, especially in the **lower judiciary**, where day-to-day interaction with litigants is most intensive.

Historical Background: Evolving Standards for Judicial Recruitment

The debate around requiring prior legal practice isn't new. The **14th Law Commission Report (1958)** first proposed a **3 to 5-year practice** condition for those entering the **subordinate judiciary**. At the same time, it recommended the establishment of an **All India Judicial Services (AIJS)**—a national-level recruitment process for the higher judiciary—which did not demand courtroom experience.

In **1992**, the Supreme Court, in the landmark **All India Judges' Association vs Union of India** case, initially allowed **fresh law graduates** to apply. However, this stance was **reversed in 1993** upon review. The **Shetty Commission (1996)** later criticized the practice requirement, citing it as a **barrier for talented law graduates**. Consequently, in **2002**, the SC scrapped the rule, acknowledging that the **judiciary was struggling to attract the best legal talent**.

Why the Rule is Back: Arguments in Favour

1. **Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide** : Legal education in India, particularly in many traditional law colleges, often lacks **practical training**. Courtroom experience imparts vital skills such as **procedural fluency, evidence handling, and courtroom decorum**.

2. **Enhancing Judicial Decision-Making**: Practical exposure leads to **better reasoning, empathy, and procedural efficiency**. Seasoned advocates are more likely to deliver judgments that are grounded in **real-world legal challenges**.

3. **Building Ethical Resilience**: Lower courts often face **external pressures and local influences**. Candidates with prior legal practice are better equipped with the **ethical grounding and maturity** to resist such interference.

4. **Global Best Practices**: Countries like **Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia** mandate **prior experience** before judicial appointment, reinforcing its value in ensuring **judicial competence and credibility**.

Concerns and Criticism: Arguments Against

1. **Barrier to Top Talent**: Graduates from **prestigious NLUs** often opt for high-paying corporate roles. Imposing a **3-year delay** further deters them from considering a **career in judiciary**.

2. **Infrequent Exams and Age Limit Challenges**: Judicial service exams are **irregular** in many states. Combined with **existing age limits**, the rule may **disqualify or discourage many aspirants**.

3. **Gender Disparity**: According to the **India Justice Report**, **women make up only 38%** of the district judiciary. **Career breaks** due to maternity and societal expectations may disproportionately affect their ability to fulfill the experience requirement.

4. **Impact on Marginalized Aspirants**: For students from **economically weaker sections**, the need to **start earning early** is critical. An added delay could make a judicial career **financially unviable**.

What Lies Ahead: Pathways for Reform

1. **Structured Training Instead of Practice** : A potential solution is to allow fresh graduates but subject them to a **comprehensive two-year judicial training program**, blending **classroom instruction** with **live court exposure**.

2. **Revamping the Examination Process**: Shift from memory-based questions to **scenario-based assessments**, focusing on **practical legal reasoning, evidence analysis**, and **judgment writing**—as envisioned in the original **14th Law Commission Report**.

3. **Attracting Talent Through Incentives**: Introduce **competitive stipends, mentorship, and career growth plans** to make the judiciary more attractive for **young legal professionals**.

Additional Insight: A Global View

- In the **UK**, aspiring judges often spend **7 to 10 years in practice** before applying for judicial roles.

- In **Germany**, law graduates undergo a **two-year legal clerkship (Referendariat)** before qualifying for judicial exams.

- The **United States** emphasizes **trial experience**, and many judges are appointed only after **significant private or public legal practice**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Conclusion: Striking a Balance Between Experience and Access

While **experience enhances judicial quality**, it is crucial to ensure that it does not become an **unjust hurdle** for talented, young, and marginalized aspirants. A **balanced approach**, combining **early-career training, inclusive policies, and reformative assessment models**, can help build a judiciary that is not only **competent but also representative and accessible**.

Justice Yashwant Varma Case Rekindles Debate on Judicial Independence and Accountability

Context: The recent developments in the **Justice Yashwant Varma case** have once again thrust the Indian judiciary into the spotlight, highlighting the complex interplay between **judicial independence** and **accountability**. **Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar'**s remarks questioning the legal foundation of the **Supreme Court's in-house inquiry** and his call to revisit the historic **K. Veeraswami judgment** have reignited a vital constitutional debate.

The Justice Yashwant Varma Episode: What Happened?

- In **March 2024**, a substantial amount of **unaccounted cash** was allegedly discovered at the residence of **Justice Yashwant Varma**, then serving on the **Delhi High Court**. Shortly thereafter, he was **transferred to the Allahabad High Court**.

The Supreme Court conducted an **in-house inquiry**, which reportedly **indicted** the judge. However, the Court declined to permit a **criminal investigation or FIR**, instead forwarding the inquiry findings to the **President and Prime Minister**.

This decision sparked strong criticism from **Vice President Dhankhar**, who questioned the **constitutional authority** of such internal mechanisms and described the **Veeraswami judgment** as a legal barrier that effectively creates **"a scaffolding of impunity"** around members of the higher judiciary.

Judicial Independence vs Accountability: A Delicate Balance

India's Constitution envisions a judiciary that is **independent of executive interference**, ensuring that judges can function without fear or favour. This principle is safeguarded through:

- **Article 124**: Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts can only be removed through a formal **impeachment process**, which is both **political** and **procedurally complex**.

- **Reality Check**: Despite multiple controversies over the years, **no judge has ever been successfully impeached** in independent India.

To fill this gap, the **Supreme Court devised the in-house inquiry mechanism**, intended to investigate complaints of judicial misconduct **without undermining judicial autonomy**. However:

- These inquiries are **non-statutory** and lack **enforceable punitive power**.

- The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** may **recommend transfers** or **withdraw judicial work**, but **cannot remove a judge**.

The Veeraswami Judgment (1991): A Judicial Shield or a Legal Straitjacket?

The **K. Veeraswami case** laid the groundwork for how corruption allegations against sitting judges could be handled:

- **Background**: Justice Veeraswami, ex-Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, was accused of holding **disproportionate assets**. The **CBI filed an FIR**, which was contested all the way to the Supreme Court.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

MAY
2025

FREEDOM UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Central Question**: Can a judge be considered a **public servant** under the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947**, and who can **sanction prosecution**?

Supreme Court's Verdict (3:2 Majority):

- Yes, a judge is a **public servant**.

- But **prior sanction** for prosecution must come from the **Chief Justice of India**, not the executive, to prevent political misuse.

This decision struck a **delicate compromise** — enabling limited **criminal accountability** while preserving **judicial independence** from executive pressure.

Post-Veeraswami Cases: Rare but Telling:

Although the ruling allows criminal proceedings against judges with **CJI approval**, this power has been **seldom exercised**:

- In **2019**, **CJI Ranjan Gogoi** allowed the **CBI to investigate Justice S.N. Shukla** (Allahabad HC) for favouring a private medical college.

- Earlier, **CJI Dipak Misra** had **recommended impeachment** of the same judge, but the government did not act.

These rare actions reveal the **institutional reluctance** to initiate criminal prosecution against judges, underscoring concerns about **insufficient checks on judicial misconduct**.

The Larger Implications:

The Justice Varma controversy and the Vice President's remarks bring into sharp focus the **fragile balance** between **institutional independence** and **public accountability**. Critics argue that:

- The **in-house inquiry system lacks transparency** and does not deliver **real consequences**.

- There is a **legal vacuum** for cases where conduct is questionable but not severe enough to justify impeachment.

- The **Veeraswami doctrine**, while protecting judicial independence, may now require **re-evaluation** in ight of modern standards of transparency.

Did You Know? A Few Striking Facts

- The **only impeachment motion** to make serious headway in Parliament was against **Justice V. Ramaswami** in 1993 — but it failed due to abstentions.

- In countries like **the UK and Canada**, judges are subject to **independent judicial conduct commissions**, separate from political or judicial control.

- The **in-house procedure** in India is based on a **1999 Charter** adopted by the SC — it is **non-binding** and **not open to public scrutiny**.

Conclusion: Towards a Stronger, Transparent Judiciary

The Justice Varma case serves as a reminder that **no institution, however exalted, is immune to the need for oversight**. As India's democracy matures, the challenge is to ensure that **judicial accountability** does not come at the cost of **judicial independence**.

Revisiting the Veeraswami judgment, instituting a **statutory oversight mechanism**, and developing **transparent procedures** for handling allegations against judges could help build **public trust** without weakening judicial authority.

Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI): A New Shield Against Digital Scams

Context: In a significant step towards bolstering cyber security, the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has rolled out the **Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)** under its **Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)**. This new mechanism aims to **fortify India's financial and telecom landscape** against a sharp surge in **cyber-enabled financial frauds**.
What is FRI?

The **Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)** is a **dynamic risk-assessment tool** designed to identify and categorize **m**

obile numbers that are potentially involved in **financial fraud**. The FRI system flags suspicious numbers and classifies them into **three risk categories**:

- **Medium Risk**
- **High Risk**
- **Very High Risk**

These classifications are based on real-time data derived from **multiple credible sources**, including:

- **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal** of the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)
- **DoT's Chakshu Platform**
- **Inputs from banks and financial institutions**

Once flagged, a number undergoes **multi-layered analysis**, and the risk level is **instantly shared with stakeholders**, such as payment platforms and telecom operators.

Integration with Major UPI Platforms:

Top digital payment platforms like **PhonePe**, **Paytm**, and **Google Pay** have begun **embedding FRI alerts** into their systems. This integration allows them to **identify and restrict transactions** linked to high-risk mobile numbers, thereby **enhancing user security** and **preventing real-time fraud.**

Rising Tide of Cyber Fraud in India:

India is experiencing a **steep rise in cybercrimes**, with financial frauds, identity theft, and online scams becoming increasingly sophisticated. With the **expansion of digital transactions**, especially through UPI and mobile wallets, the threat landscape has grown.

Types of digital frauds include:

- **Phishing and Hacking**
- **Fake Apps and Websites**
- **Identity Theft**
- **Cyber Espionage**
- **Online Financial Scams**

Cybercrime in Numbers:

- **Thousands of cases** of cyber financial fraud reported annually
- Over **1,200 crore recovered** from cyber frauds using the government's cyber reporting systems
- **3.2 lakh+ SIM cards** and **49,000+ IMEIs** blocked for their involvement in cyber scams

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Government's Multi-Layered Cyber Defense Framework:

Legislative Tools:

- **Information Technology Act, 2000**
- **Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**
- **POCSO Act, 2012** (for protection of minors in cybercrime)

Major Initiatives:

- **Chakshu on Sanchar Saathi:** Enables citizens to report suspicious calls and messages.
- **e-Zero FIR Initiative (I4C, MHA):** Allows victims to register **FIRs online**, regardless of location, improving legal response.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** The central body for cybercrime prevention and investigation.
- **MuleHunter (RBI):** An AI-based tool that helps banks **identify money mules** used in laundering stolen funds.
- **Cyber Crime Reporting Portal:** A national portal for citizens to report cybercrimes directly.
- **Cyber Fraud Recovery System:** Has successfully recovered massive sums from scam transactions.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Conducted through social media, radio, and schools to **educate citizens** about digital safety.

Conclusion: A Critical Leap Toward Safer Digital India

The launch of the **Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)** marks a **proactive and data-driven response** to India's growing cyber threats. As mobile numbers become a primary tool for digital identity and transactions, **real-time risk profiling** through FRI could significantly **reduce financial crime** and **restore trust in digital platforms**.

Professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad and the Operation Sindoor Controversy

Context: In a case that has reignited the national debate on **free speech and dissent**, the **Supreme Court of India** has granted **interim bail** to **Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad**, who was recently arrested in **Haryana** for controversial **social media remarks** linked to **Operation Sindoor** — India's military operation targeting terrorist hubs in **Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**.

Though the Court provided **temporary relief**, it **refused to stay the ongoing investigation**, underlining the legal complexity and public sensitivity of the matter.

Criminal Allegations: A Web of Severe Charges

Professor Mahmudabad is facing **multiple criminal charges** under the newly introduced **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**, through **two separate FIRs**.

Charges in the First FIR:

- **Section 152**: Punishes acts **endangering national sovereignty and integrity** (Replaces the old sedition law — **maximum penalty: 7 years imprisonment**).
- **Section 196(1)(b)**: Targets **activities likely to disrupt communal harmony**.

- **Section 197(1)(c)**: Deals with **comments prejudicial to national integration**.
- **Section 299**: Criminalises **deliberate insults to religious beliefs**.

Charges in the Second FIR:

- **Section 79**: Pertains to **remarks insulting the modesty of a woman**.
- **Section 353**: Relates to **statements inciting public mischief**.

Key Concern: **Section 152** remains the gravest charge, carrying a potential **7-year prison sentence**, while other sections are punishable with up to **3 years of imprisonment**.

Supreme Court's Observations and Conditions for Bail

Professor Mahmudabad's legal counsel argued that his posts were **patriotic in nature** and lacked **criminal intent**. However, the **Supreme Court Bench**, led by **Justice Surya Kant**, delivered a nuanced ruling.

Court's Remarks:

- Some phrases used by the professor had **"dual meanings"**, prompting the court to question his intent.
- The Bench criticized the timing and language of the posts, suggesting they may have sought **"cheap popularity"** during a national crisis.

Conditions for Interim Bail:

- **Surrender of Passport**: To prevent travel during the investigation.
- **Non-Interference**: Professor must **avoid discussing or commenting** on the controversial posts.
- **Restricted Expression**: No public comments on **Operation Sindoor** or the **Pahalgam terror attack**.
- **Full Cooperation**: He must assist the investigation as directed.
- **No New FIRs**: The Court prohibited the registration of additional FIRs regarding the same posts.
- **Formation of SIT**: A **three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT)**, composed of **senior IPS officers** from outside Haryana and Delhi, will assess the **intent and impact** of the professor's statements.

Is 'Unpatriotic' Speech Still Protected Under the Constitution?

India's **Constitution under Article 19(1)(a)** guarantees the **right to freedom of speech and expression**. However, this right is subject to **reasonable restrictions** listed under **Article 19(2)**.

Permissible Restrictions Include:

- **Sovereignty and integrity of India**
- **Security of the state**
- **Public order**
- **Decency or morality**
- **Contempt of court**
- **Defamation**
- **Incitement to an offence**
- **Friendly relations with foreign states**

Importantly, courts have repeatedly ruled that **any restriction must be narrowly defined** and **cannot be based on subjective interpretations of 'patriotism'** or public sentiment.

Judicial Precedents Supporting Freedom of Expression:

Several landmark judgments have reaffirmed that even **unpopular or offensive speech** is protected under the Constitution:

Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):

- **Section 66A of the IT Act** was struck down.
- The Court ruled that **"disturbing" or "annoying" speech** cannot be criminalised.
- Affirmed that **freedom of speech includes the right to express unpopular views**.

Kaushal Kishore v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2023):

- A **Constitution Bench** ruled that **Article 19(2)** is **exhaustive** and cannot be expanded.
- Criticised the use of **subjective morality** to curb constitutional rights.

Concerns Over Judicial Consistency and Bias:

In a separate ruling earlier this year involving **MP Imran Pratapgarhi**, the **Supreme Court clarified** that free speech must be evaluated **from the standpoint of a strong-minded and reasonable person**, not an **oversensitive or insecure audience**.

However, critics have noted an **increasingly inconsistent judicial approach** to free speech:

- Some judges appear **influenced by popular sentiment**, especially during national security crises.
- There are **concerns over deviation from past precedents**, resulting in **legal uncertainty** and **chilling effects on academic and journalistic freedom**.

Why This Case Matters: The Larger Constitutional Debate

The case of Professor Mahmudabad goes beyond a single individual. It forces India to confront urgent constitutional questions:

- Can **academic dissent** or **anti-establishment opinions** be criminalised?
- Does **social media expression**, however controversial, deserve the same **constitutional protection** as print or broadcast speech?
- Is the **state using new laws** like the BNS to silence critical voices in the name of **national security**?

As India navigates the digital age, cases like this will shape the **boundaries of free expression**, the **responsibility of institutions**, and the **resilience of democratic values**.

Did You Know?

- **Quasi-satellites**, like Kamoʻoalewa, featured in China's Tianwen-2 mission, are also challenging legal and scientific definitions — including questions about **space resource ownership and international jurisdiction**, reflecting a similar trend of **global debates about authority, rights, and exploration**.

Why the Supreme Court Must Move Beyond a Chief Justice-Centric Model

Conext: In a powerful statement echoing growing concerns within India's legal fraternity, **former Supreme Court judge, Justice A.S. Oka**, has called for a **transformation in the Supreme Court's power structure**, urging a shift away from the current **Chief Justice-dominated framework** to a more **institutional and democratic model**. His remarks have rekindled an essential debate on

judicial accountability, decentralisation, and transparency at the apex level of the Indian judiciary.

Understanding the CJI's Overarching Control:

At present, the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** wields enormous power, both in **judicial** and **administrative affairs**. While the office is meant to function with the principle of being *"first among equals,"* in reality, it holds **near-exclusive control** over vital court functions.

1. **Master of the Roster Doctrine:** As reaffirmed in the landmark case **Shanti Bhushan v. Supreme Court of India (2018)**, the **CJI unilaterally decides**:

   - Which **bench hears which case**
   - Which **judges are assigned to benches**
   - When a case is **scheduled for hearing**

This leaves little scope for collaborative decision-making or institutional checks.

2. **Constitution Bench Formation:** While the **Constitution mandates a minimum of five judges** for such benches, it is still the **CJI alone who decides**:

   - When these benches are **constituted**
   - Which judges **preside over or participate** in them

3. **Administrative Command:**

The decision in **State of Rajasthan v. Prakash Chand (1998)** outlined the CJI's administrative supremacy. It includes:

   - **Control over the registry**
   - **Work allocation across judges**
   - Implementation of policy decisions **without mandatory consultation**

The Need to Strengthen the Judiciary's Foundations:

   - Justice Oka rightly highlighted the often-overlooked role of the **district judiciary**, which he referred to as the **"backbone"** of India's justice delivery system. These courts handle over **80% of India's pending cases**, yet lack autonomy, infrastructure, and timely support from higher judiciary.

Systemic Issues with the Current Structure:

The over centralization of authority has led to **significant systemic challenges**:

Lack of Transparency:

   - Even senior judges are often unaware of **how cases are allocated**, or **why certain cases are delayed**, raising concerns about fairness and internal clarity.

Delays in Critical Hearings:

Cases of **national and constitutional importance**, such as those involving **electoral bonds, Article 370, and CAA**, have faced **unexplained delays**, often attributed to the CJI's discretionary power in listing matters.

Weakening of Collegiality:

   - A structure that overly empowers one individual can erode the principle of **judicial equality** and discourage **collective responsibility** within the Court.

Steps Towards Transparency: Progress and Gaps

   - While there have been **notable reforms**, they remain **partial and insufficient**.

News
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Public Roster System (2018):

- Introduced to provide transparency on **which judges handle what kind of cases**, but **exceptions and loopholes** remain.

CJI's Office Under RTI (2019):

- In **Subhash Chandra Agarwal v. Supreme Court**, the Court held that the **CJI's office falls under the RTI Act**, making it a **pivotal moment** for judicial transparency.

Publication of Judicial Appointments:

- The **Supreme Court now uploads reasons for judicial appointments**, helping to **demystify the collegium system** for the public.

- Still, many key decisions—especially those related to **bench composition and urgent listings**—remain **opaque and vulnerable to misuse**.

What Reforms Are Truly Needed?

- To modernise the judiciary and align it with **democratic ideals**, **systemic changes** are required:

Committee-Based Decision-Making:

Instead of individual discretion, internal **committees** should handle:

- **Bench compositions**

- **Case listings**

- **Administrative planning**

This would reduce bias and encourage collective responsibility.

Transparent, Automated Listing Mechanism:

- An **algorithm-based system**—with minimal human intervention—could ensure **neutrality** and **consistency** in listing cases.

Shared Authority in Constitution Bench Creation:

- The **timing and composition of Constitution Benches** should be determined by a **panel of senior judges**, not solely the CJI. This would **foster collegiality** and reduce arbitrary delays.

Concluding Thoughts: Time for a Structural Evolution

The **Supreme Court of India**, as the **guardian of constitutional values**, must embody not just independence but also **institutional fairness, inclusiveness, and resilience**. Moving away from a **CJI-centric approach** will not dilute the institution's strength; instead, it will **deepen its legitimacy**, **distribute responsibility**, and **fortify public trust**. As India's judiciary enters an era of digital transformation and increasing public scrutiny, the need to **democratise internal court functioning** is not just desirable—it is **urgently essential**.

Ladakh Domicile Policy Under Review: Government Proposes 15-Year Residency Rule

Context: In a move with far-reaching implications for **employment and regional identity**, the **Union Government** is considering a proposal that would require a **15-year continuous residency in Ladakh**, starting from **2019**, for individuals to qualify as **domiciles** of the region. The idea, currently under discussion, aims to address the growing concerns of **local communities** about **job security, demographic balance, and cultural preservation**.

What the Proposal Entails:

This proposed change stems from deliberations of a **High-Powered Committee (HPC)** chaired by **Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai**. The panel, constituted in **2023**, was tasked with engaging civil society leaders from **Leh and Kargil** to address local concerns following the reorganization of **Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh** in **2019**.

Key highlights of the proposed domicile rule:

- **15-year residency requirement** starting from 2019 for individuals to be considered Ladakh domiciles.

- Those who migrated to Ladakh after **August 2019**, when **Article 370** was abrogated, will be eligible for domicile status **only after 2034**.

- Domicile status will determine **eligibility for 5% of gazetted government posts** in Ladakh.

If approved, the **job quota** breakdown would be:

- **80% reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST)**

- **4% for residents near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) or Line of Control (LoC)**

- **10% for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)**

- **1% for Scheduled Castes (SC)**

Why Domicile Status Matters in Ladakh:

- Since Ladakh became a **Union Territory (UT)** in **2019**, **no formal recruitment** for gazetted government posts has taken place. There's growing anxiety among locals that **outsiders might dominate future job opportunities**, potentially sidelining Ladakh's indigenous population.

Background: The Fallout of Article 370 Revocation

Ladakh was carved out as a separate UT **without a Legislative Assembly** when **Article 370** — which previously gave special status to Jammu & Kashmir — was read down. The decision triggered **widespread protests** in Ladakh, particularly over:

- **Political marginalization**

- **Fears of cultural dilution**

- **Demand for constitutional safeguards**

Both **Leh (Buddhist-majority)** and **Kargil (Muslim-majority)** districts united in calls for **greater autonomy** and **protections under the Constitution**, including:

- **Statehood or a Legislative Assembly**

- **Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule**

- **Reserved job quotas**

- **Dedicated parliamentary representation** for both Leh and Kargil

Understanding the Sixth Schedule and Ladakh's Demands: The **Sixth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution (Article 244) provides **autonomy to tribal regions** through **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)**. These councils have **legislative, administrative, and judicial powers** over land, forests, customs, and more.

Currently, the Sixth Schedule applies only to **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram**. However, Ladakhis have demanded similar protections, arguing that:

- **Over 95% of Ladakh's population belongs to Scheduled Tribes**

- The region has a **fragile ecosystem** and a **distinct cultural identity**
- There is an urgent need for **local control over land and resources**

J&K Domicile Policy vs Proposed Ladakh Policy:

The **Jammu & Kashmir Domicile Policy 2020** introduced broader eligibility criteria, including:

- **15 years of residence**
- **7 years of study and Class 10/12 exams in the region**
- **Children of Central Government officials posted in J&K for 10 years**
- **Inclusion of West Pakistan refugees and women married to non-locals**

In contrast, Ladakh's proposed rule is **much stricter**, with a **fixed cut-off year (2019)** and no academic or service-based flexibility. The intent is to **safeguard Ladakhi identity and livelihoods**.

Core Concerns of the People of Ladakh:

- **Political Autonomy:** Lack of a Legislative Assembly means all administrative powers rest with the **Lieutenant Governor** and **central ministries**, alienating local voices.
- **Demographic Anxiety:** There is a strong fear of **demographic dilution** due to migration, which could marginalize the indigenous **Buddhist and tribal communities**.
- **Environmental Threats:** Rapid infrastructure growth, **mass tourism**, and **military expansion** have strained **water resources**, increased **pollution**, and disrupted **glacial systems**.
- **Youth Unemployment:** Many **young Ladakhis** face **joblessness** and limited access to **higher education** or **technical training**, leading to widespread frustration.
- **Cultural Preservation:** The region's unique **Tibetan-Buddhist heritage** and **monastic institutions** are under threat from commercialization and modern lifestyle shifts.

Looking Forward: The Path to Inclusive Governance

A **balanced approach** is essential to meet both **national strategic objectives** and **local aspirations**. To achieve lasting peace and prosperity in Ladakh, the government must:

- Respect and embed **cultural and tribal identities** in law
- Implement **sustainable development policies**
- Strengthen **environmental safeguards**
- Ensure **local participation** in governance and economy
- Consider **Sixth Schedule inclusion** or **statehood-like autonomy**

New Defence Rulebook: Government Notifies Inter-Services Organisations Rules, 2025

Context: In a significant move to modernise India's defence structure, the **Ministry of Defence** has officially notified the **Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control & Discipline) Rules, 2025**. These rules have been brought into force under the **Inter-Services Organisations (ISO) Act, 2023**, and will become operational from **May 27, 2025**.

Why This Matters: Strengthening Joint Military Command

India has long pursued the goal of greater **jointness and integration** among its armed forces. These new rules are a crucial step in that direction, aiming to streamline the command and disciplinary framework in **Joint Services Commands (JSCs)** and **Inter-Service Organisations (ISOs)**.

Purpose and Objectives of the New Rules:

- **Unified Command Structure**: Ensures seamless **command and control** within joint establishments comprising personnel from the **Army, Navy, and Air Force**.

- **Expedited Disciplinary Procedures**: Enables **faster resolution of cases** by avoiding procedural overlaps between different services.

- **Operational Synergy**: Facilitates **interoperability and administrative efficiency**, crucial for joint military operations and national security preparedness.

ISO Act, 2023: Foundation for Integrated Defence Governance

The **Inter-Services Organisations Act, 2023** serves as the legislative backbone for the new rules.

- **Creation of ISOs**: Empowers the **Central Government** to establish joint structures like theatre commands or integrated service units.

- **Central Oversight**: The **superintendence** of all ISOs remains with the government, allowing for national security-centric directives.

- **Commanding Officer (CO)** Framework: Designates a **CO** to lead units, ships, or establishments under the ISO umbrella.

Key Features of the ISO Rules, 2025:

- **Full Authority to ISO Commanders**: The **Commander-in-Chief (CiC)** of a JSC, the **Officer-in-Command (OiC)** of Inter-Service Establishments, and the **Commanding Officer (CO)** of ISO units will now exercise complete **disciplinary and administrative control** over all attached personnel, regardless of their parent service.

- **Preservation of Individual Service Identity**: While commanders gain power, the **Army Act, Navy Act, and Air Force Act** will continue to apply to personnel, ensuring that their **core service traditions and legal frameworks** remain intact.

- **Central Government's Role in Disputes**: In cases not covered by the ISO Rules or Act, final authority rests with the **Central Government**, ensuring a **unified resolution mechanism**.

- **Continuity in Command**: Provisions exist for **replacement or interim leadership** if the CiC, OiC, or CO is unavailable, preventing any vacuum in command.

Challenges to Implementation:

Despite its progressive framework, the ISO structure may encounter several hurdles:

- **Cultural Integration Issues**: Each service has a unique identity, operational doctrine, and command culture. **Harmonising these differences** may lead to internal friction.

- **Overlapping Jurisdictions**: Dual authority between ISO commanders and parent service chains could result in **confusion or command conflicts**, especially in sensitive matters like court-martials or administrative actions.

- **Legal Complexity**: Harmonising provisions across **multiple service acts** will require careful legal interpretation to avoid contradictions and ensure uniform justice.

Significance for India's Defence Future:

This development aligns with India's long-term plan to implement **Integrated Theatre Commands**, a reform envisioned by the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** to enhance **tri-service synergy**. Countries like the **United States, Russia, and China** already operate under joint command structures for strategic and operational advantage.

Conclusion: A Step Closer to a Unified War-Fighting Machine

The notification of the **Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control & Discipline) Rules, 2025** signals a new era in India's defence administration. While implementation will require patience and coordination, the long-term benefits in terms of **efficiency, accountability, and combat readiness** are undeniable.

Karnataka's Bold Step Toward Protecting Gig Workers: The 2025 Ordinance Explained

Context: In a landmark move, the **Karnataka government has passed the Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Ordinance, 2025** to create a **comprehensive legal framework** for the protection, welfare, and empowerment of gig and platform-based workers. Karnataka becomes the second Indian state, after Rajasthan, to introduce dedicated legislation focused on the **rights and social security of gig workers**.

Who Are Gig Workers?

As per **Section 2(35) of the Code on Social Security, 2020**, a **gig worker** is defined as *"a person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer–employee relationship."*

These include delivery personnel, drivers, freelance professionals, and others working via platforms such as **Zomato, Swiggy, Ola, Amazon**, and **Urban Company**.

India's gig economy is **booming**. A report titled *"India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy"* estimates that **gig workers may number 23.5 million by 2030**, contributing significantly to urban employment and the digital economy.

Background: Recognizing the Gig Workforce

- India introduced the **Code on Social Security in 2020** to address the needs of unorganized sector workers, including gig and platform workers. This code recognized the category of **platform workers** and laid the groundwork for forming a **National Social Security Board** to oversee their welfare.

Karnataka's ordinance builds upon this foundation to bring **state-level execution** and **enforceability** for the first time within its jurisdiction.

Key Features of the Karnataka Ordinance, 2025

1. **Creation of a Dedicated Welfare Board:** A **Gig Workers Welfare Board** will be formed to oversee the implementation of welfare measures. It will act as a **nodal agency** to address concerns, grievances, and welfare of gig and platform workers in the state.
2. **Mandatory Registration of Platforms and Workers:** All **aggregator platforms** like **Ola, Uber, Zomato, Swiggy**, and **Amazon** must register with the board. They must also **register their workers**, each of whom will be provided with a **unique identification number** for accessing welfare benefits.

3. **Welfare Contributions from Platforms:** Companies will be required to contribute **1% to 5% of their total payouts to gig workers** into a **state-managed welfare fund**. This contribution will fund **healthcare, insurance, pension, and skill development programs** for workers.

4. **Transparency in Algorithms:** In a first-of-its-kind provision, platforms are mandated to **disclose the logic behind algorithms** that determine task allocation, wage calculation, worker ratings, and account access. This ensures **algorithmic accountability** and protects workers from **arbitrary decisions**.

5. **Written Contracts and Worker Rights:** Platforms must provide **clearly worded written contracts** to workers, outlining **pay structure, payment frequency**, performance expectations, and conditions for **account suspension or termination**.

6. **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**

A **two-level grievance mechanism** is set up:

- **Internal Dispute Resolution Committee** within the platform.
- Escalation to the **State Welfare Board** for unresolved or serious disputes.

7. **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** Platforms delaying contributions face **12% annual interest**. Repeated violations can attract **fines up to 1 lakh**, ensuring that gig companies are held **legally accountable**.

Ongoing Challenges Faced by Gig Workers:

Despite their growing importance in the digital economy, gig workers continue to face:

- **Job Insecurity** due to lack of formal employment status.
- **No Social Safety Net**, leaving them vulnerable during accidents, illness, or job loss.
- **Low and Unstable Incomes**, often below minimum wage equivalents.
- **Opaque Algorithmic Control**, where app-based decisions affect their livelihood without clarity or appeal.
- **Legal Ambiguity**, since existing labor laws were created for traditional employer-employee models and don't address platform work.

What India Has Done So Far for Gig Workers:

1. **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Recognized **gig and platform workers** as a distinct category entitled to **social security coverage**.

2. **e-Shram Portal:** A **national database for unorganized workers**, including gig workers, offering **identity and access to welfare schemes**.

3. **Union Budget 2025–26 Provisions:**

Included measures like:

- **Issuance of Digital ID Cards** to gig workers.
- **Health insurance** through the **Ayushman Bharat PMJAY scheme**.

4. **Rajasthan Gig Workers Act, 2023:** India's **first dedicated state-level law** for platform-based gig workers, mandating **welfare boards and financial contributions** by platforms.

Additional Insight: India's Growing Gig Ecosystem:

- India is home to the **second-largest gig economy** in the world, after the U.S.

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- By **2030**, gig jobs are expected to form **4% of India's total workforce**.

Sectors such as **e-commerce, food delivery, transport, logistics**, and **digital freelancing** are leading the charge.

Conclusion: A Progressive Step Toward Inclusive Labor Reforms

Karnataka's **Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Ordinance, 2025** marks a **progressive shift** in recognizing and institutionalizing the rights of gig workers—those at the heart of India's on-demand digital economy.

Yashoda AI: Empowering Women Through Technology and Digital Literacy

Context: Recently, the **Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University** in **Bareilly** hosted a significant event under the banner **"Yashoda AI: Your AI SAKHI"**, aimed at enhancing **AI literacy and digital awareness** among women. This initiative marks a progressive step towards **bridging the gender gap in digital skills** and fostering **technological inclusion** in India.

What is Yashoda AI?

Yashoda AI is a transformative initiative launched by the **National Commission for Women (NCW)** in collaboration with **Future Shift Labs (FSL)**. Its core mission is to **equip women**, especially those from **rural and semi-urban communities**, with **critical skills in Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and Digital Safety**.

Key Objectives of Yashoda AI:

- Promote **inclusive digital education** among women.
- Enable women to **lead conversations and actions** around AI and digital safety.
- Conduct **interactive discussions** on pressing issues such as:
    - **AI-driven crimes**
    - **Digital privacy challenges**
    - **Online safety and security strategies**
- Encourage participation from a wide range of community members including **students, educators**, and even **female members of the police force**.

This initiative envisions a **community-led approach** to digital learning where women are **not just participants but innovators and leaders** in shaping **India's technologically advanced future**.

National Commission for Women (NCW): A Pillar of Women's Rights

The **National Commission for Women** is a **statutory and autonomous body** established in **1992** under the **National Commission for Women Act, 1990**. It plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and promoting the rights of women across the nation.

Composition and Tenure:

- **Chairperson**
- **Five Members**

- **One Member-Secretary**

All are nominated by the **Central Government**, and each holds office for a **term of three years**.

Powers of the Commission:

The NCW possesses powers equivalent to a **civil court** during investigations, including:

- **Summoning individuals** from across the country and examining them under oath.

- **Requiring documents and evidence** through affidavits.

- **Requisitioning public records** from courts or offices.

- **Issuing commissions** for examining witnesses and documents.

Additional Insights and Relevance:

- According to a 2023 report by **UNESCO**, **less than 30%** of tech workforce globally are women. Initiatives like **Yashoda AI** are vital to **correct this imbalance**.

- The program aligns with the **Digital India mission**, emphasizing **equitable access to technology** for all, especially **underrepresented groups**.

- The focus on **AI and cybersecurity** ensures that women are well-prepared to face the **challenges of the digital age**.

A Step Towards a Viksit Bharat:

Yashoda AI Abhiyan is more than an educational effort — it's a **movement** to make women **digitally confident, self-reliant**, and **future-ready**. With such initiatives, India takes a firm step towards building a **Viksit Bharat (Developed India)** driven by **innovation, inclusion**, and **empowered citizens**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Guidelines for Setting Up Bio-Resource Centres (BRCs) under NMNF

Context: The **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare** has released detailed **guidelines** for the establishment of **Bio-Input Resource Centres (BRCs)** under the **National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)**. This move is aimed at accelerating the adoption of **natural and organic farming** practices across India.

What Are Bio-Input Resource Centres (BRCs)?

BRCs are envisioned as **cluster-level hubs** that will produce and supply **natural bio-inputs** tailored to local needs. These centres will also serve as **knowledge and training hubs**, empowering farmers with region-specific solutions for sustainable agriculture.

Financial Assistance & Support:

- Each BRC will receive a **financial support of 1 lakh**, disbursed in **two installments** of 50,000.

- Assistance is **only for operational costs**—not for sheds, land, or permanent infrastructure.

- The funds aim to ensure **cost-effective production and distribution** of bio-inputs to **small and marginal farmers**.

Eligibility & Implementation:

- BRCs must be managed by **entrepreneurial farmer groups** already practicing **natural farming**.

- Where such groups are not available, **State Natural Farming Cells** will onboard **interested farmers** willing to make the shift.

- Inputs produced must remain **affordable and accessible** to all farmers in the cluster.

Integration with Other Schemes:

The initiative will be aligned with major agricultural schemes, including:

- **Formation & Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**

- **National Mission on Edible Oilseeds**

- **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER)**

- **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**

This **convergence model** ensures better resource utilization and wider reach.

Significance of BRCs under NMNF:

- Ensure **local availability of natural farming inputs**

- Promote **community-based models** to reduce input costs

- Encourage **eco-friendly agricultural practices**

- Serve as centres of **capacity building, innovation, and grassroots mobilization**

- Facilitate the **transition from chemical to natural inputs**, reducing soil and water degradation

About National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF):

Feature	Details
Type	Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)
Nodal Ministry	Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare

Launch Date	November 25, 2024
Objective	Promote **nature-based, sustainable agriculture** and reduce dependency on synthetic inputs
Implementation Target	**15,000 Gram Panchayat clusters**, reaching **1 crore farmers** and covering **7.5 lakh hectares** within 2 years

Additional Insights:

- Natural farming techniques promoted include **Jeevamrit, Beejamrit, and Ghanjeevamrit**, rooted in traditional Indian practices.

- **India aims to become a global leader** in sustainable agriculture, targeting the reduction of chemical fertilizer use by **20-30%** in coming years.

- BRCs can also become **rural employment generators**, especially for youth interested in agribusiness and eco-entrepreneurship.

Conclusion:

The establishment of **Bio-Input Resource Centres** is a strategic and timely intervention to **transform India's agricultural landscape**. By ensuring the **affordable, localized production of bio-inputs** and empowering farmers through knowledge, the **NMNF** is paving the way for a **resilient, sustainable, and inclusive agricultural economy**.

Understanding the Urban Heat Island Effect

Context: A recent study reveals the **dual impact of the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect**: While it **increases heat-related mortality**, it also **substantially reduces cold-related deaths**. In 2018, the global decline in **cold-related fatalities** was **4.4 times greater** than the rise in **heat-related deaths**, with cities like **Moscow** witnessing even larger differentials.

What is the Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect?

An **Urban Heat Island (UHI)** refers to an **urban area** significantly warmer than its surrounding rural areas. This occurs because materials like **concrete** and **asphalt** absorb and retain heat more effectively than natural landscapes, making **cities** hotter. The UHI effect is most pronounced in **large, densely populated cities** like **New Delhi**, **New York**, **Paris**, and **London**.

Key Causes of UHI:

- **Impervious Surfaces**: Materials such as **asphalt**, **concrete**, and **steel** absorb heat during the day and release it slowly at night, trapping heat due to their **low albedo**.

- **Lack of Vegetation**: Limited **green cover** and **tree canopy** reduce **evapotranspiration**, cutting off natural cooling processes and increasing heat buildup in urban areas.

- **Anthropogenic Heat**: Human activities such as **vehicular emissions**, **industrial processes**, and **air conditioning** contribute excess heat, further raising urban temperatures.

- **Air Pollution & Soot**: **Black carbon** and other **particulate matter** absorb **solar radiation**, which exacerbates the UHI effect by raising ambient temperatures.

- **Urban Morphology**: The **design** of cities, with dense buildings, narrow streets, and poor airflow, creates an **urban canyon effect**, trapping heat within confined spaces. **Skyscrapers** and high-rises restrict airflow, intensifying heat accumulation.

Consequences of the Urban Heat Island Effect:

Increased Energy Demand:

- The rise in **local temperatures** due to UHI leads to higher **energy consumption** for **cooling** purposes, straining power grids and escalating **carbon emissions**. This positions **urban heat islands** as localized accelerators of **climate change**.

Deterioration of Air Quality:

- Higher temperatures amplify **ground-level ozone formation**, worsening **smog** and respiratory issues, making it harder to breathe in urban environments.

Heat-Related Health Risks:

- UHI intensifies the occurrence of **heat strokes**, **dehydration**, and **cardiovascular stress**, particularly in vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions.

Strain on Water Resources:

- With higher temperatures, **evaporation rates** increase, reducing available **water resources** for consumption and **cooling** purposes.

Biodiversity Loss:

UHI negatively affects **native vegetation**, disrupts **ecosystems**, and poses a threat to **urban wildlife** due to excessive heat and the reduction of green spaces.

Solutions and Mitigation Strategies:

- **Increasing Green Cover**: Expanding **urban forests**, **green roofs**, and **vegetative walls** can help cool cities by enhancing **evapotranspiration** and providing shade.

- **Cool Roofs and Pavements**: Using reflective materials with **high albedo** for roofing and pavements can reduce heat absorption, helping lower temperatures.

- **Smart Urban Planning**: Designing cities with wider streets, more open spaces, and better **airflow** can help mitigate the **urban canyon effect** and enhance cooling.

- **Energy-Efficient Buildings**: Promoting **energy-efficient building designs** with natural cooling can significantly reduce the urban heat footprint.

The **Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect** highlights the urgent need for sustainable urban planning to combat the growing temperature disparity between cities and their rural surroundings. By taking proactive measures to reduce UHI effects, cities can improve quality of life, health, and environmental sustainability for their residents.

India Opposes Inclusion of Chlorpyrifos in Stockholm Convention

Context: At the ongoing **Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions** in **Switzerland**, India has **opposed the proposed listing of Chlorpyrifos** under the **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)**.

The opposition stems from **concerns about food security** and the **lack of readily available alternatives** for pest control.

Over 40 countries have already banned Chlorpyrifos due to health and environmental risks.

What is Chlorpyrifos?

- **Chlorpyrifos** is a **broad-spectrum organophosphate insecticide** used extensively in agriculture and public health.

- It has been linked to:

  - **Neurodevelopmental disorders**

  - **Reduced birth weight**

  - **Lung and prostate cancers**

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** classifies it as a **moderately hazardous pesticide**.

- It works by **inhibiting acetylcholinesterase**, an enzyme critical for nervous system function, leading to toxic effects in humans and animals.

About the Stockholm Convention on POPs:

- Adopted in **May 2001** and entered into force in **May 2004**.

- Aims to **protect human health and the environment** from long-lasting, toxic chemicals known as **persistent organic pollutants**.

- The Convention classifies chemicals under three annexes:

  - **Annex A**: For **elimination**

  - **Annex B**: For **restricted use**

  - **Annex C**: To **minimise unintentional production**

- The Convention allows for **exemptions** in specific cases based on national priorities.

Steps Toward Global Phase-Out:

- In **2021**, the **European Union** nominated Chlorpyrifos for elimination under the Convention.

- In **2024**, the **Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC)** recommended its inclusion in **Annex A** (elimination), with **limited exemptions**:

  - **Plant protection**

  - **Cattle tick control**

  - **Wood preservation**

- Global debates continue over **exemption clauses**, with **India and some other nations** advocating for **flexibility** due to agricultural and health needs.

India's Position:

- **Registered since 1977**, Chlorpyrifos was **India's most-used insecticide** in 2016–17.
- India highlights its **continued necessity**:
  - Effective for **urban pest control** (cockroaches, termites)
  - Crucial for **vector-borne disease management** (like dengue and malaria)
- A **2024 study** found **Chlorpyrifos residues in 33%** of Indian food samples.
- The **Anupam Verma Committee (2013–2015)** acknowledged its **toxicity to aquatic life and pollinators**, but did not recommend an outright ban at the time.

India's Future Path:

- The government is promoting a **National Mission on Natural Farming**, a centrally sponsored initiative by the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare** to reduce chemical use in farming.
- India is also engaging in **ongoing deliberations** about other harmful chemicals at the BRS Convention, including:
  - **Medium-chain chlorinated paraffins**
  - **Long-chain perfluorocarboxylic acids (LC-PFCAs)**

Conclusion: India's stance underscores the **complex balance between public health, agriculture, and environmental safety**. While global consensus grows around eliminating hazardous chemicals, **developing nations like India** are seeking a **phased, practical transition** that considers **food security, pest control needs, and economic realities**.

The Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle: A Triumph for Conservation

Context: In an extraordinary milestone for **biodiversity conservation**, the **critically endangered Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle** (**Batagur kachuga**) has returned to the **Ganga River** after an absence of **three decades**. This marks a significant victory for conservation efforts aimed at preserving this unique species.

About the Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle:

- **Scientific Name**: **Batagur kachuga**
- Known also as the **Bengal Roofed Turtle**, this species is a **freshwater turtle** native to the **Indian subcontinent**, including **India**, **Bangladesh**, and **Nepal**.

Historical and Current Distribution:

- **Historical Range**: Once widely distributed in the **Ganga River** and parts of **Bangladesh**, this species thrived in these regions.
- **Present Distribution**: The **National Chambal River Gharial Sanctuary** in India is now home to the **largest population** of the Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle.
- It is also found in the **Brahmaputra basin**, but populations are now sparse and fragmented.

Physical Features of the Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle:

- **Size**: A medium-sized turtle, it can grow up to **56 cm** in length and weigh up to **25 kg**.

- **Sexual Dimorphism**: Males are smaller, reaching only **half the length** of the females.
- **Coloration**:
  - The head is **reddish-orange** with a **black crown**.
  - The **upper shell** (**carapace**) is **greenish-brown** with **yellowish patterns**.
  - The **lower shell** (**plastron**) is **yellow**, marked with **black**.
- **Physical Features**:
  - The turtle has a **broad head**, **strong jaws**, and **webbed feet**, ideal for both swimming and feeding.

Diet and Behavior:

- The Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle is **omnivorous**, feeding on a mix of **plants** and **small animals**, which includes **insects**, **fish**, and **aquatic vegetation**.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List**: **Critically Endangered**
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972**: **Schedule I** (highest protection under Indian law)
- **CITES**: **Appendix II**, which lists species that are not necessarily threatened with extinction but may become so if trade is not regulated.

A Remarkable Conservation Effort:

The return of the Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle to the **Ganga River** highlights the **success of ongoing conservation initiatives**. These efforts, led by organizations and government bodies, are crucial for preserving this unique species, which has faced numerous challenges, including **habitat loss**, **pollution**, and **illegal poaching**.

**Additional Facts and Conservation Efforts:**

- The **Ganga River** has long been a symbol of India's cultural and natural heritage, and the return of such species emphasizes the river's ecological significance.
- Conservation measures include **protected habitats**, **sustainable fishing practices**, and community engagement in **river conservation**.
- Additionally, the **Indian Government** has focused on creating a balance between **human activity** and **wildlife conservation** along the river.

The **Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle's** return is a testament to the resilience of nature when given the right protection and care. With continued effort, this species can hope to thrive in its natural habitat for generations to come.

Turbidity Currents in Submarine Canyons: A Deep-Sea Phenomenon

Context: Turbidity currents are **rapid, downslope flows of water** filled with **sediments**, making the water **denser** and less transparent. These currents behave similarly to **underwater avalanches**, often triggered by **geological disturbances** such as:

- **Earthquakes**

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
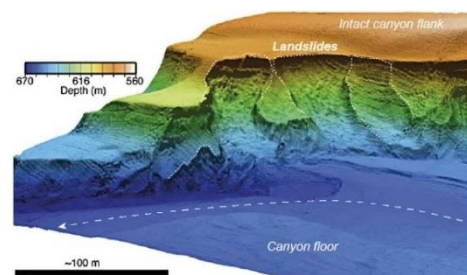
- **Submarine landslides**
- **Slope failures** and other geological events

These currents can travel great distances across the seafloor, shaping underwater landscapes and playing a vital role in oceanic processes.

Key Characteristics of Turbidity Currents:

Turbidity currents are an essential part of **deep-sea dynamics**. As the water's density increases due to suspended sediments, it becomes less transparent, often causing large-scale erosion of the seafloor. Key features include:

- **Erosion and Canyon Formation**: Turbidity currents actively carve out and **enlarge submarine canyons**, much like how rivers shape land canyons.

- **Layered Sediment Deposition**: These currents deposit sediments in **graded layers**, with **coarser particles** settling first, followed by **finer sediments**.

- **Shaping the Ocean Floor**: These flows contribute significantly to **deep-sea sedimentation**, sculpting the ocean's topography over time.

Submarine Canyons: Nature's Underwater Valleys:

Submarine canyons are **narrow, steep-sided valleys** that form on the **continental slopes** and rise. They can extend from the **continental shelf** down into the deep ocean, often carved by the erosive force of turbidity currents. Key aspects of submarine canyons include:

- **Global Presence**: There are approximately **9,477 known submarine canyons** globally, covering almost **11%** of the continental slope regions.

- **Distinct Morphology**: Canyons on **active margins** (tectonically active zones) are generally **steeper and shorter**, while those on **passive margins** (less tectonically active regions) tend to have more gradual slopes.

- **Unstable Walls**: The walls of these canyons are often **nearly vertical**, and their susceptibility to collapse adds further sediment to turbidity currents, increasing their destructive power.

Types of Submarine Canyons:

Submarine canyons come in different forms, each unique in its formation and function:

- **Bank Canyons**: These are **flat-topped** elevations along the continental margins, created through both **erosional** and **depositional** processes. A prominent example is **Dogger Bank** in the North Sea.

- **Shoal Canyons**: Shallow regions with accumulated sediments, typically found at depths of less than **10 meters** during low tide. These are often **hazardous to navigation**.

- **Reef Canyons**: Composed of **calcareous skeletons** from **corals and algae**, these reefs are biodiversity hotspots, particularly in the Pacific Ocean. They are commonly found associated with **guyots** and **seamounts**.

Microplastic Transport and Submarine Canyons:

A recent study published in *ACS Environmental Science & Technology* highlighted a groundbreaking discovery: **turbidity currents are now transporting microplastics** into the deep sea, particularly through submarine

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
MAY 2025
NEWS
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

canyons. This occurs even in regions that aren't directly fed by rivers, such as the **Whittard Canyon** off the coast of Ireland. This finding underscores the growing environmental concerns of **plastic pollution** in deep-sea ecosystems and the role of submarine canyons as conduits for this pollution to reach even the most remote ocean depths.

Fun Fact: Submarine Canyons and Ecosystem Diversity

While submarine canyons are primarily known for their geological role, they are also critical **ecosystem hotspots**. The deep, nutrient-rich waters flowing through these canyons support diverse species of fish, **invertebrates**, and even **whale populations** that feed on abundant plankton and nutrients. Thus, submarine canyons serve not only as geologically dynamic structures but also as **biodiversity reservoirs** in the deep ocean.

In conclusion, **turbidity currents** and **submarine canyons** are key players in shaping the seafloor and influencing oceanic processes. They drive sedimentation, transport pollutants, and support marine ecosystems, making them critical to understanding the complex dynamics of our oceans.

Climate Change and the Shrinking Caspian Sea: A Looming Environmental Crisis

Context: The **Caspian Sea**, the world's **largest enclosed inland water body**, is now at the frontline of climate change impacts. Once a vast expanse sustaining economies, biodiversity, and regional geopolitics, this **tectonic lake** is rapidly shrinking—primarily due to **climate-driven evaporation**.

Alarming Water Level Declines:

Even with efforts to curb global warming, scientists project that the Caspian Sea will **drop by 5–10 meters** by the end of the century. If temperatures rise unchecked, this decline could reach up to **21 meters** by **2100**. The consequences of such a dramatic fall are profound and far-reaching.

Biodiversity on the Brink:

The shrinking waters place **endemic and endangered species** at risk:

- **Caspian Seal** (*Endangered* – IUCN): The only marine mammal native to the region.

- **Beluga Sturgeon** (*Critically Endangered*): Known for producing prized caviar, this ancient fish faces habitat destruction.

As salinity increases and shorelines recede, these species lose critical breeding and feeding grounds, accelerating their decline.

Economic and Industrial Fallout:

The Caspian region's economy—heavily reliant on **ports and hydrocarbon industries**—faces significant disruption:

- **Ports at Risk**: Major transport hubs like **Baku**, **Anzali**, **Aktau**, **Turkmenbashi**, and **Lagan** may become **inland relics**, severed from the sea.

- **Volga River Threat**: As the Caspian's **only maritime connection** to the outside world, a decline in the Volga's viability could **isolate the region's shipping network**.

- **Oil and Gas Production**: Key offshore fields such as **Kashagan (Kazakhstan)** and **Filanovsky (Russia)** are at risk of being **stranded**, jeopardizing **energy exports** and national revenues.

Public Health and Environmental Disaster:

As the seabed dries:

- **Toxic Dust Storms** may emerge, **releasing pollutants and salt** into the air—reminiscent of the **Aral Sea catastrophe**.

- **Communities** near the coast face increased risks of **respiratory illnesses**, soil degradation, and water insecurity.

Geopolitical and Environmental Significance:

The Caspian Sea is bordered by **five countries—Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan**, and **Kazakhstan**—and is fed primarily by three rivers: the **Volga**, **Ural**, and **Terek**.

- It serves as a **critical geopolitical hub**, providing transit routes, energy corridors, and biodiversity resources.

- The **retreat of its shoreline** could fuel **territorial disputes**, impact **fisheries**, and strain **regional cooperation**.

Did You Know?

- The Caspian Sea is **not a sea**, but a **lake**—formed in a **tectonic depression**, isolated from the world's oceans for millions of years.

- It's a **key wintering area for migratory birds**, supporting one of the most **unique brackish ecosystems** in the world.

Conclusion: A Call for Urgent Action

The **fate of the Caspian Sea** is a stark reminder of how climate change transcends land, sea, and borders. Protecting this unique water body requires **coordinated international action**, **adaptive water policies**, and **serious climate commitments**—before it becomes another **ecological tragedy** in the pages of history.

New Rules for Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) of Biodiversity – 2025

Context: The **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** has notified the **2025 ABS Regulation** to streamline **fair and equitable sharing of benefits** from the use of India's biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.

- Aligned with India's commitments under the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** (amended in 2023).

What is Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)?

ABS is a global framework to:

- Regulate **access to biological resources** (plants, animals, microbes, etc.)

- Ensure **benefits are shared fairly** with local and indigenous communities who conserve and hold traditional knowledge.

Key Provisions of the 2025 Regulation:

Turnover-Based Benefit Sharing (for commercial users):

Annual Turnover	Benefit-Sharing Rate
Below 5 crore	Exempt
5–50 crore	0.2% of ex-factory annual turnover
50–250 crore	0.4% of turnover
Above 250 crore	0.6% of turnover

- Entities with **>1 crore turnover** must **file annual usage statements**.

Inclusion of Digital Sequence Information (DSI):

- **DSI** now recognized under ABS—includes **genetic codes and digital data** of biological resources.
- Aligns with global consensus from **CBD COP16 (Cali, Colombia)**.

Exemptions:

- **Cultivated medicinal plants** exempted—if **officially notified** by Ministry of Environment in consultation with **AYUSH Ministry**.

High-Value & Threatened Resources:

- **Red sanders, sandalwood, agarwood**, etc.:
  - **Minimum 5%** of sale/auction proceeds to be shared.
  - Can rise to **20%** in case of **commercial exploitation**.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):

- Mandatory disclosure of biodiversity use in patent/IP applications.
- **Benefit-sharing triggered upon commercialization** of inventions using biological resources.

Distribution of Shared Benefits:

- **10–15% retained** by **NBA** for administration.
- Remainder flows to **local communities via Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**.

Significance of the New Rules:

Benefit Area	Explanation
Transparency	Clear, predictable benefit-sharing slabs for industries
Regulatory clarity	DSI inclusion plugs a critical legal loophole in earlier ABS frameworks
Promotes cultivation	Incentivizes **farming medicinal plants** over unsustainable wild harvesting
Community benefit	Ensures **economic returns** reach indigenous/local biodiversity custodians

Way Forward:

- Monitor implementation through **BMCs** and **State Biodiversity Boards**.
- Promote **capacity-building** for communities to assert benefit claims.
- Encourage **research and innovation** while upholding equitable sharing norms.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Kaleshwaram Project Under Scrutiny: Structural Damage Raises Safety Concerns

Context: In a recent development, the **National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA)**—India's apex body for dam safety—has reported **"irreparable structural damage"** in **three key barrages** of the **Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)**. These findings have raised **serious concerns** over the long-term safety and sustainability of one of the **world's largest lift irrigation systems**.

KALESHWARAM BARRAGE
Maharashtra — Chhattisgarh — Kaleshwaram project — Telangana — Godavari River

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project: Engineering Marvel of Telangana:

The **Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)** is a **multi-purpose mega infrastructure project** located on the **Godavari River** in **Kaleshwaram, Jayashankar Bhupalpally district, Telangana**. This project is designed to provide **irrigation water, drinking water**, and **industrial supply** to vast areas across the state.

- **Coverage:** It aims to serve **45 lakh acres** across **20 out of Telangana's 33 districts**, including the twin cities of **Hyderabad** and **Secunderabad**.

- **Scale:** KLIP is currently the **world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project**, with a network that includes **seven links, 28 construction packages**, and an **extensive canal system** spanning more than **1,800 km**.

Hydrological and Geographical Significance:

The project taps water from the **confluence** of the **Pranhita** and **Godavari rivers**, situated in northern Telangana. The **Pranhita River** is formed by the **joining of the Wardha, Wainganga, and Painganga rivers**, making it part of the **seventh-largest river basin** in the Indian subcontinent.

- **Total Water Lifted:** The project targets the **lifting and distribution** of approximately **240 TMC (Thousand Million Cubic Feet)** of water.

- **Utilization:** Water is allocated for **agriculture, municipal water supply, industrial use**, and **rural drinking water**.

Current Challenge: Damaged Barrages Raise Alarms

The NDSA's report has highlighted **structural failures** in three crucial **barrages**, potentially threatening the project's **long-term viability** and **public safety**. The damages are reportedly **beyond repair**, prompting calls for urgent **inspection, retrofits**, or **reconstruction** of key components.

Safety experts and **civil engineers** have voiced concerns about the **quality of construction, design standards**, and **monitoring mechanisms**, calling for a thorough **technical audit**.

Did You Know?

- KLIP uses **massive pumps** to lift water to heights of over **600 meters**, a feat that requires **enormous energy** and **sophisticated engineering**.

- The project's **cost** has been estimated at **over ₹80,000 crore**, making it one of the **most expensive** irrigation ventures in India.

- If fully operational and structurally sound, KLIP has the potential to **transform Telangana's agrarian economy** and ensure **water security** for decades.

Conclusion: A Moment of Reflection and Action

While the **Kaleshwaram Project** remains a **symbol of engineering ambition**, the recent findings serve as a **stark reminder** of the importance of **structural integrity**, **transparent governance**, and **sustainable planning**. Timely **intervention and accountability** will be crucial to protect both **public investment** and **regional livelihoods** dependent on this grand initiative.

Saola: The Elusive Asian Unicorn

Context: Scientists have successfully **mapped the genome** of the Saola using **tissue fragments** from hunter-collected remains.

- **Significance:** First-ever full genome mapping of this species, aiding **genetic conservation and recovery planning**.

About Saola (Pseudoryx nghetinhensis):

- **Discovered:** 1992, during a WWF and Vietnamese Ministry of Forestry expedition.

- **Nickname:** "Asian Unicorn" due to its **rarity and elusive nature**.

- **Appearance:**
    - Long, **parallel horns** (up to 20 inches), found in **both sexes**.
    - **Distinct white facial markings**.

- **Status:** *Critically Endangered* – IUCN Red List (Estimated **50–300 individuals**, 2015).

Habitat and Distribution:

- **Region:** Found **only in** the **Annamite Mountains** along the **Vietnam–Laos border**.

- **Ecosystem:** Dense, mist-covered **evergreen forests** with little to no dry season.

- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Region supports many endemic and endangered species.

Major Threats:

- **Snaring & Poaching:** Widespread use of wire snares for bushmeat.

- **Deforestation:** Driven by agriculture, logging, and burning.

- **Habitat Fragmentation:** Isolates populations, lowers breeding success.

- **Low Reproductive Rate:** Naturally limits population recovery.

Importance of Genome Mapping:

- **Source Material:** DNA recovered from **remains in hunter households**.

- **Sample Size:** Genetic data from **26 individuals**.

- **Outcome:** Helps determine:
    - **Genetic diversity**

o **Population structure**

o **Inbreeding risk**

o **Conservation planning**

Key Genetic Insights:

- **Historical Population Split:** Two genetic lineages diverged **5,000–20,000 years ago**, likely due to forest changes post-Ice Age.

- **Human Impact:** Rise of agriculture (~4,000 years ago) accelerated habitat loss and hunting, increasing isolation.

- **Complementary Gene Pools:**

  o Each group lost **different segments** of diversity.

  o Combining both lineages may **restore lost genetic variation**, aiding species survival.

Conservation Outlook:

- Genome mapping provides a **critical tool** for future conservation strategies, possibly including:

  o **Captive breeding** programs

  o **Rewilding efforts**

  o **Genetic rescue** and **habitat corridor** design

Guardians of Nature: The Vital Role of Indigenous Communities in Biodiversity Conservation

Context: Across the globe, **conservation models** often fail to recognize the crucial contributions of **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)**. While India took a progressive step with the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, the dominant conservation paradigm still tends to be **state-centric**, frequently sidelining the traditional custodians of forests and biodiversity.

To truly achieve **sustainable and inclusive conservation**, India must empower IPLCs not only through legal recognition but also through active participation in environmental governance.

How Do Indigenous Communities Protect Biodiversity?

India is home to over **700 tribal communities**, each with deep ecological knowledge and cultural practices that are closely intertwined with the natural world. Their role in biodiversity conservation is both **practical and spiritual**, rooted in centuries-old traditions.

Preservers of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK):

- IPLCs possess **rich oral knowledge** on medicinal plants, forest ecosystems, and animal behavior. **Example**: The **Kani tribe** of Kerala contributed to the discovery of the medicinal plant *Arogyapacha*, leading to the development of a patented drug and a benefit-sharing model.

Protectors of Sacred Forests and Community Lands:

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

FREEDOM UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- Tribal communities often maintain **sacred groves**, which serve as biodiversity hotspots. **Example**: The **Bishnoi community** of Rajasthan protects **Khejri trees**, antelopes, and birds, often risking their lives for wildlife.

Custodians of Native Crops and Seeds:

- Indigenous farming methods help maintain **genetic diversity** in agriculture. **Example**: In Odisha and Nagaland, communities practice **jhum cultivation** with long fallow periods, preserving **indigenous seed varieties** and soil fertility.

Living in Harmony with Wildlife:

- Cultural taboos and ethical codes promote **non-exploitative interactions** with nature. **Example**: The **Soliga tribe** of Karnataka coexists with tigers and elephants in the **Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve**, demonstrating **peaceful cohabitation**.

What Legal Frameworks Support Indigenous Conservation in India?

India has introduced several progressive laws and policies aimed at recognizing the ecological role of IPLCs:

Biological Diversity Act (BDA), 2002:

- Establishes **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)** at local levels to record and conserve biodiversity, and safeguard **traditional knowledge**.

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:

- Grants **legal rights to forest land and resources** to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.
- Empowers **Gram Sabhas** to manage and conserve forests, ensuring community-led sustainable practices.

Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996:

- Gives **tribal communities control over land and water resources** in Scheduled Areas, promoting **decentralized natural resource management**.

Joint Forest Management (JFM):

- Encourages **collaborative forest governance** between forest departments and local communities, especially in **non-timber forest product (NTFP)** management.

National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP):

- Supports **participatory conservation**, integration of **traditional practices**, and community capacity-building to enhance **ecosystem resilience**.

What More Can Be Done to Empower IPLCs in Conservation?

While India's legal framework is commendable, **implementation gaps** and **top-down approaches** persist. To foster a more inclusive model of conservation:

1. **Fully Enforce the Forest Rights Act (FRA):**

- Expedite **Community Forest Resource (CFR)** claims.
- Strengthen the decision-making role of **Gram Sabhas** in conservation areas.
- Train local leaders in biodiversity governance.

2. **Integrate Indigenous Knowledge in Policy Making:**

- Establish national and state-level platforms to **document traditional knowledge**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- Involve IPLCs in drafting **local biodiversity plans** and forest management strategies.

3. **Include IPLCs in the '30 by 30' Global Biodiversity Agenda:** India's commitment to protect **30% of its land and marine ecosystems by 2030** must **include IPLCs as co-managers**, not just beneficiaries.

4. **Promote Ethical Use of Traditional Knowledge:** Prevent **biopiracy** by ensuring **intellectual property rights** and **benefit-sharing mechanisms** with local communities.

5. **Strengthen Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs):** Provide legal backing, training, and funding to **enable BMCs to actively participate** in ecological decision-making.

6. **Provide Financial Incentives for Community Conservation:**

- Introduce **eco-certification**, **carbon credit systems**, and **community forest enterprise grants**.

- Support local innovations such as **eco-tourism**, **wildlife stewardship**, and **sustainable harvesting** of forest products.

Conclusion: Indigenous Wisdom, the Key to India's Ecological Future

India's indigenous communities are **not just stakeholders—they are stewards** of the nation's biodiversity. Their **deep ecological insights**, **communal ethics**, and **nature-based traditions** offer time-tested solutions to environmental degradation.

By ensuring **legal recognition**, **financial empowerment**, and **decision-making authority**, India can create a truly **inclusive conservation model**—one that honors both **ecological sustainability** and **social justice**.

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Invisible Scars: The Growing Threat of Gully Erosion

Context: A recent study published in *Scientific Reports* warns that **gully erosion**, a severe form of land degradation, poses a direct threat to the achievement of at least **nine out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. It particularly endangers efforts related to **Zero Hunger (SDG 2)**, **Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6)**, and **Climate Action (SDG 13)**. Despite its devastating impact, this form of erosion remains **largely invisible in mainstream environmental policy and discourse**.

What is Gully Erosion?

Gully erosion occurs when **runoff water** aggressively cuts through the soil, creating **deep, narrow channels (gullies)** in the landscape. These gullies grow in size over time, often turning into ravines that can stretch for kilometers.

What makes gully erosion especially dangerous is its:

- **Depth and speed of land degradation**

- **Unpredictable progression**

- **Extremely high soil loss per unit area**, surpassing other erosion types

Unlike sheet or rill erosion, gully erosion is **difficult to reverse** and leaves **permanent scars** on the land.

The Global and Indian Landscape:

Worldwide Impact:

- **51 countries** have reported disasters directly linked to gully formation.

- **Nigeria** stands out, with **15 major locations** severely affected by this hazard.

India's Erosion Hotspots:

- Gully-affected areas span across **19 states and the National Capital Territory of Delhi**.
- **Severely impacted states**: Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and **Rajasthan**.
- In regions like **Bundelkhand**, expanding gullies are turning once-arable land into barren badlands.

What Drives Gully Erosion?

1. Loss of Vegetation Cover:

- **Tree felling** and degradation of grasslands weaken soil structure.
- Without plant roots to bind the soil, intense rainstorms quickly carve gullies.

2. Erratic Weather Patterns:

- **Prolonged droughts** followed by **heavy downpours** create ideal conditions for runoff-induced erosion.
- Climate change is amplifying this cycle, particularly in **semi-arid and sub-humid regions**.

3. Poor Waste Management:

- Dumping of **solid waste into natural drainage channels** causes blockages, diverting water flow and creating **high-pressure zones** that deepen gullies.

4. Fragile Soil Types:

- Regions with **sandy, loose, or lateritic soils**, like those in **Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand**, are especially prone to erosion under water pressure.

The Devastating Impacts:

1. Loss of Fertile Topsoil:

- The topmost layer of soil, rich in nutrients, is washed away—**crippling agricultural productivity**.
- Once lost, **it may take hundreds of years to regenerate**, threatening **food security and farmer livelihoods**.

2. Water Scarcity and Drought:

- Erosion **reduces groundwater recharge** and increases **surface runoff**, worsening water shortages and disrupting **local hydrological cycles**.

3. Ecological Damage:

- Gullies **fragment habitats**, reducing biodiversity and disturbing **native flora and fauna**.
- Leads to **decline in pollinator species** and the spread of **invasive plants** in degraded lands.

4. Sediment Overload in Rivers:

- Displaced soil ends up clogging **rivers, lakes, and reservoirs**, leading to **siltation, reduced water storage**, and **flooding risks** downstream.

The Way Forward: Strategies for Resilience:

1. Reforestation and Vegetative Barriers:

- **Planting native species** in erosion-prone catchments helps **stabilize soil and reduce runoff**.
- **Vetiver grass,** with its deep root system, has proven highly effective in controlling gully spread.

2. Sustainable Land Use Practices:

- Promote **terracing, agroforestry, contour bunding**, and **cover cropping** to adapt land management to **terrain and soil characteristics**.

3. Structural Interventions:

- Constructing **check dams**, **gabion walls**, and **gully plugs** helps to **slow down water flow**, allowing **sediment deposition and soil recovery**.

4. Community Involvement and Education:

- Involving **local communities**, especially **tribal and farming populations**, in **watershed management** enhances long-term impact.

- Awareness programs about the **economic and ecological costs of gully erosion** can change local land-use behavior.

A National Call to Action:

India has pledged to restore **26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030** under its commitment to the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**. Addressing **gully erosion** must become a **central pillar of this restoration mission**.

This land degradation challenge is **invisible only until it is irreversible**. By integrating both **preventive and restorative approaches**, India can not only protect its landscapes but also secure **food, water, and livelihoods** for future generations.

Methane: The Silent Accelerator of Global Warming

Context: According to the **International Energy Agency's (IEA) Global Methane Tracker 2025**, the global **energy sector** released around **145 million tonnes (Mt)** of methane in **2024**. Of this, **oil and gas facilities alone contributed over 80 Mt**, making them the largest culprits in energy-related methane emissions.

What is Methane?

Methane (CH_4) is a **colourless**, **odourless**, and **highly flammable gas**, commonly referred to as **marsh gas**. Although it stays in the atmosphere for only about **10 years**, it is **over 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO_2)** in terms of **global warming potential (GWP)** over a 20-year period.

Key Characteristics:

- **Short atmospheric lifespan**: ~10 years

- **Global Warming Potential**: ~80x more than CO_2 (over 20 years)

- **Primary sources**: ~60% from human activity, ~40% from natural sources like **wetlands**, **permafrost thawing**, and **volcanic activity**

Anthropogenic Sources of Methane Emissions:

1. Energy Sector – A Leading Contributor:

The **energy industry** accounts for **over 35%** of human-induced methane emissions, making it the **largest industrial source**.

Breakdown within the Energy Sector:

- **Oil production**: ~45 Mt

- **Natural gas operations**: ~35 Mt

- **Coal mining activities**: Over **40 Mt**, including **4 Mt** from **abandoned mines**

- **Abandoned oil & gas wells**: ~**3 Mt**
- **Bioenergy (traditional biomass)**: ~**18 Mt** — largely from **wood**, **dung**, and **charcoal** in developing countries
- **Modern bioenergy** (like **biogas**, **biofuels**, and **biomethane**): ~**2 Mt**
- **End-use equipment leakage**: Contributes an extra ~**2 Mt**

2. Agriculture – Livestock and Rice Cultivation:

Agriculture is another **major emitter** of methane, primarily through:

- **Enteric fermentation** in livestock (especially cattle)
- **Manure management**
- **Flooded rice fields**, which produce methane due to anaerobic conditions

India and China are among the **top agricultural methane emitters**, given their large livestock populations and extensive rice cultivation.

3. Waste Sector – Landfills and Wastewater:

- Organic waste in **landfills** and **wastewater treatment plants** decomposes anaerobically, emitting significant amounts of methane.

Methane's Role in Climate Change:

Methane is responsible for nearly **30% of global warming** since the **Industrial Revolution**. Its **atmospheric concentration is now 2.5 times higher** than pre-industrial levels and continues to **increase at an alarming rate**.

Studies show that methane concentrations are **rising faster than any other greenhouse gas**, underscoring its critical role in near-term climate action.

Tackling the Methane Challenge:

Mitigation Potential:

The IEA emphasizes that:

- ~**70%** of fossil fuel-related methane emissions can be **prevented using existing technologies**.
- In the **oil and gas sector**, ~**75% of emissions** could be cut by **fixing leaks**, improving infrastructure, and **plugging abandoned wells**.

Top Emitters from Fossil Fuels:

- **China**
- **United States**
- **Russia**
- **Iran**
- **Turkmenistan**
- **India**

Global Response:

- **Global Methane Pledge**: Over 150 countries, including India, have committed to collectively **reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030**, relative to 2020 levels.

- **Technological Interventions**: Satellites like **GHGSat** and **Copernicus Sentinel-5P** are now being used to **track methane hotspots** and **support enforcement efforts**.

Conclusion: Urgency for Action

Methane may be invisible, but its impact on our climate is immense. With its **high warming potential** and **short lifespan**, cutting methane is one of the **fastest and most cost-effective ways** to slow down global warming in the near term.

To meet global climate goals, particularly the **1.5°C target** of the **Paris Agreement**, **governments, industries, and communities** must act swiftly to **monitor, regulate, and reduce methane emissions** across sectors.

CAQM Rolls Out 19-Point Action Plan to Eliminate Stubble Burning in Delhi-NCR

Context: Each winter, the **Delhi-NCR region** faces a suffocating haze, with **stubble burning** in neighboring states being a key contributor. In response, the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** has launched an ambitious **19-point action plan** aimed at permanently addressing this issue.

What Is the CAQM?

The **Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021** established CAQM as a **statutory body** to manage air quality through a **centralized, coordinated mechanism**. It covers **Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan**, and **Uttar Pradesh**, and aims to:

- Develop a **permanent and integrated framework** for pollution control.
- Replace the earlier fragmented system involving **multiple overlapping agencies**.
- Ensure **inter-state coordination**, especially during peak stubble-burning seasons.

Key Highlights of the 19-Point Strategy:

1. Comprehensive Farm-Level Monitoring:

- **Mapping of All Agricultural Fields** to monitor stubble management methods.
- Deployment of **one nodal officer for every 50 farmers** to ensure localized supervision and accountability.

2. Dual Approach to Stubble Management:

In-Situ Management (on-site treatment):

- Use of **bio-decomposers**, **happy seeders**, and **mulching machines** to decompose residue in the soil.

Ex-Situ Management (off-site use):

- **Baling, collection**, and **transportation** of paddy straw to **power plants**, **packaging industries**, **brick kilns**, and **paper mills**.
- Launch of a **pilot project** where a **common industrial boiler** using paddy straw will be tested to **supply steam**, creating a circular economy model.

3. Infrastructure and Logistics Planning:

- **Gap analysis** of Crop Residue Management (CRM) machinery at the state level.
- Creation of **district-level straw supply chains** to ensure effective transport and use.

- **Storage planning** to prevent losses from fire and decay of baled straw.

4. Crop Diversification and Long-Term Solutions:

- Encourage **crop diversification** to reduce dependency on **non-basmati paddy**, a major source of residue.

- Promote alternative crops like **maize**, **millets**, and **pulses**, which produce significantly less stubble and are **climate-resilient**.

Enforcement, Oversight, and Accountability:

5. Legal and Administrative Oversight:

- Formation of **state-level task forces** headed by **Chief Secretaries**, as directed by the **Supreme Court**.

- **Monthly compliance reports** starting **June 1, 2025**, to track progress.

6. Real-Time Digital Surveillance:

- Launch of a **real-time online platform** for **live crop residue data reporting**.

- Citizens empowered to report violations through **dedicated mobile applications**.

7. Creation of a 'Parali Protection Force':

- A special force at the **district and block level** comprising **police personnel**, **agriculture officers**, and **administrative officials**.

- **Intensified evening patrols** during the stubble-burning season.

- **Community-based reporting** and **reward mechanisms** for whistleblowers.

8. Penalties and Red Entries:

- Non-compliance will result in **monetary fines**, and farmers could face **'red entries'** in land records—a significant deterrent for repeat offenders.

- Escalation of penalties for repeat violations and establishment of **grievance redressal cells** for farmers with genuine concerns.

Why This Plan Matters: Broader Impact and Added Facts

- **Stubble burning contributes up to 35% of PM2.5 pollution** in Delhi during peak season, worsening respiratory health.

- India loses an estimated **2 lakh crore annually** in productivity and healthcare due to air pollution.

- The move aligns with India's **climate commitments under the Paris Agreement**, as reducing crop-burning also helps cut **methane and carbon emissions**.

Conclusion: A Sustainable Step Toward Cleaner Air

The **CAQM's 19-point plan** marks a strategic shift from reactive firefighting to **proactive, systemic reform** in combating **agricultural residue burning**. By combining **technology**, **infrastructure**, **community engagement**, and **legal enforcement**, this initiative aspires to deliver **tangible air quality improvements** not only in Delhi-NCR but also across northern India.

Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary: A Biodiversity Haven Under Threat

Context: Conservationists are raising red flags over growing **human intrusion** into the **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)** surrounding the **Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS)** in Karnataka. This **unauthorized activity** not only violates environmental norms but also poses a grave risk to one of the **richest ecological landscapes** in the Western Ghats.

BHIMGAD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY
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Understanding Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs):

Eco-Sensitive Zones serve as protective **buffer zones**—extending up to **10 km** from the boundary of protected areas like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. These zones aim to **minimize the impact of human activities** on core ecosystems.

Declared under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, ESZs follow the **National Wildlife Action Plan (2002–2016)** and categorize activities into:

- **Prohibited**:
  - **Commercial mining**, **polluting industries**, large **hydroelectric projects**, **sawmills**, and **commercial use of timber**.

- **Regulated**:
  - **Tree felling**, construction of **hotels and resorts**, **commercial water extraction**, and **use of chemical pesticides**.

- **Permitted**:
  - **Traditional agriculture**, **organic farming**, **rainwater harvesting**, **use of solar and wind energy**, and **eco-friendly technologies**.

About Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary:

A Natural Treasure in the Western Ghats:

- **Location**: Situated in the **Belgaum district** of Karnataka, near the **Goa border**, Bhimgad lies within the ecologically rich **Western Ghats**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

- **Establishment**: It was declared a **Wildlife Sanctuary in December 2011**, aiming to protect endemic species and sensitive habitats.

- **Historical Legacy**: The sanctuary is named after **Bhimgad Fort**, built in the **17th century by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** as a strategic defense point against Portuguese invasions.

- **Area**: The sanctuary spans approximately **190 square kilometers**, and its landscape includes **evergreen forests, rivers, and caves**.

Ecological Significance:

Home to Rare and Endemic Species:

- **Avifauna Diversity**: The region supports vibrant birdlife such as the:
  - **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**
  - **Malabar Grey Hornbill**
  - **Imperial Green Pigeon**

- o **Emerald Dove**
- o **Malabar Trogon** (an elusive forest-dwelling bird known for its vivid plumage)
- **Wroughton's Free-tailed Bat**: The **Barapede Caves** within Bhimgad are **the only known breeding site** for this **critically endangered bat species**, making the sanctuary a **global conservation priority**.
- **Aquatic & Forest Ecosystems**: Bhimgad includes the **Vajrapoha Waterfalls** and lies within the **catchment of the Mahadayi River**—a lifeline for downstream ecosystems and human settlements.

Emerging Threats and Conservation Concerns:

- **Public Intrusion** into the ESZ is disturbing natural habitats and could result in the **displacement of wildlife**, **soil erosion**, and **forest degradation**.
- Illegal **construction activities**, **unsustainable tourism**, and **unauthorized logging** are reported in the periphery.
- The **Mahadayi River**, originating in the sanctuary, is part of a **politically sensitive inter-state water dispute** between Goa and Karnataka. Any ecological damage here could impact water availability for multiple states.

The Way Forward: Strengthening Protection:

- **Enhanced Monitoring**: Use of **drones and satellite mapping** to track illegal activities in real time.
- **Community Involvement**: Promoting **eco-tourism**, **local guide employment**, and **awareness programs** to involve nearby communities in conservation.
- **Strict Enforcement**: Empowering the **Forest Department** and **local governance bodies** to implement ESZ guidelines with stricter penalties for violations.
- **Research and Habitat Restoration**: Funding studies on **species population trends** and initiating **reforestation drives** to restore disturbed patches.

Conclusion: Preserving a Natural Heritage

The **Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary** is not just a biodiversity hotspot but also a **critical ecological corridor** within the **Western Ghats**, linking several protected areas across Karnataka and Goa. Immediate attention and **coordinated conservation actions** are essential to preserve its **unique flora and fauna**, **water systems**, and **cultural heritage**.

Preserving Bhimgad today means securing a **resilient ecosystem** for generations to come.

India's Mounting E-Waste Crisis: Time to Rethink Management

Context: As India rapidly transitions into a digital powerhouse, it is facing a **mounting e-waste crisis**. The exponential growth in the use of electronic devices has led to a **surge in discarded gadgets**, making India the **third-largest generator of e-waste globally**, after **China and the United States**.

What is E-Waste?

Electronic waste (e-waste) includes **discarded electrical or electronic devices**—from **smartphones and laptops** to **televisions, refrigerators, and printers**—that are no longer usable due to **technological obsolescence** or physical damage.

India's E-Waste Landscape: A Startling Surge

- **Growth Trajectory**: E-waste generation in India surged by a staggering **151%** in just six years—rising from **7.08 lakh metric tonnes in 2017–18** to over **17.78 lakh metric tonnes in 2023–24**.

- **Urban Centers as E-Waste Hubs**: **Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai**, and **Hyderabad** are among the top cities contributing significantly to the e-waste burden.

- **Devices Driving the Surge**: Mobile phones, computers, routers, air conditioners, and LED TVs are the leading contributors to India's e-waste mountain.

Consequences of Poor E-Waste Management:

1. Environmental Damage:

- **Water Pollution**: Toxic chemicals like **cyanide, mercury, and sulphuric acid** leach into water bodies.

- **Air Pollution**: Burning plastics and metals releases **lead fumes** and **dioxins**, causing respiratory ailments.

- **Soil Contamination**: Heavy metals seep into soil, harming **agriculture, microbes**, and **local ecosystems**.

2. Social and Health Costs:

- **Informal Sector Dominance**: Nearly **95%** of India's e-waste is processed in the **unregulated informal sector**, often by **marginalized women and children**.

- **Toxic Exposure**: Workers face **chronic health risks**, with an **average life expectancy below 27 years** in some cases.

3. Economic Losses:

- India forfeits over **80,000 crore annually** in lost critical metals such as **gold, platinum, palladium, and rare earth elements**.

- The absence of a robust formal recycling ecosystem leads to **$20 billion in potential tax revenue losses** each year.

What's Holding India Back? Major Challenges

- **Lack of Public Awareness and Incentives**: Consumers lack **financial rewards** or **easy return mechanisms** for responsible disposal.

- **Inadequate Collection Infrastructure**: There's a **shortage of authorized collection centers**, particularly in **Tier-II and Tier-III cities**. Informal scrap dealers remain the **default recycling channel**.

- **Unsafe Recycling Techniques**:Informal recyclers use methods like **open-air burning**, **acid leaching**, and **manual dismantling without safety gear**, releasing toxic fumes.

- **Grey Market Imports**: Used electronics often enter India under the guise of **"donations" or "refurbished goods"**, adding to the domestic e-waste pile.

India's E-Waste Policy Framework:

1. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):

Under **E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022**, manufacturers, producers, and importers are now **legally responsible** for the **entire lifecycle** of their products, including post-consumer disposal.

- **Digital Compliance**: The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** operates a digital **EPR portal** where stakeholders must register and report their e-waste management activities.

2. Formalized Collection and Disposal:

- **India's First E-Waste Clinic**: Launched in **Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**, the clinic serves as a centralized facility for **safe collection, processing**, and **disposal of electronic waste** from both households and businesses.

- **E-Waste Parks**: Delhi and other metro cities are proposing **dedicated recycling parks** to house registered dismantlers and recyclers.

3. International Framework: The Basel Convention

India is a signatory to the **Basel Convention (1989)**, which controls the **transboundary movement of hazardous waste**. It helps India restrict illegal dumping of e-waste from developed nations.

Global Best Practices: Lessons for India:

- **Japan**: Employs a strict **home appliance recycling law**, where manufacturers are required to collect and recycle their products.

- **European Union**: Has implemented a **Circular Economy Action Plan**, incentivizing repair, reuse, and recycling of e-goods.

- **South Korea**: Uses **reverse logistics systems**, encouraging retailers to accept e-waste returns with government subsidies.

Path Forward: Building a Circular E-Economy:

1. Empower the Formal Sector:

- Scale up **eco-certified recycling units** with **government subsidies**.

- Encourage **urban mining**—extracting rare materials from e-waste—to reduce import dependency.

2. Educate and Engage Citizens:

- Launch **nationwide awareness drives** promoting safe disposal.

- Introduce **cash-back incentives**, e-waste kiosks, and mobile collection vans in cities.

3. Regulate the Grey Market:

- Enforce stringent **border checks** and **labelling norms** to curb e-waste imports disguised as refurbished goods.

Conclusion: Turning Trash into Treasure

India stands at a crossroads—between **technological progress** and **ecological responsibility**. The way forward lies not just in managing e-waste, but in **extracting value**, **ensuring worker safety**, and **fostering green growth**.

By embracing a **circular economy**, investing in **formal infrastructure**, and ensuring **policy enforcement**, India can transform its e-waste burden into a powerful tool for achieving its **Viksit Bharat (Developed India) vision**.

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Geotubing: A Modern Solution to India's Coastal Erosion Crisis

Context: India's vast coastline is under threat from rapid **coastal erosion**, a phenomenon exacerbated by **climate change**, **unregulated development**, and **natural disasters**. However, a recent success story from **Poonthura, Kerala**, has put the spotlight on an innovative solution — **geotubing technology** — that is proving to be a **game-changer in shoreline protection**.

What is Geotubing?

Geotubes, or **geotextile tubes**, are large, durable fabric containers filled with **sand or dredged slurry**, strategically placed along vulnerable coastlines.

- These structures act as **wave energy absorbers**, reducing the intensity of incoming waves.
- They serve as **artificial dunes or sea walls**, preventing shoreline retreat.
- Their **multi-layered composition** allows long-term durability, even during high tides and storm surges.

Case in Point: The deployment of geotubes in **Poonthura, Kerala**, has significantly mitigated erosion and safeguarded local fishing communities.

India's Coastal Landscape: An Overview

- **Revised Coastline Length**: India's coastline has been updated to **11,098.81 km** (from 7,516.6 km) using **modern GIS-based measurement techniques**.
- **Coastal Composition**:
  o **43%** sandy beaches
  o **36%** muddy flats
  o **11%** rocky shores
  o **10%** marshy and estuarine zones
  o Includes **97 major estuaries** and **34 lagoons**
- **Geographical Spread**: 9 coastal states and 2 union territories, comprising **66 coastal districts**.

Erosion Patterns: A Cause for Concern

According to the **National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR)**:

- **33.6%** of India's coast is **eroding**
- **26.9%** is witnessing **accretion** (land build-up)
- **39.6%** remains **stable**

Worst-Affected States:

- **West Bengal** – 60.5% of the coastline eroding
- **Kerala** – 46.4%
- **Tamil Nadu** – 42.7%

Why is India Losing Its Coastline?

Natural Causes:

- **Rising Sea Levels**: Due to **melting glaciers** and **thermal expansion**.
- **Cyclones and Storm Surges**: Increasing in frequency and intensity due to **climate change**.
- **Monsoonal Variability**: Seasonal wind patterns drastically affect sediment deposition and erosion.

Human-Induced Factors:

- **Sand Mining**: Unregulated extraction of sand from riverbeds and coastal zones.
- **Port Development**: Alters natural **littoral drift** and sediment transport.
- **Mangrove Clearance**: Removes natural bio-shields that absorb wave energy.
- **Urban Encroachment**: Shrinks the coastal buffer zones, exposing communities to sea intrusion.

Government's Response: Policy and Planning

1. Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (ICZMP):

- **World Bank-assisted** initiative implemented in **Gujarat, Odisha, and West Bengal**
- Promotes **sustainable coastal livelihoods**, **marine biodiversity**, and **disaster preparedness**

2. Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019:

- Categorizes coastal zones based on ecological sensitivity
- Establishes **No Development Zones (NDZs)** in ecologically vulnerable areas
- Emphasizes **Shoreline Management Plans** and **Local Participation**

3. Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI):

- Developed by **INCOIS**, this tool maps **hazard zones** using parameters like elevation, slope, tidal range, and wave action.
- Helps prioritize **adaptive strategies** and **infrastructure planning**.

4. 15th Finance Commission Allocation:

- **2,500 crore** earmarked for **coastal resilience**, including **relocation** of affected communities and **infrastructure strengthening**.

Engineering and Nature-Based Solutions:

Geotube Installations:

- Used successfully in **Pentha Village, Odisha**, and now **Poonthura, Kerala**
- Provide immediate and **cost-effective protection**
- Flexible in design, **adaptable to local geography**, and **eco-sensitive**

Artificial Reefs:

- Installed offshore to **dissipate wave energy** and **support marine biodiversity**
- Mimic coral reef functions without ecological damage

Eco-Friendly Breakwaters:

- Constructed with materials that **blend with the marine ecosystem**
- Help avoid the negative visual and ecological impacts of conventional concrete structures

Mangrove Restoration and Shelterbelts:

- Natural vegetation like **Casuarina** and **mangroves** stabilizes coastal soil

- Acts as **green barriers** to high tides and cyclone surges

Looking Ahead: Building Climate-Resilient Coasts

With rising sea levels and intensifying weather patterns, India's coastal resilience must move beyond traditional barriers and embrace **hybrid solutions** — combining **engineering innovation** with **ecosystem restoration**.

The Way Forward:

- **Expand geotube deployment** in erosion hotspots
- **Integrate satellite-based monitoring** for real-time shoreline changes
- Encourage **community participation** in mangrove conservation
- Develop a **national shoreline protection strategy** linked to the **Blue Economy framework**

Conclusion: From Crisis to Coastal Conservation

India's battle against coastal erosion is both urgent and complex. **Geotubing**, supported by sound policy and environmental planning, offers a **sustainable model** for other vulnerable regions.

By investing in **science-driven interventions**, fostering **community awareness**, and upholding **regulatory safeguards**, India can turn the tide and ensure its coastlines remain **livable, resilient**, and **thriving for generations to come**.

Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project: A Landmark Water Collaboration Between MP and Maharashtra

 Context: In a significant development, the states of **Madhya Pradesh (MP)** and **Maharashtra** have signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to jointly execute the **Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project**—the **world's largest groundwater recharge initiative**. The project aims to ensure sustainable use of river water for **irrigation and drinking needs** in water-stressed regions of both states.

What is the Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project?

About the Project:

The **Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project** is a **major inter-state water management initiative** involving **groundwater recharge** through optimal use of the **Tapti River** and its tributaries. The project focuses on **three Tapti streams** that originate from **Multai** in Madhya Pradesh.

This marks **MP's third inter-state river collaboration**, following:

- The **Ken-Betwa Link Project** (with **Uttar Pradesh**)
- The **Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project** (with **Rajasthan**)

Key Features of the Project:

- **Water Diversion and Allocation**: The project will divert water from the **Tapti River** for dual purposes—**drinking water in northeastern Maharashtra** and **irrigation support in southern and southeastern MP**.

    Water Usage Breakdown:

    o **Total planned usage**: **31.13 TMC** (Thousand Million Cubic Feet)

    o **Madhya Pradesh**: **11.76 TMC**

- o **Maharashtra**: **19.36 TMC**
- **Infrastructure Development**:
  - o A **diversion weir** will be constructed at the **MP-Maharashtra border**
  - o **Right and left bank canals** will be built in both states to ensure proper distribution
- **Land and Environmental Aspects**: The project spans **3,362 hectares** in MP, but **does not require displacement or rehabilitation**, making it a **sustainable and community-friendly model**.

Beneficiary Regions:

The project will benefit several **drought-prone districts**:

- **In Madhya Pradesh**: **Burhanpur** and **Khandwa**
- **In Maharashtra**: **Akola**, **Amravati**, and **Buldhana**

These districts have long struggled with **groundwater depletion** and **unpredictable monsoons**, making this project a **critical step toward long-term water resilience**.

Understanding the Tapti River System:

Geographical Significance:

The **Tapti River** is India's **second-longest west-flowing river** after the **Narmada**. It travels through **Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra,** and **Gujarat**, before draining into the **Arabian Sea** via the **Gulf of Khambhat**.

It is one of only **three major Indian rivers** that **flow westward**—the others being the **Narmada** and **Mahi**.

Basin Characteristics:

- The **Tapi basin** is flanked by:
  - o The **Satpura Range** (north)
  - o **Mahadeo Hills** (east)
  - o **Ajanta and Satmala Hills** (south)
  - o **Arabian Sea** (west)
- It runs **parallel to the Narmada River**, separated by the **core ridge of the Satpura Range**, creating a **unique hydrological zone**.

Tributaries of the Tapti:

The river is fed by **14 major tributaries**:

- **Right-bank (4)**: **Vaki**, **Aner**, **Arunawati**, **Gomai**
- **Left-bank (10)**: **Nesu**, **Amravati**, **Buray**, **Panjhara**, **Bori**, **Girna**, **Waghur**, **Purna**, **Mona**, **Sipna**

Purna River is the **most significant left-bank tributary**, offering a **perennial water supply** crucial to the basin's ecology.

Major Dams and Projects on the Tapti

- **Ukai Dam** in **Gujarat**
- **Hathnur Dam** in **Maharashtra**

These existing projects play a key role in regional water storage and flood control.

Conclusion: A Step Toward Sustainable Water Security

The **Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project** is not just an engineering feat—it represents **cooperative federalism**, **climate resilience**, and **sustainable groundwater management** in action. By uniting two states in a shared mission, this initiative has the potential to **revive agriculture, secure drinking water,** and **alleviate water stress** for generations to come.

India Moves Toward Natural Farming Revolution with Nationwide Certification

Context: In a progressive step towards promoting **sustainable agriculture** and boosting **consumer confidence**, the **Government of India** is set to roll out a **Natural Farming Certification System (NFCS)** across the country. This initiative aims to **standardize practices**, increase **farmer incomes**, and offer **premium market access** for natural produce.

What is Natural Farming?

Natural Farming is a **chemical-free, traditional farming method** enriched by modern ecological knowledge. It emphasizes the use of **on-farm resources**, **zero synthetic inputs**, and **soil-friendly techniques**, making it a highly **sustainable alternative** to conventional agriculture.

Key Features of Natural Farming

- **Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF):** A widely recognized approach pioneered by **Subhash Palekar**, focusing on **drastic reduction of input costs**.

- **Core Practices Include:**

    o **Beejamrit**: Natural treatment of seeds using cow dung and urine.

    o **Jeevamrit**: Fermented microbial culture to enrich soil health.

    o **Mulching** and **Waaphasa**: Techniques for moisture retention and soil aeration.

- **Low Cost, High Sustainability:** It eliminates dependency on **chemical fertilizers**, promoting **cost-effective farming**.

Why Natural Farming Matters:

Economic Benefits:

- **Lower Input Costs:** Reduces dependency on market-bought fertilizers and pesticides.

- **Higher Profit Margins:** Allows farmers to earn more from **natural produce premiums**.

Health and Nutrition:

- **Chemical-Free Food:** Natural farming ensures **pesticide-free crops**, reducing **health risks**.

- **Nutrient-Rich Produce:** Yields **more nutritious food**, improving **public health outcomes**.

Environmental Advantages:

- **Soil Health Restoration:** Boosts soil biodiversity and natural fertility.

- **Water Efficiency:** Encourages **judicious water usage**.

- **Lower Emissions:** Reduces **carbon and nitrogen footprints**, supporting **climate resilience**.

Need for a Certification System:

As natural farming practices gain popularity, a **robust certification mechanism** becomes essential to:

- **Build Consumer Trust:** Assure buyers about the **authenticity** of naturally grown produce.

- **Access Premium Markets:** Enable farmers to reach **high-value domestic and export markets**.
- **Standardize Practices:** Establish **uniform protocols** across regions.
- **Enable Traceability:** Ensure **transparency and accountability** in production processes.

Major Challenges in Scaling Natural Farming:

Despite its benefits, natural farming faces several roadblocks:

- **Initial Yield Drops:** Many farmers experience a **temporary dip in productivity** during the transition.
- **Limited Research Support:** A lack of **long-term scientific studies** across various agro-climatic zones.
- **Weak Institutional Backing:** Insufficient coordination among **agriculture departments, research bodies**, and **rural institutions**.
- **Market Linkages:** Many farmers struggle to access **organized and remunerative markets**.

Government's Push: National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)

The government is aggressively promoting natural farming through the **National Mission on Natural Farming**, focusing on mass adoption and support systems.

Key Components of the Mission:

- **Targeted Outreach:** Aiming to reach **1 crore farmers** across India through awareness and capacity building.
- **Cluster-Based Implementation:** Around **15,000 clusters** in **Gram Panchayats** will serve as hubs for promoting natural farming.
- **Bio-Input Resource Centers (BRCs): 10,000 BRCs** to be set up to provide **locally available, organic inputs** for easy farmer access.
- **Model Demonstration Farms:**
  o **2,000 model farms** will be created at **Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)**, **Agricultural Universities**, and **farmer fields**.
  o These will be run by **experienced Master Trainers** to guide new practitioners.
- **Market and Certification Support:**
  o **Simplified certification** mechanisms will be introduced.
  o Dedicated **branding and marketing channels** to promote natural farming products both **domestically and internationally**.81

Conclusion: Toward a Greener Agricultural Future

The upcoming **Natural Farming Certification System** represents a **landmark policy intervention** to legitimize and mainstream **eco-friendly agriculture**. By empowering farmers, protecting the environment, and ensuring **safe, nutritious food**, India is moving decisively towards a **resilient and sustainable farming future**. With continued support, **natural farming** could become the cornerstone of India's **agricultural transformation**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Plastic Menace in the Himalayas: A Growing Ecological Crisis

Context: The pristine Himalayan ecosystem is under increasing threat from **plastic pollution**, with a recent report revealing that **over 84% of plastic waste collected** in the region is **non-recyclable**, raising serious environmental and systemic red flags.

The Himalayan Cleanup 2024: Troubling Findings

The **Himalayan Cleanup (THC) 2024**, an extensive environmental audit conducted across **nine Himalayan states**, exposed alarming statistics:

- Over **1.2 lakh waste items** were examined — **88% were plastic**.
- **84.2% of the plastic waste** was linked to **food and beverage packaging**.
- Shockingly, **71% of this packaging** was **non-recyclable**, single-use plastic.

Top Polluters by Volume:

- **Sikkim** and **Darjeeling (West Bengal)** ranked highest.
- Followed by **Ladakh**, **Nagaland**, and **Uttarakhand**.

Environmental Impact of Plastic Waste in the Himalayas

Tourism-Driven Pollution:

- Plastic waste is concentrated around **tourist hotspots**, **riverbanks**, and **protected areas**.
- Unregulated tourism and **lack of sustainable infrastructure** amplify the crisis.

Threat to Climate and Biodiversity:

- Plastic degrades slowly, leading to **soil and water contamination**.
- Disrupts **biodiversity**, damages local **agriculture**, and threatens **water sources**.

Public Health Hazards:

- Improper disposal near habitations causes:
    - **Vector-borne diseases**
    - **Water pollution**
    - **Air toxicity** from open burning of plastic

Systemic Challenges in Himalayan Waste Governance:

Lack of Infrastructure:

- **Mountain villages and towns** lack basic facilities for **waste collection, segregation**, and **processing**.

Weak Enforcement of Plastic Ban Policies:

- Despite state-level **bans on single-use plastics**, enforcement remains **inconsistent and ineffective**.
- Limited availability of **eco-friendly alternatives** discourages compliance.

Awareness and Responsibility Gaps:

- **Tourists and local businesses** are often unaware of their role in plastic pollution.
- Producers frequently ignore their obligations under **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**.

Topographical & Logistical Barriers:

- **Remote terrain**, **dispersed settlements**, and **extreme weather** conditions complicate waste management.

India's Initiatives to Curb Plastic Pollution:

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):

- Mandates that **producers and brand owners** manage the lifecycle of plastic products, including post-use collection and recycling.

Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2022:

- Prohibits plastic bags **below 120 microns** in thickness.

- Aims to restrict **manufacture, import, and sale** of low-grade plastic products.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:

- The nationwide cleanliness campaign includes **plastic waste collection and awareness** drives.

Plastic Parks Scheme:

- Dedicated zones for **plastic recycling and processing**, promoting a **circular economy** approach.

The Way Forward: Towards Sustainable Waste Solutions

1. Mountain-Sensitive Waste Policies:

- Design policies that respect **geographical, cultural, and ecological realities**.

- Incentivize **eco-alternatives** suitable for cold and remote terrains.

2. Decentralized Waste Management:

- Promote **community-led initiatives** using **traditional ecological knowledge**.

- Set up **low-cost, modular waste processing units** across villages.

3. Eco-Friendly Tourism Practices:

- Implement **mandatory waste audits** at tourist sites.

- Enforce **carry-in, carry-out policies**, especially around **pilgrimage routes** and **rivers**.

Did You Know?

- **Plastic takes 500–1,000 years** to decompose in cold environments like the Himalayas.

- **Microplastics** have now been found in **glacial meltwater**, threatening **Himalayan river systems** that sustain over a **billion people downstream**.

India stands at a critical juncture to **preserve the fragile Himalayan ecosystem**. By combining **policy innovation**, **community engagement**, and **eco-conscious tourism**, the nation can lead by example in tackling mountain plastic pollution before it becomes irreversible.

Back From the Brink: Blyde Rondavel Flat Gecko Rediscovered After 34 Years

Context: In a thrilling breakthrough for conservation biology, the **Blyde Rondavel Flat Gecko**, a species that had gone unrecorded for over **three decades**, was **rediscovered in April 2025** in the rugged **Blyde River Canyon** of **Mpumalanga Province**, **South Africa**. This marks the first confirmed sighting of the elusive lizard since its initial discovery in **1991**.

About the Blyde Rondavel Flat Gecko:

- This **flat-bodied gecko** reaches a length of **8–9 cm** when fully grown.

- It is likely **rock-dwelling**, specially adapted to **cliff habitats and isolated rocky outcrops**, which contributes to its **elusiveness** and difficulty in detection.

- After its original discovery, the gecko vanished from all records, sparking fears of **extinction** and even **doubts about its taxonomic validity**.

- Due to the absence of sufficient data, it had been listed as **"Data Deficient"** by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.

Rediscovery Confirmed by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT):

The rediscovery was made during a targeted **research expedition** by the **Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT)** to an **inaccessible rocky escarpment** of the canyon—precisely the site where the species was first found.

This marks the **fifth successful rediscovery** of a species by EWT in recent years, joining an impressive list of once-thought-lost creatures, including:

- A **dune mole**, rediscovered after **80 years**,

- A **rare butterfly**,

- An **unrecorded lizard**, and

- A **frog species**, all of which had similarly disappeared from scientific sight.

A Victory for Conservation and Biodiversity:

The reappearance of the Blyde Rondavel Flat Gecko is a **testament to the importance of sustained fieldwork** in even the most inaccessible habitats. It also reaffirms the critical value of **protected ecosystems like the Blyde River Canyon**, which serve as refuges for unique and often overlooked species.

This rediscovery contributes to a growing list of so-called **"Lazarus species"**—organisms presumed extinct that reemerge, surprising scientists and conservationists alike.

Looking Ahead:

The find is expected to lead to:

- **New ecological studies** on the gecko's behavior and habitat,

- **Updated conservation assessments** by the IUCN, and

- **Heightened interest** in protecting other potentially hidden species in remote ecosystems.

It also serves as a **beacon of hope** for biodiversity conservation, proving that even in a rapidly changing world, **nature still holds secrets waiting to be uncovered**.

Yala Glacier Declared "Dead": A Stark Reminder of Climate Crisis in the Himalayas

Context: In a powerful moment of environmental reckoning, **Nepal's Yala Glacier**, nestled in the **Langtang Valley**, has been officially declared **"dead"** by the **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)**. The announcement was marked with a solemn **climate memorial ceremony**, acknowledging the **rapid retreat of Himalayan glaciers** under the weight of global warming.

Why Yala Glacier Matters: A Symbol of Himalayan Vulnerability

The **Yala Glacier**, located in the **Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region**, has undergone **a dramatic 66% reduction** in its ice mass since the 1970s. Now motionless and without internal ice flow, it has earned the grim status of being the **first glacier in Nepal—and in Asia—officially declared "dead."**

- A **commemorative plaque**, engraved in **English, Nepali, and Tibetan**, now marks the site.

- The ceremony was part of Nepal's broader initiative under the **UN International Year for Glaciers Preservation 2025** and coincided with the **inaugural Sagarmatha Sambad (mountain dialogue) Summit**—an international platform for mountain and climate diplomacy.

Did You Know? Glaciers are considered "dead" when they **stop moving under their own weight**, signaling the end of their natural ice cycle.

What Are Glaciers and Why Are They Disappearing?

Understanding Glaciers:

A **glacier** is a **massive, persistent body of ice and debris** that forms on land and flows slowly downhill due to **gravity**. These frozen reservoirs play a vital role in **regulating water supplies**, maintaining **ecosystem balance**, and supporting **millions of livelihoods**, especially in high mountain regions.

Global Glacier Distribution:

- **Antarctica**: ~**91%** of the world's glacier ice

- **Greenland**: ~**8%**

- The remaining **<1%** is spread across **Asia, Europe, North America, Africa, New Zealand**, and **Indonesia**

- **Australia** has **no glaciers**

The **Hindu Kush Himalayas** alone provide **freshwater to nearly 2 billion people** across Asia through major rivers like the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus.

Climate Change and Glacier Melting: A Global Wake-Up Call

Between **2000 and 2023**, global glaciers have collectively lost a staggering **6,542 billion tons of ice**, directly contributing to:

- A **global sea level rise of 18 millimeters**

- Increased flood risk for **200,000–300,000 additional people** per millimeter of rise

Glacier melt is now the **second-largest cause of sea level rise**, trailing only behind **thermal expansion caused by ocean warming**.

Additional Insight: If current warming trends continue, **two-thirds of Himalayan glaciers** could disappear by **2100**, posing a severe risk to regional water security.

The Himalayan Cryosphere in Crisis:

The **Himalayas**, often called the **"Third Pole"**, are home to the **largest volume of ice outside the Arctic and Antarctic**. However, rising global temperatures—especially in high-altitude regions—are **accelerating glacial retreat at alarming rates**.

Nepal, at the frontline of this crisis, is using platforms like **Sagarmatha Sambad 2025** to call for **global climate solidarity** and **urgent emission reductions**.

Conclusion: Yala Glacier's Silence Speaks Volumes

The declaration of **Yala Glacier's death** is more than a scientific classification—it is a **poignant climate warning**. It tells a story of **neglect, delay**, and the **heavy cost of inaction**. As ice continues to vanish from the world's highest mountains, the time to act is now.

The New Conservation Crisis: Tigers Raised with Human Help Now Pose a Danger

Context: A troubling case in **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve** has brought the controversial practice of **live baiting** back into the spotlight. A young tigress named **Kankati**, just 23 months old, has killed **two people within a month**, alarming both wildlife officials and conservationists. The reason? She was raised on **live bait provided to her injured mother, Arrowhead**, making her **less fearful of humans** — and more dangerous.

What is Live Baiting?

A Colonial Hangover with Modern Risks

Live baiting refers to the practice of offering a **live animal (like a goat or buffalo calf)** as prey to large carnivores such as tigers. Once a tool of **British-era trophy hunters**, it evolved into a **tourism tactic** post-independence — allowing tourists to witness tiger kills in parks like **Sariska**, until it was **officially banned in 1982** by **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi**.

Still Practiced: Feeding the Old and the Injured

Though banned for tourism, live baiting **continues unofficially** — particularly for **injured or aging tigers** who can no longer hunt. **Buffalo calves** are commonly used in reserves like **Ranthambhore** and **Tadoba**, with feedings every **7–10 days**.

Despite **NTCA's (National Tiger Conservation Authority)** guidelines promoting **minimal human interference**, the practice persists. The **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** label artificial feeding as **"not advisable,"** but not explicitly **illegal** when used for non-hunting tigers.

How It Harms: Breaking the Wild Spirit of the Tiger:

Experts argue that artificial feeding**:**

- **Disrupts natural selection**
- Makes tigers **dependent on humans**
- Causes them to **lose hunting instincts**
- Increases **risk of human-wildlife conflict**

Fact: Habituated tigers are more likely to approach villages or attack people and livestock, mistaking them as easy prey.

Veteran conservationists insist that if baiting is ever used, it should be:

- Only during **genuine emergencies**
- Limited to **biweekly feeding**
- Not continued beyond **three months**

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

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Case Studies: When Kindness Backfires:

The Guda Cubs (2008): Orphaned by poisoning, they were **fed buffalo calves** instead of being taught to hunt. One male, **T36**, died in a territorial fight. His sister, **T37**, survived — but remained less independent than wild-born tigers.

Simba's Sad End:

Another hand-raised cub, **Simba**, died after suffering injuries from a porcupine — a result of **poor hunting skills** developed due to early dependence on bait.

Machhli — A Tiger on Life Support:

Known as the "**Queen of Ranthambhore**," **Machhli** was fed bait for **seven years**. Though she gained celebrity status, her **unnaturally long survival** raised questions about the **ethics of wildlife care**.

A Growing Culture of Over-Intervention:

Live baiting is just one symptom of a larger issue: a shift from **preservation** to **pampering** in India's tiger reserves.

Examples of Overreach:

- **Transporting prey animals** into reserves
- **Tranquilising tigers** for minor injuries
- **Creating artificial waterholes** in summer
- **Tourist-driven treatment demands** for limping or aging tigers

This trend is seen in major reserves like **Corbett**, **Bandipur**, **Kanha**, and **Pench**, where **emotional decisions** are replacing **scientific wildlife management**.

The Ethical Dilemma: Compassion vs. Natural Law

While public sentiment often demands saving every tiger, conservationists remind us:

In nature, not every animal survives — and that's essential to ecosystem health.

Feeding and rescuing every weak or injured tiger can:

- Create **artificial population pressures**
- Prevent natural **population turnover**
- Increase **competition and territorial conflicts**
- Lead to **more human-tiger encounters**

What Experts Say: Respect Nature's Wisdom

Leading biologists and ecologists emphasize a return to **core conservation principles**:

- Let wild tigers **hunt, fight, and survive** naturally
- Avoid **turning reserves into zoos**
- Focus on **protecting habitats and prey base**
- Limit human involvement to **critical interventions only**

Extra Insight: India's success in tiger conservation — with over **3,100 tigers as of 2022**, the highest in the world — depends not just on numbers, but on ensuring these apex predators **remain truly wild**.

Conclusion: Preserve, Don't Interfere

Live baiting, though sometimes well-intentioned, risks **undermining the very essence of wildness** that conservation strives to protect. India's majestic tigers deserve more than survival — they deserve the **dignity of the wild**.

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Global Hunger Crisis Deepens: Nearly 300 Million Faced Acute Food Insecurity in 2024

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Context: The **Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) 2025**, released by the **Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC)**, paints a bleak picture of the world's food security. According to the report, **295 million people** across **53 countries** faced **acute hunger** in 2024—**an increase of 13.7 million** compared to 2023.

This disturbing trend signals a growing inability of communities to access **sufficient, safe, and nutritious food**, often due to a mix of conflict, economic instability, and climate shocks.

About the Report and Its Global Relevance:

The **GRFC** is produced annually through a collaboration between **UN agencies**, the **European Union**, **governmental bodies**, and **non-governmental organizations**. It offers a **comprehensive analysis** of:

- **Acute food insecurity**
- **Malnutrition**
- **Displacement trends**

The 2025 edition focuses on nations already experiencing food crises and highlights both **short-term emergencies** and **medium-term risks** to global food security.

What Is Acute Food Insecurity?

Acute food insecurity refers to a **sudden disruption in one or more of the four pillars** of food security:

- **Availability**
- **Access**
- **Utilization**
- **Stability**

When this disruption overwhelms a country's capacity to respond and requires **urgent external assistance**, it escalates into a **food crisis**.

Catastrophic Hunger on the Rise:

The situation has worsened dramatically in several regions:

- The number of people suffering from **catastrophic levels of hunger**—those at **"Phase 5"** or **famine-level conditions**—**more than doubled** to **1.9 million**, the **highest** since records began in **2016**.
- Some of the **most affected regions** include:
  - **Sudan** (where famine has been officially declared)
  - **Gaza Strip**
  - **South Sudan**
  - **Haiti**
  - **Mali**

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Monthly Current Affairs

NEWS

May 2025

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Major Drivers of the Crisis:

The report highlights several **interconnected factors** behind the escalating crisis:

- **Armed conflict** and political instability

- **Forced displacement** and refugee crises

- **Climate change**–induced droughts, floods, and weather extremes

- **Economic pressures** such as inflation and fragile governance

These challenges have created **compound effects**, making it harder for vulnerable populations to recover and secure stable food access.

Mixed Trends: Improvements vs Deterioration:

Although **15 countries**, including **Afghanistan**, **Kenya**, and **Ukraine**, showed signs of improvement, the situation deteriorated in **19 others**, negating overall progress.

This imbalance suggests that without **urgent and systemic action**, global food insecurity could become a **permanent humanitarian emergency**.

UN and Global Response: What Needs to Be Done

The United Nations and its partners have emphasized a **strategic shift** toward **sustainable, long-term interventions**, recommending:

- **Evidence-based, impact-driven responses** tailored to local needs

- **Investments in local food systems**, agriculture, and nutrition services

- **Scaling proven solutions** and pooling global resources

- **Centering community voices** in the decision-making process

A Broader Perspective on Global Hunger:

- In 2024, **hunger levels globally** continued to **exceed pre-pandemic levels**, with **climate-linked disasters** and **regional conflicts** intensifying the crisis.

- The **World Food Programme (WFP)** estimates that **45 million people** in 38 countries are currently on the **edge of famine**.

- According to the **FAO**, nearly **one in nine people** in the world still go to bed hungry every night.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The findings of the **Global Report on Food Crises 2025** are a stark reminder that **hunger is not just a humanitarian issue—it's a crisis of development, security, and equity**. As the global community continues to grapple with climate change, political instability, and economic volatility, **collaborative and resilient food systems** will be critical to ensuring that no one is left behind.

Supreme Court Strikes Down Retrospective Environmental Clearances

Context: In a landmark verdict, the **Supreme Court of India** has declared that **retrospective environmental clearances**—approvals granted **after a project has already started**—are **illegal and unconstitutional**. The Court ruled that such clearances **violate environmental laws** and undermine the **fundamental right to a clean and healthy environment** under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

This judgment marks a pivotal moment in the **legal protection of environmental rights** in India.

What Are Retrospective Environmental Clearances?

Retrospective or *ex post facto* clearances are granted **after industrial or infrastructure projects** have already commenced operations, without undergoing the **mandatory prior environmental impact assessment**.

According to the **EIA Notification, 2006**, issued under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, any project likely to impact the environment must obtain **prior Environmental Clearance (EC)**. Allowing operations to begin **before such clearance** violates this legal safeguard.

Supreme Court's Firm Stand on Environmental Justice:

- The Court struck down both the **2017 notification** and the **2021 Office Memorandum** that permitted retrospective approvals.

- These provisions, the Court ruled, are **contrary to India's constitutional framework** and **environmental jurisprudence**.

- The judgment strongly emphasized **Article 21**, stating that the **right to life includes the right to live in a pollution-free environment**.

Constitutional Duty to Protect Nature:

The ruling reaffirms constitutional safeguards:

- **Article 48A** (Directive Principles): Directs the **State to protect and improve the environment**, forests, and wildlife.

- **Article 51A(g)** (Fundamental Duties): Imposes a duty on every citizen to **protect and improve the natural environment**, including **forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife**.

This reflects a **shared responsibility** between the **State and the people** in preserving ecological balance.

Upholding the Polluter Pays Principle:

The Court, while not naming it explicitly, reinforced the **Polluter Pays Principle**, implying:

- **Violators cannot be shielded** by ex post facto approvals.

- **Environmental compensation** must be imposed where damage has occurred.

- Projects that began illegally **must undertake reparations** and mitigation measures.

This aligns with India's evolving stance on **corporate environmental accountability**.

A Step Toward Global Environmental Commitments:

The ruling also has global implications, as it strengthens India's compliance with:

- The **Paris Agreement**, which urges nations to prioritize **sustainable development**.

- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, especially:

    o **SDG 13**: **Climate Action**

    o **SDG 15**: **Life on Land**

Allowing retrospective clearances would have undermined India's international reputation and **environmental diplomacy**.

Why This Judgment Matters:

- It reinforces the **Supreme Court's role as a guardian of environmental rights**.

- Prevents a dangerous **precedent of legalizing environmental violations**.

- Encourages **regulatory accountability** by ensuring that authorities enforce **environmental laws in letter and spirit**.

- Sends a strong signal to industries: **compliance is not optional**.

Looking Ahead: Strengthening Green Governance

This judgment is a **clarion call for environmental vigilance**. It urges:

- **Stricter scrutiny** of projects before approval.

- Strengthening of **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) mechanisms**.

- Empowering local communities and stakeholders in **environmental decision-making**.

- Encouraging **sustainable project planning** that balances **economic growth with ecological integrity**.

Operation Olivia: Safeguarding India's Marine Biodiversity

Context: Operation Olivia is a **flagship conservation initiative** of the **Indian Coast Guard (ICG),** launched annually between **November and May**. The mission is focused on **protecting Olive Ridley sea turtles** during their **critical nesting season**, especially along the **Odisha coastline**, including the **Gahirmatha Beach** and **Rushikulya river mouth**.

In its latest success, the operation ensured the safe nesting of over **6.98 lakh Olive Ridley turtles** at the Rushikulya river mouth — setting a **new conservation milestone**.

How Operation Olivia Works:

Operation Olivia employs a **multi-layered protection strategy** that includes:

- **24/7 coastal patrolling** by ships and personnel

- **Aerial surveillance** using aircraft and drones

- **Monitoring of fishing activity** to curb illegal practices

- **Community engagement** and collaboration with NGOs

- **Promotion of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)** to reduce bycatch

- **Environmental awareness campaigns** for sustainable fishing

Since its inception, the Indian Coast Guard has executed:

- **5,387+ surface patrol sorties**

- **1,768+ aerial surveillance missions**

These concerted efforts have led to a **sharp decline in threats** such as **illegal trawling**, **marine pollution**, and **habitat degradation**.

Why Olive Ridley Turtles Matter:

The **Olive Ridley turtle (Lepidochelys olivacea)** is one of the **smallest and most abundant** sea turtles in the world. They are recognized by their **olive-colored, heart-shaped shell** and are famous for their

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

MAY
2025

FREEDOM UPSC
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Arribada — a rare mass nesting event where **thousands of females** come ashore **simultaneously to lay eggs**.

Key Features:

- **Length**: Up to **2 feet**

- **Weight**: Around **50 kg**

- **Diet**: **Omnivorous** – feeding on jellyfish, shrimp, algae, and seaweed

- **Behavior**: **Solitary** and **highly migratory**, traveling **thousands of kilometers** between feeding and nesting grounds

Where Are They Found?

These turtles inhabit the **warm tropical waters** of the **Pacific, Indian**, and **Atlantic Oceans**. In India, **Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary** is recognized as the **world's largest rookery** of Olive Ridley turtles.

Other important nesting sites include:

- **Rushikulya river mouth**, Odisha

- **Devi river mouth**, Odisha

- **Velas Beach**, Maharashtra

- **Chilika Lake area**, Odisha

Conservation Status:

Despite their abundance, Olive Ridley turtles face **multiple threats** from **coastal development**, **climate change**, and **fishing-related mortality**. They are protected under:

- **IUCN Red List**: **Vulnerable**

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (India)**: **Schedule I** (highest protection)

- **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species)**: **Appendix I** (trade strictly prohibited)

Extra Facts and Insights:

- The **Arribada phenomenon** is **unique to Olive Ridley** and **Kemp's ridley turtles** only.

- The turtles use **geomagnetic cues** to return to the **same beach** where they were born.

- **Turtle hatchlings**, upon emerging, instinctively **crawl toward moonlight** reflecting on the sea — a process disrupted by **artificial coastal lighting**.

- The **incubation temperature** of eggs determines the **sex** of hatchlings — **higher temperatures** produce **more females**, raising climate-related concerns.

- **Plastic ingestion** and **oil spills** are growing threats to marine turtle populations.

The Bigger Picture:

Operation Olivia is more than a conservation effort — it is a **symbol of hope** and **collaborative commitment** to preserving **India's marine ecosystem**. The initiative reflects a **harmonious balance between enforcement and education**, making it a model for **wildlife protection globally**.

By ensuring a **safe nesting environment**, India contributes significantly to the **global survival** of this ancient species, helping maintain the **delicate balance** of marine biodiversity.

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To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
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Integrating Mission LiFE into India's Climate Strategy: A New Era of People-Centric Action

Context: India is moving toward a more holistic and inclusive approach to climate action by exploring the integration of **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)** into the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**. This alignment reflects a growing recognition that **individual behaviour** is just as critical as policy and technology in fighting climate change.

What is Mission LiFE?

Launched at the **UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in 2021**, **Mission LiFE** was India's visionary call to elevate **individual and community behaviour** as central to global climate efforts. It aims to shift from the current **"use-and-dispose" culture** toward a **circular, sustainable economy**, encouraging people to **adopt mindful consumption patterns** and environmentally friendly habits.

Under the leadership of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**, Mission LiFE seeks to transform climate responsibility into a **Jan Andolan** — a **nationwide movement** led by the people.

Core Principles of Mission LiFE

1. **Behavioural Focus**: Shift from government-led to **citizen-led climate action** by encouraging everyday lifestyle changes — such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and choosing eco-friendly products.

2. **Global Collaboration**: Tap into the world's brightest minds through **international partnerships** with **universities, think tanks, and organizations** to develop **innovative, scalable climate solutions**.

3. **Cultural Integration**: Harness the power of **local traditions, customs, and daily practices** that already align with sustainable living to make change feel **authentic and achievable**.

What is the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)?

Launched in **2008**, the **NAPCC** is India's overarching policy framework for climate resilience. It comprises **eight national missions** focused on key sectors:

- **National Solar Mission**
- **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency**
- **National Mission on Sustainable Habitat**
- **National Water Mission**
- **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem**
- **National Mission for a Green India**
- **National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture**
- **National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change**

Together, these initiatives tackle both **mitigation and adaptation**, addressing India's unique climate **challenges.**

Why Integrate Mission LiFE into NAPCC?

Bringing **Mission LiFE under the NAPCC** umbrella offers several benefits:

- **Quantifiable Impact**: It allows measurable tracking of **individual and community contributions** to climate goals.

- **Enhanced Awareness**: National campaigns under NAPCC can significantly **boost visibility and reach** of LiFE-related initiatives.

- **Behavioural Change at Scale**: Promotes **low-cost, high-impact** lifestyle changes, such as **energy conservation**, **plastic reduction**, and **eco-conscious commuting**.

- **Bridging Awareness and Action**: Converts climate understanding into tangible outcomes, addressing the common gap between **knowledge and implementation**.

Challenges to Overcome:

Despite its potential, the integration faces certain hurdles:

- **Voluntary Participation**: Unlike incentive-based schemes (e.g., **rooftop solar or electric vehicle subsidies**), Mission LiFE relies on **self-motivation** and **personal responsibility**.

- **Lack of Tracking Tools**: There is a need for robust **metrics to monitor** the effectiveness of lifestyle-based climate actions.

- **Limited Climate Literacy**: A large segment of the population lacks the **basic understanding** of how their actions impact the environment, making **awareness campaigns crucial**.

The Road Ahead: Making It Work'

To fully realize the potential of this integration, a multi-pronged approach is essential:

1. **Policy Convergence**: Align Mission LiFE with ongoing programs such as **Ujjwala Yojana**, **FAME India Scheme**, and the **National Electric Mobility Mission** to create a seamless sustainability ecosystem.

2. **Adequate Funding**: Allocate **dedicated resources** for mass outreach, research, and community-level projects to accelerate adoption.

3. **Practical Outreach Campaigns**: Design and launch **targeted, action-oriented campaigns** offering **simple daily actions** — like reducing food waste or switching to energy-efficient appliances.

Final Thoughts: A Paradigm Shift in Climate Action

Integrating **Mission LiFE** into the **NAPCC** has the power to **transform India's climate policy** into a truly **inclusive, people-driven movement**. It recognizes that **every citizen is a stakeholder**, and even the smallest habit change can contribute to a **greener, cleaner future**.

This approach not only strengthens India's commitment under the **Paris Agreement**, but also sets a global example for how **individual behavior** and **policy frameworks** can work in harmony to combat the climate crisis.

Saving the Kakapo: Science Steps In to Rescue the World's Rarest Parrot

Context: In a groundbreaking conservation achievement, scientists from **Justus Liebig University Giessen (Germany)**, in collaboration with **New Zealand's Department of Conservation**, **Kakapo Recovery**, and the **University of Otago**, have successfully used **artificial insemination (AI)** to support the breeding of the **Kakapo** — one of the most **critically endangered** bird species on the planet.

This scientific milestone marks a significant step in the fight to preserve this **ancient, flightless parrot**, a bird whose survival hangs by a thread.

Meet the Kakapo: Nature's Nocturnal Giant

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
NEWS

The **Kakapo** (*Strigops habroptilus*) is no ordinary bird. Native only to **New Zealand**, it holds several unique distinctions:

- It is the **largest flightless parrot** in the world.

- Entirely **nocturnal** and **herbivorous**, it feeds on leaves, fruits, seeds, and bark.

- It's the **only parrot species that breeds via lek mating**, where males perform competitive displays in designated arenas to attract females.

With its **owl-like facial disc**, **moss-green plumage**, and **robust body**, the Kakapo is not just visually striking but also a **living relic**, representing an evolutionary lineage dating back millions of years.

The Kakapo's Mysterious Mating Rituals

Breeding is infrequent and tightly linked to the :availability of certain native fruits, especially the **rimu berry**, which only fruits in mast years. Males carve **bowl-like hollows** into the forest floor and emit **low-frequency booming calls** that can be heard up to several kilometers away — all part of a dramatic, energy-intensive courtship ritual.

However, despite these elaborate displays, **reproduction rates are alarmingly low** due to issues like:

- **Infertility**

- **High embryo mortality**

- **Environmental dependency for breeding triggers**

Survival Under Threat:

The Kakapo's decline began with the arrival of **European settlers**, who introduced **invasive mammalian predators** like **rats, stoats, and cats** — animals against which the Kakapo had no natural defense. The species' **ground-dwelling habits** made them easy prey.

Today, the Kakapo faces several critical threats:

- **Predation by invasive species**

- **Infertility and genetic bottlenecks**

- **Vulnerability to disease**, notably **aspergillosis**, a deadly fungal infection

With only a few hundred individuals remaining, each bird is **monitored, named, and DNA-tested** — a level of care reserved for the rarest species on Earth.

Artificial Insemination: A Game-Changer in Conservation

To counter fertility issues and improve genetic diversity, researchers are now turning to **advanced reproductive techniques**. **Artificial insemination** allows conservationists to:

- Select genetically optimal pairings

- Overcome physical or behavioural mating challenges

- Increase the chances of successful fertilization in low-breeding years

This breakthrough not only improves **reproductive success**, but also supports the long-term **genetic health** of the population.

Did You Know? Fascinating Facts About the Kakapo

- Kakapos can live **up to 90 years**, making them one of the **longest-living bird species**.

- Males can **lose half their body weight** during mating season from nonstop booming and displaying.

- The Kakapo's evolutionary journey has been so isolated that it **lacks a strong flight instinct** or fear of predators — a trait that once helped it thrive but now contributes to its vulnerability.

Looking Forward: A Future of Hope

The Kakapo's story is one of both tragedy and triumph. From the brink of extinction to a beacon of cutting-edge conservation science, it now stands as a **symbol of resilience and ecological dedication**.

With **artificial insemination offering a lifeline**, and continued commitment from scientists, conservationists, and the New Zealand government, the dream of a thriving Kakapo population no longer seems out of reach.

Union Minister Launches Comprehensive Action Plan to Revive the Aravallis

Context: In a significant move toward environmental restoration, the **Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has officially unveiled a **Detailed Action Plan for the Revival of the Aravalli Landscape**. Speaking at the launch, the minister urged stakeholders from **four key states — Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi** — to adopt a **"Whole of Government"** and **"Whole of Society" approach** in tackling the mounting ecological challenges facing this ancient range.

Why the Aravallis Matter:

The **Aravalli Range** is one of the **oldest mountain systems on Earth**, formed hundreds of millions of years ago — long before the rise of the Himalayas. Stretching approximately **692 kilometers**, the range spans from **Gujarat** in the west to **Delhi** in the north, traversing **Rajasthan** and **Haryana** along the way.

These hills are not only rich in **biodiversity**, but also serve as a **natural climate regulator** and **barrier against desertification**:

- They help **block the spread of the Thar Desert**, protecting agricultural lands in **Rajasthan and Gujarat**.

They play a key role in modulating the monsoon cycle and influencing regional climate patterns.

Mounting Environmental Threats:

Despite their ecological significance, the Aravallis are under increasing threat due to:

- **Deforestation** and loss of forest cover

- **Illegal mining** operations that scar the landscape

- **Habitat destruction** leading to **wildlife displacement**

- **Unregulated urban expansion** and encroachments

These pressures have led to a **rapid decline in ecological health**, making restoration an urgent priority.

Inside the Detailed Action Plan:

The newly released **Action Plan** lays out a **science-driven**, **community-based**, and **policy-backed** strategy to reverse environmental damage and rebuild the **ecological integrity** of the Aravallis. Key features include:

- **Ecological Restoration**: Reforestation using **native species** to enhance biodiversity and stabilize soil.

- **Watershed Management**: Rejuvenation of **natural springs, check dams, and rainwater harvesting** systems.

- **Community Engagement**: Involving **local populations**, NGOs, and educational institutions in **conservation efforts**.

- **Policy and Governance**: Strengthening enforcement mechanisms to combat **illegal mining** and prevent land degradation.

Major Initiatives Already Underway:

1. **Aravalli Green Wall Project**: A landmark initiative aiming to create a **5-kilometre-wide green buffer** along the Aravalli range across four states. This aims to **combat desertification**, increase **carbon sequestration**, and boost **biodiversity**.

2. **State-Level Protections**: In **2016**, the **Haryana government** declared the **Mangar Bani forest** — a sacred grove within the Aravallis — a **"no-construction zone"**, preserving a crucial biodiversity hotspot.

3. **Judicial Interventions**: In the landmark **M.C. Mehta v. Union of India** case, the **Supreme Court of India** imposed strict **prohibitions on mining** across the Aravalli hills, setting a legal precedent for environmental protection.

Did You Know? Aravallis at a Glance

- The Aravallis are believed to be over **3.2 billion years old** — older than most continents!

- Home to **leopards, nilgai, jackals, porcupines**, and hundreds of **bird species**, the range is a **cradle of biodiversity**.

- The region provides a vital **green lung** to cities like **Gurugram and Delhi**, which suffer from severe **air pollution**.

The Way Forward: A Shared Responsibility

The success of the **Aravalli restoration mission** depends not just on government intervention, but also on **public participation**, **scientific expertise**, and **policy enforcement**. The minister emphasized the need for **cross-sectoral collaboration**, where **villagers, urban residents, industrial players**, and **civil society organizations** work hand-in-hand.

With **climate change intensifying** and **ecosystems under strain**, restoring the Aravallis isn't just an environmental necessity — it's a national imperative.

Restoring the Aravallis is more than reviving a mountain range — it's about securing the future of India's environment, agriculture, and climate stability.

International Day for Biological Diversity 2025

Context: Observed every year on **22 May**, the **International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB)** marks the global commitment to preserving life in all its forms. The date commemorates the **adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** at the **Rio Earth Summit** in 1992. This day serves to raise awareness about the significance of biodiversity and the **urgent need to protect the variety of life** on Earth.

Theme for 2025: "Harmony with Nature and Sustainable Development"

The 2025 theme underscores the inseparable link between biodiversity and the achievement of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. It calls for **balancing human development with ecological preservation**, reminding us that progress must not come at the cost of nature.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): A Global Commitment

- **Origin:** Signed during the **1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** (UNCED), also known as the **Rio Earth Summit**.

- **Entry into Force:** 29 December 1993.

- **Headquarters:** Montreal, Canada.

- **Ratified by:** 196 countries, making it **one of the most universally supported environmental treaties**.

- **Note:** The **United States** is the only UN member that has not ratified the CBD.

CBD's Three Core Objectives:

1. **Conservation of biological diversity**
2. **Sustainable use** of biodiversity components
3. **Equitable sharing** of benefits from genetic resources

The **Conference of the Parties (COP)** serves as the governing body and meets **biennially** to track progress and set new agendas.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022):

Adopted during **COP15 in Montreal**, this historic agreement aims to address the worsening **biodiversity crisis** with:

- **23 ambitious global targets for 2030**

- **4 long-term goals for 2050** focused on living in harmony with nature

- Acknowledges the urgency, though it remains **non-binding**

India: A Mega-Diverse Powerhouse:

India is recognized as one of the **17 mega-diverse countries** of the world.

- **Geographical area:** 329 million hectares

- **Species richness:** Over **1,00,000 animal species** and **55,000 plant species**

- Spread across **ten distinct bio-geographic zones**, from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats.

India's Conservation Framework and Achievements:

- **National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP):** Launched in **2008** and updated in **2014**, it is India's main policy to meet CBD commitments.

- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:**
    - Established the **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)**, **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)**, and **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**.
    - Regulates **access to biological resources** and promotes the protection of **traditional knowledge**.
    - Promotes **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)**—community-led documentation of local ecosystems and practices.

- **Ramsar Sites (2025):** India has designated **89 wetlands** of international importance, covering **over 1.35 million hectares**.

- **Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS): 49 sites** have been notified to preserve unique ecosystems and cultural values.

Extra Insights: Did You Know?

- **Wetlands**, often referred to as the **"kidneys of the Earth,"** are vital for flood control, water purification, and biodiversity support.

- **Pollinators** like bees, butterflies, and bats are crucial for over **75% of global food crops**—yet many are threatened by habitat loss and pesticides.

- **Traditional farming practices**, especially in India, are biodiversity-friendly and conserve both **crop diversity** and **local ecosystems**.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The International Day for Biological Diversity is more than a celebration—it is a global **wake-up call**. As the planet faces accelerating species loss, climate change, and habitat degradation, **collective and immediate action** is vital. The 2025 theme reminds us that **human well-being is rooted in ecological well-being**.

With its rich biodiversity, deep ecological traditions, and active policy framework, **India is uniquely positioned to lead** the global charge toward **sustainable and inclusive conservation**.

Preserving Urban Forests: A Lifeline for India's Sustainable Cities

Context: One of **Hyderabad's last green lungs**, **Kancha Gachibowli Urban Forest**, recently faced extinction when **400 acres were allocated for industrial use** by the Telangana government. This incident highlights the **pressing need to safeguard urban forests** in India's rapidly expanding cities.

Why Urban Forests Matter More Than Ever:

Urban forests are **not just patches of greenery**—they are vital ecosystems that enhance both **ecological balance and urban well-being**.

Combatting Climate Change:

- **Urban trees act as carbon sinks**, absorbing carbon dioxide and storing carbon, playing a direct role in **lowering greenhouse gas emissions**.

Purifying Urban Air:

- A single hectare of forest can eliminate **nearly one ton of air pollutants annually**, helping **combat dangerous particulate matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10)** that plagues Indian cities.

Cooling Cities:

- Forests help reduce the **Urban Heat Island effect**, naturally **lowering city temperatures**, making urban spaces more livable amid rising global temperatures.

Flood and Erosion Control:

- With their **natural stormwater absorption**, urban forests minimize urban flooding, promoting **climate-resilient infrastructure**.

Biodiversity Hotspots:

- These forests are **urban sanctuaries for birds, insects, and small mammals**, preserving **threatened and endemic species** in a concrete jungle.

Mental and Social Well-being:

- Green spaces improve **mental health**, offer venues for **community interaction**, and **preserve cultural practices**, fostering a **better quality of life**.

Landmark Judicial Support for Urban Forests:

T.N. Godavarman v. Union of India (1996):

- The Supreme Court broadened the definition of **'forest'**, ruling that **any land recorded as forest, regardless of ownership**, should be treated as such under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**.

Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1997):

- The Court barred the leasing of **forest lands in Scheduled Areas** to **non-tribals or private entities**, reinforcing **tribal land rights and ecological conservation**.

Government Measures Promoting Urban Greening:

Nagar Van Yojana (2020):

- Launched by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**, the scheme aims to **develop 1000 urban forests** by 2027.
- As per the **India State of Forest Report 2023**, it has added **over 1,445 sq. km** of green cover.

Other Key Programs:

- **National Forest Policy (1988)** and **National Mission for Green India (2014)** push for afforestation and sustainable forestry.
- Urban development initiatives like **Smart Cities Mission** and **AMRUT** include **ecological design mandates** for city planning.

Innovative Reforestation: The Miyawaki Model

- Developed by **Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki**, this method creates **dense, self-sustaining native forests** in small urban spaces.
- These forests grow **10 times faster and are 30 times denser** than conventional plantations, requiring **low maintenance after 3 years**.
- Cities like **Mumbai, Pune, and Bengaluru** are already adopting this approach for rapid greening.

The Road Ahead: Protecting India's Urban Forests:

News

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Integrate Green Norms in Urban Planning**: Urban forests must be embedded into **city master plans, land-use zoning, and construction regulations**.

- **Strengthen Legal Safeguards**: Enhance the **legal status of urban green zones** and impose stricter **penalties for deforestation**.

- **Empower Citizens and Communities**: Promote **community-led conservation**, urban gardening, and **forest stewardship** through education and campaigns.

- **Leverage Technology**: Use **satellite monitoring, GIS mapping, and digital forest inventories** to track and protect urban forests.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**: Encourage corporate participation through **CSR initiatives** focused on **urban greening and afforestation**.

Final Thoughts: The Fight for Urban Green Survival

India's iconic urban forests—**Aarey in Mumbai**, **Turahalli in Bengaluru**, **Ridge in Delhi**, and **Dol Ka Baadh in Jaipur**—are **essential ecosystems** threatened by unplanned expansion.

The survival of these green spaces demands **synergized judicial oversight, proactive policies, civic engagement, and ecological urban design**. As cities continue to grow vertically and horizontally, **urban forests must grow with them**, ensuring that our cities remain **breathable, biodiverse, and human-friendly** for generations to come.

Oil Spill Crisis off Kerala Coast: A Wake-Up Call for Marine Protection

Context: A significant **environmental emergency** has unfolded off the **Kerala coast** following the sinking of the **Liberian-flagged cargo vessel MSC ELSA 3**, approximately **14 nautical miles** from the shoreline. The ship's descent has triggered a **major oil spill**, threatening marine biodiversity and coastal livelihoods.

The **Indian Coast Guard** has swiftly mobilized resources, including the **ICGS Saksham** and **Dornier surveillance aircraft**, to **contain and manage the spill**.

Understanding Oil Spills: A Hidden Menace

An **oil spill** occurs when **liquid petroleum hydrocarbons** leak into the **marine ecosystem**, either due to **shipping accidents**, **pipeline failures**, **offshore drilling mishaps**, or **refinery leaks**.

These spills involve various harmful substances:

- **Crude oil**

- **Refined fuels** like **diesel and petrol**

- **Heavy bunker oil** used by large ships

- **Oily residues** or waste

Environmental and Economic Consequences:

Oil spills are **catastrophic** in their impact, not only to marine life but also to human communities:

Damage to Marine Life:

- Oil coats the **gills of fish**, **feathers of birds**, and **fur of mammals**, impairing their mobility and survival.

- It disrupts breeding and feeding patterns, leading to **population decline**.

Destruction of Coastal Habitats:

- **Mangroves, beaches, and coral reefs** absorb the oil, leading to **long-term degradation**.
- **Sensitive ecosystems** may take decades to recover.

Impact on Fisheries and Aquaculture:

- Contaminated waters cause a **collapse in fish stocks**.
- Damages fishing equipment and threatens **livelihoods of coastal communities**.

Hit to Tourism:

- Oil-laden shores deter visitors, leading to a **steep decline in coastal tourism**, a major income source for Kerala.

Health Hazards:

- **Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)** and other toxic compounds in oil can cause:
  - **Respiratory issues**
  - **Skin irritation**
  - **Neurological effects**
  - **Long-term cancer risk** through seafood consumption

Notable Oil Spills: Global and Indian Examples

International Incidents:

- **Deepwater Horizon (2010, Gulf of Mexico):** Largest marine spill in history.
- **MV Wakashio (2020, Mauritius):** Caused ecological destruction near a marine park.
- **Venezuela (2020):** El Palito refinery leak.
- **Norilsk, Russia (2020):** Diesel fuel spill in the Arctic.

Major Indian Spills:

- **Chennai (2017):** Two ships collided, causing a massive spill near Kamarajar Port.
- **Mumbai (2010):** 800 tonnes of oil spilled after ship collision.
- **ONGC Uran (2013):** Leak into the Arabian Sea.
- **Sundarbans (2014):** Sela River spill in Bangladesh threatened India's mangrove biodiversity.

Global Response: International Frameworks

MARPOL (1973): The **International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships** mandates stringent standards for maritime pollution control.

India is a signatory and adheres to its protocols.

Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response Convention (1990):

- Promotes **global cooperation**, **information exchange**, and **emergency preparedness** among nations to tackle major spills effectively.

India's Strategy: National Preparedness and Legal Measures

National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP):

- Enforced by the **Indian Coast Guard**
- Originally framed in **1996**, revised in **2015**
- Key Goals:
  - **Quick incident reporting**
  - **Rapid containment and recovery**
  - **Public health and marine ecosystem protection**
  - **Integration of technology and science**

Merchant Shipping Act, 1958:

- Grants the **central government authority** to take action against vessels that violate maritime safety norms.
- Enables **penal action** against shipowners responsible for spills.

Control and Clean-Up Technologies:

Bioremediation:

- Use of **oil-degrading microorganisms** to naturally break down pollutants.
- **TERI's "Oil Zapper"** is a pioneering microbial solution developed in India.

Oil Booms:

- Floating barriers that **contain and prevent the spread** of oil slicks on water surfaces.

Dispersants:

- Chemicals sprayed via **aircraft or boats** that break oil into small droplets, enhancing natural degradation.

In Situ Burning:

- Controlled burning of thick oil layers at sea to **minimize residue**.

Skimming:

- Mechanical method using **specialized vessels and equipment** to remove oil from the water surface.

Additional Insights: Kerala's Marine Ecosystem at Risk

Kerala's coast is rich in:

- **Mangrove forests**
- **Coral patches near Lakshadweep**
- **Commercial fish species (sardines, mackerel, prawns)**

A spill here threatens not just the **local ecosystem**, but **national fish exports**, and **the livelihoods of thousands of artisanal fishers**.

Conclusion: Time for Proactive Marine Governance

The oil spill near Kerala is a **reminder of the fragility of our coasts** and the **need for proactive environmental safeguards**.

India must:

- Invest in **satellite surveillance**, **AI-based prediction models**, and **cross-border alert systems**
- Conduct **mock drills**, capacity-building, and **community awareness programs**

- Push for **greener maritime practices**, including **cleaner fuels** and **double-hulled tankers**

As climate change intensifies and shipping traffic increases, protecting our **coastal and marine heritage** is no longer optional — it is imperative.

Why the Monsoon Arrived Early in India This Year: Unpacking the Key Climatic Drivers

Context: In a rare but significant event, the **Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)** announced the **onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala on May 24**, eight days ahead of the usual June 1 timeline. This early arrival marks only the second such instance in over a decade—the last one being in **2009 (May 23)**.

The monsoon's early onset plays a **crucial role in India's agriculture**, economy, and water resources, as it brings nearly **70% of the country's annual rainfall** between **June and September**.

How Does IMD Declare Monsoon Onset?

The IMD uses a scientific set of criteria to declare the arrival of the southwest monsoon after **May 10** every year. These include:

1. **Rainfall Distribution:** At least **60% of 14 designated meteorological stations** across southern India (including **Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Mangaluru**) must record **2.5 mm or more rainfall** for **two consecutive days**.

2. **Wind Patterns:**

   - **Westerly winds** must prevail up to an altitude corresponding to **600 hPa**.

   - Wind speeds at **925 hPa level** should range between **15–20 knots (approx. 27–37 km/h)**.

3. **Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR):** OLR, which is **infrared radiation emitted by Earth back into space**, must fall below **200 W/m²**. Lower OLR values indicate higher cloud cover and atmospheric moisture, both favorable for monsoon conditions.

Once all these conditions are satisfied for **two consecutive days**, the **IMD officially declares monsoon onset**.

Regions That Witnessed Early Onset This Year:

This year, monsoon arrived not only in **Kerala** but also extended into:

- **Lakshadweep**

- **Mahe (Puducherry)**

- **Southern parts of Karnataka**

- **Mizoram**

- Parts of the **Bay of Bengal** and **Arabian Sea**

Why Did the Monsoon Arrive Early in 2024?

Several **atmospheric and oceanic phenomena** aligned to speed up the monsoon's arrival. Here's a breakdown of the **key contributing factors**:

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

1. **Low-Pressure System over the Arabian Sea:** A developing **low-pressure area** off India's western coast boosted **moisture inflow** and **atmospheric convection**, fast-tracking the monsoon's progress.

2. **Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO):** The **MJO**, a moving atmospheric disturbance originating in the Indian Ocean, played a major role. Its **favorable phase** led to:

   - Enhanced cloud formation

   - Increased wind convergence

   - Boosted rainfall over Indian subcontinent

3. **Mascarene High:** The **Mascarene High**, a high-pressure zone in the **south Indian Ocean**, intensified and pushed **moist winds** toward India's west coast. Its **variability is linked to the strength of monsoon currents** and coastal rains.

4. **Convective Activity and Atmospheric Heating:** Rising **convective currents**—caused by heat and moisture moving vertically—also played a role. This phenomenon increases **cloud formation and rainfall**, and was observed recently even over **Delhi**, following a convective system from **Haryana**.

5. **Strengthened Somali Jet:** The **Somali Jet**, a strong **low-level wind system**, crossed from the African coast into the **Arabian Sea**, transporting vast amounts of **moisture-laden air** to India. A robust Somali jet is often a **harbinger of an active and early monsoon**.

6. **Formation of Heat-Low Zones:** As the **Sun shifts northward** during summer, a **low-pressure zone** (known as a **heat-low**) forms over regions like **Pakistan and northwest India**. This creates a **suction effect**, pulling moisture from the sea and amplifying monsoon rainfall.

7. **Monsoon Trough Dynamics:** The **monsoon trough**—an extended low-pressure belt from **northwest India to the Bay of Bengal**—oscillates during the season, causing **widespread rainfall** across India. The presence of a **monsoon vortex** in the Arabian Sea also added to the system's strength.

**Conclusion: A Climate Puzzle with Global Pieces**

The **early arrival of the monsoon** in 2024 showcases how interconnected **atmospheric, oceanic, and regional factors** determine monsoon dynamics. With climate variability on the rise, such early or erratic monsoon behavior may become **more frequent in the future**.

Bow Echo: The Arching Storm System Behind Delhi's Recent Turbulence

Context: The recent powerful thunderstorms that swept across **Delhi** created dramatic visuals resembling a **crescent or an archer's bow**. Meteorologists refer to this unique radar signature as a **"Bow Echo."** These storms are part of a **larger weather pattern known as squall lines**, which can cause **destructive straight-line winds**, intense rain, and even **tornadoes** in some cases.

Understanding the Bow Echo Phenomenon:

- A **Bow Echo** is a **curved line of thunderstorms** visible on weather radar that typically stretches over **20 to 100 kilometers**, and can last for **3 to 6 hours**. The formation gets its name from its **distinct bow-shaped curve**, which is not just visually striking but also indicates **intense storm activity and damaging winds**.
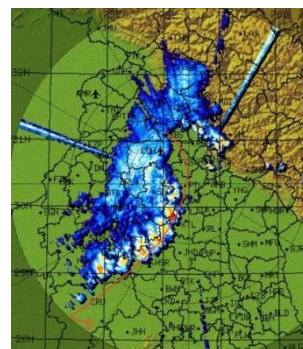
This term was introduced in the **1970s** by renowned meteorologist **Ted Fujita**, the scientist behind the **Fujita Scale** used to classify **tornado intensity**.

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Page No
108

News

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

How Does a Bow Echo Form?

The formation of a Bow Echo is a complex atmospheric process involving several key stages:

1. **Rain-cooled air** from thunderstorms descends to the surface.

2. This cool air **spreads outward** horizontally, forming a **gust front**.

3. The gust front lifts the **warm, moist surface air**, triggering **new thunderstorm cells**.

4. These new cells produce more rain, further reinforcing the **gust front's power**.

5. Eventually, air begins to flow in from behind the storm line, causing the system to **arch forward**—mimicking the shape of a **bow**.

This cycle continues as long as **fresh storm cells** form at the leading edge, pushing the system forward with **strong straight-line winds**, sometimes exceeding **100 kmph**.

Recent Bow Echo Over Delhi:

- The **storm that recently battered Delhi** was a classic example of a bow echo. It brought intense winds, heavy rainfall, and widespread disruption. Interestingly, **a similar bow echo occurred in 2022**, also affecting **Delhi and Noida**, although it was **short-lived** and lasted for just an hour.

The 2024 event, however, was more intense and dramatic, causing damage to trees, infrastructure, and power lines, and prompting experts to emphasize the growing frequency of **extreme weather events in urban India**.

Why Bow Echoes Matter:

Bow echoes are more than just meteorological curiosities—they are **critical warning signs**. Their presence on radar helps forecasters issue **severe weather alerts**, allowing authorities to **prepare for high winds, power outages, and flash floods**.

Moreover, they highlight the need for **urban planning that accounts for climate resilience**, especially in cities like Delhi that are increasingly vulnerable to **extreme and fast-developing weather systems**.

Looking Ahead: Monitoring and Preparedness

With climate change intensifying weather patterns, phenomena like **bow echoes** are expected to become **more frequent and severe**. Advanced radar systems, **real-time forecasting tools**, and **public awareness** are essential to mitigating the risks associated with such events.

Global Temperature Likely to Breach 1.5°C in Next Five Years: WMO

Context: The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** has released its latest climate outlook titled **'Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update (2025–2029)'**, offering a sobering forecast for global temperatures. The findings point towards an **increasing likelihood of breaching the critical 1.5°C warming limit**, as set by the **Paris Agreement**.

Key Findings: Temperature Projections for 2025–2029

- **2024**: Already marked as the **hottest year ever recorded**, it was the **first year to temporarily exceed the 1.5°C** mark above **pre-industrial levels (1850–1900 baseline)**.

- **2025–2029 Outlook**:

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Page No
109

- o There is a **70% probability** that the **average global temperature** for this period will surpass **1.5°C** above the pre-industrial baseline.

- o There is an **80% chance** that **at least one year** will exceed the record set in 2024.

- o An **86% likelihood** that **at least one year** in this five-year period will **breach the 1.5°C threshold**.

- o The projected temperature range lies between **1.2°C and 1.9°C** above the 1850–1900 average.

- o A **1% probability** exists for **exceeding 2°C** in any one of the next five years—an early sign of potentially irreversible climate damage.

Regional Climate Outlook: What to Expect Globally and Locally

- **South Asia**: Continued trend of **wetter-than-usual monsoon seasons** is likely (barring occasional dry years like 2023). The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has forecast **above-normal monsoon rainfall in 2025**.

- **Arctic Region**:

  - o Projected to warm by approximately **2.4°C during winters** (Nov–Mar), which is **3.5 times faster** than the global average.

  - o Significant **decline in sea ice** expected in regions like the **Barents Sea, Bering Sea**, and **Sea of Okhotsk**.

- **Other Regional Projections (2025–2029)**:

  - o **Wetter regions**: Sahel, Northern Europe, Alaska, and Northern Siberia.

  - o **Drier regions**: Amazon basin—raising alarms about **deforestation and ecological balance**.

Paris Agreement: Understanding the 1.5°C Limit

- Adopted at **COP21 in 2015**, the **Paris Agreement** is a **legally binding global treaty** aimed at curbing climate change.

- It seeks to **limit warming to below 2°C**, while **striving to cap it at 1.5°C**.

- The **1.5°C target is a global ambition**, not a legal threshold, and refers to **long-term temperature averages over decades**, not single-year anomalies.

- Countries commit to **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**, which must be **updated every five years** to reflect growing ambition.

  - o Alarmingly, **180 of the 195 signatories** have **yet to submit updated NDCs** for the 2031–2035 period, due before **COP30**.

About the World Meteorological Organization (WMO):

- **WMO** is a specialized agency of the **United Nations**, established in **1950**, with **193 member countries and territories**.

- It is the global authority on **weather, climate, operational hydrology, and geophysical sciences**.

- Headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**, its highest decision-making body is the **World Meteorological Congress**.

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Why This Matters: The World Is Running Out of Time

This forecast serves as a **red alert for humanity**. Breaching the 1.5°C limit could trigger **irreversible climate tipping points**—including **melting polar ice**, **rising sea levels**, and **disruptions to global food and water supplies**.

New High-Altitude Plant Species Discovered in Rohtang Pass: Pedicularis rajeshiana

Context: In a remarkable scientific breakthrough, researchers have identified a **new plant species**, *Pedicularis rajeshiana*, in the **western Himalayan region** near **Rohtang Pass**, Himachal Pradesh. This finding enriches India's alpine biodiversity and underscores the ecological value of high-altitude habitats.

About Pedicularis rajeshiana: A Unique Hemiparasitic Plant

- *Pedicularis rajeshiana* belongs to the **Lousewort family**, a group of plants known for their **hemiparasitic nature**—they draw **nutrients from host plants** while still conducting **photosynthesis**.

- It was discovered at a **staggering altitude of 4,390 metres** (approx. **14,400 feet**), thriving on **shaded, rocky slopes** in scattered clusters.

- This plant is **adapted to extreme alpine conditions**, a trait typical of many Himalayan endemics.

Discovery and Significance:

- The plant was found during a **botanical survey** conducted by the **Botanical Survey of India (BSI)** and the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.

- The discovery is part of the prestigious **"Flora of India" project**, a national mission to document India's rich plant heritage.

- The identification of this species highlights the **undocumented floral diversity** in remote and difficult-to-access Himalayan terrains.

Key Features and Ecological Role:

- India hosts **83 known species** of the **Pedicularis** genus, with **36 species endemic to the Western Himalayas**.

- These plants are often **highly specialized**, evolving to survive in **narrow ecological niches**.

- Many species in this genus are **region-specific and vulnerable**, making new discoveries crucial for **conservation biology**.

- *Pedicularis rajeshiana* adds to the growing evidence that the **Himalayan ecosystem is a global biodiversity hotspot** that requires **urgent protection**.

Why It Matters: Conservation and Climate Relevance

- **High-altitude ecosystems** like those in Rohtang Pass are **sensitive to climate change**, habitat degradation, and human encroachment.

- Discoveries such as *Pedicularis rajeshiana* reinforce the need for **continued ecological monitoring**, **plant conservation**, and **policy support for biodiversity research**.

- These plants not only maintain ecological balance but may hold **potential medicinal or ecological benefits** yet to be explored.

Extra Insight: The Role of Hemiparasitic Plants

- **Hemiparasitic plants** play a unique role in ecosystems by influencing **plant community dynamics** and nutrient cycles.

- They are often **indicator species** of ecological health, especially in **fragile alpine environments**.

Conclusion: A Blooming Beacon for Himalayan Biodiversity

The discovery of *Pedicularis rajeshiana* serves as a **symbol of nature's hidden wonders** and a **call to action for conservationists**. As scientists continue to explore the **rich botanical tapestry of the Himalayas**, each new finding strengthens the case for **safeguarding these irreplaceable ecosystems**.

Urban Flooding in India: A Rising Crisis Amidst Rapid Urbanization and Climate Change

Context: **Bengaluru** recently witnessed **intense pre-monsoon showers** resulting in severe **waterlogging**, **overflowing lakes**, and substantial **damage to life and property**. With an **early monsoon onset** this year, the **threat of urban flooding** is expected to worsen across Indian cities, especially those already struggling with poor drainage and rapid urban expansion.

Understanding Urban Flooding:

Urban flooding refers to the **inundation of land or property** in **densely populated urban areas**, primarily caused by **heavy rainfall**, **inadequate drainage systems**, **river overflows**, and **encroachment on natural water bodies**. Unlike rural flooding, urban floods have **higher economic, infrastructural, and human costs** due to population density and infrastructure complexity.

Notable Examples:

- **Bengaluru (2024):** Overflowing lakes and submerged IT hubs.
- **Delhi (2023):** Yamuna river breached embankments after record rain.
- **Mumbai (2020):** Monsoon floods halted transport and damaged property.
- **Chennai (2015):** Cyclonic rains led to massive inundation and power cuts.

Key Causes of Urban Flooding in India:

Natural Factors:

- **Heavy Monsoon Rainfall:** The Indian subcontinent experiences **intense monsoon bursts**, especially during **June–September**. Cities like Mumbai, located along the **Western Ghats**, are prone to flash floods due to **high rainfall in short durations**.
  - *E.g., Chennai (2015)* experienced historic rainfall due to a **cyclonic system** over the Bay of Bengal.

- **Geographical and Topographical Challenges:** Many Indian cities are built on **floodplains**, **coastal belts**, or **low-lying zones**, making them naturally vulnerable.
  - *Mumbai* is on the **Konkan coast**, and *Kolkata* lies in the **Ganga-Brahmaputra delta**.
  - Even cities at higher elevations like **Bengaluru (900 m above sea level)** lack natural drainage outlets like major rivers.

- **Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events:** Global warming has led to **unpredictable and intense weather patterns**, causing **frequent cloudbursts and flash floods**.
  - *Delhi (2023)* faced major flooding due to **record-breaking rainfall** within a short span.

Anthropogenic (Human-Induced) Factors:

- **Unplanned Urbanization and Land Encroachment:** Rapid urban growth has led to the **concretization of natural landscapes**, obstructing natural water flow.
  - *Bengaluru*, which once had **over 1,000 lakes**, has lost nearly **80%** to construction and encroachment.
- **Outdated and Inadequate Drainage Systems:** Many urban centres still rely on **colonial-era drainage infrastructure**, which is **ill-equipped to handle modern rainfall intensities**.
  - *Mumbai's drainage*, designed for just **25 mm/hour**, is easily overwhelmed.
- **Solid Waste Mismanagement:** Unregulated dumping of **plastic and waste** clogs drains and nullahs.
  - In the *2023 Himachal Pradesh floods*, blocked waterways worsened damage.
- **Deforestation and Soil Erosion:** In hill regions, **deforestation**, **shifting cultivation (Jhum)**, and poor land-use practices cause **increased runoff and siltation**.
  - *Guwahati (Assam)* frequently floods due to such upstream land degradation.

Major Impacts of Urban Flooding:

- **Severe Economic Losses:** Damages to **infrastructure, transportation, housing, and businesses** run into thousands of crores.
  - *Chennai (2015)* suffered losses exceeding ₹**15,000 crore**.
- **Public Health Emergencies:** Stagnant floodwater fosters **mosquito breeding**, causing **malaria, dengue**, and **waterborne diseases** like **cholera, typhoid**, and **hepatitis**.
  - *Kerala (2020)* saw a spike in **leptospirosis cases** post-flooding.
- **Displacement and Inequality:** Floods disproportionately affect the **urban poor**, especially slum dwellers and those in **low-lying, informal settlements**.
  - *Mumbai (2022)* floods rendered thousands **homeless and jobless**.
- **Environmental and Ecological Damage:** Floodwaters carry **sewage, industrial waste, and plastics**, polluting lakes, rivers, and groundwater.
  - *Bengaluru's lakes*, like Bellandur, have seen **foam and toxic froth** after floods.
- **Overstressed Infrastructure:** Frequent floods expose **systemic flaws** in urban planning, from **underground drainage to surface water retention systems**.

How Can India Build Resilience Against Urban Flooding?

1. Integrated Watershed and River Basin Management:

Adopt comprehensive flood control by managing **entire catchment areas**, from **hills to plains**.

- The **Netherlands' "Room for the River" project** provides a successful model—allocating space for rivers to expand safely.

2. Implement Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS):

Use nature-based drainage alternatives such as:

- **Permeable pavements**

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Rain gardens and bioswales**
- **Detention and retention ponds** :These systems **reduce surface runoff** and **enhance groundwater recharge**.

3. Embrace the Sponge City Model:

A "Sponge City" uses **green infrastructure** to **absorb, store, and reuse rainwater**, helping mitigate flood peaks.

- **Shanghai** has implemented **green roofs**, **porous pavements**, and **urban wetlands**.
- *Mumbai* is currently integrating this model into its **stormwater strategy**.

4. Revive and Restore Urban Water Bodies:

- **Lakes, tanks, and wetlands** act as natural **flood buffers**.
- *Bengaluru's Jakkur Lake restoration* is a prime example of how eco-restoration helps flood control.

5. Community Involvement and Early Warning Systems:

- Engage local communities in **disaster risk reduction**, education, and **preparedness drills**.
- Use **real-time monitoring tools** like **Singapore's SWAN (Smart Water Assessment Network)**, which sends alerts via SMS based on live water level data.

6. Policy and Urban Planning Reforms:

- Strengthen **zoning regulations**, protect **green belts**, and enforce **building codes** to avoid construction in flood-prone zones.
- Include **climate-resilient infrastructure** in urban master plans.

Extra Insight: India's Urban Flooding Challenge by the Numbers

- **45 million people** in India are directly exposed to urban flood risk annually (UNDRR, 2023).
- **50,000 crore** is India's average annual loss due to flood-related disasters (World Bank Report).
- Over **75% of India's cities** lack basic **stormwater management plans**.

Conclusion: A Call for Sustainable Urban Transformation

Urban flooding is not just a natural disaster—it's a **man-made crisis** rooted in **poor planning, ecological neglect**, and **climate vulnerability**. India must move toward **climate-responsive urban development** that prioritizes **resilient infrastructure**, **restored ecosystems**, and **community-led adaptation**.

The way forward lies in:

- **Learning from global best practices**
- **Investing in green infrastructure**
- **Coordinating across agencies**
- And most importantly, **putting nature at the heart of urban planning**

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Page No
114

Only a Quarter of Glaciers May Survive if Global Warming Hits 2.7°C: A Stark Climate Warning

Context: A **recent study** published in the journal *Science* has sounded a powerful alarm: if the planet warms by **2.7°C**—the path currently projected under existing climate policies—**only 24% of the world's current glaciers** will survive. This would represent a catastrophic loss of the planet's **freshwater reserves**, glacial ecosystems, and climate stability.

What Are Glaciers and Why Are They Important?

Glaciers are massive, slow-moving bodies of **ice formed over centuries** from compacted snow. Though they cover just about **10% of Earth's land surface**, they hold around **70% of the planet's freshwater**.

These frozen giants are **critical freshwater sources**, especially in **mountain regions**, feeding rivers, sustaining agriculture, and regulating ecosystems.

Key Findings of the Study: Alarming Glacier Loss Ahead

- **Irreversible Ice Loss Even Today**: Even if temperatures stopped rising immediately, the world would still lose **39% of glacier mass** (relative to 2020), resulting in **113 mm of sea-level rise**.

- **Regional Disparities in Melting**: Glaciers in **Scandinavia**, the **Rockies of Western Canada and the US**, and the **European Alps** are extremely sensitive and could largely vanish.

- **Sensitivity to Temperature Rise**: For every **0.1°C increase** between 1.5°C and 3°C, glaciers lose around **2% of their total mass**, with some regions experiencing even **steeper losses**.

- **Hindu Kush Himalaya at Severe Risk**: At 2°C warming, only **25% of glaciers** in this region may survive. These glaciers are essential for the **Ganga, Indus, and Brahmaputra rivers**, which sustain **over a billion people**.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH): Asia's Water Lifeline

- Spanning **3,500 km across eight nations**—India, China, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar—the **HKH region** is known as the **"Water Tower of Asia."**

- It feeds **10 major river systems**, including the **Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, and Yangtze**, supporting **one-fourth of the global population**.

- These glaciers are a **climate lifeline** for agriculture, drinking water, and hydroelectric power across South Asia.

Consequences of Glacial Meltdown: Far-Reaching and Dangerous

- **Water Scarcity in South Asia:** Glacial meltwater supports India's **agriculture, drinking water**, and **hydropower**, especially during **dry seasons**. Their retreat threatens year-round water availability for millions.

- **Rising Sea Levels and Coastal Hazards:** Melting glaciers contribute significantly to **sea-level rise**, posing severe risks to **low-lying countries** like the **Maldives** and coastal cities such as **Mumbai and Kolkata**.

- **Ecosystem Disruption:** Melting disrupts **alpine habitats**, threatens **biodiversity**, and increases the risk of **glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)**.

- **Socioeconomic Fallout:** Reduced water availability may lead to **climate-induced migration**, **resource conflicts**, and deepen **poverty** in already vulnerable communities.

Global Efforts to Protect Glaciers and the Cryosphere:

1. **Paris Agreement (2015):** Aims to limit global warming to **well below 2°C**, ideally **1.5°C**, above **pre-industrial levels**.

2. **International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI):** Established after **COP-15 in 2009**, ICCI works to protect the **cryosphere**—Earth's frozen regions—by informing **policy** and coordinating global **research**.

3. **High Mountain Summit (WMO):** Highlights the vulnerability of mountains and promotes **early warning systems**, **data sharing**, and **adaptation strategies**.

4. **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE):** India's initiative to monitor and respond to climate change impacts in the **Himalayan ecosystem**, focusing on **glacial retreat, biodiversity**, and **natural hazards**.

5. **Arctic Council:** An intergovernmental forum promoting **environmental protection** and sustainable development in the **Arctic**, with lessons applicable to other glacial regions.

6. **Global Ice Monitoring Programs:**

   - **Global Cryosphere Watch (GCW)** by the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**.

   - **ESA's CryoSat Mission**: Uses satellite technology to monitor ice thickness, volume, and changes in polar and mountain glaciers.

Glaciers and the Global Climate System: A Delicate Balance

- Glaciers play a **key role in regulating sea levels, cooling planetary temperatures,** and maintaining **regional water cycles**.

- Their loss is not just a **local tragedy**, but a **global crisis**—affecting everything from **food security** to **urban resilience**.

Way Forward: Urgent, Coordinated Climate Action

- **Strengthen Emission Reduction Commitments**: Countries must align national policies with the **1.5°C climate goal** and update their **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** accordingly.

- **Accelerate Renewable Energy Transitions**: Phasing out fossil fuels and investing in **green energy** is crucial to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Protect Mountain Ecosystems**: Implement **adaptive infrastructure**, improve **glacial risk monitoring**, and promote **community resilience** in vulnerable regions.

- **Invest in Research and Data Sharing**: Strengthen global cooperation for **scientific research**, **satellite monitoring**, and **climate modeling** to enhance understanding and preparedness.

Conclusion: A Call to Save Our Frozen Frontiers

The potential loss of **over three-quarters of Earth's glaciers** should be a wake-up call for the world. While international agreements like the **Paris Accord** lay the foundation for action, true success will require **swift, ambitious, and united global efforts**.

World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) 2025

Context: At the **inaugural WAVES Summit 2025** held in **Mumbai**, the **Prime Minister of India** emphasized the **creative economy** as a vital force driving **GDP growth**, **innovation**, and **inclusive development** in the digital era.

Major Announcements:

Launch of the Indian Institute of Creative Technology (IICT)

- A **National Centre of Excellence** to be set up by the **Ministry of Information & Broadcasting**.

- Developed in partnership with **FICCI** and **CII**.

- Aims to **upskill youth**, promote **media innovation**, and nurture talent in:
  - **Animation**
  - **Gaming**
  - **Content creation**
  - **Film and media technologies**

Targeting a $50 Billion Market by 2029:

- WAVES 2025 envisions unlocking a **$50 billion global market** in **media, entertainment, and content sectors**, positioning India as a **world leader in the creative economy**.

Understanding the Creative Economy (Orange Economy):

"**Creativity is the new currency of the digital age.**"

The **Creative Economy** refers to industries that generate **economic value through creativity, intellectual property (IP), and cultural expression**.

Key Sectors:

- **Cultural Industries**: Music, cinema, theatre, literature, dance, crafts

- **Creative Industries**: Fashion, architecture, advertising, design

- **Digital Sectors**: Animation, **VFX**, gaming, **OTT platforms**, XR, YouTube, influencer content

Term Popularised by: **John Howkins**

"Orange Economy" coined by: Former Colombian President **Iván Duque** and **Felipe Buitrago**

Current Status of India's Creative Economy (2025):

- **$30 Billion** contribution to GDP

- Employs around **8% of the workforce**

- **Creative exports** exceed **$11 Billion annually**, led by film, music, and digital content

- India is among the **top global players** in fintech, mobile tech, and startups

India's Untapped Potential in the Creative Sector:

Demographic Advantage:

- Over **65% of India's population** is below 35

- Youth are key drivers of **gaming**, **design**, **content creation**, and **short videos**

Digital Backbone:

- **Second-largest internet user base** globally
- Supported by initiatives like:
  - **Digital India**
  - **BharatNet**
  - **5G rollout**

Cultural Soft Power:

- Rich traditions in **language, music, art, and mythology**
- Exports like **Bollywood**, **yoga**, and **Indian cuisine** strengthen **India's global identity**

Key Challenges Hindering Growth

Challenge	Description
Lack of IP awareness	Weak enforcement of **copyrights** and **royalties**
Fragmented industry	Mostly **informal**, lacking **formal structures**
Skill Gaps	Outdated training methods in fast-evolving digital tools
Limited Funding	Inadequate access to **grants** and **credit**
Urban-centric Growth	**Rural artists and talent** remain underrepresented

Way Forward:

- **Expand IICT's reach to Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities**
- **Strengthen IP laws** and **royalty systems**
- **Formalize creative sectors** with MSME-style incentives
- **Support rural artisans** through digital platforms and e-commerce
- **Update skilling programs** to include XR, AI in art, and blockchain for IP

Conclusion:

The **WAVES 2025 Summit** marks a turning point in recognizing **creativity as capital**. With policy support, digital tools, and youth participation, **India's creative economy** can not only entertain the world—but also **enrich its economy and empower its people**.

Enhancing Competitiveness of MSMEs in India

Context: The **NITI Aayog**, in partnership with the **Institute for Competitiveness (IFC)**, has released a pivotal report aimed at strengthening the **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** sector in India—focusing on reforms to unlock its full potential.

About the Report:

- **Prepared By**: NITI Aayog & Institute for Competitiveness.
- **Objective**: To drive **systemic reforms** in **financing**, **skilling**, **innovation**, and **market access** to enhance MSME competitiveness.

- **Sectoral Focus**: Textiles, Chemicals, Automotive, Food Processing, among others.
- The report outlines **policy interventions** to improve India's position in the global value chain through **MSME transformation**.

India's MSME Sector at a Glance:

- Home to **5.93 crore registered MSMEs**, employing over **25 crore people**.
- In **2023–24**, MSME-related goods made up **45.73% of India's total exports**.
- Contribution to **Gross Value Added (GVA)** has steadily risen:
  - **27.3%** in 2020–21
  - **29.6%** in 2021–22
  - **30.1%** in 2022–23

Recent Policy Support:

- **Union Budget 2025–26** includes:
  - **Enhanced credit access**
  - Support for **first-time entrepreneurs**
  - Promotion of **labour-intensive industries**
- **Revised Classification Criteria**:
  - **Investment limits** increased by **2.5x**,
  - **Turnover limits** doubled -Aimed at boosting **scale**, **technology adoption**, and **job creation**.

Challenges Identified in the Report:

Financing Gaps:

- MSME access to formal credit rose (2020–24):
  - **Micro & Small**: From **14% to 20%**
  - **Medium**: From **4% to 9%**
- **Still**, about **81% of credit demand remains unmet**, with a funding gap of **80 lakh crore**.
- **CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund)** has scaled up but still falls short in addressing deep credit deficits.

Skilling and Human Capital:

- Many MSME workers **lack formal training**, hindering **productivity**, **scalability**, and **quality standards**.

Innovation & Technology Adoption:

- **Low investment** in **R&D**, **product innovation**, and **quality certifications**.
- **Barriers** include:
  - High costs
  - Weak internet and electricity infrastructure
  - Lack of awareness of state tech-support schemes

Policy Awareness Deficit: Existing MSME policies suffer from **low awareness** and **ineffective implementation**, especially at the **state and district levels**.

Recommendations & Way Forward:

1. Targeted Interventions:

- Focus on **cluster-based** MSME development tailored to regional strengths (e.g., textiles in Tamil Nadu, food processing in Bihar).

2. Strengthening Market Access:

- Training in **digital marketing**

- Partnerships with **logistics and supply chain firms**

- Creation of **platforms for direct B2B and B2C linkages**, especially in the **Northeast and Eastern India**

3. State-Level Reforms:

- Develop **adaptive policy frameworks** that:
    - Promote **innovation**
    - Enhance **competitiveness**
    - Support **inclusive and green growth**

4. Institutional Collaboration:

- Stronger coordination between:
    - Central and state governments
    - Financial institutions
    - Academic and research bodies
    - Private sector partners

Agriphotovoltaics: Powering Farms with the Sun

Context: On **World Solar Day (May 3rd)**, attention turned to the transformative role of **solar energy in agriculture**, with **Agriphotovoltaics (APVs)** emerging as a powerful innovation to address **climate, food, and energy security**.

What are Agriphotovoltaics (APVs)?

Agriphotovoltaics refers to the **simultaneous use of land** for **solar energy production and agriculture** by **elevating solar panels** over crop fields. This integrated model:

- Increases **land-use efficiency**

- Creates **microclimates** for better crop resilience

- Enables **dual income streams** for farmers

Origin: Concept first introduced by German scientists **Adolf Goetzberger and Armin Zastrow in 1981**.

India's Solar Growth Milestones:

- **3450% growth** in solar capacity in a decade

- **100.33 GW** achieved as of **January 2025**

- **2024 solar boom**:
  - **24.5 GW** added (2x increase from 2023)
  - **18.5 GW utility-scale** installations

Benefits of APVs for Farmers:

Benefit Area	Details
Water Efficiency	Solar panels reduce evaporation by creating shade
Climate Resilience	Shields crops from heat and erratic weather
Stable Incomes	Lease land to solar companies or sell electricity via feed-in tariffs
Crop Growth	Suitable for **shade-tolerant crops** (e.g., **potatoes, tomatoes, turmeric**)
Income Potential	1.5 lakh/acre vs 25,000 from traditional farming in Delhi pilot

APV in Action: India's Pilot Success:

- **Najafgarh, Delhi Project**:
  - Farmer leases land for 1 lakh/acre/year
  - Dual income from **crop + solar lease** or **solar power sales**

Scaling Up APVs: Policy and Support Needed:

1. **Revamp PM-KUSUM Scheme**:
   - Integrate **APV models** into existing solarisation programs
   - Promote **grid-connected dual-use solar plants**

2. **Financial Incentives**:
   - Credit support & subsidies for **smallholder farmers** (<2 ha)
   - Increase **feed-in tariffs** for APV-generated solar power

3. **Farmer Training**:
   - Government-led programs on **APV installation & management**
   - Encourage community-level **solar farming cooperatives**

4. **Research & Customization**:
   - Expand **pilot programs** across **different agro-climatic zones**
   - Develop **crop-specific APV designs**

Challenges:

Challenge	Description
Pilot-Scale Only	Currently limited to research and demonstration projects
High Initial Costs	Need for affordable financing and better risk coverage
Policy Gaps	No dedicated **agrivoltaics policy** in India
Lack of Awareness	Farmers and institutions unfamiliar with APV benefits

Future Outlook:

- Align APVs with India's **Net Zero** and **Doubling Farmers' Income** goals

- Integrate APVs into **national agricultural and climate strategies**
- Promote **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** to expand infrastructure
- Launch **awareness campaigns** to popularize APV potential

Conclusion: Agriphotovoltaics offer a **win-win model** for India: **Higher farmer incomes**, **climate-adaptive agriculture**, and **renewable energy expansion**—all from the same piece of land.

Human Development Report 2025 – UNDP Insights

Context: The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** has released the **Human Development Report (HDR) 2025**, titled:

"A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI"

The report emphasizes how **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is reshaping the future of **human development**, while highlighting India's progress in **health**, **education**, and **income**.

Human Development Index (HDI): Concept and Dimensions

Conceived by **Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq** in **1990**, HDI is a composite index used to measure a country's **socio-economic development** through:

1. Health:

- Measured by **Life Expectancy at Birth**
- Related to **SDG-3: Good Health and Well-being**

2. Education:

- Assessed by **Mean Years of Schooling** (SDG-4.4)
- And **Expected Years of Schooling** (SDG-4.3)

3. Standard of Living:

- Measured via **Gross National Income (GNI) per capita**
- Adjusted for inequality (SDG-8.5)

HDI Categories:

Development Level	HDI Value
Low Human Development	Below 0.550
Medium Human Development	0.550 – 0.699
High Human Development	0.700 – 0.799
Very High Development	0.800 and above

Limitations & Complementary Indices:

HDI doesn't account for **inequality**, **poverty**, **security**, or **empowerment**. To bridge these gaps, UNDP also uses:

1. **Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI)**
2. **Gender Inequality Index (GII)**

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

3. **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**

Global HDI Rankings (2023 Snapshot):

- **Top Ranked**: **Iceland (0.972)**, followed by **Norway** and **Switzerland**
- **Lowest**: **South Sudan** (Rank 193, HDI: 0.388)

India's HDI Performance:

- **HDI Rank**: **130th** (up from 133rd in 2022)
- **HDI Value**: **0.685** (from 0.676)
- India remains in the **Medium Human Development** category.
- **53% HDI growth** since 1990, **outpacing** global and South Asian averages.

Comparison with Neighbours:

Country	Rank
China	75th
Sri Lanka	78th
Bhutan	127th
India	130th
Bangladesh	130th
Nepal	145th
Myanmar	149th
Pakistan	168th

India's Human Development Achievements:

Health:

- **Life Expectancy** rose from **58.6 years (1990)** to **72 years (2023)**
- Key Programs: **Ayushman Bharat**, **Janani Suraksha Yojana**, **Poshan Abhiyaan**

Education:

- **Mean years of schooling** increased from **8.2 to 13 years**
- Boosted by: **Right to Education Act**, **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, **NEP 2020**

Income:

- **GNI per capita** surged from **$2,167 (1990)** to **$9,046 (2023)**
- **135 million people** escaped **multidimensional poverty** (2015–2021)

Key Challenges Highlighted in HDR 2025:

AI and Human Development:

- AI should **augment human potential**, not replace it.
- Calls for **bold policy measures** to ensure **AI benefits everyone**.

Widening Global Inequalities:

- **Rising inequality** is slowing global progress.

- **India's HDI loss due to income inequality**: **30.7%** (among the highest in Asia)

- Persistent **gender disparities** in education, healthcare, and employment.

Key Policy Recommendations:

Three Action Areas:

1. **Complementarity Economy** – Foster collaboration between **humans and AI**

2. **Innovation for Capability Expansion** – Use AI to enhance **human creativity and productivity**

3. **Invest in Social Systems** – Prioritize **inclusive education**, **universal healthcare**, and **social protection**

Conclusion: The **HDR 2025** emphasizes that **human development is a matter of choice**—and in the **AI era**, we must choose to build a **fair, inclusive, and sustainable future**. India's progress is commendable, but the road ahead demands **deeper reforms**, **ethical AI use**, and **inclusive policies** to truly empower all citizens.

Revised SHAKTI Policy: Powering India's Energy Security with Transparent Coal Allocation

Context: The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)** has approved a major revamp of the **SHAKTI Policy (Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala Transparently in India)**, aiming to streamline coal allocation and energize the power sector with improved transparency, accessibility, and efficiency.

SHAKTI Policy: A Shift Towards Transparent Coal Allocation

Launched in **2017**, the SHAKTI policy marked a pivotal transition from the earlier **nomination-based coal linkage system** to a more **transparent, auction and tariff-based** allocation mechanism. The latest **revision of the SHAKTI policy** brings in a host of **innovative features**, aiming to:

- **Broaden eligibility** for coal allocation

- Provide **greater flexibility** in the linkage mechanism

- Ensure **enhanced access to coal** for all power producers

These changes will lead to **increased power generation**, **lower electricity tariffs**, and a **boost to economic productivity** by ensuring a reliable supply of fuel to power plants.

India's Coal Sector: Backbone of the Power Industry

Coal continues to be the **cornerstone of India's energy mix**, playing a critical role in the nation's development.

- **Record Production**: India crossed the **1 billion tonne production mark** in FY 2024–25, registering a **4.99% annual growth**.

- **Global Ranking**: India is the **second-largest coal producer** and **consumer** in the world.

- **Reduced Import Dependency**: Coal imports fell by **8.4%**, saving foreign exchange and reducing vulnerability to global price fluctuations.

- **Dominant Energy Source**: Coal contributes nearly **55%** of India's energy supply and **powers over 74%** of electricity generation.

Key coal-producing regions include **Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh**, and **Madhya Pradesh**. **Economic Importance of the Coal Sector:**

- **Rail Freight**: Coal is the **largest freight commodity** for Indian Railways, contributing **49% of total freight revenue**.

- **Government Revenue**: The sector yields over **70,000 crore annually** through **royalties, GST, and levies**.

- **Employment Generator**: Employs over **239,000 workers** in **Coal India Ltd (CIL)** and thousands more through contractors and logistics networks.

Major Challenges in India's Coal Landscape:

Despite its dominance, India's coal sector grapples with several persistent issues:

- **Environmental Concerns**: High **carbon emissions**, **air pollution**, and **ecosystem degradation** from mining activities.

- **Import Dependency**: Continued need for **coking coal** and **high-grade thermal coal**, despite large domestic reserves.

- **Regulatory Delays**: Slow **land acquisition** and **environmental clearances** delay coal block development.

- **Underutilization**: Mining operations often run **below capacity** due to demand fluctuations and infrastructure issues.

- **Climate Commitments**: India's **Net Zero by 2070** goal puts pressure to phase down coal usage.

- **Limited Private Sector Role**: The sector is **dominated by PSUs**, limiting competition and innovation.

Government Initiatives to Modernize the Coal Sector:

To address these challenges, several forward-looking reforms have been introduced:

- **Commercial Coal Mining (2020)**: Allows **private players** to mine and sell coal without end-use restrictions—promoting **competition** and **self-sufficiency**.

- **Single Window Clearance Portal (2021)**: Speeds up approval processes for land, forest, and environment clearances.

- **Auction for Non-Regulated Sectors**: Coal blocks are auctioned for use in **steel, cement, aluminum**, etc., expanding the market.

- **Coal Gasification Target**: India plans to **gasify 100 million tonnes** of coal by **2030**, reducing pollution and diversifying coal usage.

- **Technology Upgrades**: **Drones, GPS tracking**, automated loading, and **online coal sale portals** increase transparency and safety.

- **Coal Logistics Modernization**: **Dedicated freight corridors** and **first-mile connectivity** projects improve coal transport efficiency.

- **Access for SMEs**: Through **e-auctions**, even small industries can procure coal at **market-linked prices**, enhancing inclusivity.

Conclusion: A Balanced Path Towards Energy Transition

While coal remains vital for India's **short- to mid-term energy security**, a **strategic and balanced transition** toward cleaner energy is imperative. The revised SHAKTI policy reflects the government's intent to **strengthen domestic production**, **enhance transparency**, and **support power affordability**. It aligns with the broader vision of **Viksit Bharat**—an energy-secure, self-reliant, and sustainable India.

India Unveils Draft Climate Finance Taxonomy to Accelerate Green Investments

Context: India has taken a significant step toward aligning its climate goals with financial policy by introducing a **Draft Climate Finance Taxonomy**, aimed at attracting sustainable investments and strengthening the nation's transition to a low-carbon economy.

What is the Climate Finance Taxonomy?

The **Ministry of Finance** has released a draft framework titled **'India's Climate Finance Taxonomy'**, which aims to:

- **Define and classify economic activities** based on their environmental impact.
- **Steer capital flows** toward **clean energy and climate-resilient infrastructure**.
- **Prevent greenwashing**—the misleading promotion of projects as 'green' without meaningful environmental benefits.

This taxonomy is designed to support India's dual national targets:

- **Achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2070**
- **Transforming into a developed nation under the 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision**

Key Objectives of the Framework:

The draft taxonomy serves as a **strategic tool for investors, financial institutions, and policymakers** by offering:

- **Clear definitions of climate-aligned investments**
- **Transparent criteria for project evaluation**
- **Support for low-carbon technologies and emission-reduction pathways**

It also acts as a **credible national benchmark** to counter inflated claims by developed countries in international climate finance negotiations, ensuring **greater accountability and transparency**.

Core Principles and Categories:

The taxonomy is built on **international best practices** while being tailored to India's development context. It classifies activities into two broad categories:

- **Climate Supportive**: Directly contribute to **greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction** or **climate resilience**. *Examples: Solar energy, electric mobility, energy-efficient buildings.*
- **Climate Transition**: Help reduce the **carbon intensity** of traditionally high-emission sectors. *Examples: Cleaner technologies in steel, cement, and thermal power.*

Key Sectors Identified for Green Investment:

The taxonomy highlights sectors critical for India's climate goals:

- **Power generation and distribution**
- **Green buildings and resilient infrastructure**
- **Low-emission transport and mobility**
- **Sustainable agriculture and food systems**
- **Water resource management and water security**

These focus areas will guide both **public and private investment** towards long-term environmental and economic sustainability.

Massive Push in Energy and Adaptation Investment:

Power Sector Expansion Goals:

India plans to dramatically scale up its **installed power generation capacity** from **470.4 GW (as of February 2025)** to **777.14 GW by 2049**.

A key focus will be on **Advanced Ultra Super Critical (AUSC) thermal power technology**, which offers:

- **Efficiency of 46%** (compared to ~38% for subcritical and ~41–42% for supercritical systems)
- **Lower carbon emissions** per unit of electricity generated

This represents a **transitional path** for coal-based power generation, enabling energy security while aligning with climate goals.

India's Climate Adaptation Investment Needs:

India's **Initial Adaptation Communication** to the United Nations (submitted in December 2023) estimates that the country needs a **whopping 56.68 trillion (≈ USD 648.5 billion)** by 2030 to fund adaptation measures.

The investment is required across several climate-vulnerable sectors, including:

- **Agriculture and food systems**
- **Forestry and biodiversity**
- **Fisheries**
- **Urban and rural infrastructure**
- **Water resources**
- **Ecosystem restoration and climate resilience**

This financial requirement underscores the **magnitude of climate risk** India faces and the **urgent need for resource mobilization**, both domestically and internationally.

Why This Matters Globally:

India's taxonomy initiative could serve as a **template for other developing economies**, helping them attract **climate finance** while resisting the practice of **greenwashing** by wealthier nations. It also reinforces India's role as a **responsible stakeholder** in global climate governance.

Did You Know?

- The European Union's **Sustainable Finance Taxonomy** served as one of the inspirations for India's framework.
- India is among a handful of developing countries creating a **national-level green finance classification system**.

Conclusion: A New Era for Climate-Aligned Capital

India's **Draft Climate Finance Taxonomy** marks a crucial turning point in the integration of **climate goals with economic planning**. By defining what truly qualifies as "green" or "transitional," this framework paves the way for **targeted investment**, **policy coherence**, and **global credibility**.

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

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NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

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CCI Overhauls Cost Regulations to Tackle Predatory Pricing in Digital Markets

Context: In a significant regulatory shift, the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** has issued the **"Determination of Cost of Production Regulations, 2025"**, replacing the older 2009 framework. This new regulation marks a critical update in India's antitrust oversight, specifically targeting **predatory pricing and deep discounting**, particularly in **e-commerce** and **quick-commerce sectors**.

Understanding the Context: Predatory Pricing and Market Fairness

Predatory pricing refers to the strategy of **selling goods or services at prices below production cost** with the intent to **undermine competition or drive rivals out of the market**. Under **Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2002**, such conduct is considered an **abuse of dominant position** and is subject to strict scrutiny by the CCI.

The now-superseded **Cost Regulations, 2009**, were developed in a pre-digital era and struggled to address the **complex economics of modern, platform-based markets**, where **cross-subsidies**, **free services**, and **non-cash value** have become common.

Highlights of the 2025 Cost Determination Framework:

1. Adaptive and Sector-Neutral Design:

- Moves away from the rigid **one-size-fits-all** structure.
- Allows **case-specific evaluations**, recognizing the **distinct dynamics of digital, retail, telecom**, and **tech-driven platforms**.

2. Focus on Internal Production Cost:

- Establishes **internal cost of production** as the benchmark for pricing analysis.
- **Rejects the use of market value** as a benchmark due to its reliance on **consumer perceptions, subsidies, or branding**, which may not reflect actual cost.

3. Aligned with Global Best Practices:

- Incorporates insights from **international competition authorities** and **modern economic theory**.
- Builds on evolving jurisprudence on **platform economies, network effects**, and **dynamic pricing models**.

4. Clear Framework for Evidence-Based Investigations:

- Offers the CCI a **standardized yet flexible approach** to assess pricing practices.
- Enables deeper scrutiny of **pricing algorithms**, **subscription bundles**, and **freemium models**.

Why This Matters: Implications for India's Competition Ecosystem

Legal and Regulatory Clarity:

- The 2025 regulations provide a **more objective and economically sound method** to determine cost benchmarks.

- Enhances legal certainty for firms operating in **highly competitive and tech-driven sectors**.

Digital Economy Focus:

- The framework explicitly considers **cross-subsidization**, **high fixed costs**, and **non-linear pricing strategies**—hallmarks of **startups and digital giants**.

- Enables CCI to effectively assess **zero-price markets**, like those offering **free apps or services**.

Level Playing Field for MSMEs:

- Protects **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** from being priced out by **loss-leading strategies** of dominant players.

- Encourages **fair competition** and **innovation** by ensuring **market access** for smaller businesses.

Better Enforcement Capacity:

- Empowers CCI to conduct **more precise, consistent, and data-driven investigations** into alleged anti-competitive pricing.

- Strengthens India's regulatory readiness in the face of **rapidly evolving digital business models**.

Global Context and Comparative Insight:

- **European Union** and **United States** regulators have also faced similar challenges in defining cost metrics in platform economies.

- Countries like **Australia and Japan** have adopted **dynamic tools** to regulate pricing in sectors such as **ride-sharing, e-retail**, and **online food delivery**.

- India's 2025 regulation brings it in line with **mature jurisdictions**, reinforcing its role as a **progressive antitrust authority** in the **Global South**.

Conclusion:

The **2025 Cost of Production Regulations** represent a forward-looking approach to **maintaining fair competition** in a rapidly digitizing economy. By modernizing its toolkit, the **CCI is better equipped to curb exploitative practices**, preserve consumer welfare, and protect **India's competitive digital landscape** from monopolistic abuse.

Why Indian Farmers Still Favour Rice and Wheat

Context: Despite rising discussions around **crop diversification** and environmental sustainability, a majority of Indian farmers continue to rely on **rice and wheat**. This preference is rooted in a complex blend of **economic security**, **government policy**, **ecological suitability**, and a **historical legacy** shaped by the **Green Revolution**.

India's Rice and Wheat Landscape (2024–25):

- **Wheat**: Estimated production stands at **122.7 million tonnes**, grown over **330.8 lakh hectares**.
  - Key wheat-producing states: **Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Gujarat**, and **Maharashtra**.

- **Rice**: Annual output exceeds **120 million tonnes**, with cultivation spread across **Kharif and Rabi seasons**.
  - Leading rice producers include **West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh**, and **Tamil Nadu**.

Why Rice and Wheat Remain the Farmer's First Choice:

1. Government Support and Economic Assurance:

- **Minimum Support Price (MSP)**: Rice and wheat are among the few crops with **assured procurement**, ensuring **financial security** even when market prices are volatile.
- **Public Distribution System (PDS)**: Sustained demand for rice and wheat through welfare schemes like **PMGKAY** (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) ensures a **stable market** for these grains.

2. Legacy of the Green Revolution:

- The 1960s Green Revolution introduced **semi-dwarf, high-yielding varieties** of wheat and rice, transforming these into **high-return crops**.
- These varieties responded exceptionally to **fertilizers and irrigation**, making them **low-risk and high-reward** for farmers, especially in **Punjab, Haryana**, and **western UP**.

3. Yield Stability and Irrigation Infrastructure:

- Both crops are extensively grown in **irrigated zones**, which reduces dependency on erratic monsoons.
- **Continuous research** and **public sector breeding programs** have improved their resilience to pests and diseases.
- Use of **hybrid rice varieties** and **mechanized farming** practices further boosts productivity.

4. Food Security and Strategic Importance:

- Rice and wheat are **cornerstones of India's food security framework**, forming the base of national buffer stocks and emergency reserves.
- Their strategic role in maintaining **price stability**, avoiding **food inflation**, and supporting **nutrition programs** keeps them in policy focus.

Technological Innovations: Making Rice More Sustainable

- India has developed **two genome-edited rice varieties** using **CRISPR-Cas9** techniques, improving:
  - **Yield potential**
  - **Drought resistance**
  - **Nitrogen-use efficiency**
- These varieties also aim to **cut methane emissions** and reduce **groundwater consumption**, making rice farming more **climate-smart**.

Challenges Confronting Rice and Wheat Cultivation:

1. Climate Vulnerability:

- Rising **temperatures**, **heat waves**, and **unseasonal rainfall** are threatening productivity.
- **Heat stress** during the flowering and grain-filling stages leads to **lower yields** and **grain quality deterioration**.

2. Water Crisis:

- **Rice** is extremely **water-intensive**, requiring over **3,000–5,000 litres of water per kg**.

- Continuous cultivation in **Punjab** and **Haryana** has led to **alarming groundwater depletion**.

- Wheat is also heavily dependent on **canal and tube well irrigation**.

3. Changing Food Preferences:

- Despite high production, **domestic cereal consumption has plateaued** at around **150 million tonnes** per year.

- Urban diets are shifting towards **protein-rich and diversified foods**, challenging the long-term demand projections for rice and wheat.

Why India Needs to Encourage Alternative Grains:

1. Climate Resilience and Environmental Gains:

- Crops like **millets, sorghum (jowar)**, **maize**, and **pulses** are more **drought-tolerant** and require less water.

- They emit **fewer greenhouse gases** compared to flooded rice fields, thus lowering **agriculture's carbon footprint**.

- Studies suggest that **reallocating some rice acreage** to climate-resilient crops could reduce **climate-induced production losses by up to 11%**.

2. Economic Incentives for Diversification:

- Farmers are **price-sensitive**, and shifting away from wheat and rice demands **assured returns** and **market access**.

- **Price support**, **insurance coverage**, and **direct procurement** of alternative crops are crucial to incentivize change.

3. Strengthening Supply Chains:

- Developing **processing units**, **cold chains**, and **storage infrastructure** for alternative grains can help build **stable markets** and reduce **post-harvest losses**.

- Public awareness campaigns and **branding of millets** as **nutri-cereals** can boost consumer demand, especially in urban areas.

Conclusion: A Balanced Path Forward:

While the dominance of **rice and wheat** in Indian agriculture is grounded in **security and familiarity**, the looming **climate crisis**, **water stress**, and **changing food patterns** demand a **rethinking of cropping choices**.

Policy makers must strike a balance: continue supporting essential cereals for food security while **actively promoting sustainable and climate-resilient crops** through **economic support**, **infrastructure development**, and **market creation**.

Centre Clears More FCI Rice for Ethanol: Fuel Ambitions vs Food Security

Context: In a bold push toward energy sustainability, the **Union Government** has sanctioned an **additional 2.8 million tonnes of rice** from the **Food Corporation of India (FCI)** stock for **ethanol production**. This brings the total rice allocation for the **Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2024–25** to a substantial **5.2 million tonnes**.

While hailed as a major step in India's biofuel journey, the move has sparked a debate about its **impact on food security**, **agricultural priorities**, and **ecological sustainability**.

Ethanol & The Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme:

Ethanol is a **renewable alcohol-based biofuel**, typically derived from:

- **Sugar-rich crops** like sugarcane and sweet sorghum
- **Starchy crops** like maize and rice
- **Cellulosic materials** such as crop residues and agricultural waste

Launched in **2003** and fast-tracked since **2014**, the **Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme** mandates the blending of ethanol with petrol to:

- **Reduce vehicular emissions**
- **Lower fossil fuel dependence**
- **Strengthen rural income streams**

Milestones Achieved:

- **E20 Target Achieved**: India has met the target of **20% ethanol blending** by **2025**, five years ahead of schedule.
- **Next Aim**: Achieve **30% blending** by **2030**, aligned with India's **climate goals** and **green energy roadmap**.

Why This Move Matters:

1. Energy Independence:

- Reduces India's dependence on crude oil imports, saving **foreign exchange reserves**
- Strengthens domestic energy production capacities

2. Environmental Gains:

- Ethanol-blended fuel emits significantly **fewer greenhouse gases** than petrol
- Helps India meet its **Paris Agreement** commitments on emission reduction

3. Boost to Farmers:

- Creates a **market for surplus crops** like rice and maize
- Could enhance **income stability** for farmers in surplus-producing regions

4. Policy Alignment:

- Supports the **National Bio-Energy Policy**
- Advances the **"Green Growth" pillar** of the **Union Budget 2023**

Key Concerns: The Other Side of the Coin

1. **Food Security Implications:** Diverting **5.2 million tonnes of rice** from the **central food buffer stock** could weaken the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** during **droughts**, **natural disasters**, or **price shocks**.
2. **Pricing Distortions:**

- Rice is supplied to distilleries at **22.50/kg**, much below market rates.
- Could lead to **inflated open market prices**, disproportionately affecting **low-income households**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

3. **Ecological Concerns:**

- **Rice is highly water-intensive**, requiring over **3,000–5,000 litres of water per kg**.
- Using it for fuel in **water-scarce states** may worsen **groundwater depletion** and **climate vulnerability**.

4. **Ethical and Efficiency Debates:**

- Using **edible crops** for fuel raises ethical concerns in a country with existing **nutritional challenges**.
- **Second-generation (2G) ethanol** from **non-food biomass** (e.g., bagasse, crop stubble) is more **efficient and sustainable**, yet remains underutilized.

5. **Agricultural Monoculture Risks:** Over-emphasis on ethanol-linked crops like **sugarcane, rice, and maize** can reduce **crop diversity**, deplete soil health, and increase **pest vulnerability**.

The Way Forward: A Balanced Biofuel Path

To ensure **biofuel ambitions do not compromise food security or ecological balance**, India must recalibrate its strategy:

1. Shift to 2G and Advanced Biofuels:

- Prioritize ethanol production from **agricultural waste**, **municipal solid waste**, and **industrial by-products**.
- Accelerate rollout of **2G ethanol plants** under the **Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana**.

2. Strengthen Regulatory Oversight:

- Establish **strict audit mechanisms** to monitor diversion of food grains and its **impact on PDS stocks**.
- Enforce **transparency in pricing and procurement** of grains for fuel use.

3. Promote Crop Diversification:

- Incentivize **multi-cropping systems** and **low water-requiring crops**
- Educate farmers on the long-term risks of monocultures linked to ethanol demand

4. Foster Public Dialogue:

- Engage civil society, farmers' groups, and environmentalists in shaping biofuel policies.
- Ensure an **inclusive debate** around food vs fuel choices in the public domain.

Conclusion: India's ethanol journey is pivotal for its **energy security**, **climate leadership**, and **rural prosperity**. However, this journey must not come at the cost of **nutrition security**, **ecological sustainability**, or **social equity**.

A **smart ethanol strategy** would balance **clean energy ambitions** with **ethical resource use**, ensuring that India's **biodiversity, food systems**, and **farmers' futures** are equally protected.

Revitalizing Inland Water Transport in India: A New Wave of Connectivity

Context: In a transformative move, the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** has launched a **regional office in Srinagar** and committed **100 crore** to develop **three National Waterways** in Jammu & Kashmir:

- **Chenab River (NW-26)**

- **Jhelum River (NW-49)**
- **Ravi River (NW-84)**

This marks a significant step towards **enhancing water-based transport and tourism** in northern India.

Key Developments and Infrastructure Boost:

- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** has been signed between **IWAI and the J&K Government** to promote **river cruise tourism**.
- **Ten floating jetties** will be installed at strategic locations like **Akhnoor, Reasi, Pantha Chowk, Zero Bridge, Amira Kadal**, and **Safa Kadal**.
- IWAI will also develop **landside infrastructure** to facilitate **passenger and cargo movement**.
- **Dredging operations** are planned to maintain **navigable fairways** for safe vessel traffic.

Overview of Inland Waterways in India:

The **National Waterways Act, 2016** declared **111 inland waterways** as **National Waterways (NWs)** to promote shipping and navigation.

- These waterways span **20,275 km across 24 states**.
- Operational routes currently include stretches along:
    - **Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly**
    - **Brahmaputra** and **Barak rivers**
    - **Goa's rivers, Kerala's backwaters**, and the **Godavari-Krishna delta**

About IWAI: The Pillar of Waterborne Logistics

The **Inland Waterways Authority of India** was established in **1986**, under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**, following the **National Transport Policy (1980)** recommendations.

- **Headquarters**: Noida, Uttar Pradesh
- **Regional Offices**: Patna, Kolkata, Guwahati, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar, Kochi
- **Sub-Offices**: Located in major riverine hubs including **Prayagraj, Haldia, Dibrugarh**, and **Vijayawada**

Core Responsibilities:

- **Developing and regulating National Waterways**
- Conducting **hydrographic surveys**
- Providing **navigational aids**
- Promoting **river tourism and ferry services**

India's Major National Waterways:

- **NW-1**: Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly (Haldia to Prayagraj, **1,620 km**)
- **NW-2**: Brahmaputra (Dhubri to Sadiya, **891 km**)
- **NW-3**: West Coast Canal (Kottapuram to Kollam, **205 km**)
- **NW-4**: Godavari-Krishna-Buckingham Canal (**1,095 km**)
- **NW-5**: Brahmani-Mahanadi-East Coast Canal (**623 km**)
- **NW-16**: Barak River (**121 km**)

Why Inland Water Transport (IWT) Matters:

Economic Efficiency:

- **Lowest cost per ton-km**:
  - 1 litre of fuel moves **24 tonnes** by road
  - **95 tonnes** by rail
  - A remarkable **215 tonnes** via IWT

Decongesting Road & Rail:

- India's **highways and railways** are heavily burdened.
- IWT serves as an effective **supplementary transport mode**, improving overall cargo efficiency.

Eco-Friendly Alternative:

- IWT has the **lowest carbon footprint** among transport modes.
- Reduces **air pollution**, **traffic congestion**, and **urban noise levels**.

Expanding the Horizon: Beyond Freight

Ro-Ro (Roll-on/Roll-off) Services:

- Enables **vehicles and freight** to travel across waterways, easing **road congestion**.

River Tourism:

- Promotes **houseboats, cruises**, and **eco-tourism**, creating **rural employment** and enhancing **local economies**.

Passenger Ferry Services:

- Offers **affordable and efficient travel**, particularly in **remote or underserved areas**.

Key Government Initiatives:

Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP):

- Focused on **developing NW-1** for cargo transport
- Includes **multi-modal terminals**, **navigational locks**, and **fairway upgrades**

Jalvahak Scheme:

- Offers **cost incentives** to encourage **cargo owners** to shift to water routes
- Aims to **increase IWT's share** from **2% to 5%** by 2030

Green Shipping Revolution:

- **Hybrid Electric and Hydrogen Vessels** are being developed for sustainable water navigation
- **Coastal Green Shipping Corridor** initiated from **Kandla to Tuticorin**

New Regulatory Framework:

- **National Waterways (Construction of Jetties/Terminals) Regulations, 2025** aim to streamline infrastructure development and promote efficient usage of waterways

Vision Ahead: A Blue Economy Pathway

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways targets **150 inland and maritime projects by September 2025**, as part of a broader **Blue Economy vision**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

The **Harbour Craft Green Transition Programme** and green corridors highlight India's commitment to **environmentally sustainable transport**.

Challenges and Roadblocks:

- **Seasonal water levels** and **river depth variations** hamper navigation
- **Insufficient infrastructure** like modern jetties and terminals
- **Low private sector participation** due to regulatory and financial constraints

Conclusion: Unlocking India's Waterways Potential

With strategic investment, innovation, and regulatory reforms, **India's inland waterways** can become a **game-changer for sustainable and affordable transport**.

By strengthening inland water connectivity, promoting tourism, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, India is paving the way for a **cleaner, cheaper, and more inclusive transport ecosystem** aligned with its **Blue Economy and Green Growth goals**.

India's Right to Repair Movement: Empowering Consumers and Promoting Sustainability

Context: In a significant move towards **consumer empowerment** and **eco-conscious electronics**, the **Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA)** has received a report proposing a **"Repairability Index Framework"** for mobile phones and electronic appliances. This initiative aligns with India's efforts to strengthen the **Right to Repair Movement** and support a **circular economy**.

A New Era in Consumer Protection:

India's **Right to Repair initiative** marks a major step forward in redefining **consumer rights**, **product longevity**, and **sustainable consumption**. By introducing a **Repairability Index (RI)**, the government aims to provide consumers with **clear information** about how easily a product can be repaired—putting power back in the hands of buyers.

What Is the Repairability Index?

The **Repairability Index** is designed to rate electronic products based on how easily they can be fixed. It will help consumers compare products beyond just brand and price.

Key Factors Considered in the Index:

- **Availability and cost of spare parts**
- **Access to repair manuals and service documentation**
- **Ease and cost of repair services**
- **Software support**, including availability of updates

This scoring system will apply to items such as **smartphones, refrigerators, washing machines**, and other consumer electronics—encouraging **transparency and better product design**.

Why Repairable Products Matter:

Consumers today are frustrated by **frequent product breakdowns** and the **high cost of repairs**—often designed intentionally through **planned obsolescence**. Additionally:

- **Low durability** is being linked to a **decline in material quality**, particularly as manufacturers reduce **metal content** to cut costs.

- **India's dependence on imported metals** like copper has made it harder to maintain the durability of appliances.

Repairability Supports Key National Goals:

- **Reduces electronic waste (e-waste)**
- Promotes a **circular economy**
- Minimizes the use of newly mined ("virgin") metals
- Increases **product lifespan and consumer savings**

The Right to Repair in India:

The **Right to Repair** is a global concept that ensures **consumers can choose** how and where their devices are repaired. In India, the **DoCA launched the Right to Repair Portal**, which includes:

- A directory of **manufacturer-authorized service centers**
- **Repair guides and manuals** for consumers

Although India currently emphasizes **authorized service networks**, the participation of **consumer rights advocates** signals a possible shift towards **greater repair freedom**. There is a growing push against denying repairs for older products, which many believe violates the **consumer's right to choice**.

Global Perspective: How India Compares

In the **United States**, the Right to Repair movement has led to:

- **Legal requirements** for access to spare parts and manuals
- Opposition to **software locks** that prevent independent repairs
- Scrutiny of **exclusive service arrangements**, such as McDonald's deal with Taylor for ice cream machine repairs

In contrast, **India's approach is more collaborative**, involving **both industry representatives and consumer bodies in** policy formation. The framework is still evolving, but it aims to balance **business innovation** with **consumer protection**.

Challenges That Lie Ahead:

While the introduction of a Repairability Index is a forward-thinking move, several hurdles remain:

- **Industry resistance** from manufacturers that profit from closed repair ecosystems
- Need for **robust enforcement mechanisms**
- Ensuring **safe and quality repair services** from third parties
- Preventing **corporate influence** in the policy, as the drafting committee is largely made up of industry stakeholders

Conclusion: A Step Towards Smarter and Greener Choices

India's **Right to Repair framework** is not just about fixing gadgets—it's about **fixing the system**. By making **repair information accessible** and encouraging **durable product design**, the government is pushing for a future where consumers have more **control**, **choice**, and **sustainability**.

With continued advocacy and smart regulation, India can become a **global leader** in **consumer-centric and environmentally responsible electronics**.

India's Major Ports Set New Benchmark in FY 2024-25

Context: India's **Major Ports** have achieved a **historic performance milestone** in **FY 2024-25**, recording a **cargo handling capacity of approximately 855 million tonnes**, up from **819 million tonnes** in the previous fiscal year. This marks an **annual growth of 4.3%**, showcasing the growing strength and modernization of India's maritime sector.

Key Performance Highlights:

Boost in Operational Efficiency:

- **Average Turnaround Time (TRT)** for vessels has been reduced to **49.5 hours**, a remarkable **48% improvement** from **96 hours in FY 2014-15**.

- The **operating ratio** improved significantly, falling from **64.7% to 42.3%**, reflecting greater cost-effectiveness and optimized port operations.

Financial Growth:

- The **total income** of major ports has **more than doubled over the past decade**, recording a **7.5% CAGR** (Compound Annual Growth Rate).

- This financial success is largely attributed to improved port operations and increased private sector involvement.

Private Sector Participation:

- **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) investments** have **tripled**, playing a crucial role in infrastructure upgrades, digitalisation, and innovation across ports.

India's Maritime Sector: A Strategic Asset

- India has **13 Major Ports** (under the central government) and **217 Non-Major Ports** (managed by state governments).

- The sector is overseen by the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**.

- Located along some of the **world's busiest trade routes**, India's ports serve as a vital link in global maritime logistics.

Trade and Ranking:

- The sector handles **95% of India's trade by volume** and **70% by value**.

- India's position in the **Global Port Performance Index** improved from **54th in 2014 to 38th in 2023**.

- **Nine Indian ports** now rank among the **top 100 globally** for performance and infrastructure.

Sectoral Growth and Strategic Vision:

Cargo Capacity Growth:

- From **2014-15 to 2023-24**, major ports increased their annual **cargo-handling capacity by over 87%**.

Vision for 2035:

- India aims to invest **US$ 82 billion** in port infrastructure by 2035.

- Plans include establishing a **national shipping company** to add **1,000 ships** over the next decade to expand fleet capacity and reduce dependence on foreign vessels.

Challenges Hindering Maritime Expansion:

Despite impressive growth, several structural and operational challenges persist:

- **Infrastructure Gaps**: Some ports still lack modern facilities, limiting potential throughput.
- **Congestion**: Heavy traffic at major ports causes delays and increases turnaround time.
- **Environmental Issues**: Emissions and pollution from port activities raise sustainability concerns.
- **Inefficient Connectivity**: Poor road and rail links hinder smooth cargo transportation.
- **Security and Cyber Threats**: Ports are vulnerable to smuggling, piracy, and cyberattacks due to inadequate security protocols.

Government Initiatives Driving Transformation:

Sagarmala Programme:

- Focuses on **modernising port infrastructure**, enhancing coastal economic zones, and improving port-road-rail connectivity.
- Provides financial support for coastal berths, **fishing harbours**, cruise terminals, and connectivity projects.

Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030):

- Aims to transform India into a **top-10 global shipbuilding nation**.
- Comprises **150+ initiatives** across sectors like port modernization, shipbuilding, skill development, and logistics.

Inland Waterways Development: 26 new national waterways have been added to promote **sustainable and cost-effective transport**.

Green Tug Transition Program (GTTP): Targets **100% transition to eco-friendly fuel-based harbour tugs by 2040** to reduce carbon emissions and support the green port initiative.

Sagarmanthan Dialogue: An annual strategic platform positioning India as a **global maritime thought leader**, bringing together policymakers, industry experts, and academia.

Financial Incentives and Support:

- **Maritime Development Fund** worth 25,000 crore launched for long-term investment in ports and shipping.
- **Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy (SBFAP 2.0)** upgraded to make Indian shipyards globally competitive.

The Road Ahead:

India's maritime sector is poised for a **new era of global leadership**, driven by:

- Continued **mechanisation** and **digitalisation** of port processes.
- Expansion of **multi-modal logistics hubs** for seamless cargo flow.
- Promotion of **green and sustainable practices** to meet global environmental standards.

Conclusion: FY 2024-25 stands as a **landmark year** for India's port sector—defined by record-breaking performance, global recognition, and forward-looking reforms. With strategic investments and a strong policy push, India is on course to become a **leading maritime power** in the coming decades.

Account Aggregators: Laying the Foundation for India's Consent-Based Data Economy

Context: With the advent of the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, and the draft **DPDP Rules, 2025**, India is taking a transformative step toward **empowering individuals with control over their personal data**. A key pillar of this initiative is the **Account Aggregator (AA)** framework, which now serves as a **blueprint for developing Consent Managers (CMs)** under the new data protection regime.

What is an Account Aggregator (AA)?

An **Account Aggregator** is a **Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC-AA)** regulated by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**. It acts as a **digital bridge** between institutions that hold your financial data and those that need access to it — all based on your **explicit consent**.

Key Features:

- Operates on a **real-time, consent-based, and encrypted data-sharing system**.
- Acts as a conduit between:
  - **Financial Information Providers (FIPs)**: e.g., banks, mutual funds, insurance firms.
  - **Financial Information Users (FIUs)**: e.g., lenders, wealth advisors, insurers.
- **Does not store, modify, or analyze data** — it merely facilitates secure transfer.

How it Works:

1. A user links their bank accounts to an AA.
2. Provides **consent** to share specific data (e.g., bank statements) with a **FIU**.
3. The AA fetches the data from the relevant **FIP** and delivers it securely to the FIU.

Examples of Licensed AAs:

- **CAMS FinServ** – Backed by Computer Age Management Services.
- **PhonePe AA** – A subsidiary of PhonePe, utilizing its vast digital ecosystem.

Transitioning to the Consent Manager (CM) Framework under DPDP

The **DPDP Act, 2023** introduces the concept of **Consent Managers (CMs)** — entities entrusted with managing an individual's **consent lifecycle** in the data-sharing ecosystem.

Role of Consent Managers:

- Facilitate **consent collection, modification, and withdrawal**.
- Ensure secure data transfers between **Data Principals** (individuals) and **Data Fiduciaries** (organizations using data).
- Act as **trusted intermediaries**, much like AAs, but across all sectors, not just financial services.

Draft DPDP Rules, 2025: Key Proposals for Consent Managers

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

To build an effective and scalable CM ecosystem, the draft rules propose several foundational elements:

1. **Mandatory Registration:** Consent Managers must register with the **Data Protection Board (DPB)** to ensure oversight and regulatory compliance.

2. **Sector-Specific Consent Managers:** Encourages development of **domain-specific CMs** (e.g., for health, finance, education), provided they adhere to **common APIs and technical protocols**.

3. **Commercial Flexibility:** Allows CMs to **enter into business arrangements with Data Fiduciaries**, enabling sustainable business models while preserving user trust.

Why a Unified Consent Infrastructure Matters:

1. **Avoids Redundancy:** Aligning the **AA and CM frameworks** avoids duplication and unnecessary complexity across sectors.

2. **Boosts Efficiency:** Leverages the **proven efficiency** of the AA model, accelerating the nationwide rollout of **Consent Managers**.

3. **Fosters Innovation :** Empowers startups, fintechs, and public platforms to **develop secure, user-centric data-sharing services**.

4. **Supports Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) :** Strengthens India's vision for a **secure, interoperable, and citizen-first digital ecosystem**, building on success stories like **UPI** and **DigiLocker**.

India's Moment to Lead in Data Empowerment:

India stands at the cusp of redefining global standards in **data protection and empowerment**. By **harmonizing the Account Aggregator model with the Consent Manager regime** under the DPDP framework, the country can establish a **scalable, transparent, and inclusive data governance system**.

This unified approach not only safeguards personal data but also unlocks massive potential for **digital innovation**, **financial inclusion**, and **user autonomy** in the digital age.

India Sets Sail Towards Global Maritime Leadership

Context: India is no longer content with merely being a **regional maritime player**. It is rapidly positioning itself as a **global port infrastructure leader**, leveraging a mix of public-private partnerships, bilateral agreements, and strategic investments. With a bold vision to expand its port presence beyond national shores, **India's maritime strategy** is now a core pillar of its foreign policy and economic diplomacy.

Africa: The New Frontier for Indian Port Diplomacy

Tanzania at the Heart of Indian Maritime Ambitions:

India has intensified its engagement in **East Africa**, particularly in **Tanzania**, where it is establishing a multi-layered presence:

- **Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA)** is spearheading the creation of an **industrial park** in Tanzania to enhance trade connectivity.

- **Cochin Shipyard Limited** has partnered with **Marine Services Co Ltd**, a Tanzanian firm, to strengthen local shipbuilding and repair capabilities.

- **Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd (APSEZ)** has taken a commanding role by:
    - Managing **CT2 at Dar es Salaam Port** under a 30-year concession.
    - Owning a significant stake in **Tanzania International Container Terminal Services (TICTS)** through its joint venture, **East Africa Gateway Ltd (EAGL)**, in collaboration with **AD Ports Group** and **East Harbour Terminals Ltd**.

Chabahar: India's Strategic Gateway to Central Asia

Transforming a Regional Outpost into a Global Connector:

The **Chabahar Port** in Iran, operated by **Indian Ports Global Ltd (IPGL)**, is fast becoming a cornerstone of India's **connectivity to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe**:

- **TEU Throughput** has surged from just **9,000 containers in FY23** to **64,000 TEUs by January FY25**, with expectations to hit **75,000 TEUs** by the end of FY25.
- A planned **4,000 crore investment** aims to increase capacity to **500,000 TEUs** over the next decade.
- Upcoming developments include the deployment of **mobile harbor cranes** and the construction of a **second berth**, enhancing the port's handling efficiency.

Regional Integration: Strengthening India's Maritime Neighbourhood:

Myanmar and Sri Lanka in Focus:

India is reinforcing maritime ties with its immediate neighbors to foster **regional interconnectivity**:

- In **Myanmar**, IPGL is managing **Sittwe Port**, part of the **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project**, which connects India's northeast with Southeast Asia.
- In **Sri Lanka**, India is developing **Kankesanthurai Port**, and ferry services to the Indian mainland have been **revived** after decades.
- **Adani Ports** has commenced operations at the **Colombo West International Terminal (CWIT)**—a vital **transshipment hub** for South Asia.

IPGL's Transformation: From Strategy Arm to Global Operator

Emergence of Bharat Global Ports:

The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** is now repositioning **IPGL** from a strategic facilitator to a **commercially driven operator**, capable of managing **domestic and global terminals**. This evolution includes:

- Launching **Bharat Global Ports**, a new **umbrella entity** to serve as a central port infrastructure provider.
- Using IPGL as its **operational arm**, aimed at consolidating India's credibility in **international port operations**.

India's Maritime Ecosystem: A Snapshot:

- **13 Major Ports** and **217 Minor Ports**, governed by central and state bodies respectively.
- **Handles 95%** of India's trade by volume and **70% by value**.
- Port ranking improved from **54th in 2014** to **38th in 2023**, with **9 ports** now in the **top 100 globally**.
- Between **2014-15 and 2023-24**, major ports increased their **cargo-handling capacity by 87.01%**.
- India is the **16th-largest maritime nation**, playing a pivotal role along key **global shipping routes**.

Knowledge Nugget: India's maritime sector contributes significantly to **employment and GDP**, and is a backbone of the country's **Make in India** and **Blue Economy** initiatives.

The Road Ahead: Maritime Power Projection:

India is setting its sights on becoming a **rule-making power** in the global maritime architecture. Its forward-looking approach includes:

- Expanding its fleet with a **new shipping company**, targeting **1,000 ships** within a decade.
- Investing **US$ 82 billion** by 2035 in port modernization and connectivity.
- Deepening engagement across the **Indo-Pacific**, **Central Asia**, and **Africa**, aligning port development with strategic partnerships and **regional infrastructure diplomacy**.

India Charts Strategic Northeast–Kolkata Route Through Myanmar, Sidesteps Bangladesh

Context: In a **bold geopolitical move**, India has advanced efforts to connect its **Northeast region with Kolkata** via **Myanmar**, bypassing traditional routes through **Bangladesh**. This shift not only addresses diplomatic friction but also strengthens India's strategic foothold in Southeast Asia and enhances regional autonomy.

Myanmar: India's Crucial Eastern Gateway

India shares a **1,643 km-long land border** with **Myanmar**, connecting the northeastern states of **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur**, and **Mizoram**. Myanmar plays a pivotal role in **India's Act East Policy**, serving as a bridge between **South Asia and Southeast Asia**.

Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP): A Game Changer

The **Kaladan Multimodal Project** is central to this strategic vision. Designed to create a **seamless corridor** from **Kolkata to Mizoram** via **Myanmar**, it integrates **sea, river, and road transport** to drastically reduce logistical dependence on the narrow **'Chicken's Neck' corridor**.

Project Phases and Status:

- **Kolkata to Sittwe (Sea)** – *539 km*: **Completed**
- **Sittwe to Paletwa (Inland Waterways)** – *158 km*: **Completed**
- **Paletwa to Zorinpui (Road)** – *108 km*: ⚠ **Partially complete** (Delayed by conflict in Rakhine State)
- **Zorinpui to Aizawl & Shillong (Road link)** – **Under development** via **Shillong–Silchar–Zorinpui Corridor**

Once operational, this route will **cut travel distance and time**, enhance **regional logistics efficiency**, and support **India's East-West Industrial Corridor** plans.

Why This Shift Matters:

1. **Reducing Dependency on Bangladesh:** India's earlier transit routes to the Northeast relied heavily on Bangladesh. However, **Dhaka's recent remarks** labeling India's Northeast as "landlocked and dependent" triggered a strategic response. India aims to secure **self-reliant routes**, minimizing **transit fees, delays**, and **geopolitical vulnerability**.

2. **Empowering the Northeast:** Improved connectivity through Myanmar will:

- Stimulate **trade, tourism, and local industries**

- Enhance **logistics** for **manufacturing and agriculture**

- Draw **investment into the Northeast**, traditionally isolated

3. **Reinforcing India's Act East Vision:**

The Myanmar route aligns with the **India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway** and strengthens links to **ASEAN economies**, boosting **regional integration**.

Security & Strategic Implications:

- The route allows India to **counterbalance China's expanding presence** in western Myanmar (e.g., **Kyaukpyu port**, CMEC).

- India's infrastructure investments **stabilize border zones**, especially in insurgency-prone areas like **Chin and Rakhine States**.

- It affirms **India's role as a regional power** investing in peace, connectivity, and inclusive development.

Challenges Along the Myanmar Route:

Despite its promise, the corridor faces obstacles:

- **Insurgent activity** by groups like the **Arakan Army**

- **Challenging terrain** slowing construction

- **Geopolitical rivalry** with **China's Belt and Road projects** in the same region

Yet, India's persistence reflects a **long-term strategic vision** rooted in self-reliance and regional leadership.

India's Countertrade Measures: Shifting Dynamics with Bangladesh

Amid tensions, India has **banned Bangladeshi ready-made garments** from entering through land ports in **Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya**, and **Mizoram**. These exports must now go through **Kolkata and Mumbai sea ports** where **stringent inspections** are in place.

This move is seen as a **reciprocal response** to Bangladesh's restriction on **Indian yarn exports**, previously limited to sea routes only. As **93% of Bangladesh's apparel exports to India** used land routes, this policy shift could significantly **alter trade balances** and **increase operational costs** for Dhaka's exporters.

The Road Ahead: Toward a Self-Reliant, Globally Connected Northeast

With enhanced infrastructure, strategic intent, and growing geopolitical awareness, **India is rewriting the connectivity script** for its Northeast. The **Myanmar corridor** is more than a logistics route—it represents **resilience, regional integration**, and **India's emergence as a decisive actor in Indo-Pacific geopolitics**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

FREEDOM UPSC
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India's Nuclear Power Makeover: Paving the Way for Private and Global Investment

Context: In a game-changing development, the **Indian government is set to introduce two major amendments** to reshape its nuclear energy sector during the upcoming **Monsoon Session of Parliament**. This move signals a strategic shift — allowing **private and foreign players** to finally participate in the country's nuclear power generation.

A New Era for India's Atomic Energy Sector:

India stands at a critical juncture in its **energy transformation journey**. With increasing electricity demand and global climate commitments, the government is looking to **modernize the nuclear sector** — an area long dominated by **state-run entities** such as the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**.

These reforms follow a significant boost from the **United States**, clearing a longstanding barrier to bilateral civil nuclear cooperation and unlocking long-delayed opportunities from the historic **Indo-US nuclear deal**.

Key Legislative Reforms: Unlocking the Sector:

1. Overhaul of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010)

Currently, the **liability for nuclear accidents** lies heavily with equipment vendors — a major deterrent for companies like **Westinghouse, GE-Hitachi, and Framatome**. The proposed amendment will:

- **Cap the vendor's liability** to the original value of the contract.
- Introduce a **defined liability window**, post which vendors are no longer accountable.

This is designed to **de-risk foreign investment** and address long-standing industry concerns around **financial exposure and legal uncertainty**.

2. Amendment to the Atomic Energy Act (1962):

The second key change would:

- Allow **private Indian players** — and potentially **foreign partners** — to **operate nuclear power plants**.
- Enable **public-private partnerships** in atomic energy.
- Allow **minority equity stakes** for foreign firms in upcoming projects.

These steps would invite **greater investment**, **competition**, and **technology innovation**, catalyzing the next wave of growth in India's nuclear power industry.

US Regulatory Green Light: A Turning Point

In **March 2025**, the **US Department of Energy** granted **Holtec International** permission to **transfer Small Modular Reactor (SMR) technology** to Indian partners, including **Tata Consulting Engineers** and **Larsen & Toubro**. This **Part 810 clearance** is significant because:

- It lifts a **long-standing restriction** on US firms participating in India's nuclear development.
- It enables **technology co-production**, empowering India to **localize SMR manufacturing**.

This move aligns US and Indian strategic interests while enabling India to emerge as a **regional nuclear technology hub**.

Geostrategic and Trade Implications:

These reforms are not isolated. They form part of a broader push to deepen **Indo-US strategic and trade ties**, potentially paving the way for:

- A **comprehensive trade pact** with nuclear energy as a key pillar.

- **Expanded clean energy collaboration**, especially in **climate-resilient technologies**.

- Greater **strategic trust**, solidifying India's role as a **critical partner** in the Indo-Pacific.

India could also become a **key export base** for advanced nuclear technologies, particularly **SMRs**, in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Boosting India's Energy Security and Climate Ambitions:

With a target of **net-zero emissions by 2070**, India's energy basket must shift toward **low-carbon baseload solutions**. Nuclear power provides:

- A **stable, carbon-free alternative** to coal.

- The potential for **large-scale energy deployment** with **minimal land and water footprint**.

- A chance to **decarbonize industrial sectors**, including **steel and hydrogen production**.

India currently lags behind in nuclear capacity — contributing less than **2%** of total electricity generation. These reforms could change that narrative.

The Road Ahead: Challenges to Navigate:

While the proposed reforms promise transformation, they face several hurdles:

- **Public safety concerns** and **political resistance**, especially over private participation in sensitive sectors.

- **Legislative delays**, particularly in amending the liability framework.

- Need for **robust safety protocols** and **transparent regulatory oversight** to manage private operations.

Yet, successful implementation could place India among **top-tier nuclear innovators**, leading the charge in **advanced reactor technologies**.

Conclusion: A Strategic Shift With Global Impact

India's decision to **reform its nuclear laws** and embrace **private and foreign participation** marks a **historic policy evolution**. It reflects a forward-looking approach to:

- **Modernize energy infrastructure**

- **Strengthen strategic global alliances**

- **Accelerate clean energy goals**

With **US collaboration**, **industry confidence**, and **parliamentary will**, India is poised to unlock a new era in nuclear energy — not just as a power source, but as a symbol of **technological self-reliance and global leadership**.

US Proposal to Tax Remittances Raises Alarm Among Immigrants and Global Economists

Context: A newly proposed bill in the **United States Congress** is causing significant concern among immigrant communities and global economists. The legislation seeks to impose a **5% excise tax on all remittances** sent from the U.S. to foreign countries—**but only if sent by non-citizens**. The tax would apply to individuals on **temporary work visas** (such as H-1B, L-1, F-1) and even **green card holders**, sparing only **U.S. citizens and nationals** from this new burden.

Key Provisions of the Proposed Legislation:

- **Tax Applicability**: The proposed tax will cover all **international remittances** made by **non-citizen residents**, including visa holders and permanent residents.

- **No Minimum Threshold**: There is **no lower limit**, meaning even small transfers would attract the 5% levy.

- **Inclusive of Investment Income**: The bill targets not just wages, but also **income from investments**, such as **stock options**, earned in the U.S. by non-citizens.

- **Collection Mechanism**: The tax is to be **withheld by remittance service providers**—banks, money transfer operators, or digital platforms—and **deposited quarterly** with the U.S. Treasury.

Understanding Remittances and Their Significance:

Remittances are **financial lifelines**—typically **funds sent by migrant workers** to support families in their home countries. Globally, they:

- **Outpace Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** and **Official Development Assistance (ODA)**.

- Contribute directly to **household income**, **education**, **healthcare**, and **local business activity**.

- Act as a **buffer for national trade deficits**, especially in **developing economies**.

The Indian Context: A Closer Look

- **Overseas Indian Population**: Nearly **5.4 million Indians** reside in the U.S., many of whom are on **temporary work visas or hold green cards**.

- **Top Remittance Source**: The U.S. has emerged as **India's largest remittance contributor**, sending **$32.9 billion** in **FY 2023–24**, forming **27.7%** of India's total inward remittances.

- **India's Global Standing**: According to the **World Bank**, India has been the **top global recipient** of remittances since **2008**, with a **14% global share** in 2024.

Potential Impacts of the Tax:

- **Higher Costs for Immigrants**: This policy would **increase the cost of sending money** to families abroad, disproportionately affecting **middle-income and blue-collar workers**.

- **Possible Decline in Remittance Flows**: A **reduction in remittance volumes** could affect **economic stability** in countries like India, the Philippines, Mexico, and Nigeria.

- **Administrative Challenges**: Transfer service providers would bear **additional compliance burdens** and **operational costs**.

- **Investment Deterrent**: Immigrants may **reconsider holding assets or investing in the U.S.** due to this perceived **double taxation**—since they already **pay federal and state income taxes**.

- **Global Criticism**: Economists and human rights organizations argue the move is **punitive**, particularly against **law-abiding immigrants** who contribute significantly to the U.S. economy.

Broader Economic Insights:

- **India's Remittance Growth**: Inward remittances to India have **more than doubled** from **$55.6 billion in 2010-11** to **$118.7 billion in 2023-24**.

- **Shift in Sources**: Remittances from the **U.S. and U.K.** now constitute **40%** of India's total inflows, compared to **26% in FY17**.

- **Geographic Spread in India**: States like **Maharashtra**, **Kerala**, and **Tamil Nadu** receive **over 50%** of these funds, sustaining household consumption and local economies.

- **World Impact**: Global remittances reached an estimated **$860 billion** in 2023, with **low- and middle-income countries** receiving nearly **$669 billion**.

Final Thoughts: A Policy in the Crosshairs

This proposed tax underscores a growing tension between **domestic fiscal priorities** and **global economic interdependence**. If passed, the bill could not only **burden millions of immigrant workers** in the U.S. but also disrupt the **financial stability of countries reliant on diaspora income**.

Stakeholders, including migrant advocacy groups, international economists, and foreign governments, are expected to **push back strongly**. The coming months will reveal whether this bill proceeds, and how it may **reshape the global remittance landscape**.

Understanding the Economic Capital Framework and RBI's Dividend Transfer to the Government

Context: The **Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Central Board of Directors** recently reviewed the **Economic Capital Framework (ECF)**—a crucial system that guides how much risk buffer the RBI maintains and determines the amount of **surplus (dividend)** it can transfer to the **Government of India**. This review impacts fiscal management and the overall economy.

What is the Economic Capital Framework (ECF)?

The **ECF** is a well-structured mechanism used by the RBI to decide the appropriate level of **risk provisioning** and the **surplus funds** that can be transferred to the government under **Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934**.

- **Origin:** The framework was recommended by the **Bimal Jalan Committee** in 2018 and formally adopted in 2019.

- **Purpose:** To strike a careful balance between maintaining adequate financial reserves for **monetary and financial stability** and distributing prudent dividends to support the government's fiscal needs.

- **Contingency Risk Buffer (CRB):** A key component of the ECF, the CRB acts as a **financial safety net**, set between **5.5% and 6.5%** of the RBI's total balance sheet. This buffer helps the RBI absorb unforeseen shocks like **currency fluctuations** and **economic crises**, ensuring it remains capable of functioning as the **Lender of Last Resort**.

Key Components of the Revised ECF (Bimal Jalan Committee, 2019):

- **Realized Equity (Contingency Fund - CF):** Serves as a reserve to protect against unexpected losses, maintained between **5.5% and 6.5%** of the balance sheet. Any surplus beyond this threshold is transferred to the government. Currently, the RBI targets the **lower limit of 5.5%**.

- **Economic Capital (Capital and General Risk Account - CGRA):** Includes the RBI's **capital base**, reserves, and risk provisions, plus revaluation balances from changes in exchange rates, gold prices, and interest rates. The CGRA is maintained between **20.8% and 25.4%** of the balance sheet, with excess funds eligible for transfer to the government.

- **Periodic Review:** The ECF is reviewed every **five years** to accommodate evolving economic conditions. The latest review was conducted in **August 2024**.

Surge in RBI's Dividend Transfers:

The RBI's dividend transfers to the government have witnessed a sharp increase—from around **30,307 crore in FY22** to an estimated **2.5-3 lakh crore in FY25**. This surge is primarily due to:

- Strong earnings from **foreign exchange operations (dollar sales)**

- Rising **gold prices**

- Appreciation in **government securities**

This substantial dividend transfer aids the government in managing its **fiscal deficit** and enhancing **banking liquidity**, which can help ease **short-term interest rates**.

Legal Framework Governing RBI's Surplus Transfer

- **Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934:** Mandates that the RBI transfer its **net profits** (after provisioning for the Contingency Fund and Asset Development Fund) to the Central Government.

- **Section 48:** Exempts the RBI from paying income tax or super tax on its income, facilitating a more direct and larger transfer of surplus to the exchequer.

Historical Committee Recommendations

Several expert committees have shaped the RBI's capital and dividend policy over time:

- **V. Subrahmanyam Committee (1997)**

- **Usha Thorat Committee (2004)**

- **Y.H. Malegam Committee (2013):** Recommended increasing transfers to the government while maintaining prudent reserves.

- **Bimal Jalan Committee (2018):** Introduced the revised ECF, balancing risk buffers with fiscal needs.

Following these expert recommendations, the RBI has progressively raised its surplus transfers, supporting both **macroeconomic stability** and expanding **fiscal space** for government spending.

Why Is RBI's Surplus Transfer Crucial?

- **Helps Reduce Fiscal Deficit:** Provides significant **non-tax revenue**, supporting the government's fiscal deficit target of **5.1% for FY24–25**.

- **Boosts Revenue Generation:** Enables higher government spending on infrastructure, health, and social sectors, driving economic growth.

- **Reduces Government Borrowing:** By augmenting revenues, it may reduce **gross borrowing needs by up to 1 trillion**, freeing resources for capital investments.

- **Lowers Borrowing Costs:** Reduced borrowing requirements can soften **government security yields**, decreasing debt servicing costs.

- **Keeps Interest Rates Stable:** Lower sovereign yields influence market interest rates, making borrowing cheaper for businesses and consumers alike.

Additional Insight

The RBI's dividend policy has a direct impact on the broader financial ecosystem:

- **Fiscal discipline and monetary policy coordination** are strengthened when the RBI maintains a prudent capital base and shares surplus responsibly.

- A **healthy Contingency Risk Buffer** ensures the central bank can respond decisively during financial crises, such as currency crashes or global economic shocks.

- The dividend transfers can be viewed as a tool for **monetary-fiscal cooperation**, balancing the autonomy of the RBI with the government's funding requirements.

Conclusion: Safeguarding Stability While Supporting Growth

The **Economic Capital Framework** ensures that the RBI maintains a robust financial cushion while transferring reasonable surpluses to the government. This balanced approach strengthens **macroeconomic resilience**, supports **fiscal prudence**, and underpins sustainable **economic growth**.

By adhering to clear, transparent guidelines for risk provisioning and dividend transfers, the RBI contributes significantly to India's economic stability and development.

Net FDI Plummets by 96% in FY25 to Just $353 Million

Context: In a startling shift, **Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** into India **plummeted by over 96%** in **FY2024-25**, standing at a mere **$353 million**, according to data released by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**. This sharp fall comes after net FDI had already slipped to **$10.1 billion** in **2023-24**, down from **$44 billion** in **2020-21**—highlighting a consistent downward trend over the last few years.

Gross FDI Inflows Remain Strong:

Interestingly, **gross FDI inflows** remain robust. In FY25, India witnessed a **13.7% year-on-year (Y-o-Y) increase**, recording **$81 billion** in foreign investment inflows. These were **diversified across multiple sectors**, with over **60% of investments directed toward manufacturing, financial services, energy, and communication services**.

Top contributing nations included:

- **Singapore**
- **Mauritius**
- **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**
- **Netherlands**
- **United States (US)**

Together, these five countries accounted for **over 75% of total gross FDI**.

Why Is Net FDI Declining Despite Strong Inflows?

The sharp drop in **net FDI** is largely due to two major outflows:

1. **Repatriation by Foreign Firms:** Many global companies are **pulling profits or disinvesting assets**, sending capital back to their home countries.

2. **Surge in Outward FDI by Indian Firms:** Indian companies are increasingly **investing abroad**—a sign of growing **global ambitions**. In FY25, outward FDI soared to **$29.2 billion**, marking a **75% increase** from the previous year.

Understanding Net FDI:

Net FDI is the **balance of foreign investment**, calculated as: **Net FDI = Gross FDI Inflows – (Repatriation by Foreign Firms + Outward FDI by Indian Firms)**

Components Explained:

- **Gross FDI Inflows:** New investments by foreign companies (e.g., setting up factories, acquisitions, JV partnerships).

- **Repatriation/Disinvestment:** Profits or capital taken out of India by foreign firms.

- **Outward FDI:** Investments made by Indian businesses in overseas ventures (subsidiaries, M&As, joint ventures).

Why Net FDI Still Matters:

- A **positive net FDI** reflects **greater investor confidence**, suggesting more money is entering the economy than exiting.

- A **low or negative net FDI**, while not always alarming, can point to capital being redirected abroad or lower reinvestment by foreign firms.

Important to Note: Low net FDI doesn't always indicate a weak investment climate—it could also signify:

- **Economic diversification** by domestic firms

- **Higher corporate maturity** and **strategic international expansion**

Additional Insight: Global Context

- Countries like **China** and **Brazil** have also experienced similar dips in net FDI due to increased **globalization of domestic corporations**.

- In a **globalized economy**, outward investments often signify **confidence in international competitiveness**, not necessarily domestic weakness.

Conclusion: A Mixed Signal

India's **net FDI slump** in FY25 raises important questions about the investment environment. However, **rising outward FDI** and **strong gross inflows** suggest a **more complex economic narrative**—one where Indian firms are **asserting their global presence**, even as foreign investors remain engaged in key sectors.

The challenge ahead lies in converting gross inflows into long-term commitments and ensuring that India remains a **magnet for foreign capital** while **supporting the global rise of Indian enterprises.**

Bitcoin Soars Past $110K Amid Hype Over GENIUS Act: Crypto Gets a Regulatory Boost

Context: Bitcoin has crossed the $110,000 milestone for the first time in its history, fueled by **growing investor confidence** following progress on a landmark crypto regulation bill in the **U.S. Senate** — the **GENIUS Act** (*Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for US Stablecoins*).

This bipartisan legislation, once contested by several lawmakers, has now **garnered cross-party support**, sparking enthusiasm among crypto advocates and institutional investors. The bill is viewed as a major step toward formalizing **stablecoin regulation**, and its progress has helped reinforce **market optimism**.

However, the bill hasn't escaped controversy, especially due to **alleged conflicts of interest** tied to former President **Donald Trump** and **Melania Trump**, both of whom are **active participants in crypto ventures**, including **meme coin promotions**.

What Is the GENIUS Act? A Framework for Stablecoin Oversight

The **GENIUS Act** proposes a federal framework to regulate **stablecoins**, which are cryptocurrencies pegged to stable assets like the **U.S. dollar**, and are widely used for digital payments and trading.

This act aims to ensure **transparency**, **accountability**, and **financial integrity**, while also opening the doors for **tech giants** to issue their own **stablecoins** — a major policy shift in the digital finance landscape.

Key Provisions of the GENIUS Act:

- **Mandatory Compliance**: Issuers must follow **anti-money laundering (AML)** and **counter-terrorism** rules under existing financial laws.

- **100% Reserve Backing**: Stablecoins must be backed **1:1 by fiat currency or equivalent high-quality liquid assets**.

- **Separation of Reserves**: Issuers are required to keep **reserve funds distinct** from operational or corporate funds.

- **Transparency & Audit Mechanism**: Periodic **independent audits** and **public disclosure of reserves** will be mandatory.

These rules aim to reduce systemic risks and **legitimize the role of stablecoins** in the financial ecosystem.

Controversies and Criticisms Surrounding the Bill:

While the GENIUS Act has won praise for its effort to regulate a rapidly evolving sector, it has also drawn sharp criticism from economists, lawmakers, and consumer rights advocates.

1. **Insufficient Consumer Safeguards:** Experts argue the bill does **not ensure consumer protections** comparable to those offered by traditional financial systems like credit cards or banks. Concerns persist over **user recourse mechanisms** in cases of fraud or technical failures.

2. **Threat of Illicit Transactions:** Stablecoins currently account for **over 60% of illegal crypto-related activity**. Without more robust provisions, critics warn the GENIUS Act may unintentionally fuel **money laundering, tax evasion**, and **black-market trade**.

3. **Political Conflict of Interest:** Allegations have emerged about the **Trump family's crypto involvement**, including the **promotion of meme coins**, creating potential for **personal financial gain** from regulatory changes. Critics suggest this raises questions of **political ethics** and **favoritism**.

4. **Big Tech Entry and Market Risks:** The bill permits **Big Tech firms** to enter the stablecoin space, prompting fears of **financial monopolies**, **data misuse**, and **privacy erosion**. Analysts also warn that the bill contains **regulatory gaps**, potentially allowing large corporations to bypass essential financial checks.

Global Implications and Long-Term Outlook:

The GENIUS Act could mark a **turning point in U.S. digital finance policy**, potentially setting the tone for other nations grappling with how to manage **stablecoins** and **blockchain assets**. The regulatory clarity it offers could lead to:

- **Increased institutional investment** in crypto

- Greater **integration of digital assets** into the financial mainstream

- **Stricter compliance expectations** for global crypto firms

The bill also comes at a time when countries like **Japan**, **Switzerland**, and the **EU** are actively developing their own **centralized digital currency frameworks** and stablecoin rules, making the U.S. move even more consequential.

Conclusion: A Turning Point for Crypto Regulation

With the GENIUS Act advancing through Congress and **Bitcoin hitting all-time highs**, the U.S. appears to be entering a **new era of digital finance governance**. While the bill promises to **legitimize stablecoins** and boost investor confidence, it also raises **critical ethical, financial, and regulatory questions** that will shape the crypto landscape for years to come.

India Overtakes Japan to Become the World's 4th Largest Economy

Context: In a historic economic milestone, **India has surpassed Japan** to become the **world's fourth-largest economy** by **nominal GDP**, according to a recent announcement by **NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam**. India's **nominal GDP now stands at $4.19 trillion**, narrowly outpacing **Japan's $4.18 trillion**, as per the latest estimates.

With this achievement, India is firmly on track to **displace Germany and claim the third spot** by **2028**, backed by consistent economic growth and proactive reforms.

India's Economic Surge: Powered by Growth and Reform

- India's economic momentum is among the strongest globally. According to the **IMF's World Economic Outlook**, India is projected to grow at **6.2% in 2025** and **6.3% in 2026**, maintaining its position as the **fastest-growing major economy**.

- In just a decade, India has doubled its GDP from **$2.1 trillion in 2015** to over **$4.19 trillion in 2025**, marking an unprecedented rise in global financial stature.

Path to Becoming the Third-Largest Economy:

- The IMF estimates that India will likely **overtake Germany by 2028**, when India's GDP is projected to reach **$5.5 trillion**. Meanwhile, **Germany's economy** is expected to **stagnate**, with **0% growth in 2025** and only **0.9% in 2026**, largely due to **global trade tensions** and internal economic challenges.

Key Drivers of India's Economic Ascent:

1. **Expanding Domestic Consumption:** India's growth is significantly supported by **robust consumer demand**, particularly in **rural areas**. Rapid **urbanization**, coupled with rising incomes, is driving a **consumption-led boom**. India's **urban population** is projected to hit **600 million by 2030**, creating a vast consumer base.

2. **Demographic Advantage:** With a **median age of 29**, India enjoys a **demographic dividend**, offering a **young, productive workforce** that could fuel long-term growth.

3. **Infrastructure & Digital Evolution:** Massive public investment in infrastructure, including **transportation, logistics**, and **digital connectivity**, is transforming the economic landscape. Initiatives like **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, **Gati Shakti**, and **PM-WANI** have made India a **leader in digital governance** and public service delivery.

4. **Rise of Manufacturing & Services:** India's **manufacturing sector** has gained traction under schemes like **Make in India** and the **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI)** program. Simultaneously, the **IT and financial services sectors** continue to dominate, contributing heavily to GDP and exports.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
NEWS
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

5. **Global Strategic Shifts:** With the world embracing the **"China Plus One" strategy**, India is emerging as a **preferred alternative** for global manufacturing. Major multinational corporations, such as **Apple**, are now **setting up production units in India**, accelerating **FDI inflows** and boosting domestic capacity.

6. **Reforms and Policy Initiatives:** Reforms such as the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**, **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)**, and **corporate tax reductions** have significantly enhanced **ease of doing business**.

   Programs like **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)**, and **PM Gati Shakti** have spurred **capital formation** and improved productivity.

Additional Insight: Real GDP vs Nominal GDP:

- **Nominal GDP** reflects the **current market value** of all goods and services without adjusting for inflation.

- **Real GDP**, on the other hand, adjusts for inflation, offering a clearer picture of **actual growth in production**.

India's current ranking is based on nominal GDP, which is useful for comparing global economic influence.

Challenges on the Road Ahead:

1. **Geopolitical Tensions:** Global conflicts, trade disruptions, and supply chain bottlenecks pose risks to India's open and export-oriented economy.

2. **Inflation Concerns:** While headline inflation has declined, **services inflation remains stubborn**, and **volatile commodity prices**—especially food and fuel—continue to pressure household budgets.

3. **Employment and Skill Gaps:** The rise of **automation, AI, and digital technologies** demands **continuous upskilling** of India's workforce to stay relevant in a changing labor market.

4. **Export and Trade Deficit Pressures:** India's **current account deficit** has narrowed to **1% of GDP**, but **weak global demand** has impacted export growth. There's an urgent need to **diversify trade partnerships**.

5. **Infrastructure Investment Needs:** Though India's **Capex-to-GDP ratio has risen to 3.3%**, sustained investment is essential to build **modern logistics**, **power grids**, and **rural connectivity**.

Way Forward: Strategies for Sustained Growth:

- **Expand Global Trade Footprints**: Strengthen trade relationships with Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America to reduce dependency on traditional markets.

- **Boost Domestic Manufacturing**: Scale initiatives like **Make in India** to reduce import dependency and build resilient supply chains.

- **Embrace Green and Digital Transformation**: Invest in **clean energy**, **digital tools**, and **AI-led innovation** to foster inclusive and sustainable development.

- **Foster Inclusive Growth**: Create policies that ensure **financial inclusion**, **rural development**, and **gender equity** to make growth more broad-based.

Conclusion: India's Moment on the Global Stage

India's rise to become the **fourth-largest global economy** marks a **pivotal moment** in its journey toward economic superpower status. With strategic reforms, youthful energy, and digital leadership, the nation is well-positioned to shape the future of the global economy.

Microfinance Loan Defaults Soar by 163% in FY2025: Sector Faces Alarming Stress

Context: India's **microfinance sector** has been hit hard in FY2025, with **loan delinquencies** skyrocketing by **163%** to reach **43,075 crore**, signaling deep-rooted stress in a segment that supports millions of low-income borrowers. This alarming trend reflects growing financial vulnerabilities among India's bottom-of-the-pyramid borrowers and challenges in credit discipline.

What Is Microfinance?

Microfinance provides **financial services**—including **microloans**, **savings**, **insurance**, and **remittances**—to **low-income households** traditionally excluded from formal banking. In India, these services are primarily offered by **NBFC-MFIs**, **Small Finance Banks (SFBs)**, and **mainstream banks**.

As per the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, a **microfinance loan** is a **collateral-free** loan extended to a household with an **annual income of up to 3,00,000**.

Current Trends Reshaping the Microfinance Landscape:

- The **gross loan portfolio** of the microfinance industry contracted by **13.9%**, falling from **4.42 lakh crore** in March 2024 to **3.81 lakh crore** in March 2025.

- A notable shift from **small-ticket to large-ticket loans** was observed. Loans above **1 lakh** increased by **38.5%**, while those under **30,000** declined by **35.9%**.

- The number of **active microfinance loans** dropped from **16.1 crore to 14 crore**, indicating both a decline in borrower base and possible lender caution.

- The proportion of **borrowers linked to five or more lenders** has nearly halved—from **9.7% to 4.9%**, hinting at a tightening of credit norms.

Why Are Loan Defaults Rising?

The sharp increase in defaults is a result of **multiple converging factors**:

- **Overleveraging**: Many borrowers have taken loans from **multiple institutions**, leading to unsustainable **debt burdens**, especially in rural areas.

- **Weak Credit Appraisal Systems**: Under pressure to meet targets, some **smaller MFIs** and banks have **compromised on due diligence**.

- **Economic Instability**: Post-pandemic income disruption, rising **inflation**, and **rural distress** have dented borrowers' ability to repay.

- **Collection Inefficiencies**: Field operations and **recovery mechanisms** were weakened post-COVID, with **digital-only engagement** proving inadequate.

- **Improper Loan Utilisation**: A significant portion of loans is being diverted towards **consumption** or **social expenses** such as weddings and festivals, instead of **income-generating activities**.

Government Initiatives to Support Microfinance:

India has launched several initiatives to bolster the microfinance ecosystem:

- **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)**: Initiated in **2015**, it offers loans of up to **10 lakh** to non-corporate small businesses, without collateral, via MFIs and banks, backed by **MUDRA Ltd**.

- **Udyam Assist Platform (UAP)**: Helps **informal micro-entrepreneurs** register as MSMEs and access benefits like **priority sector lending**, **subsidies**, and **credit guarantees**.

- **Credit Information Mandate**: RBI has made it mandatory for lenders to report borrower data to **credit bureaus** like **CIBIL** and **CRIF High Mark**, facilitating informed credit decisions.

- **2022 RBI Regulatory Framework**: Aims to ensure **uniform regulations** across all types of lenders, enhancing **borrower protection** and promoting **responsible lending practices**.

The Road Ahead: Strengthening India's Microfinance Backbone

To safeguard the future of the microfinance sector, a multi-pronged approach is essential:

- **Enhanced Credit Assessment**: Adoption of robust tools and algorithms to identify creditworthy borrowers and reduce **over-indebtedness**.

- **Empowering Credit Bureaus**: Wider integration and real-time data usage from agencies like **CRIF High Mark** to **flag early warning signs**.

- **Stronger Regulatory Oversight**: **RBI** and state governments must **tighten monitoring** and ensure **ethical collection practices**.

- **Financial Literacy and Inclusion**: A push toward **educating borrowers** about their **rights**, **obligations**, and **financial planning** can reduce misuse of loans.

- **Support for Livelihood-Linked Lending**: Encouraging loans for **productive assets**—like dairy, tailoring, or agri-processing—can improve repayment capacity.

Did You Know?

- Globally, **Bangladesh's Grameen Bank**, founded by **Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus**, pioneered microfinance. Its model of **group lending** with social collateral inspired India's early MFIs.

- India's microfinance penetration is highest in states like **Bihar**, **West Bengal**, and **Tamil Nadu**, which also show high **default risks**.

Conclusion:

The rise in delinquencies is a wake-up call for the entire ecosystem—from policymakers to lenders. The solution lies not just in tighter regulation but in **empowering borrowers**, **ensuring responsible lending**, and **building resilient rural economies**. As microfinance serves the country's most vulnerable, preserving its integrity is critical for **inclusive growth**.

CPM Named in Money Laundering Case by ED: A New Twist in Karuvannur Bank Scam

Context: In a rare and unprecedented move, the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** has named the **Communist Party of India (Marxist)** or **CPM** as an **accused** in the **Karuvannur Cooperative Bank money laundering case**. This case marks the first time that a **registered political party** has been formally implicated under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**.

How the CPM Became an Accused:

- The CPM, registered under **Section 29A** of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, qualifies as an "**association of individuals**." Under **Section 70 of the PMLA**, this classification places it within the **definition of a 'company'**, making it liable for offenses committed by its members or functionaries.

Section 70 of the PMLA states that:

"If a company is involved in any offense under this Act, every person who was in charge of, and responsible for the conduct of the business of the company, shall be deemed guilty unless they prove otherwise."

By this logic, the ED argues that the **party as an entity** bears **institutional responsibility** in the alleged laundering of public funds through the cooperative bank.

Understanding Money Laundering:

Money laundering is the **illegal process** by which funds generated through **criminal activities**—such as corruption, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, or terrorist financing—are disguised as legitimate income. The aim is to **"clean" the money**, removing any trace of its illegal origin.

It typically involves three stages:

1. **Placement** – Injecting illicit funds into the financial system.
2. **Layering** – Concealing the origin of the funds through complex transactions.
3. **Integration** – Reintroducing the 'cleaned' money into the economy.

Wider Implications of Money Laundering:

The impact of money laundering extends beyond financial fraud. It has **broad socio-economic consequences**, such as:

- **Loss of Tax Revenue**: Undisclosed earnings result in **revenue shortfalls** for governments.
- **Distorted Economies**: Illicit funds drive **asset bubbles** in real estate and luxury sectors.
- **Investment Barriers**: Lack of financial transparency deters **foreign and domestic investors**.
- **Fueling Crime**: It acts as the **lifeline for organized crime**, terrorism, and extremist groups.
- **Global Fallout**: Countries with weak anti-laundering regimes risk **blacklisting** by international watchdogs like the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**.

India's Fight Against Financial Crime:

India has ramped up efforts to combat financial misconduct through a **multi-layered approach**:

- **JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile)**: Strengthens **financial inclusion and traceability**.

- **GST E-Invoicing**: Enhances transparency in **business transactions**.

- **Cyber Crime Coordination Centres**: Target digital fraud and laundering through **online platforms**.

- **Central KYC Registry**: Ensures standardized and **centralized customer verification**.

- **Special Task Forces**: Focus on **black money, narcotics, counterfeit currency**, and corruption.

- **Key Agencies**:

   o **Enforcement Directorate (ED)**: Investigates **economic crimes** and **foreign exchange violations**.

   o **Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND)**: Monitors **suspicious transaction reports (STRs)** and acts as a **central node for anti-laundering efforts**.

The Political Angle: Need for Greater Oversight:

The ED's move has reignited the debate on the **financial transparency of political parties**, which often remain outside the scrutiny applicable to corporate or individual entities.

Key Suggestions for Reform:

- **Legislate Financial Accountability**: Introduce **clear laws** to govern political party finances without undermining their democratic roles.

- **Strengthen Election Commission Oversight**: Empower the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to **audit, inspect, and enforce compliance** in party finances.

- **Ensure Fair Investigations**: Bodies like the ED must operate with **full independence, transparency**, and **impartiality**, to avoid political misuse or bias.

Conclusion: A Landmark Case in Political Accountability

The naming of the **CPM in a money laundering case** by the ED marks a **turning point** in the scrutiny of **political finance in India**. Whether it leads to convictions or not, it underlines a pressing need to **clean up the opaque world of political funding** and **bring accountability across all institutions**, irrespective of their ideological or organizational standing.

Boosting Organic Agriculture in India: A New Alliance to Empower Farmers

Context: In a significant step to foster sustainable agriculture, **Indian Overseas Bank (IOB)** has partnered with **Amul** and **Rich Plus** by signing a **tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** aimed at promoting **organic farming** across India. This collaboration seeks to bridge the gap between **organic farmers and market accessibility**, while also ensuring financial and technical support.

Major Highlights of the Initiative:

1. **Launch of the Organic Farming Card:** IOB, in collaboration with Amul, has introduced a **co-branded Organic Farming Card** exclusively for farmers maintaining organic practices. This card will:

   - Provide access to **discounted organic inputs**.

   - Be accepted at **Amul's certified retail outlets**.

   - Help streamline procurement of high-quality organic supplies.

2. **Introduction of 'Harit Kranti' Credit Scheme:** To ensure that **financial barriers** do not hinder organic agriculture, IOB has launched the **'Harit Kranti' credit scheme**, specially designed to:

   - Cater to the **unique financial needs** of organic farmers.

   - Offer **easy loan access** for buying certified inputs and infrastructure.

   - Support **transition from conventional to organic farming**.

3. **Rich Plus: Delivering Technical Expertise: Rich Plus** will play a crucial role by offering:

   - **On-field training** for organic farming practices.

   - **Workshops and demonstrations** to educate farmers.

   - Expert support for **certification processes** and compliance.

Understanding Organic Farming: **Organic farming** is a **sustainable agricultural approach** that eliminates the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms. Instead, it emphasizes:

   - **Natural inputs** like compost, green manure, biofertilizers.

   - **Soil health and biodiversity conservation**.

   - **Eco-friendly pest and weed control measures**.

It aligns with the global push toward **climate-resilient** and **health-conscious agriculture**.

Organic Farming in India: A Growing Movement

   - India holds the **4th position globally** in terms of certified organic area, according to **IFOAM Statistics 2022**.

   - **Madhya Pradesh** leads in organic cultivation, followed by **Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Karnataka**.

   - **Sikkim** became India's **first fully organic state**, converting 75,000 hectares of land.

   - India ranks **first globally** in the **number of organic farmers**.

   - In 2022–23, **India exported organic products worth $708 million**, while the **global organic market stands at $138 billion**, indicating massive **untapped export potential**.

Why Organic Farming Matters: Key Benefits

1. **Safer and Healthier Food:** Organic produce is **free from harmful chemicals** and often contains **higher nutritional value**, including antioxidants and micronutrients.
2. **Enhanced Soil Fertility:** By relying on **organic manure, compost, and crop rotation**, this method improves **soil structure, microbial activity**, and **nutrient cycling**.
3. **Economic Gains for Farmers:** Organic farming leads to:

   - **Lower long-term input costs**.

   - **Premium prices** in both domestic and international markets.

   - **Niche marketing opportunities**.

4. **Environmental and Climate Benefits:** Practices like **carbon sequestration**, **minimal soil disturbance**, and **composting** help in **reducing greenhouse gas emissions** and mitigating **climate change**.

5. **Biodiversity Support:** It creates habitats for **pollinators, beneficial insects, and wildlife**, enhancing overall **ecosystem stability**.

Certification Systems for Organic Farming in India:

1. **National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP):**

   - Operated by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

   - Focuses on **third-party certification** for **export markets**.

   - Ensures compliance from production to **processing and marketing**.

2. **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India):**

   - Managed by the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**.

   - A **community-based certification approach**, involving mutual verification by farmers.

   - Promotes **local accountability and trust**.

3. **Food Safety Norms and Jaivik Bharat Logo:** It is **mandatory** for all organic products sold in the domestic market to be **certified under NPOP or PGS-India**, and labeled with the **Jaivik Bharat logo**, ensuring authenticity and consumer trust.

Role of APEDA in Organic Agriculture:

The **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)**:

   - Functions under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

   - Promotes the **export of organic and processed food products**.

   - Serves as the **National Accreditation Board Secretariat** for certifying bodies under NPOP.

   - Headquarters: **New Delhi**.

Government Initiatives Supporting Organic Farming:

1. **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY):**

   - Offers **end-to-end support** to organic farmers.

   - Covers **training, certification, marketing**, and **post-harvest handling**.

2. **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER):**

   - Focused on organic farming in **Northeast India**.

   - Supports **organic clusters**, **value chains**, and **infrastructure development**.

3. **Jaivik Kheti Portal:** A **digital marketplace and knowledge hub** for:

   - **Selling organic produce**.

   - **Connecting farmers, buyers, and suppliers**.

   - Promoting **awareness and benefits** of organic farming.

Way Forward: Building a Resilient Organic Ecosystem:

1. **Strengthen Market Linkages:** Leverage platforms like **Amul** and **Jaivik Kheti** to ensure wider **procurement and branding** of organic produce.

2. **Promote Awareness and Training:** Expand outreach and technical training to help farmers understand **certification requirements**, market trends, and **sustainable practices**.

3. **Improve Certification Infrastructure:** Simplify certification processes and increase the availability of **local certifying agencies**, especially in remote areas.

**Conclusion: A Sustainable Leap Toward Future Farming**

The collaboration between IOB, Amul, and Rich Plus is a **significant milestone** in promoting **green agriculture**. As consumer demand for **chemical-free, healthy food** rises, empowering farmers with **financial tools, market access**, and **technical knowledge** is key to unlocking India's full potential in the **organic revolution**.

Terror Financing: A Global Security Threat

Context: India has intensified its crackdown on **terror financing**, urging global financial institutions such as the **IMF**, **World Bank**, and **ADB** to ensure that **developmental aid is not misused**—particularly in countries like **Pakistan**.

India also advocates for **Pakistan's re-listing on the FATF Grey List**, citing the need for **strict monitoring** of its financial ecosystem.
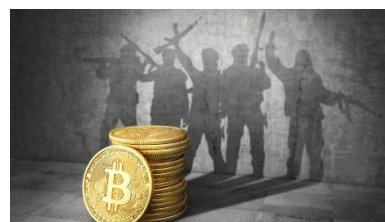
What is Terror Financing?

Terror financing refers to the **provision of funds**—from either **legitimate** or **illegitimate sources**—to support **terrorist individuals or organizations**. These funds are used to:

- Recruit operatives
- Procure weapons
- Plan and execute terror attacks
- Sustain organizational infrastructure

Major Sources of Terror Financing:

Source	Description
Hawala Transactions	Informal money transfer systems that evade formal banking channels, making funds hard to trace.
Fake Currency	Counterfeit notes circulated to destabilize economies and fund illegal activities.
Drug Trafficking	Illicit narcotics trade is a major source of income for terror outfits.
Extortion & Kidnappings	Hostage-taking and extortion from businesses/individuals for ransom.
Misused NGOs/Charities	Front organizations collect donations under false pretenses and redirect them to terror groups.

Challenges in Combating Terror Financing:

1. **Complex Financial Webs**: Use of shell companies, front businesses, and underground networks.
2. **Weak Global Coordination**: Poor intelligence sharing and uneven enforcement.
3. **Regulatory Gaps**: Disparity in laws and enforcement levels across jurisdictions.
4. **Technology Misuse**: Cryptocurrencies and encrypted payment platforms offer **anonymity**, making tracing difficult.

India's Multi-Pronged Response:

Legislative Framework:

- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**:
  - Allows designation of individuals/entities as **terrorists**.
  - Enables seizure of **assets and bank accounts**.
- **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**:

    o Targets financial crimes and enables **confiscation of laundered property**.

Institutional Mechanisms:

- **Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU-IND)**: Tracks suspicious transactions and shares intelligence with agencies.

- **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**: Specializes in **counter-terrorism** investigations and financial linkages.

International Collaboration:

- Participation in the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**

- Hosting and joining platforms like **No Money for Terror (NMFT)** to build global consensus and enforcement mechanisms.

Technology Integration:

- **NATGRID (National Intelligence Grid)**: Integrates data from multiple sources for **real-time intelligence sharing**.

Data Analytics & AI tools to trace unusual transaction patterns and financial anomalies.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen **cross-border coordination** to shut down terror funding routes.

- Enhance **financial literacy and awareness** among law enforcement and banking institutions.

- Develop **robust regulation of cryptocurrencies and digital payment platforms**.

- Promote **public-private partnerships** for proactive threat identification and counteraction.

SCALP Missile: Precision Firepower from the Skies

Context: In a strategic show of strength during **Operation Sindoor**, **SCALP missiles** were reportedly deployed by **Indian Rafale fighter jets** to deliver precision strikes on **terror infrastructure** located deep within **Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**. This marks a significant demonstration of India's long-range strike capability and reinforces its ability to conduct high-value operations with surgical accuracy.
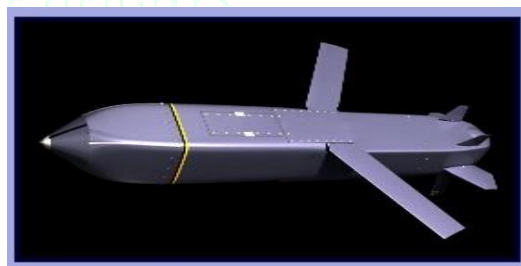
What is the SCALP Missile?

Known internationally as **Storm Shadow**, the **SCALP missile** is a **long-range, air-launched cruise missile** specifically designed for **deep strike missions**. It is **conventionally armed** and targets **fixed or fortified installations**, such as command centers, bunkers, and strategic infrastructure.

The acronym **SCALP** stands for *Système de Croisière Autonome à Longue Portée*, or **Autonomous Long-Range Cruise System**, emphasizing its **autonomous targeting capability and extended operational reach**.

Origin and Global Use:

- **Jointly developed by France and the United Kingdom**, SCALP is a product of European defense collaboration under **MBDA Systems**.

- It is operational in the air forces of **India, UK, France, Egypt, Italy, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Qatar**, and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.

- **India acquired SCALP as part of the Rafale fighter jet deal**, giving the Indian Air Force an advanced precision-strike capability over hostile territory.

Key Features of the SCALP Missile:

- **Range**: Capable of striking targets at a range of **approximately 500 km**, allowing **deep penetration into enemy territory** without endangering aircraft.

- **Warhead**: Carries a **450 kg BROACH warhead** (Bomb Royal Ordnance Augmented Charge), designed to **pierce hardened shelters and underground bunkers**.

- **Size & Weight**: The missile is **around 5 meters in length**, has a **3-meter wingspan**, and **weighs roughly 1,300 kg**.

- **Stealth & Navigation**: Flies at **low altitudes** using **terrain-following radar**, INS/GPS navigation, and **infrared terminal guidance**.

- **Precision Targeting**: In the terminal phase, the missile's **infrared seeker compares real-time images to pre-programmed target visuals**, ensuring **pinpoint accuracy with minimal collateral damage**.

- **Weather Independence**: Its sophisticated design enables **operation in all weather conditions, day or night**.

Launch Platforms and Indian Integration:

The SCALP missile has been **custom-integrated into India's Rafale fleet**, significantly expanding the Indian Air Force's strike envelope. It offers **strategic deterrence** and the ability to **neutralize high-value assets across difficult terrain**, including mountainous regions and fortified zones.

Did You Know?

- The SCALP has been **combat-tested in Iraq, Syria, and Libya**, where it demonstrated **high precision and reliability**.

- The missile is part of a new generation of stand-off weapons, allowing **jets to launch from a safe distance, outside enemy air defense range**.

- Its **stealthy profile and low radar cross-section** make it **hard to detect and intercept**, even in heavily contested airspace.

Conclusion: A Game-Changer in Modern Warfare

The **SCALP missile** represents a leap forward in **long-range precision warfare**, enhancing India's ability to **pre-empt or respond to cross-border threats with surgical precision**. Its integration into the **Rafale platform** reflects India's commitment to building a **technologically superior, responsive, and versatile air strike capability** for 21st-century warfare.

India's Multilayered Air Defence Shield: IACCS, Akashteer, and the Future of National Security

Context: In a recent briefing on **Operation Sindoor**, the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** showcased its cutting-edge **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)**—a robust digital network that offers **real-time monitoring** of India's airspace. The system coordinates inputs from radar systems, fighter jets, and missile units to **neutralise aerial threats** like drones, enemy aircraft, and ballistic missiles.

What is the IACCS?

A Game-Changer in Aerial Command and Control:

The **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)** is a state-of-the-art command and control infrastructure developed by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)** for the IAF. It forms the **nerve centre** of India's air defence architecture by integrating:

- **Ground and airborne radars**
- **Civilian air traffic radar systems**
- **Communication networks**
- **Command and control centres**

Key Features of IACCS:

- **Real-time situational awareness** for operational commanders
- Centralised command with **decentralised execution** for faster response
- **Overlapping radar and communication coverage** for minimal blind spots
- Optimised **deployment of air defence assets** in high-threat zones

Akashteer: Army's Eye on the Battlefield Skies

A Complementary System for Ground-Based Defence:

The **Akashteer system**, developed by **BEL** for the **Indian Army**, is designed to monitor and defend **low-altitude airspace** over battlefields. It serves as the Army's dedicated air defence command network.

Highlights of Akashteer:

- **Real-time battlefield airspace surveillance**
- **Integration of multiple weapon systems** like guns and missiles
- Ongoing efforts to **synchronize Akashteer with IAF's IACCS** for seamless joint operations

India's Multilayered Air Defence Architecture:

India employs a **comprehensive, multi-tiered air defence strategy**, aimed at detecting and intercepting threats at various stages of incursion—ranging from drones to cruise missiles.

Key Components of the Air Defence Shield:

- **Point Defence**: Small arms, low-level anti-aircraft guns, and MANPADS
- **Aerial Defence**: Fighter jets, short and long-range surface-to-air missiles
- **Surveillance Grid**: Ground radars, **AWACS** (Airborne Warning and Control System), and **AEW&C** (Airborne Early Warning & Control), all networked via IACCS

The Four Defence Layers Explained:

1. **Layer 1**: Counter-drone systems and **Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS)**
2. **Layer 2**: **Short-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (SR-SAM)** and close-in weapon systems
3. **Layer 3**: **Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MR-SAM)** for broader coverage
4. **Layer 4**: **Long-Range SAMs (LR-SAM)** capable of intercepting high-altitude threats

The Road Ahead: Future of IACCS and Air Defence

Strengthening the National Shield:

- The **IAF is rapidly expanding the IACCS network** by deploying more **radars** and **Surface-to-Air Guided Weapon (SAGW)** systems, especially around sensitive military zones.

Towards Unified Defence Operations:

- With warfare becoming increasingly complex, the IACCS will be pivotal in enabling **tri-service coordination**—uniting the **Army, Navy, and Air Force** under a **shared command network** for real-time responses.

Infusion of Next-Gen Technology:

- Future upgrades of IACCS will harness **artificial intelligence (AI)** and **data analytics** to enhance threat prediction, asset deployment, and **situational awareness**, ensuring India stays ahead in **aerospace warfare technology**.

Conclusion: A Fortress in the Sky

India's **layered air defence ecosystem**, anchored by **IACCS and Akashteer**, offers a formidable shield against diverse aerial threats. With ongoing integration, innovation, and modernization, India is laying the foundation for a **future-ready air defence grid**—one that is smart, responsive, and impenetrable.

Gallantry Awards of India: Honouring Courage, Sacrifice, and Selfless Duty

Context: President Droupadi Murmu recently conferred the prestigious **Kirti Chakras** and **Shaurya Chakras** upon brave personnel from the **Armed Forces**, **Central Armed Police Forces**, and **State/Union Territory Police**. The honours were bestowed during **Phase-I of the Defence Investiture Ceremony** held at the **Rashtrapati Bhavan**, recognising **extraordinary acts of bravery** in the line of duty.

About Gallantry Awards:

The **Ministry of Defence**, in coordination with the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs**, invites recommendations **twice a year** for conferring gallantry awards. These accolades are awarded to individuals for showing **exceptional bravery**, **unwavering courage**, and **complete disregard for personal safety**, often in perilous circumstances such as:

- **Counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations** in **Jammu & Kashmir** and the **North-East**

- **Anti-piracy operations at sea**

- **Firefighting** and **rescue missions** under extreme conditions

Wartime Gallantry Awards:

Param Vir Chakra (PVC) – *India's Highest Military Honour*

- **Instituted:** 26 January 1950

- **Awarded For:** Supreme acts of **valour in the face of the enemy**, on land, sea, or air

- **Eligibility:** All ranks of the Armed Forces, including **Reserve Forces, Nursing Services**, and **civilians under military command**

- **Allowance:** 3,000 per month, plus 3,000 per bar for additional acts of gallantry
- **Interesting Fact:** Only **21 individuals** have been awarded the PVC to date, many **posthumously**.

Maha Vir Chakra (MVC) – *Second-Highest Wartime Honour*

- **Instituted:** 26 January 1950
- **Awarded For:** Acts of **conspicuous bravery** in the presence of the enemy
- **Allowance:** 2,400 per month
- **Note:** 'Maha Vir' translates to '**Great Warrior**'

Vir Chakra – *Third in Wartime Gallantry Order*

- **Established:** 26 January 1950 (effective from **15 August 1947**)
- **Awarded For:** Gallantry in the presence of the enemy
- **Eligibility:** All Armed Forces personnel including **Reserves**
- **Allowance:** 1,700 per month

Peacetime Gallantry Awards:

Ashoka Chakra – *India's Highest Peacetime Gallantry Award*

- **Instituted:** 1952, renamed in **1967**
- **Awarded For:** "**Most conspicuous bravery** or **self-sacrifice** away from the battlefield"
- **Peacetime equivalent of:** Param Vir Chakra
- **Eligibility: Military**, **police**, **paramilitary forces**, **civilians**, and **nursing personnel**
- **Allowance:** 2,800 per month
- **Extra Insight:** Ashoka Chakra recipients are often honoured during **Republic Day** celebrations.

Kirti Chakra – *Second Highest Peacetime Award*

- **Instituted:** 1952 as **Ashoka Chakra Class-II**, renamed in 1967
- **Awarded For:** Valour and self-sacrifice away from combat zones
- **Peacetime equivalent of:** Maha Vir Chakra
- **Eligibility:** Both **civilians and military personnel**, including **posthumous recipients**
- **Allowance:** 2,100 per month

Shaurya Chakra – *Third in Peacetime Gallantry*

- **Established:** 4 January 1952 as Ashoka Chakra Class-III, renamed in 1967
- **Awarded For:** Courageous action not involving enemy combat
- **Peacetime equivalent of:** Vir Chakra
- **Eligibility:** All Armed Forces, including **Territorial Army**, **Reserve Forces**, and legally constituted forces

- **Allowance:** 1,500 per month

Additional Facts You Should Know:

- Gallantry awards can be conferred **posthumously**, and are often awarded during **Independence Day** and **Republic Day**.

- **Bars** can be awarded for **multiple acts of bravery**, each carrying the same monetary reward.

- These decorations are not just **symbols of honour**, but a **testament to the highest standards of duty and sacrifice** expected from those who wear the uniform.

- Some recipients have also gone on to serve the country in **public service**, **sports**, and **humanitarian efforts**.

Conclusion: Gallantry awards are a **tribute to the courage and dedication** of India's brave hearts. From the icy heights of the Himalayas to the high seas and the dense jungles of the Northeast, our heroes continue to inspire us with their **unflinching bravery**. These awards are more than medals—they are stories of **valor, sacrifice, and an unbreakable spirit** that defines the soul of the nation.

Theatre Commands: Ushering a New Era in India's Defence Transformation

Context: India is on the cusp of a historic military overhaul as the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** has reiterated the urgent need for establishing **Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs)**. This transformative initiative aims to reshape the country's defence framework for better **jointness**, **efficiency**, and **operational agility**.
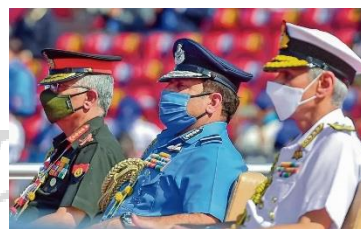
What are Integrated Theatre Commands?

Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs) are unified command structures where units of the **Army, Navy, and Air Force** are brought together under a single commander to operate as a cohesive force. This concept, widely adopted by global military powers, enhances **joint operations**, ensures **resource optimization**, and enables **rapid response** to threats across multiple domains.

In the Indian context, ITCs are being designed to:

- Strengthen **border security** with **China and Pakistan**

- Bolster **maritime dominance** in the **Indo-Pacific**

- Streamline command structures and eliminate duplication

India's Current Military Command Setup:

Currently, India operates through **17 single-service commands**, each with its own command structure:

- **Indian Army**: 7 commands

- **Indian Air Force**: 7 commands

- **Indian Navy**: 3 commands

While effective individually, this arrangement often leads to **overlapping logistics**, **coordination delays**, and **fragmented operations**. Each command is led by a **four-star officer**, leading to turf issues and inefficiencies in integrated warfare scenarios.

A Shift Toward Integration: Theatre Commands in the Pipeline

The new model envisions **consolidating 17 commands into a smaller number of integrated commands**, each covering a specific theatre of operations. The proposed structures include:

- **Northern Theatre Command (Lucknow)**
  - o Focus: **China border** (Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh)
- **Western Theatre Command (Jaipur)**
  - o Focus: **Pakistan front** (J&K, Punjab, Rajasthan)
- **Maritime Theatre Command (Thiruvananthapuram)**
  - o Focus: **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** and **Andaman Sea**

Existing Tri-Service Commands:

India already has two operational tri-service commands:

- **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**: Manages India's **nuclear arsenal**
- **Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)**: Ensures security across the **Bay of Bengal** and **Southeast Asia**

Additionally, in **2024**, India inaugurated its **first tri-service logistics base in Mumbai**, a milestone in joint infrastructure development.

Why India Needs Theatre Commands:

1. **Enhanced Combat Efficiency**: A **single commander** across services allows faster decisions, unified strategies, and better battlefield coordination.
2. **Resource Optimization**: Shared infrastructure and logistics prevent **duplication of assets** and reduce costs.
3. **Seamless Interoperability**: ITCs promote **joint planning**, **communication**, and **execution**, which are crucial in modern multi-domain warfare.
4. **Preparedness for Hybrid Threats**: Future wars will involve **cyber, space, AI-based warfare**, and **electronic operations**, requiring integrated responses.
5. **Post-Kargil Imperative**: The **Kargil Review Committee** highlighted lack of inter-service coordination as a critical failure.

Challenges on the Road to Reform:

Despite its potential, several obstacles lie in the path of ITC implementation:

- **Inter-Service Differences**: Aligning the doctrines of the **Army**, **Navy**, and especially the **Indian Air Force**, which operates in a **centralized domain**, remains complex.
- **Command Hierarchy Issues**: Theatre commanders being of **equal rank** to service chiefs could create **authority overlaps** and disrupt the chain of command.
- **Limited Resources**: With **scarce air assets**, assigning resources across multiple theatres may strain capabilities.
- **Infrastructure Gaps**: Construction and readiness of new **theatre headquarters** is still underway.
- **Policy Delays**: Government approval is still pending; implementation has been slowed by the need for further **deliberations**, as highlighted by the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence**.

Global Experience: Lessons from Other Nations:

- **United States**: Operates under **Unified Combatant Commands** that span the globe — e.g., **INDOPACOM**, **CENTCOM**, and **EUCOM** — integrating all service branches including the **Space Force**.

- **China**: Established **five theatre commands** in 2016, such as the **Western Theatre Command** focused on India, demonstrating a swift, decisive military reform model.

- **Russia**: Uses **four military districts** functioning as theatre commands, integrating land, air, and naval forces.

- **United Kingdom**: Operates a **Joint Forces Command** managing cyber, logistics, and intelligence.

- **France**: Integrates **special forces** under **Commandement des Opérations Spéciales** for swift overseas operations.

Looking Ahead: The Road to Strategic Transformation

The establishment of **Integrated Theatre Commands** is not just a bureaucratic or structural reform — it represents a **fundamental shift in India's military doctrine**. As warfare evolves into **multi-domain**, **tech-driven**, and **network-centric** combat, India must adapt with **visionary reforms** that promote **jointness**, **agility**, and **strategic coherence**.

Vizhinjam International Seaport: India's Gateway to Global Maritime Power

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate the **Vizhinjam International Seaport**, placing **Kerala** firmly on the **global maritime map**. This event marks a significant leap in India's port infrastructure and trade capabilities.

Location & Overview:

Located in **Vizhinjam**, a serene coastal town near **Thiruvananthapuram**, Kerala, this port is set to be a **game-changer** in India's maritime sector.

- **India's First**: Dedicated **transshipment port**
- **Semi-Automated Operations**: The first of its kind in the country
- **Project Cost**: ₹8,900 crore
- **PPP Model**: Operated by **Adani Group**, with the **Kerala Government** holding a **majority stake**

Cutting-Edge Infrastructure & Technology:

- **Deepest Breakwater in India**: Nearly **3 km long**, offering unmatched protection
- **Natural Draft of 20 Metres**: Ideal for **ultra-large container vessels (ULCVs)**
- **Minimal Littoral Drift**: Reduces **dredging** and **maintenance costs**
- **AI-Powered Vessel Traffic Management System (VTMS)**: India's first **indigenously developed system**, in collaboration with **IIT Madras**
- **Automation at Its Best**:
  - **Remotely operated ship-to-shore cranes**
  - **Fully automated yard cranes**
  - Ensures **faster, safer, and cost-efficient** cargo handling

Strategic Importance:

- **Location Advantage**: Just **10 nautical miles** from the **busiest international East-West shipping route**
- **Transshipment Revolution**: Currently, **75% of India's transshipment** is handled by foreign ports like **Colombo, Singapore, and Dubai**, leading to **foreign exchange outflows**
  - **Vizhinjam** aims to **reclaim this traffic**, retaining economic value within the country
- **Global Connectivity**: Now part of direct shipping routes to **Shanghai**, **Singapore**, **Busan**, and other major ports

Future Expansion & Multi-Modal Connectivity:

Vizhinjam is envisioned as more than a port—it's set to become a **multi-modal logistics hub**:

- **Direct highway access** via **NH-66**
- **Kerala's first cloverleaf interchange**
- **Upcoming rail link** to integrate with the **national railway network**
- Plans for **free trade warehousing zones**, **cold chains**, and **inland container depots** to boost regional trade

Extra Insights & Global Comparison:

- **Transshipment Defined**: It refers to transferring cargo from one ship to another—crucial for countries with global trade ambitions.

- **Why This Matters**: Ports like **Singapore** and **Dubai** grew into financial powerhouses by dominating transshipment. **Vizhinjam** aims to replicate this model in India.

- **Environmental Edge**: The port's naturally deep waters reduce ecological disruption and save on costly dredging operations.

Key Takeaways:

- **First-of-its-kind** project in India with **world-class features**

- Will enhance **India's competitiveness** in global maritime trade

- A **transformational asset** for Kerala's economy and employment

- Supports **Make in India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** by boosting local infrastructure

Exploring the Sun's Secrets: Breakthrough in Near-Surface Shear Layer (NSSL) Dynamics

Context: An **international team of solar physicists**, including experts from the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)**, has successfully mapped the **plasma currents** within the **Sun's Near-Surface Shear Layer (NSSL)**. This breakthrough reveals flow patterns **tied closely to the Sun's 11-year sunspot cycle**, offering new insights into solar dynamics and magnetic activity.
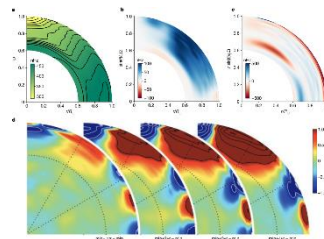
What is the Near-Surface Shear Layer (NSSL)?

- The **NSSL** is a **highly dynamic zone** located **just beneath the Sun's visible surface**, extending to a depth of approximately **35,000 kilometers**.

- In this layer, the **Sun's angular velocity** (its rotation speed) **decreases sharply with radius**, creating a **rotational shear** that varies with **depth**, **latitude**, and the **Sun's magnetic cycle**.

- It serves as a **crucial interface** for solar magnetic and rotational processes, influencing **surface flows** and **subsurface convection**.

Key Findings from the Study:

- **Surface plasma flows** were observed to **converge toward sunspot latitudes**. However, midway through the NSSL, these flows **reverse direction**, **moving outward** to form **large-scale circulation cells**.

- These dynamic patterns are shaped by the **Sun's rotation** and the **Coriolis force**—the same force that governs **hurricanes on Earth**.

- Despite this dynamism, these localized flows **do not** account for the Sun's **large-scale zonal flows**, called **torsional oscillations**, suggesting the **existence of deeper, unexplored forces** within the solar interior.

- **3D velocity maps** confirmed the dual nature of these flows—**surface inflows and deeper outflows**—especially in sunspot-rich regions.

Scientific Methods & Instruments Used:

Researchers relied on **helioseismology**, a technique akin to "**ultrasound for the Sun**," which tracks **sound waves** generated within the Sun to probe its interior layers.

Data Sources:

- **NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO)** – particularly the **Helioseismic and Magnetic Imager (HMI)**.

- **Global Oscillations Network Group (GONG)** – part of the **National Solar Observatory (NSO), USA**.

- These instruments provided **over a decade's worth of continuous data**, ensuring high precision and reliability of results.

Why This Matters:

- Understanding the NSSL is **vital to decoding solar activity cycles**, which affect **space weather**, **satellite communications**, and **power grid stability on Earth**.

- The study improves our models of **solar dynamo processes**, the mechanism responsible for generating the **Sun's magnetic field**.

- Findings may lead to better **predictions of solar flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs)**, which have major implications for Earth's technological infrastructure.

Did You Know?

- The **Sun's magnetic activity** varies over an **11-year cycle**, influencing the number of **sunspots**, **solar flares**, and **geomagnetic storms**.

- Helioseismology has also been used to **detect sunquakes**, which are solar equivalents of earthquakes.

- The NSSL plays a **pivotal role in the solar dynamo theory**, which seeks to explain how the Sun **generates and sustains its magnetic field**.

Conclusion:

This landmark study in the **Near-Surface Shear Layer** deepens our understanding of the Sun's **plasma dynamics and internal structure**. With advanced observational tools and collaborative international efforts, scientists are inching closer to unraveling the mysteries of our closest star—enhancing not only **space science** but also safeguarding **Earth's technological future**.

Breakthrough in Green Hydrogen Production by INST Scientists

Context: Scientists from the **Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), Mohali**, have introduced a **new approach to green hydrogen production** by enhancing the **efficiency of the Hydrogen Evolution Reaction (HER)**. Their innovative work revolves around **proton adsorption dynamics** on specially engineered catalyst surfaces, potentially revolutionizing the green hydrogen landscape.

Key Scientific Breakthrough:

Novel Catalyst Design:

- The team developed a **heterostructure catalyst** made by combining **Copper Tungsten Oxide (CuWO₄)** and **Copper Oxide (CuO)**.

- This combination forms a **p-n heterojunction**, utilizing the **Built-In Electric Field (BIEF)** effect, which creates an **asymmetric electronic environment** at the interface.

Role of BIEF in Hydrogen Evolution:

- The **BIEF** influences how **protons are adsorbed and released**, directly impacting the **efficiency of HER**, a core step in hydrogen production.

- The gradient in **Gibbs Free Energy (ΔG)** at the **CuO–CuWO₄ interface** helps:

  o **Enhance hydrogen adsorption** on the CuO side

  o **Promote desorption** on the CuWO₄ side

Unique Mechanism: Negative Cooperativity:

- This system exhibits **negative cooperativeity**, where **increased proton binding at one site reduces binding at adjacent sites**, encouraging **proton desorption**.

- This property is particularly beneficial for **alkaline water electrolysis**, where desorption is a **rate-limiting step**.

Understanding Green Hydrogen:

What is Green Hydrogen?

- **Green hydrogen** is generated via the **electrolysis of water** powered by **renewable energy sources** such as **solar, wind, or hydropower**.

- It emits **no greenhouse gases**, with **water vapour as the only by-product**, making it a **carbon-neutral** energy solution.

Comparison with Other Types of Hydrogen:

Type	Source	Emissions
Green Hydrogen	Renewable energy + water	**Zero emissions**
Grey Hydrogen	Natural gas (methane)	High CO_2 emissions
Blue Hydrogen	Natural gas + CCS*	Lower CO_2 (partial)

CCS: Carbon Capture and Storage

Major Green Hydrogen Production Methods:

1. Alkaline Electrolysis:

- **Most mature and cost-effective**

- Uses **KOH or NaOH** as electrolyte

- Requires **nickel or platinum electrodes**

- Suitable for **large-scale deployment**

2. Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) Electrolysis:

- Offers **high efficiency and fast response**

- Operates at **low temperatures**

- Involves **expensive catalysts** (e.g., platinum, iridium)

- Ideal for **fluctuating renewable power inputs**

3. Solid Oxide Electrolysis (SOEC):

- Works at **high temperatures (700–1000°C)**

- Can co-electrolyze H_2O **and** CO_2

- Offers **high conversion efficiency**

- Requires **advanced materials** and **robust infrastructure**

Why This Matters for India and the World:

- India aims to become a **global hub for green hydrogen** under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission**.

- Efficient catalysts like the **CuO–CuWO₄ heterostructure** can help **lower the cost** of green hydrogen production.

- This breakthrough supports the goal of **decarbonizing energy**, **industry**, and **transportation**, critical sectors in achieving **net-zero emissions** by **2070**.

Did You Know?

- **One kilogram of green hydrogen** can power a **fuel cell vehicle for over 100 km**.

- **Green hydrogen** can also be used to **store surplus renewable energy** and convert it back into electricity when needed—acting as a **clean energy battery**.

S8 Tension and the Clumpiness of the Universe: A Cosmic Puzzle

Context: Recent astrophysical studies suggest that the **key to understanding the universe's fundamental nature** may lie in measuring how **"clumpy"** the matter in the universe is. This has led to the growing scientific focus on an emerging anomaly known as the **S8 tension**.

What is Clumpiness in the Universe?

The Birth of Structure After the Big Bang:

- Approximately **13.8 billion years ago**, the universe emerged from the **Big Bang**, starting as an extremely hot and dense point. As it **expanded**, matter began to gather, forming **galaxies**, **clusters**, **stars**, and **planets**.
- However, when scientists observed the **Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB)**—the leftover radiation from the early universe—they noticed an **exceptionally smooth glow**, indicating that the **early cosmos was strikingly uniform**, with only minor density fluctuations.

From Smooth to Structured:

- Over billions of years, gravity pulled matter together into clumps, forming the **large-scale structure** we see today—webs of galaxies surrounded by vast cosmic voids. This **non-uniform distribution of matter** is what cosmologists refer to as **"clumpiness."**

Understanding S8: The Cosmic Clumpiness Factor

What is S8?

The **S8 parameter** is a cosmological quantity that measures the **degree of matter clustering** in the universe. It combines information about:

- σ_8 (sigma-8): How strongly matter clumps together on 8 megaparsec scales.
- Ω_m (Omega matter): The proportion of the universe made up of matter.

Formally, **S8 = $\sigma_8 \times (\Omega_m / 0.3)^{0.5}$**.

Higher vs Lower S8 Values:

- A **higher S8 value** means more **clustering** of matter—galaxies are tightly packed.
- A **lower S8 value** indicates a **smoother**, more **uniform** matter distribution.

What is the "S8 Tension"?

A Disagreement in the Data:

When scientists measured S8 using two different techniques, they found **inconsistent results**:

1. **CMB observations** (like those from the **Planck satellite**) suggest a **higher S8 value**.

2. **Local measurements** based on **gravitational lensing** and **galaxy surveys** indicate a **lower S8 value**.

This persistent discrepancy is known as the **S8 tension**—a growing challenge in modern cosmology.

Why Does the S8 Tension Matter?

If this mismatch isn't due to **measurement errors**, it could indicate that:

- The **ΛCDM model** (Lambda Cold Dark Matter)—our standard model of the universe—may be **incomplete or flawed**.

- **Dark matter or dark energy** might have **unusual interactions** or **evolving properties** not yet understood.

- It could signal the need for **new physics**, such as:

  o **Modified gravity theories**

  o **Time-varying fundamental constants**

  o **Decaying or interacting dark energy**

  o **Non-standard neutrino properties**

Did You Know?

The **Hubble tension**, another major cosmic inconsistency, parallels the S8 tension. Both could be interconnected and hint at a **deeper underlying issue** in our cosmological models.

Conclusion: The Frontier of Cosmic Discovery

The **S8 tension** isn't just a technical issue—it's a potential **gateway to revolutionary insights** about the universe. Whether it leads to a **new theory of gravity**, a **revised dark matter model**, or an **entirely new paradigm**, one thing is clear:

The universe may be hiding secrets that defy our current understanding—and solving the S8 mystery could be the key to uncovering them.

World's Largest Fusion Project Hits Major Milestone - With India's Crucial Contribution

Context: The **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)** has achieved a major construction milestone by **completing its main magnet system**, with **India** playing a vital role in this landmark scientific achievement.

What is ITER?

ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) is the **world's largest nuclear fusion project**, under construction on a **180-hectare site in southern France**. It is a **collaborative megaproject** involving **35 countries**, including:

India, China, the United States, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union

Purpose:

To demonstrate the **feasibility of nuclear fusion** as a **safe, large-scale, carbon-free** energy source for the future.

Understanding Nuclear Fusion:

"**Fusion** is the process that powers the **Sun and stars**."

- **Fusion** involves combining two light atomic nuclei (like **deuterium** and **tritium**) into a **heavier nucleus**, releasing immense energy.

- Unlike **fission**, fusion:

    o **Does NOT produce long-lived radioactive waste**

    o Is **inherently safer** (no meltdown risk)

    o Is **clean and sustainable**

Objectives of ITER:

- To generate **500 MW of energy output** from just **50 MW of input**, achieving a tenfold energy gain.

- To demonstrate a **self-sustaining "burning plasma"**—a critical condition for viable fusion energy.

- To provide scientific data for **future commercial fusion reactors** (ITER will not generate electricity itself).

Funding and Cost Sharing:

Region/Country	Contribution
European Union	**45%**
India, China, Japan, Korea, Russia, US	**~9% each**

Note: All members receive **equal access** to research outputs and **intellectual property rights**.

Contributions by Member Countries:

Country	Key Contributions
USA	Built the **Central Solenoid**, ITER's most powerful magnet
Russia	Supplied the **Poloidal Field magnet**
Europe	Designed and produced **four major Poloidal Field magnets**
China	Supplied **Correction Coil magnets** and **Poloidal Field magnets**
Japan	Produced **43 km of Nb$_3$Sn superconducting strand**
South Korea	Developed **tooling systems** for large component assembly
India	**See details below ↓**

India's Pivotal Role in ITER:

India is a **core member** and has made **critical technological contributions**, including:

Cryostat and Cooling Systems:

- Designed and built the **Cryostat** — a **30-meter-tall vacuum chamber** that houses the Tokamak.

- Installed **cryolines** and **helium systems** to cool magnets to **-269°C (superconducting state)**.

Heating and Shielding:

- Delivered components for **neutral beam heating, cooling water systems**, and **biological shielding structures**.

What Milestone Was Just Reached?

ITER has successfully **completed the assembly of its pulsed superconducting electromagnet system**, a major part of the **Tokamak's magnetic confinement**.

Key Function:

- This system will **generate plasma** by ionizing **deuterium and tritium fuel**.

- The plasma will be heated to over **150 million °C—10x hotter than the Sun's core**—to trigger **fusion reactions**.

Timeline and Future Outlook:

Phase	Target Year
Scientific Operations Begin	2034
Deuterium-Tritium Fusion Tests	2039

If Successful…

- **Fusion energy** could offer:
    - Near-**limitless clean power**
    - **Zero carbon emissions**
    - **No radioactive waste**

- Could **revolutionize the global energy landscape** and help meet climate targets.

Did You Know?

- ITER's central magnet is so powerful that it can **lift an aircraft carrier**.

- The **cryostat built by India** is the **largest high-vacuum pressure chamber** ever built.

- Fusion produces **4 million times more energy** than burning coal, per unit mass of fuel.

Conclusion: The ITER milestone, achieved with significant **Indian scientific and engineering input**, represents a **historic step toward achieving clean, sustainable fusion energy**. As we move closer to 2034, the world watches as **ITER becomes humanity's biggest bet on the energy of the stars**.

Brain-Computer Interface (BCI): Restoring Movement for the Paralysed

Context: In a groundbreaking advancement, researchers at the **University of California** have developed a **new Brain-Computer Interface (BCI)** that allows people with **paralysis** to regain **movement** using robotic limbs—bridging brain signals directly to external devices.

What is a Brain-Computer Interface?

A **Brain-Computer Interface (BCI)** is a system that creates a **direct communication link** between the **brain's electrical activity** and an **external device**—bypassing the body's damaged motor pathways.

- **Purpose**: To **assist**, **augment**, or **restore** sensory-motor and cognitive functions.

- In this breakthrough, the **BCI decodes signals** from the brain's **motor cortex** using **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to control **robotic limbs**.

Types of Brain-Computer Interfaces:

1. Invasive BCI:

- **Implanted directly** into the brain tissue.
- Provides **highly accurate signals**.
- Used in severe cases like **paralysis** or **locked-in syndrome**.
- **Example**: *Neuralink's Blindsight*, which explores restoring vision and movement.

2. Partially Invasive BCI:

- Placed **within the skull** but **outside the brain tissue**, typically on the **dura mater**.
- Uses techniques like **electrocorticography (ECoG)** to record signals.
- Offers a **balance** between signal quality and risk.

3. Non-Invasive BCI:

- Requires **no surgery**; uses external sensors like **EEG electrodes**.
- More **accessible and safer**, but less precise.
- Ideal for general use in **assistive technologies** and **education**.

Applications of BCI Technology:

Medical & Rehabilitation:

- **Assistive Devices**: Let users control **wheelchairs**, **robotic arms**, or **computers** with their minds.
- **Neurorehabilitation**: Stimulates brain areas post-stroke to **regain motor control**.
- **Prosthetics**: Enables brain-operated **artificial limbs**.

Education & Training:

- **Attention Monitoring**: Helps track **student engagement** in classrooms.
- **Skill Learning**: Offers **real-time feedback** on brain activity during learning or simulations.

Industry & Automation:

- **Human-Robot Collaboration**: Enhances **efficiency and safety** in automated environments.
- **Hands-Free Operation**: Beneficial in **hazardous jobs** like mining or chemical processing.

Ethical and Practical Concerns:

1. Privacy Risks:

- Neural data may contain **sensitive thoughts**, emotions, or intentions.
- Raises fears of **data misuse** and **mental surveillance**.

2. Digital Divide:

- Advanced BCIs are **expensive** and **technically complex**, risking **exclusion** of marginalized groups.

3. Mental Autonomy:

- Long-term BCI use could alter **brain function** or affect a person's **sense of agency**, leading to questions about **identity and autonomy**.

The Way Ahead:

- **Affordable Innovation**: Focus on developing **low-cost**, **scalable** BCI systems for widespread adoption.

- **Collaborative Ecosystem**: Foster **public-private partnerships** and **startup-driven solutions**.
- **Workforce Development**: Establish **education programs** and **certifications** to train specialists in BCI design, ethics, and deployment.

Genome-Edited Rice Varieties: India's Leap Toward a Second Green Revolution

Context: In a landmark announcement, the **Union Agriculture Minister** introduced **two genome-edited rice varieties**, signaling a **new era in agricultural innovation** that could ignite the **Second Green Revolution** in India.

What is Genome Editing?

Genome editing is a cutting-edge biotechnological method that enables **precise alterations in the DNA** of living organisms. The most notable tool in this domain is:

- **CRISPR-Cas9** (*Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats – associated protein 9*):
  - Acts like **molecular scissors** to remove, insert, or modify genetic material with pinpoint accuracy.
  - Unlike **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)**, it doesn't require **foreign DNA** insertion, making it more **biologically natural and acceptable** under Indian biosafety regulations.

In India, **SDN-1 and SDN-2** techniques (which do not introduce foreign genes) are permitted for general crops.

India's First Genome-Edited Rice Varieties:

Developed by **ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research)**, the two new varieties are:

- **DRR Rice 100 (Kamla)**
- **Pusa DST Rice 1**

These are outcomes of CRISPR-based research that began in 2018 under the **National Agricultural Science Fund**, targeting **Samba Mahsuri** and **MTU 1010** rice lines.

Benefits of Genome-Edited Rice:

Impact Area	Benefit
Yield	**19% increase**
Water Use	Saves **7,500 million cubic meters** of irrigation water
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	**20% reduction**, especially in methane
Climate Resilience	Tolerant to **drought, salinity, and heat**
Pest & Disease Resistance	Less dependence on **chemical pesticides & fertilizers**

Understanding CRISPR Technology:

- Inspired by **natural bacterial immunity**, CRISPR identifies and destroys **invading viral DNA**.

- In agriculture, it helps in:

  o Developing **disease-resistant** crops

  o Improving **nutritional quality**

  o Enhancing **climate adaptability**

Path to a Second Green Revolution:

First Green Revolution	Second Green Revolution (Genome-Editing)
High-yielding wheat & rice varieties	**Precision-edited, climate-resilient crops**
Water-intensive, heavy chemical usage	**Efficient resource use**, lower environmental footprint
Increased productivity, but ecological stress	Sustainable yield with **minimal ecological harm**
Focused on food security	Focused on **food security + climate adaptation + sustainability**

Challenges & Concerns:

- **Global Regulatory Uncertainty**: Not all countries accept genome-edited crops, limiting **exports**.

- **Corporate Monopolies**: Risk of **private control** over patented technologies and seeds, raising **costs for farmers**.

- **Biodiversity Risk**: Over-reliance on select varieties could threaten **agro-genetic diversity**.

Way Forward:

1. **Boost R&D Investment**: 500 crore allocated in the **2023–24 Union Budget** for crop genome editing.

2. **Expand Public Sector Role**: ICAR is now extending genome-editing research to **oilseeds**, **pulses**, and **horticultural crops**.

3. **Public-Private Partnerships**: Encourage joint ventures for **responsible innovation**.

4. **Farmer & Scientist Training**: Build national capacity for **safe, inclusive use** of genome-editing tools.

5. **Streamlined Regulation**: Ensure transparent, science-based policies to **balance safety and innovation**.

Conclusion:

Genome-editing marks a **revolutionary stride** in India's agricultural transformation. With a focus on **higher yields, sustainability, and climate resilience**, these innovations can propel India into a **future of food security**, **farmer welfare**, and **eco-friendly farming**—without repeating the ecological mistakes of the past.

India Tightens Security Rules for Satellite Communication Service Providers

Context: India's **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has rolled out **stricter security and operational guidelines** for satellite communication (**satcom**) firms to enhance **data security**, **national sovereignty**, and the **integration of indigenous technologies**.

India Satellite Communication Guidelines: Latest Updates

The new norms impact companies such as **Starlink (Elon Musk)**, **Amazon's Project Kuiper**, **Eutelsat OneWeb**, and **Jio Satellite**. The guidelines focus on:

- **Data localisation**
- **NavIC integration**
- **Metadata collection**
- **Blocking non-compliant websites**
- **Local infrastructure mandates**

Key Compliance Requirements for Satcom Companies:

1. Local Manufacturing Mandate:

- Companies must submit a **phased manufacturing plan**.
- **20% indigenisation** of the **ground segment** is required within **five years** of commercial launch.

2. Integration of NavIC:

- Mandatory on a **best-effort basis** initially.
- **Full transition to NavIC** required by **2029**.
- Supports **India's autonomous navigation capability**.

3. Data Localisation Norms:

- All **user data** must be **stored within India**.
- No traffic should **route through foreign gateways, PoPs, or space systems** not authorized by India.
- **Data mirroring or decryption** outside India is strictly **prohibited**.

4. Website Blocking & Traffic Control:

- Firms must implement systems to **block access** to **government-identified websites**.
- Operators must comply with instructions to **restrict services** to individuals or regions during **emergencies or conflict**.

5. Law Enforcement Compliance:

- Satcom firms must:
  - Share **metadata** upon request.
  - Report any **foreign/unregistered terminals** operating in India.
  - Offer **real-time location tracking** (latitude–longitude) of all **user terminals**.

6. India-Based Infrastructure Mandate:

- All key infrastructure must be **India-hosted**, including:

  o **Data centers**

  o **DNS resolution**

  o **Lawful interception systems**

  o **Network control & monitoring tools**

Special Security Provisions:

Special Monitoring Zones (SMZs):

- Includes areas:

  o Within **50 km of international borders**

  o Coastal areas up to the **Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nautical miles)**

- Subject to **heightened surveillance** by security agencies.

Clearance for Communication Services:

- Launch of **voice or data communication services** requires **separate national security clearances**.

Strategic Intent Behind the Guidelines:

These guidelines reflect India's commitment to:

- **Digital Sovereignty**

- **Strengthening National Security**

- **Promoting Indigenous Technologies** (e.g., NavIC)

- **Boosting Local Manufacturing** in telecom and satellite infrastructure

Current Regulatory Landscape:

- **Starlink** is awaiting **final security clearance** to begin operations in India.

- Partnerships already formed with **Airtel** and **Jio**.

- The **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** is finalizing a **satellite spectrum allocation framework**, which will further shape the satcom landscape.

Hydrogen vs Battery: The Future of Clean Fuel in Transportation

Context: As the global push for **sustainable transportation** accelerates, two prominent contenders have emerged:

- **Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs)**

- **Hydrogen Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles (FCEVs)**
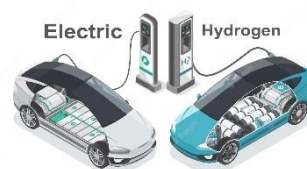
While **BEVs** currently dominate the market, **FCEVs** are gaining attention for their **longer range**, **quick refueling**, and **adaptability to harsher climates**.

Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs):

- Powered by **electricity stored in rechargeable batteries**.

- Require **regular charging** via external sources like **home chargers** or **public charging stations**.

- Emit **zero tailpipe emissions**, making them eco-friendly.

- Examples: Tesla, Tata Nexon EV, MG ZS EV.

Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles (FCEVs):

- Run on **hydrogen gas**, which generates electricity through a **chemical reaction** in a fuel cell.

- Emit **only water vapor**, making them a **clean and efficient** solution.

- Suitable for **heavy-duty** and **long-range** applications.

- Examples: Toyota Mirai, Hyundai NEXO.

Hydrogen vs Battery: A Feature-wise Comparison

Feature	Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs)	Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCEVs)
Refueling Time	Several hours (depending on charger)	**5–15 minutes**
Driving Range	Moderate (150–400 km)	**Longer (500–700+ km)**
Vehicle Weight	**Heavier** (large battery packs)	**Lighter**
Terrain Suitability	Less suited for rough terrain	**Better for rugged/off-road use**
Cold Climate Performance	Performance decreases	**Performs better** in cold temperatures

India's Electric Vehicle Landscape: 2023 Highlights

- **EV Adoption:** Electric Vehicles made up **5% of total vehicle sales** in India.

Electric Three-Wheelers:

- India became the **world's largest market** in 2023, surpassing China.

- Accounts for a staggering **60% of global sales** in this segment.

Electric Two-Wheelers:

- India ranks **second globally**, with **0.88 million units sold** in 2023.

- **China** leads with **6 million units** sold.

Global Leaders: India, China, and ASEAN nations dominate the **2- and 3-wheeler EV** segment, while **rest of the world contributes less than 5%**.

Conclusion:

Both **BEVs and FCEVs** offer **clean and sustainable** alternatives to fossil fuel vehicles.

- **BEVs** are currently more popular due to **charging infrastructure** and **urban use**.

- **FCEVs**, with faster refueling and better performance in **long-range and rugged conditions**, could be the **future for heavy transport and rural mobility**.

Northeast India's First Geothermal Production Well – Dirang, Arunachal Pradesh

Location: Dirang, **Arunachal Pradesh**

- **Executed by:** Centre for Earth Sciences and Himalayan Studies (CESHS)

- **Significance: First successful geothermal production well** in the **northeastern region of India**

International Collaboration:

- **Partners:**
  - CESHS (India)
  - **Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI)**, Oslo
  - **Geotropy ehf** (Icelandic geothermal firm)
  - **Guwahati Boring Service (GBS)** – Indian drilling team

About Geothermal Energy:

- **Definition:** Energy harnessed from **heat beneath the Earth's surface**
- **Sources of Heat:**
  - **Radioactive decay** of minerals
  - **Residual heat** from Earth's formation
- **Applications:**
  - **Electricity generation**
  - **Direct heating and cooling**

Advantages:

- **Renewable & Clean**
- **Operates Year-Round** (base-load energy source)
- **Low Carbon Footprint**

Disadvantages:

- **Land subsidence risk**
- **High energy transmission costs (remote locations)**
- **Risk of toxic gas or chemical emissions**

Geothermal in India: Current Scenario:

- **Geothermal Atlas of India (2022)** by GSI identifies potential sites.
- **MNRE's RE-RTD Programme** promotes indigenous R&D in geothermal and other renewables.
- **Telangana Pilot Project:**
  - 20 kW geothermal plant by **Singareni Collieries** in **Manuguru**, Bhadradri Kothagudem.

Major Geothermal Locations in India:

Some prominent geothermal provinces (per Geothermal Atlas):

- **Himalayan Region** – Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh
- **Sohana Region** – Haryana
- **Cambay Graben** – Gujarat
- **Son-Narmada-Tapti (SONATA)** – Central India
- **Godavari Basin** – Andhra Pradesh
- **West Coast Belt** – Maharashtra
- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

Conclusion:

The successful drilling in Dirang represents a **pivotal step toward geothermal development in the Northeast**, backed by global collaboration. With rising energy demands and climate challenges, such renewable breakthroughs offer a sustainable path forward.

Cloud Seeding in NCR: Delhi Launches High-Tech Battle Against Air Pollution

Context: In a bold move to combat severe air pollution, the **Delhi Cabinet has approved a 3.21 crore project** to conduct **five cloud-seeding trials** across the **National Capital Region (NCR)**. This decision marks a significant technological intervention aimed at improving air quality through **artificial rainfall generation**.

What is Cloud Seeding?

Cloud seeding is a **weather modification technique** designed to **enhance rainfall** by artificially stimulating precipitation. It works by dispersing substances into the atmosphere that encourage cloud droplets to coalesce and fall as rain.

How it Works:

- **Seeding agents** such as **silver iodide**, **potassium iodide**, **dry ice**, or **liquid propane** are dispersed using aircraft, rockets, or ground-based generators.
- These particles act as **condensation nuclei**, encouraging moisture in clouds to form droplets large enough to precipitate.
- The method is also used to **suppress hailstorms**, **reduce dust**, and **clear particulate matter**, improving **air quality**.

Ideal Conditions for Successful Cloud Seeding:

Cloud seeding **cannot create clouds**—it can only enhance precipitation from **existing cloud systems**. The effectiveness depends on several meteorological factors:

- **Cloud Type and Depth**: The cloud must be **sufficiently thick** and have the **right moisture content**.
- **Temperature Range**: Optimal conditions exist when cloud temperatures are between **-10°C and -12°C**, allowing the seeding agents to form ice crystals.
- **Wind Speed**: Wind must be **moderate** to prevent dispersal of the seeding material away from target areas.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
NEWS
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Topography**: Hilly and mountainous regions are particularly suited for effective seeding due to better cloud formation and moisture dynamics.

Challenges and Concerns:

Despite its promise, cloud seeding comes with **scientific, environmental, and ethical concerns**:

- **Chemical Impact**: The use of agents like **silver iodide** may pose **risks to soil and water quality**, potentially affecting agriculture and drinking water sources.

- **Rain Redistribution**: Inducing rainfall in one area might inadvertently **reduce natural rainfall** in neighboring regions, leading to **localized droughts**.

- **High Operational Costs**: The technology requires **advanced aircraft, skilled meteorologists**, and **precise coordination**, making it a **resource-intensive process**.

Why Cloud Seeding for Delhi?

Delhi's air quality regularly plunges to **hazardous levels**, especially during winter months when **stubble burning, vehicle emissions**, and **low wind speeds** combine to create a toxic smog blanket. Cloud seeding offers a **temporary but immediate solution**:

- It can help **settle airborne pollutants** by encouraging rainfall.

- Provides **respite during critical pollution spikes** when other mitigation strategies fall short.

The Way Forward: Technology as Part of a Larger Solution

While cloud seeding may **offer short-term relief**, experts stress that it must not be seen as a standalone fix. A **multi-dimensional strategy** is essential, which includes:

- **Stringent emissions control**

- **Expansion of green spaces and urban forests**

- **Shift to cleaner fuels and public transport**

- **Health preparedness for pollution-related diseases**

Conclusion:

The Delhi government's decision to embrace **cloud seeding** is a landmark initiative, combining **science and governance** in the fight for breathable air. While not a silver bullet, it represents a bold step forward in **climate adaptation** and **urban pollution management**.

HAROP Drones: Precision Loitering Munitions in Modern Warfare

Context: In a powerful demonstration of advanced strike capability, the **Indian armed forces** recently utilized **Israeli-origin HAROP drones** during **'Operation Sindoor'** to target **critical air defence infrastructure** across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

What is the HAROP Drone?

The **HAROP (Harpy 2)** is a **loitering munition system**—a hybrid between a drone and a missile—**developed by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI)**. Unlike conventional drones that return after completing surveillance tasks, HAROP is **designed to identify and destroy enemy targets** by crashing into them with its onboard explosive payload.

Dual Role: Surveillance and Strike

This drone belongs to a unique class of **autonomous kamikaze drones**. It can:

- **Loiter over a target area for several hours**

- **Detect radar signals or visual cues**

- **Dive onto the target with precision and eliminate it**

The **HAROP** is especially effective against **air defence systems, radar installations, missile batteries**, and **command-and-control centres**, offering the ability to suppress enemy air defences before a manned strike.

Key Features of HAROP:

- **Endurance**: Can **stay airborne for over six hours**, providing persistent surveillance and target-hunting capabilities.

- **Explosive Payload**: Carries a **16 kg high-explosive warhead**, capable of eliminating hardened targets.

- **Range & Speed**: Operational range of **200 km** and a **top speed of 417 km/h**.

- **Dimensions**: Wingspan of **3 meters**, length of **2.5 meters**.

- **Altitude**: Can operate at a **service ceiling of ~15,000 feet**.

- **Accuracy**: Delivers a **Circular Error Probable (CEP) of less than one meter**, ensuring pinpoint strikes.

- **Seeker Systems**: Equipped with **electro-optical (EO)** and **infrared (IR)** sensors to detect, track, and engage targets—even in **low-visibility conditions**.

Advanced Operational Capabilities:

- **Man-in-the-loop Mode**: Offers real-time human intervention for **precision strike decisions**, ensuring **ethical and tactical control**.

- **Abort Function**: Operators can **cancel a mission mid-flight** to prevent unintended collateral damage.

- **Stealth and Flexibility**: Launches from mobile ground stations and attacks from **steep or shallow angles**, bypassing terrain and radar-based defences.

- **Jamming Resistance**: Operates effectively in **GPS-denied environments**, offering **anti-jamming capabilities** critical for modern electronic warfare.

India and HAROP:

- India has been an **active user of HAROP drones for over a decade**, integrating them into its **tri-service strategic operations**. The drones have played a **key role in tactical surveillance and suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD)** during cross-border operations.

In recent years, India has considered upgrading its HAROP fleet with improved **target recognition**, **AI-based guidance**, and **enhanced range**, showcasing a continued commitment to **next-gen precision warfare systems**.

Did You Know?

- HAROP is based on IAI's earlier "**Harpy**" drone but includes **day/night surveillance and visual targeting**.

- It has been used by countries like **Israel, Azerbaijan, South Korea**, and **Germany** in **various combat theatres**.

- Its **"fire-and-forget" capability** combined with **real-time human oversight** makes it one of the most reliable loitering munitions in the world.

Conclusion: Drones That Think and Strike

The **HAROP drone** represents a **leap forward in precision strike technology**, blending **endurance, autonomy, and surgical accuracy**. As conflicts evolve into **high-tech hybrid warfare**, such systems will play an increasingly vital role in **counter-air defence**, **pre-emptive strikes**, and **deep-penetration missions**—offering nations like India a significant tactical edge on the battlefield.

HAROP Drones: Precision Loitering Munitions in Modern Warfare

Context: In a powerful demonstration of advanced strike capability, the **Indian armed forces** recently utilized **Israeli-origin HAROP drones** during **'Operation Sindoor'** to target **critical air defence infrastructure** across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

What is the HAROP Drone?

The **HAROP (Harpy 2)** is a **loitering munition system**—a hybrid between a drone and a missile—**developed by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI)**. Unlike conventional drones that return after completing surveillance tasks, HAROP is **designed to identify and destroy enemy targets** by crashing into them with its onboard explosive payload.

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Air Defence Systems: Safeguarding the Skies of India and the World

Context: In a significant demonstration of military preparedness, **India recently repelled aerial attacks** launched from Pakistan along the western front. In a strategic counteroffensive, **Indian forces successfully neutralized an enemy air defence installation** near Lahore. These events underscore the crucial role played by **air defence systems** in ensuring national security and deterrence.

WORLD'S BEST AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS

Understanding Air Defence Systems:

Air Defence Systems form the backbone of a nation's aerial security, tasked with the detection, tracking, and elimination of hostile aerial threats such as **enemy aircraft, missiles, and drones**. These systems are typically composed of a **layered defensive architecture**, incorporating cutting-edge technology like **radars**, **missile interceptors**, **electronic warfare systems**, and **command-control networks**.

Core Components of Air Defence Mechanisms:

1. Detection and Surveillance:

- **Radar Systems**: Utilize high-frequency electromagnetic waves to **identify incoming targets**, even at long distances.

- **Satellite and Infrared Sensors**: Provide **high-resolution imaging** and **thermal tracking** to spot **stealth aircraft** and **hypersonic threats**.

- **Tracking and Threat Classification**: Algorithms assess object **speed, altitude**, and **flight path** to determine whether the intruder is a **fighter jet, drone**, or **missile**.

2. Command and Control:

- **Combat Operation Centers**: Evaluate threat levels and coordinate a **multi-layered response**, including missile interception or electronic warfare.

3. Engagement and Elimination:

- **Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs)**: Serve as the primary tool to destroy aerial threats at various ranges.

- **Electronic Warfare Systems**: Include **signal jammers** and **spoofers** to confuse or disable enemy radars and communications.

- **Anti-Aircraft Artillery**: Offers **close-range defensive firepower**, crucial during **saturation attacks** or when SAMs are not feasible.

Classification of Air Defence Systems:

Short-Range Air Defence (SHORAD):

- Designed for **low-altitude, close-proximity threats** like drones and cruise missiles. **Example**: Barak-8 Missile System

Medium-Range Air Defence (MRAD):

- Provides protection over **broader zones**, effective against **fighter aircraft and tactical missiles**. **Examples**: **Patriot Missile System**, **S-400 Triumf**

Long-Range Air Defence (LRAD):

- Capable of intercepting threats over **hundreds of kilometers**, including **intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)**.

  Examples: **THAAD**, **Aegis BMD**

India's Air Defence Arsenal:

Akash Missile System:

- Indigenous **Surface-to-Air Missile** system.

- Can engage multiple airborne targets with **command-guided precision**.

- Effective against **aircraft, cruise missiles**, and UAVs.

S-400 Triumf (From Russia):

- Among the world's most advanced LRAD systems.

- Intercepts threats at distances up to **400 km**.

- Capable of engaging **stealth aircraft, ballistic missiles, and drones**.

- Also deployed by **China** and **Turkey**.

Barak-8 Missile System (India-Israel Collaboration):

- **Quick-reaction interceptor** for aerial targets.

- Deployed on naval vessels and land-based launchers.

- Offers **360-degree coverage** against **supersonic threats**.

Integrated Counter-UAS Grid:

- Specialized system against **unmanned aerial threats (UAVs)**.

- Combines **radar detection**, **electronic jamming**, and **kinetic weapons** for neutralization.

- Deployed along **sensitive borders**, including the **Line of Control (LoC)**.

Notable Global Air Defence Systems:

Patriot Missile System (USA):

- Multi-role air and missile defence system.

- Used by **USA, Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia**.

- Capable of intercepting **ballistic and cruise missiles**.

Iron Dome (Israel):

- Designed for **short-range interception**, highly effective against **rockets and artillery**.

- Widely used to **defend urban areas and military bases**.

- Demonstrated over **90% success rate** in combat situations.

THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) – USA

- Intercepts **ballistic missiles in terminal phase**.

- Operates at **exosphere altitudes**, enhancing strategic coverage.

- Deployed in **South Korea, Japan, and Guam** for **regional deterrence**.

Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (USA):

- Sea-based missile defence system installed on **Aegis-class destroyers**.

- Utilizes **Standard Missile-3 (SM-3)** for high-altitude interception.

- Integral to **NATO and Indo-Pacific** security strategies.

Additional Insights and Emerging Trends:

- **Hypersonic Threats**: Nations are now developing countermeasures against **hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs)**, which travel at speeds exceeding **Mach 5** and can evade traditional radar.

- **AI in Defence**: **Artificial Intelligence** is increasingly used for **threat assessment, radar signal processing**, and **autonomous targeting**.

- **Multi-Domain Integration**: Modern air defence is moving towards **integration with space, cyber, and naval assets** for real-time threat coordination.

Conclusion:

As aerial threats evolve—from **swarms of drones** to **stealth bombers** and **hypersonic missiles**—nations must continually upgrade their air defence capabilities. **India's robust and modernizing air defence network**, integrated with **indigenous systems** and **global technology partnerships**, plays a pivotal role in maintaining national sovereignty and strategic deterrence.

Magnetic Flip-Flop: Earth's Magnetic Field in Flux

Context: Recent research has raised alarm bells across the scientific community as Earth's **magnetic field** continues to show signs of **weakening and shifting**. These fluctuations hint at the possibility of a **magnetic excursion** or even a **complete polarity reversal** — an event that could have widespread implications for our planet and its inhabitants.

What Powers Earth's Magnetic Field?

Earth's **magnetic field** originates from the **dynamo action** in the **liquid outer core**, where **molten iron and nickel** circulate due to **thermal and rotational forces**. This constant churning creates a **dipolar magnetic field**, with magnetic north and south poles roughly aligned with the planet's rotational axis.

- The **solid inner core** plays a stabilizing role, anchoring this dynamo effect.

- Earth's rotation enhances the **Coriolis effect**, further influencing the magnetic field's structure.

What Triggers a Magnetic Reversal?

Short-Term Variations:
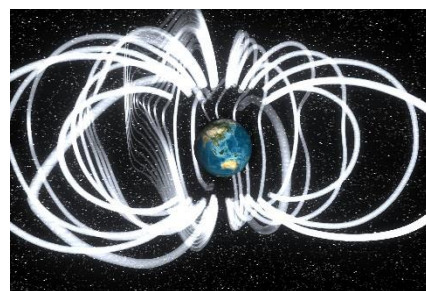
- Caused by interactions with **solar winds** and **charged particles** from space.
- These changes occur over **milliseconds to days** and are typically localized.

Long-Term Variations:

- Result from **turbulent flows** in the outer core, influenced by **heat loss** from the inner core and **planetary rotation**.
- A **full reversal** occurs when the flow pattern in the outer core changes dramatically — potentially switching from **clockwise to anticlockwise** — altering the overall field orientation.

Magnetic Reversals vs. Excursions:

Magnetic Reversals:

- Involve a complete swap of the **magnetic north and south poles**.
- Have occurred **183 times in the last 83 million years**.
- The last known full reversal, the **Brunhes-Matuyama reversal**, happened approximately **780,000 years ago**.
- Reversals are **gradual processes**, typically taking **thousands to tens of thousands of years** to complete — average estimate: **22,000 years**.

Magnetic Excursions:

- Represent **temporary, incomplete shifts** in the magnetic field direction.
- Occur **ten times more frequently** than full reversals.
- Notable events include:
  o **Norwegian-Greenland Sea Excursion** (~64,500 years ago)
  o **Laschamps and Mono Lake Excursions** (~34,500 years ago)
  o **Bagwalipokar Excursions** (found in Uttarakhand, India): 15,500–14,700 years ago and 8,000–2,850 years ago.

Why Should We Be Concerned?

1. Atmospheric Exposure:

During weak phases, the **magnetic field's shielding capability diminishes**, making Earth's atmosphere more vulnerable to **solar wind**, **cosmic rays**, and **radiation storms**. This increases risks such as:

- **Ozone layer depletion**
- Enhanced **auroras at lower latitudes**
- Potential **climate disturbances**

2. Technological Vulnerabilities:

In our increasingly digital world, magnetic instability could:

- **Disrupt GPS**, satellite operations, and **radio communications**
- Affect **airline navigation** and **military systems**
- Cause **blackouts** in power grids due to induced currents from solar storms

3. Impact on Wildlife:

Many species use **geomagnetic cues** for navigation. A shifting or reversing field may:

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TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
NEWS

- **Confuse migratory animals** like birds, turtles, and whales

- Disrupt breeding patterns and nesting behaviors

- Pose a threat to **ecosystem stability**

Did You Know?

- A region called the **South Atlantic Anomaly**, stretching from South America to Africa, is experiencing an **unusual weakening of the magnetic field**, possibly hinting at an ongoing excursion.

- The **magnetic north pole** is drifting at unprecedented speeds — moving from **Canada toward Siberia** at a rate of 50–60 km per year.

- Despite the concerns, fossil and geological records suggest that **life has persisted** through past reversals with **no mass extinctions** directly linked to them.

Conclusion: Preparing for the Unknown

Though **magnetic reversals** are a natural part of Earth's geological history, the **timing and triggers** remain difficult to predict. As we continue to unravel the mysteries of Earth's inner workings, it's vital to **monitor field behavior closely**, enhance our **technological resilience**, and invest in **space weather preparedness**.

In a world increasingly reliant on electromagnetic systems, understanding Earth's **invisible shield** is not just a scientific pursuit — it's a **necessity for global stability and security**.

Denmark Launches World's First Commercial e-Methanol Plant

Context: In a groundbreaking move for **green energy**, Denmark has inaugurated the **world's first commercial-scale e-methanol plant** in **Kassø**. Developed through a partnership between **European Energy (Denmark)** and **Mitsui & Co. (Japan)**, the plant is set to produce **42,000 metric tonnes** of **e-methanol** annually, marking a significant leap in **carbon-neutral fuel** production.

Understanding Methanol: The Fuel of the Future

Methanol (CH_3OH) is a **colorless, volatile, and flammable alcohol** traditionally derived from **natural gas and coal**. It serves as a critical component in the **chemical industry**, **fuel production**, and **manufacturing of plastics**.

Types of Methanol:

- **Conventional Methanol:** Produced using fossil fuels like coal and natural gas.

- **Bio-Methanol:** Derived from **biomass** and organic waste.

- **E-Methanol (Green Methanol):** Produced using **renewable electricity**, **green hydrogen**, and **captured carbon dioxide (CO_2)**—a truly **carbon-neutral alternative**.

Applications of Methanol:

Methanol is emerging as a versatile fuel with widespread industrial use:

- **Shipping and Maritime Fuel**

- **Fuel Cells for Power Generation**

- **Feedstock in Plastics and Chemicals**

- **Alternative Fuel for Automobiles**

Barriers to E-Methanol Adoption:

Despite its potential, **e-methanol** faces several challenges:

- **High Production Costs:** Still **more expensive than fossil fuels**; **price parity** is expected by **2035**.
- **Limited Production Infrastructure:** Current global capacity is **insufficient for large-scale demand**.
- **CO₂ Capture and Utilization:** Requires **reliable and sustainable technologies** for CO_2 sourcing.
- **Storage and Transportation:** Needs **dedicated logistics infrastructure** and **new safety protocols**.

India's Methanol Economy: A Step Towards Energy Independence

To reduce its dependency on imported crude and promote **clean energy**, India has launched the **Methanol Economy Programme**, spearheaded by **NITI Aayog**.

Objectives of the Programme:

- **Cut Oil Imports:** Targeting a **10% reduction** in crude oil imports by **2030**.
- **Reduce Pollution:** Methanol is a **clean-burning fuel** that emits fewer pollutants than conventional alternatives.
- **Utilize Domestic Resources:** Encourages methanol production from **coal, biomass**, and **municipal waste**.

Key Government Initiatives:

- **Methanol Economy Research Programme (MERP):** Led by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** to support **R&D in methanol production** and usage.
- **Fuel Blending:** **15% methanol-blended petrol (M15)** has been notified, and **testing standards** are underway.
- **National Biofuels Policy 2018:** Recognizes **methanol and dimethyl ether (DME)** as **approved alternative fuels**.

Conclusion: A Greener Tomorrow Begins Today

The launch of the **e-methanol plant in Denmark** represents a **significant shift towards low-carbon fuels**. As global efforts intensify to **combat climate change**, e-methanol offers a promising alternative to fossil fuels in hard-to-decarbonize sectors. With India's proactive steps under the **Methanol Economy Programme**, the country is positioning itself as a **key player** in the **future of sustainable fuel**.

India's Bold Leap into 6G Technology

Context: India has marked a significant milestone in global telecom leadership. At the **Bharat 6G International Conference**, the **Union Minister of State for Communications** announced that **India is now among the top six countries worldwide** in filing **patents related to 6G technology** — a testament to its rising stature in the high-tech innovation ecosystem.

India's Rising Leadership in 6G Research:

India's 6G push is backed by strategic investments, global partnerships, and deep research capabilities:

- Over **111 government-funded R&D projects** with a total value exceeding **300 crore**.

- International collaborations with tech-advanced nations like **Japan, Finland, and Singapore** to co-develop cutting-edge solutions.

- Breakthroughs in **terahertz communication**, **AI-native networks**, and **intelligent infrastructure**.

- The economic potential of 6G is immense—expected to contribute up to **US$1 trillion (~85 lakh crore)** to India's economy by **2035**.

Bharat 6G Vision: A Roadmap to Digital Leadership

The **Bharat 6G Vision**, launched by the Government of India, envisions a **globally competitive, inclusive, and secure digital future**.

Strategic Goals:

- Position India as a **leader in 6G technology** by **2030**.

- Ensure **affordable and scalable access** to 6G networks.

- Bridge the **digital divide** and promote equitable development across all regions.

Two-Phase Development Approach:

1. **R&D Phase (2023–2025)**: Focused on core technology development, **network architecture design**, and **pilot testing**.

2. **Deployment Phase (2025–2030)**: Aims for **large-scale rollout**, with integration into national digital infrastructure and **support for new-age industries**.

What 6G Brings to the Future:

6G is not just an upgrade—it's a revolution:

- **Sub-millisecond latency**: Enabling real-time control for critical applications like remote surgery and autonomous vehicles.

- **AI-native and self-healing networks**: Offering adaptive and intelligent infrastructure.

- **Volumetric Connectivity**: Extending networks beyond earth to **underwater** and **aerospace realms**.

- **Terahertz Band Communication**: Allowing ultra-high-speed data transfer, thousands of times faster than 5G.

5G vs 6G: What's the Difference?

Feature	5G	6G
Peak Speed	10 Gbps	100 Gbps+
Latency	~1 ms	<0.1 ms
Network Intelligence	Limited AI	Fully AI-native
Coverage	Terrestrial	Air, Sea, Space
Use-Cases	Smart Cities, AR/VR	Holographic Telepresence, Digital Twins, Industrial Automation

Technology Innovation Group on 6G (TIG-6G):

To shape India's 6G trajectory, the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has established the **TIG-6G**, which includes:

- **Top industry players**

- **Premier academic institutions**
- **Leading research organizations**

This body is responsible for drafting the **national 6G roadmap** and formulating policies to keep India at the forefront of telecom innovation.

Spectrum Allocation and Global Coordination:

India is actively participating in international regulatory efforts led by the **International**

Telecommunication Union (ITU). The **IMT2030** initiative is studying frequency bands for global 6G use:

- **4400–4800 MHz**
- **7125–8400 MHz**
- **14.8–15.35 GHz**

These bands are under evaluation for allocation at the **World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) in 2027**.

India has also identified several frequency bands for **IMT (International Mobile Telecommunications)** services, including:

Industry Collaboration and the Bharat 6G Alliance:

To deepen collaboration and build a **robust innovation ecosystem**, India plans to launch the **Bharat 6G Alliance (B6GA)**. This initiative will bring together:

- **Startups and industry leaders**
- **Academic and research institutions**
- **Government and private sector stakeholders**

B6GA aims to ensure that India's 6G technologies are **globally competitive**, **secure**, and **inclusive**.

India's Global 6G Journey: Looking Ahead

India's push into 6G isn't just about faster networks—it's about **shaping the future of digital civilization**. With strategic vision, global collaboration, and grassroots innovation, India is poised to become a **key driver of 6G development** worldwide.

India to Dive into the Depths: 'Samudrayaan Mission' Set for Launch by End of 2026

Context: In a landmark announcement, the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)** has confirmed that **India's Samudrayaan Mission** will be launched by the **end of 2026**. This ambitious venture is part of the broader **Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)** and marks **India's entry into elite global club** of countries capable of **manned deep-sea expeditions**.

So far, only **five nations—the U.S., Russia, China, France, and Japan**—have achieved such underwater milestones.

Unveiling Matsya-6000: India's Deep-Sea Chariot

At the heart of Samudrayaan is **'Matsya 6000'**, a **4th-generation human-rated submersible vehicle** capable of diving to a **depth of 6,000 metres** (6 km).

Key Features of Matsya 6000:

- Developed by **NIOT-Chennai**, under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.

- Successfully completed **wet testing**.

- **Endurance:** 12 hours of standard operation and **up to 96 hours** in emergency mode.

- Designed to carry **three humans**, supported by life systems and scientific equipment.

- Constructed with **titanium alloy pressure hull**, suitable for extreme deep-sea pressure conditions (over 600 times atmospheric pressure).

Mission Objectives: More Than Just Exploration

The **Samudrayaan Mission** will open up vast possibilities in:

- **Deep-sea scientific research**

- **Mapping of marine biodiversity**

- **Exploration of polymetallic nodules**, rare-earth metals, and hydrothermal vents

- **Survey of deep-living biological resources** with potential pharmaceutical value

- **Development of ocean observation technologies**

- **Laying the foundation for deep-sea tourism and robotics**

This initiative will greatly enhance India's efforts to sustainably harness its **blue economy potential**, which already contributes nearly **4% to the national GDP**.

Deep Ocean Mission (DOM): Driving India's Blue Economy

About DOM:

- **Launched:** 2021

- **Tenure:** 5 years

- **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**

- **Goal:** Develop **deep-sea technologies**, promote **resource assessment**, and ensure the **sustainable use** of the ocean's unexplored depths.

Objectives of DOM Include:

- Deep-sea mining and exploration of energy resources

- Mapping the ocean floor and biodiversity

- Creation of advanced marine infrastructure and underwater robotics

- Development of climate change forecasting tools

- Coastal and island community development

Why Samudrayaan Matters for India:

- Enhances **India's strategic capabilities** in the Indian Ocean region

- Supports **self-reliance** in ocean exploration technology

- Boosts **scientific innovation and marine education**

- Helps mitigate climate and ecological challenges through better ocean data

Conclusion: A Giant Leap into the Blue Frontier

With **Samudrayaan**, India is not just diving into the ocean—it's **diving into the future**. By integrating cutting-edge technology, environmental sustainability, and strategic marine development, the mission will place **India on the global map of deep-sea exploration**. This milestone aligns with the broader vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and propels the nation toward **scientific sovereignty in marine exploration**.

The Future of Retail Scanning: GS1's Next-Gen QR Codes to Go Global by 2027

Context: In a landmark announcement, **GS1**, the global organization behind the original barcode, has declared that its **next generation of QR codes** will become the **global retail standard by 2027**. This move marks a significant shift in how products are scanned, tracked, and authenticated across the world.
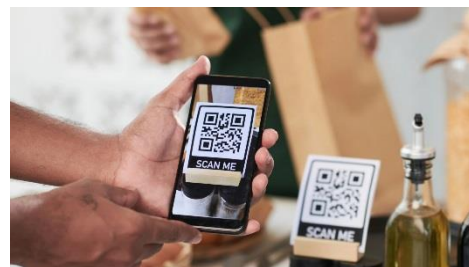
What is GS1?

GS1 (Global Standards One) is a **non-profit international body** that creates globally recognized **data standards** used across industries to improve **product identification**, **supply chain efficiency**, and **consumer trust**.

- Founded nearly **50 years ago**, GS1 introduced the **barcode** that revolutionized global retail.
- Today, GS1 operates in **over 100 countries**, including **GS1 India**, where it helps manufacturers, retailers, and consumers connect more effectively through standardized data.

What's Changing with the New QR Codes?

The **next-generation QR codes** will go far beyond traditional barcodes in both function and form. Here's what sets them apart:

- **Higher Data Capacity**: These new QR codes can carry **much more information**, enabling **real-time inventory tracking**, **enhanced product traceability**, and **authenticity verification**.
- **Greater Consumer Transparency**: Shoppers will be able to scan a product and instantly access details such as **origin**, **ingredients**, **sustainability practices**, and **certifications**.
- **Improved Product Safety**: These QR codes can link to **dynamic databases**, offering up-to-date recall alerts or expiration notices.

Phased Rollout Strategy:

- **Dual Labeling (Transitional Phase)**: Both **traditional 1D barcodes** and **new QR codes** will appear side-by-side on packaging to accommodate existing **Point-of-Sale (POS) systems**.
- **Full Adoption (Post-2027)**: As global retail infrastructure upgrades, the **QR code will become the sole scanning standard**, retiring the decades-old linear barcode.

Understanding the Technology: Barcode vs QR Code

What is a Barcode?

A **barcode** is a **machine-readable visual code** made up of vertical lines (1D) or a grid of squares (2D), used to **identify products** or items quickly and accurately.

- Introduced in **1973** by **George Laurer** and **Norman Joseph Woodland**.
- Known commonly as the **Universal Product Code (UPC)**.
- Primarily used in **supermarkets**, **logistics**, and **medical records**.

What is a QR Code?

A **QR Code (Quick Response Code)** is a type of **2D barcode** that stores information in **both horizontal and vertical dimensions**, making it capable of holding **hundreds of times more data** than a traditional barcode.

- Developed in **1994** by Japanese engineer **Masahiro Hara**.

- Widely adopted in **UPI payments**, **ticketing**, **e-commerce**, and **product authentication**.

Bonus Insight: In Japan, QR codes are so integrated into daily life that they are now used on **tombstones**, linking to online memorials.

Why This Matters: Benefits for Retailers, Manufacturers, and Consumers

- **Retailers** gain improved **inventory control** and **supply chain visibility**.

- **Manufacturers** can offer **traceability** and protect against **counterfeiting**.

- **Consumers** benefit from **product transparency**, **ethical sourcing info**, and **easy returns or recalls**.

Global Impact and India's Role:

- India, through **GS1 India**, is expected to play a pivotal role in the adoption of this new technology, especially with the growth of **digital retail** and **e-commerce**.

The move supports India's goals under the **Digital India** and **Smart Logistics** initiatives.

Conclusion: A Smarter Scan for a Smarter World

The shift to **GS1's next-gen QR codes** signals the dawn of **intelligent packaging** and **data-rich commerce**. With implementation targeted by **2027**, businesses and governments worldwide are gearing up to transition into a new standard of **connected retail**, where every scan tells a richer story.

India Receives 70 Proposals Under Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme

Context: The Government of India has received **70 applications**, with nearly **80% from small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**, under its flagship **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme**, signaling growing industry interest in **building a resilient domestic electronics ecosystem**.

About the Scheme: A Strategic Leap Towards Self-Reliance

The scheme, with an outlay of **22,919 crore**, is designed to:

- **Attract major investments**—both domestic and global—into **component-level manufacturing**.

- Enhance **Domestic Value Addition (DVA)** by strengthening India's **technological and manufacturing capabilities**.

- Facilitate the integration of Indian firms into **Global Value Chains (GVCs)**.

Key Features of the Scheme:

- Offers **differentiated incentives** based on component categories to bridge manufacturing disadvantages.

- Has a **six-year implementation period**, including a **one-year gestation period**.

- **Performance-linked payouts** are tied to **employment generation targets**, promoting both job creation and industrial growth.

Component Categories Eligible for Incentives:

1. **Category A**: High-tech subassemblies such as **display modules** and **camera modules**.

2. **Category B**: Critical base components like **multi-layered PCBs**, **lithium-ion cells**, and **non-surface mount devices**.

3. **Category C**: **Flexible PCBs** and **SMD passive components** that support miniaturization and efficiency.

4. **Category D**: **Capital equipment** and components used in the production of the above categories.

India's Electronics Sector: From Aspiration to Acceleration

- **Domestic production** has jumped from **1.90 lakh crore in FY15** to **9.52 lakh crore in FY24**, clocking a **CAGR of over 17%**.

- **Exports** have grown from **38,000 crore to 2.41 lakh crore** in the same period—a **20% CAGR**.

This rapid growth showcases India's rising prominence in global electronics markets, especially in areas like **mobile phones, LED lighting, and consumer electronics**.

Challenges on the Road to Global Leadership:

Despite the progress, India still faces several hurdles:

- **Fierce competition** from established players like **China, Taiwan, South Korea, USA, and Vietnam**.

- **Shortage of skilled manpower** for advanced electronics manufacturing.

- High **capital costs**, **technological complexity**, and **long payback periods** deter quick scalability.

Government Initiatives Supporting the Sector:

- **Make in India**: Focus on domestic production and reducing imports.

- **Digital India**: Expands digital infrastructure, increasing demand for electronic devices.

- **Startup India**: Encourages innovation in electronics and embedded systems.

- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme**: Offers lucrative benefits for manufacturing **mobile phones and critical components**.

- **National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019)**: Envisions India as a **global manufacturing and export hub**.

- **EMC 2.0 (Electronics Manufacturing Clusters)**: Supports shared infrastructure and logistics for efficient manufacturing.

Way Forward: Toward a $500 Billion Electronics Vision

India has set an ambitious goal of achieving **$500 billion in electronics manufacturing by 2030**. To meet this target, the country must:

- **Localize the production of advanced components** such as semiconductors, sensors, and chipsets.

- **Strengthen research and design capabilities** through robust **R&D investment**.

- **Form strategic global alliances** with technology leaders in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and the U.S.

- **Upskill the workforce** with specialized training in areas like **semiconductor design, robotics, and precision electronics**.

A Crisis in American Science: A Golden Moment for India

Context: For decades, the **United States** has stood as the **global leader in scientific innovation**, attracting top talent, producing Nobel laureates, and driving breakthroughs across disciplines. However, a deepening **scientific and funding crisis** is now threatening that dominance — and **offering a unique opportunity for India** to step into a more prominent role.

What's Going Wrong in the US Scientific Landscape?

1. **Funding Freeze:** Major funding bodies like the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** and **National Science Foundation (NSF)** are **cutting back international collaborations** and freezing new grants. This is stalling critical research across medical, environmental, and tech domains.
2. **Institutional Disruption:** American universities, including several top-tier institutions, are seeing **budget cuts, lab closures**, and **fewer tenure-track positions**, severely impacting the future of academic science.
3. **Scientist Exodus: Early-career and senior scientists** alike are migrating to **Europe, Asia, and Latin America** in search of stable research environments and better funding.

The Diaspora Edge: A Window of Opportunity for India

Tapping into Global Indian Talent:

India-born scientists represent a **significant portion of the US STEM workforce**, with many winning **prestigious global awards** such as the **Lasker, Breakthrough, and even Nobel Prizes**.

From Brain Drain to Brain Gain:

India has a timely opportunity to **reverse the brain drain** by:

- Creating **permanent academic pathways**
- Funding **world-class laboratories**
- Offering **institutional leadership** to returning scientists

How the World Is Responding:

France: Introduced the **"Safe Place for Science"** initiative at Aix-Marseille University to provide secure research environments for displaced scientists.

Germany & Switzerland: Offering **long-term fellowships** and **grant schemes** specifically targeting international researchers seeking stability.

China: Aggressively expanding **"Talent Return" programmes** to bring back overseas Chinese scientists with **generous funding and lab support**.

India's Steps Toward Scientific Repatriation:

1. **VAIBHAV Fellowships:** Connects the **Indian scientific diaspora** with domestic research institutes, promoting collaborative projects and mentorship.
2. **VAJRA Scheme:** Enables **short-term research opportunities** for **NRIs and PIOs**, helping to boost **global collaboration** within Indian R&D.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
NEWS
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

3. **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):** Launched to **strengthen research ecosystems** in Indian universities and **increase R&D investments**, promoting a **culture of innovation**.

4. **Philanthropic Contributions:** As per the **Indian Philanthropy Report 2025**, private funding for the **social sector reached 1.31 lakh crore in 2024**.
   Foundations like the **Tata Trusts, Infosys Foundation**, and **Wipro Foundation** are actively investing in R&D and academic excellence.

Challenges on the Road Ahead:

Despite positive steps, India must address several systemic issues:

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Many institutions lack **state-of-the-art laboratories** and **interdisciplinary collaboration platforms**.

- **Low Start-Up Funding:** Indian **research grants** are still **significantly smaller** compared to the US, EU, or China.

- **Short-Term Orientation:** Most schemes focus on **temporary roles**, not **long-term integration** into Indian academia.

- **Bureaucratic Hurdles: Slow approvals**, rigid regulations, and **inefficient fund disbursal** processes deter returning scientists.

- **Low R&D Spending:** India invests just **0.65% of GDP in R&D**, compared to **China's 2.4%** and the **US's 3.45%**, as per **NITI Aayog**.

Conclusion: From Knowledge Importer to Innovation Exporter

The **decline of America's scientific edge** presents India with a rare, historic opening. By **modernizing research infrastructure**, **offering global-standard autonomy**, and **strategically welcoming its diaspora**, India can **emerge as a global hub for science and innovation**.

This moment is not just about filling gaps — it's about **reshaping India's scientific destiny** and **transforming it into a net exporter of cutting-edge knowledge** in the 21st century.

Mosura Fentoni: Ancient Three-Eyed Predator Unearthed in Canadian Rockies

Context: In a stunning paleontological breakthrough, scientists have unveiled **Mosura fentoni**, a **506-million-year-old marine predator** that once ruled the ancient seas during the **Cambrian period**. This extinct creature belonged to the enigmatic group **Radiodonta**, early ancestors of modern arthropods, and exhibits an **extraordinary blend of primitive and advanced anatomical traits**.

A Glimpse Into the Ancient Oceans:

Mosura fentoni is the latest fossil find from the renowned **Burgess Shale** in the **Canadian Rockies**, a site famous for preserving soft-bodied organisms in exceptional detail. The discovery sheds light on the **incredible diversity and evolutionary experimentation** of early marine ecosystems.

Named after **"Mothra," the iconic kaiju** from Japanese cinema, Mosura fentoni earned its name due to its **moth-like hovering appearance** and unusual body design, setting it apart from its radiodont relatives like **Anomalocaris**.

Key Features of Mosura Fentoni:

- **Time Frame**: Thrived around **506 million years ago**, during the **Cambrian explosion**—a period of rapid diversification of life.

- **Group**: Member of **Radiodonta**, an extinct lineage of early arthropods known for their predatory lifestyle.

- **Size**: Measured about the **length of a human index finger**—small, but fierce.

- **Eyes**: Featured **three eyes**—two lateral and one large central eye—offering **advanced visual capabilities** for hunting and navigation.

- **Body Design**: Possessed a **trunk-like body** with **lateral swimming flaps**, similar to how modern rays glide through the water.

- **Rear Segments**: Had a uniquely **segmented rear section** with **16 compact segments**, each lined with **delicate gills**, an innovation that likely enhanced its **respiratory efficiency**.

- **Breathing Mechanism**: Unusually, it **breathed through posterior gills**, a **first among radiodonts**, showing a surprising **convergence with modern arthropods** like **horseshoe crabs, crustaceans, and insects**.

Why Mosura Fentoni Matters:

This discovery provides a rare glimpse into the **evolutionary innovations** of early arthropods. The advanced respiratory system, combined with a high level of mobility and visual acuity, suggests that even **half a billion years ago**, marine predators had already developed complex features that echo in modern-day species.

Moreover, the presence of a **central median eye** is an evolutionary puzzle that continues to fascinate researchers. It hints at **diverse sensory adaptations** that may have allowed species like Mosura fentoni to dominate Cambrian ecosystems.

Wider Implications in Evolutionary Biology:

- **Evolutionary Convergence**: Mosura's traits show that nature often **repeats successful designs**, even across vastly different eras and species.

- **Paleobiological Insights**: Helps scientists understand the **internal anatomy** and **respiratory evolution** of ancient lifeforms.

- **Fossil Record Significance**: Reinforces the **Burgess Shale's role** as a window into the early development of complex ecosystems.

This ancient predator may be long extinct, but it leaves behind a legacy that continues to enrich our understanding of life's deep history.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Dr. M.R. Srinivasan: The Visionary Behind India's Peaceful Nuclear Power Revolution

Context: India mourns the loss of **Dr. M.R. Srinivasan**, a pioneering nuclear scientist and a key figure in shaping the nation's nuclear energy programme. A titan in the field, Dr. Srinivasan passed away recently, leaving behind a legacy rooted in **scientific excellence, national service, and energy self-reliance**.

A Career Defined by Nation-Building:

Born on **January 5, 1930**, Dr. Srinivasan dedicated his life to advancing India's nuclear capabilities. His illustrious career spans the formative decades of India's atomic energy mission.

Key Milestones in His Journey:

- **1955**: Joined the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**, collaborating closely with **Dr. Homi Bhabha** on **Apsara**, India's first nuclear research reactor.

- **1959**: Became **Principal Project Engineer** for India's first nuclear power station.

- **1967**: Appointed **Chief Project Engineer** of the **Madras Atomic Power Station**.

- **1974**: Led the **Power Projects Engineering Division**, driving key infrastructural advancements.

- **1984**: Took charge as **Chairman of the Nuclear Power Board**.

- **1987**: Became **Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission** and **Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy**.
  - He was also the **founding Chairman of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**, under which **18 nuclear reactors** were commissioned.

Honours and Recognition:

Dr. Srinivasan's contributions earned him **national and international acclaim**:

- **Padma Shri** (1984)

- **Padma Bhushan** (1990)

- **Padma Vibhushan** (2015) – one of India's highest civilian honours

- Served on the **Planning Commission (1996–1998)** and **National Security Advisory Board (2002–2004, 2006–2008)**.

His scientific vision helped shape India's nuclear policy in both **civilian and strategic sectors**, balancing technological independence with responsible governance.

India's Nuclear Programme: A Pillar of Energy Security

India's nuclear journey, championed by visionaries like **Dr. Srinivasan**, is rooted in the aim of achieving **energy security, clean power, and strategic autonomy**.

The Three-Stage Nuclear Power Strategy:

1. **Stage I – Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)**: Utilizing **natural uranium** as fuel. This stage is the current backbone of India's civilian nuclear energy generation.

2. **Stage II – Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)**: Convert plutonium and depleted uranium into more fissile material, enabling sustainable fuel cycles.

o India has **successfully entered Stage II** with the **core loading of the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** at Kalpakkam.

3. **Stage III – Advanced Thorium Reactors**: Designed to leverage **India's vast thorium reserves**—the country holds **21% of global thorium resources**.

o Projects like **'Bhavini'** aim to unlock this clean and abundant energy source.

Current Capacity and Future Outlook:

- **Installed Capacity (2024)**: India operates **23 nuclear reactors** across **seven power stations**, generating **8,180 MW** (up from 4,780 MW in 2014).

- **Future Projection**: The nuclear capacity is expected to rise to **22,480 MW by 2031–32**, indicating rapid growth.

- **Energy Distribution Model**: Under a new power-sharing framework:

  o **50%** of electricity goes to host states

  o **35%** to nearby regions

  o **15%** to the **national grid**

Recent Developments and Global Cooperation:

India is increasingly positioning nuclear power as a **clean energy alternative**, alongside solar and wind. Recent advancements include:

- **Ten new reactors approved** for construction

- Exploration of **private sector participation**, including the launch of **Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMRs)**

- **Strategic partnerships** with **Russia, France, and the United States** for nuclear technology transfer and collaboration

India is also actively engaging in the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** to strengthen global nuclear safety and research cooperation.

Legacy of Dr. Srinivasan: A Torchbearer of Scientific Excellence

Dr. M.R. Srinivasan's life epitomized **visionary leadership, scientific innovation, and patriotic commitment**. His guidance helped lay the foundation for one of the world's most **self-reliant nuclear energy programmes**, driving both **clean energy growth** and **strategic independence**.

As India aims to meet its climate goals and energy needs, his legacy continues to **inspire the next generation of scientists and policymakers**.

Unveiling the Secrets of Liquid Carbon: A Scientific Breakthrough

Context: Liquid carbon is a rare and exotic state of carbon that does **not naturally exist** under everyday conditions. Unlike familiar forms such as **graphite** and **diamond**, or when bonded with oxygen as **carbon dioxide (CO_2)**, carbon in a **liquid phase** is only stable under **extreme temperatures and pressures**. It bypasses the liquid phase under normal atmospheric conditions, undergoing **sublimation** — transitioning directly from solid to gas.
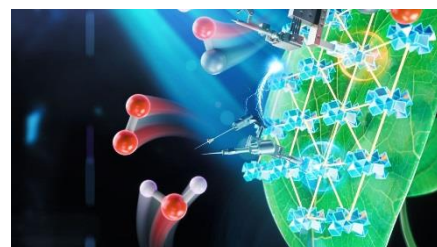
However, understanding this **transient phase** of carbon is crucial. It plays a key role in:

- **Planetary formation theories**, especially in the context of **carbon-rich exoplanets**

- **Astrophysical phenomena**, including those occurring in the cores of **giant planets**

- **High-energy material science**, such as in **laser-material interactions** and **nuclear fusion technologies**

Why Is Liquid Carbon So Elusive?

Studying liquid carbon in a laboratory has long been considered nearly impossible due to its **extreme formation conditions**:

- **Temperatures above 4500°C**

- **Pressures so high that no physical container can survive**

Unlike water or metals, carbon **does not have a conventional melting point** at ambient pressure — it skips the liquid state entirely. As a result, scientists have been unable to observe its atomic structure directly — until now.

The Breakthrough: Seeing the Invisible:

Using cutting-edge technology, researchers at the **European XFEL (X-ray Free Electron Laser)** in Germany, in conjunction with the **DIPOLE 100-X laser**, have finally cracked the code. Here's how:

1. **Laser-Driven Compression**: The high-powered **DIPOLE 100-X laser** was used to generate **intense compression waves**, transforming solid carbon into its **liquid form** for just a **nanosecond** — a billionth of a second.

2. **Ultrashort X-Ray Pulses**: During this fleeting phase, **XFEL's powerful X-ray pulses** were fired at the sample. These pulses produced **diffraction patterns**, revealing how the atoms were arranged at that precise moment.

3. **Atomic Resolution Movie**: By repeating the experiment with slight variations in timing, scientists effectively captured a **frame-by-frame molecular movie** of the **solid-to-liquid transition** of carbon.

What They Discovered: A Surprising Structure

The team found that **liquid carbon** has an **unexpectedly ordered structure** — similar to **liquid water**. Specifically, it consists of **four closely packed atomic neighbours**, a feature that **resembles diamond**, even though it's in a liquid state.

This result:

- **Validates long-standing theoretical models** of carbon behavior under high pressure

- **Accurately determines** the **melting point** of carbon in these conditions

- Offers clues about the internal composition of **exoplanets and stellar bodies**

- Enhances understanding of how **carbon-based materials behave** in **fusion reactors** and **laser experiments**

Did You Know? Extra Insight into the Carbon Universe

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Carbon is the fourth most abundant element** in the universe by mass, yet its **liquid form** has remained one of the **least understood**.

- The study could influence future **material engineering**, where carbon's unique properties are harnessed in fields like **quantum computing**, **nanotechnology**, and **spacecraft shielding**.

- The extreme conditions under which liquid carbon exists are similar to those inside **gas giants like Neptune** or even **super-Earths**, offering hints about **planetary evolution** and **habitability**.

## A Step Into the Future of Matter:

This groundbreaking research not only brings us closer to understanding carbon — the **element of life** — but also sets a new standard in **ultrafast, high-resolution science**. By pushing the boundaries of **laser physics** and **X-ray imaging**, scientists have opened a new frontier in observing **states of matter that were once only theoretical**.

Tianwen-2: China's Bold Leap Toward Asteroid Exploration and Beyond

Context: China is set to embark on its **next grand interplanetary venture** with the imminent launch of the **Tianwen-2 mission**, a pioneering journey to a **near-Earth asteroid** and a **distant comet** in the asteroid belt. This ambitious dual-objective mission will significantly enhance China's capabilities in **asteroid sampling** and **deep space research**.

Mission Overview: Tianwen-2 at a Glance

- **Launch Vehicle**: **Long March 3B**

- **Launch Site**: **Xichang Satellite Launch Centre**, Sichuan Province, China

- **Space Agency**: **China National Space Administration (CNSA)**

- **Primary Objective**:
    - **Survey and collect samples** from **asteroid 469219 Kamo'oalewa**
    - **Extended goal**: Fly onwards to study **comet 311P/PANSTARRS** in the **asteroid belt**
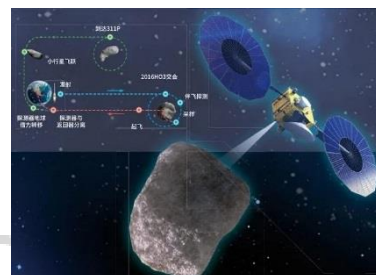
Target Asteroid: Kamo'oalewa — Earth's Mysterious Companion

Discovered in **2016** by the **Pan-STARRS 1 telescope** in Hawaii, **Kamo'oalewa** is a **quasi-satellite** of Earth — a rare class of celestial objects that **orbit the Sun** but stay **gravitationally influenced by Earth**.

Key Characteristics:

- Appears to **circle Earth**, though it's actually orbiting the Sun

- Has been in its current orbit for approximately **100 years**

- Predicted to stay in a **quasi-stable orbit** for the next **300 years**

- Offers a unique opportunity to study a **primitive remnant of early solar system material**

Such quasi-satellites could one day serve as **staging points for future lunar or Martian missions**, given their relative proximity and accessibility.

Sampling Mechanism: Advanced Technology in Action

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Tianwen-2 will employ the **"touch-and-go" technique** for sample collection — a method successfully demonstrated by:

- **NASA's OSIRIS-REx** (asteroid Bennu)
- **Japan's Hayabusa2** (asteroid Ryugu)

Key Sampling Features:

- The spacecraft will briefly **hover over the asteroid**, firing a projectile or gas burst to **dislodge surface material**, which is then collected.
- A **secondary sampling method** — known as the **"anchor-and-attach" technique** — may also be deployed. This involves **four robotic arms** that can **drill and extract subsurface material**, allowing scientists to access **more pristine samples**.

Expanding Horizons: A Journey Beyond Kamo'oalewa

Following the primary asteroid mission, Tianwen-2 will journey to **comet 311P/PANSTARRS**, a celestial object located in the **asteroid belt**. This phase aims to:

- Study **cometary activity**
- Observe **dust ejection mechanisms**
- Analyze the composition of **volatile-rich bodies**, enhancing our understanding of **solar system evolution**

About the Tianwen Program: China's Space Aspirations Soar

The **Tianwen** missions — named after **"Heavenly Questions"**, a classic poem by **Qu Yuan** — symbolize China's deepening engagement with **space exploration** and **scientific discovery**.

Key Missions:

- **Tianwen-1 (2020)**:
  o China's **first Mars mission**
  o Deployed an **orbiter, lander, and the Zhurong rover**
  o Marked China as only the **second country** to operate a rover on Mars
  o **Zhurong** operated successfully until **2022**
- **Tianwen-3 (planned for 2028)**:
  o Aims to **retrieve samples from Mars**
  o Will position China alongside NASA and ESA in the elite club of **interplanetary sample-return missions**

Why Tianwen-2 Matters: A Scientific and Strategic Leap

- **Scientific Discovery**: Provides vital clues to **early solar system formation**, **asteroid composition**, and the **origin of water and organics** on Earth.
- **Technological Advancement**: Demonstrates China's ability to execute **complex, long-duration interplanetary missions**.
- **Strategic Capability**: Reinforces China's position in the **global space race**, expanding its role in **planetary defense**, **resource prospecting**, and **space diplomacy**.
- **Potential for Future Mining**: Missions like Tianwen-2 lay the groundwork for **asteroid mining** — tapping resources like **platinum, nickel, and water ice** that could fuel future space colonies.

Looking Ahead: A New Era in Asteroid Research

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
NEWS
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

As nations look to the stars, **asteroids and comets** have become the **next frontier** for scientific breakthroughs and space-based industries. With **Tianwen-2**, China signals its determination to be a **leading player in the cosmos**, not just by reaching celestial bodies, but by **bringing their secrets back to Earth**.

Unlocking Pea Genetics: How Mendel's Legacy is Powering Modern Sustainable Agriculture

Context: A **global team of scientists** has made significant progress in **decoding the genetic blueprint of pea plants**, shedding new light on the classic traits studied by **Gregor Mendel**, the **pioneer of genetics**. This international collaboration, involving the **John Innes Centre (UK)**, **Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences**, and research groups from the **USA**, **France**, and **China**, has successfully mapped over **70 agronomic traits** to specific regions in the **pea genome**.

Revisiting Mendel Through Modern Genomics:

More than **150 years ago**, **Mendel** conducted experiments on **pea plants**, observing how traits like **seed shape**, **flower color**, and **plant height** were inherited. Now, through advanced **genomic sequencing**, scientists have connected these observable traits to **specific genetic markers**, enabling faster and more accurate **plant breeding** strategies.

This research, published in the journal **Nature**, not only honors Mendel's legacy but also deepens our understanding of the **genetic diversity** within pea plants—diversity that was largely hidden until now.

Why This Study Matters Today:

- **Peas and legumes** are vital to **sustainable agriculture** as they naturally **fix atmospheric nitrogen**, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers.

- With rising demand for **plant-based protein**, improving legume crops like peas is essential to support **food security** and **environmental sustainability**.

- The study enhances **predictive breeding** methods by integrating **AI technologies** that can analyze genomic data and forecast **ideal gene combinations** for traits like **high yield**, **disease resistance**, and **climate adaptability**.

Did you know? Peas were one of the first crops to be genetically analyzed in agriculture, and they continue to lead innovation in **legume breeding programs** around the world.

Mendel's Experiments: The Foundation of Modern Genetics

Gregor Mendel, often called the **Father of Genetics**, laid down the principles of heredity based on meticulous experiments with **pea plants** in the 19th century. He selected peas because they grow quickly, show **clear trait variations**, and allow controlled **cross- or self-pollination**.

Mendel studied **seven specific traits**:

- **Seed shape** (round or wrinkled)

- **Seed color** (green or yellow)

- **Pod shape** (constricted or inflated)

- **Pod color** (green or yellow)

- **Flower color** (purple or white)

- **Plant height** (tall or dwarf)

- **Flower position** (axial or terminal)

By cross-breeding thousands of plants, Mendel formulated three fundamental laws:

Mendel's Laws of Inheritance – Simplified:

1. **Law of Segregation** : Every organism carries **two alleles** for each trait, but only **one allele** is passed on to offspring during **gamete formation**. This explains how traits remain **discrete** and don't blend.

2. **Law of Independent Assortment**: **Genes for different traits** are inherited **independently**, meaning the inheritance of one trait (like seed color) doesn't affect another (like pod shape)—as long as the genes are on **different chromosomes**.

3. **Law of Dominance**: When two different alleles are present, the **dominant allele** masks the **recessive allele**. For example, in a hybrid plant with tall (T) and dwarf (t) genes (Tt), the **plant appears tall**.

Fun Fact: Mendel's research, though conducted in the mid-1800s, was largely ignored until **rediscovered in 1900** by three independent scientists—Hugo de Vries, Carl Correns, and Erich von Tschermak—who confirmed his findings.

From Monastery to Modern Labs: The Legacy Continues

- What began in a quiet **monastery garden in Austria** has today become the cornerstone of **genetic science**. Mendel's insights not only revolutionized biology but now fuel innovations in **agriculture**, **biotechnology**, and **personalized medicine**.

With this latest advancement in pea genetics, researchers are poised to make **crop improvement faster, more sustainable, and more efficient**—just as Mendel might have envisioned if he had access to today's technology.

Conclusion: A Legacy Reinvented for the Future

Gregor Mendel's pioneering spirit lives on, not just in classrooms and textbooks, but in the DNA of the crops we grow. This new genomic research bridges the gap between **classical genetics** and **cutting-edge technology**, ensuring that the lessons of the past continue to **nurture a more resilient and sustainable future**.

A Leap into the Quantum Era: DRDO Launches QTRC

Context: In a major step towards bolstering India's strategic technological edge, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** has inaugurated the **Quantum Technology Research Centre (QTRC)**. This cutting-edge facility is dedicated to advancing **indigenous quantum technologies** with a sharp focus on **national defence and security applications**.

Mission and Vision of QTRC:

The newly established QTRC is envisioned to **develop critical quantum technologies** that will transform areas such as **secure communications, advanced sensing, and timing systems**. It aims to enable India to lead in the **post-quantum era**, where quantum-powered systems will redefine **national security, surveillance, and communication**.

Key focus areas of QTRC:

- **Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)** systems to facilitate **ultra-secure communication** networks.

- **Laser characterisation** tools including **Vertical-Cavity Surface-Emitting Lasers (VCSELs)** and **Distributed Feedback (DFB) Lasers**.

- **Single-photon source test-beds**, essential for **quantum cryptography** and **secure data transmission**.

- **Micro-fabricated Alkali Vapor Cell set-ups**, crucial for **next-gen quantum sensors**.

Foundational Quantum Research Capabilities:

QTRC will also serve as a nucleus for **foundational quantum research**, led by **Solid State Physics Laboratory (SSPL)**. Key technologies being explored include:

- **Ultra-compact Atomic Clocks** using **Coherent Population Trapping (CPT)** to enable **precision timing in GNSS-denied zones**.

- **Atomic Magnetometers** based on **optically pumped magnetometry** to detect **extremely weak magnetic fields**—ideal for military and intelligence applications.

- Development of **solid-state quantum devices** and **novel materials**, such as **superconductors** and **topological insulators**, for cutting-edge defence applications.

Quantum Technology: A Revolution in the Making

Quantum technology leverages the **unusual properties of quantum mechanics**, such as **superposition** and **entanglement**, to achieve what classical systems cannot. This emerging frontier is reshaping global research and defence strategies.

Key Domains of Quantum Technology:

1. **Quantum Communication** – Enables **unbreakable encryption** and secure transfer of information.
2. **Quantum Computing** – Can **solve problems exponentially faster** than classical computers in specific domains like cryptography and drug discovery.
3. **Quantum Simulation** – Used to **model quantum systems**, particularly in physics and materials science.

4. **Quantum Sensing & Metrology** – Offers **unprecedented measurement precision**, useful in **geophysics, defence**, and **navigation**.

National Quantum Mission (NQM): India's Quantum Roadmap

Launched in **2023**, the **National Quantum Mission (NQM)** is a landmark initiative to position India as a **global leader in quantum innovation** by **2031**. The mission is focused on **scaling research**, **developing infrastructure**, and **accelerating quantum-powered applications**.

Key Goals of the NQM:

- **Build Quantum Computers** with **50 to 1000 physical qubits** using superconducting and photonic platforms.

- Achieve **satellite-based quantum communications** across **2000+ km** within India.

- Establish **inter-city quantum networks** with **quantum memory integration**.

- Design and manufacture **high-sensitivity magnetometers** and **atomic clocks** for critical use in **navigation and defence**.

- Develop **entangled photon sources**, **quantum detectors**, and **novel quantum materials**.

Implementation Strategy:

The NQM operates through **Four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs)**, partnering with premier research institutions and start-ups across India:

- **Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru**

- **IIT Madras**, in collaboration with **Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), New Delhi**

- **IIT Bombay**

- **IIT Delhi**

Together, these hubs integrate **14 technical groups across 17 states and 2 Union Territories**, creating a **pan-India quantum ecosystem**.

Why Quantum Matters for India's Future:

As nations race to **militarize and commercialize quantum capabilities**, India's focus on indigenous quantum research ensures **strategic autonomy**, **technological resilience**, and **security against emerging cyber threats**. By investing early and boldly, India can shape the global future of quantum science.

Conclusion: A Strategic Move Towards a Quantum-Ready India

The inauguration of the **Quantum Technology Research Centre by DRDO** is more than a scientific milestone—it's a **strategic leap**. By harnessing the disruptive potential of quantum mechanics, India is poised to **redefine its defence, technological, and economic landscape** in the coming decades.

India Creates History with Its First Gene-Edited Sheep

Context: In a landmark scientific development, researchers from **Kashmir** have successfully created **India's first gene-edited sheep** using the revolutionary **CRISPR-Cas9** technology. This milestone was achieved under a research initiative supported by the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**, marking a significant leap forward in the field of **animal genetics and biotechnology**.

What Makes This Sheep Unique?

Scientists edited the **myostatin gene** in a **local Merino lamb**, a gene that naturally limits muscle growth. By **disabling this gene**, the sheep experienced a **remarkable 30% increase in muscle mass**, resembling the characteristics of the **Texel sheep breed** known for its muscular build in Europe.

*This gene-edited sheep is **non-transgenic**, meaning it does **not contain foreign DNA**, and thus does not fall under the category of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).*

This is a critical distinction that could influence how the animal is regulated and perceived by the public and policymakers.

Gene Editing: A Precision Tool for the Future

Gene Editing, also known as **Genome Editing**, refers to a set of technologies that allow scientists to **precisely modify an organism's genetic code**. Unlike traditional genetic modification, which involves inserting foreign DNA, gene editing can simply **turn off, delete, or alter specific genes** within the existing genome.

Popular Gene Editing Techniques:

- **CRISPR-Cas9**: The most widely used tool today, CRISPR-Cas9 uses a **guide RNA (gRNA)** to locate a specific DNA sequence. The **Cas9 enzyme** then cuts the DNA at the exact location, allowing for gene correction, deletion, or insertion.

- **Zinc Finger Nucleases (ZFNs)**: These are engineered proteins where **zinc finger domains** recognize specific DNA sequences, and **FokI enzymes** cleave the DNA at that point.

- **Gene Knockout**: A technique where a specific gene is **disabled or deleted**, preventing the production of the protein it encodes. This approach helps in studying gene function and its impact on physiology or disease.

Why Is This Development Important?

- **Boosts Livestock Productivity**: The enhanced muscle mass in sheep can significantly **increase meat yield**, offering economic benefits to farmers.

- **Precision Without Transgenics**: Since **no foreign DNA** is introduced, it **may bypass stricter GMO regulations**, making commercialization easier.

- **Scientific Milestone for India**: This positions India at the forefront of **livestock genome editing**, aligning with global advances in **agricultural biotechnology**.

- **Ethical and Regulatory Significance**: The non-transgenic nature of the animal offers **a middle ground** in debates over GMOs, where **precision editing** is seen as less controversial.

Looking Ahead: A Revolution in Animal Genetics

This gene-edited sheep opens the door to **new possibilities in breeding** for traits such as **disease resistance, improved nutrition, and climate adaptability**. With proper regulatory guidance, gene editing could **transform India's livestock sector**, enhancing **food security, rural income, and sustainable farming**.

This development is a strong testament to India's growing capabilities in cutting-edge science and its potential to contribute meaningfully to the global bioeconomy.

India's first gene-edited sheep is not just a scientific achievement—it's a vision of how technology can shape the future of agriculture, economy, and sustainability.

India's Sodium-Ion Battery Revolution: A Game-Changer Beyond Lithium

Context: In a major scientific breakthrough, researchers at the **Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR)** in Bengaluru have developed a **high-speed sodium-ion (Na-ion) battery** capable of charging **up to 80% in just six minutes**. This innovation marks a significant step toward building an **energy-secure and lithium-independent India**.

Sodium-Ion Battery Technology India

Why Sodium-Ion Batteries? The Strategic Shift:

With global lithium reserves becoming increasingly **scarce, expensive**, and **geopolitically concentrated**—particularly under China's dominance—India is actively pivoting toward **sodium-ion battery technology** as a **sustainable, scalable alternative**.

Key Drivers for the Shift:

- **Lithium Dependency:** China controls over **70% of lithium refining** and battery manufacturing globally.

- **Abundant Sodium Resources: Sodium is widely available**, even in seawater, and is easier to extract and manage.

- **Reduced Environmental Risk:** Sodium poses **lower ecological and safety hazards** during storage and transportation.

Breakthrough by Indian Scientists: Superfast Charging Na-Ion Batteries

The JNCASR team has developed a **NASICON-type sodium-ion battery** that outperforms traditional Na-ion cells in both **charging speed and life cycle**. This cutting-edge battery can:

- **Charge to 80% in just six minutes**

- **Endure more than 3,000 charging cycles**

What Makes It Revolutionary?

- **Nanoparticle Engineering: Downscaling the anode material** to nanosize increases surface area for faster ion exchange.

- **Carbon Coating:** A thin **carbon wrap** stabilizes the anode and enhances conductivity.

- **Aluminum Doping: Introducing aluminum atoms** improves both **charge transport and structural integrity**.

These modifications significantly boost battery efficiency, while reducing wear and risk of overheating.

Advantages of Sodium-Ion Batteries:

- **Widespread Availability: Sodium is more abundant** than lithium and more evenly distributed globally.

- **Lower Production Costs: Aluminum replaces copper**, cutting costs significantly.

- **Superior Safety Profile:** Can be **transported at zero volts**, reducing risks of short-circuits and fires.

- **Enhanced Thermal Stability:** Functions effectively over **a wider temperature range**—ideal for Indian climates.

Challenges Still Ahead:

While promising, Na-ion batteries are still in the early stages of commercialization and face some limitations:

- **Lower Energy Density:** Current Na-ion batteries store **less energy per kilogram** than lithium counterparts.

- **Design Constraints:** Lack of flexibility in cell design (**fewer shape options**).

- **Shorter Cycle Life:** While 3,000+ cycles is impressive, it still trails **lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO$_4$)** batteries which exceed **8,000 cycles**.

- **High Initial Costs:** Early-stage production remains expensive due to limited **economies of scale**.

Future Scope: Powering a Greener Tomorrow

Despite these limitations, sodium-ion batteries are ideal for:

- **Electric two- and three-wheelers**

- **Drones and low-speed electric vehicles**

- **Decentralized solar energy systems in rural areas**

- **Stationary grid storage for renewable power backup**

Validated through **advanced electrochemical tests and quantum simulations**, India's Na-ion battery innovation could offer a **cost-effective and safe solution** for powering its vast energy needs—especially in **climate-sensitive and economically diverse regions**.

Global Implications: India as a Clean Tech Leader

As the world looks for **lithium-free, sustainable battery alternatives**, India's early investments in Na-ion R&D may position it as a **global hub for green battery innovation**. This aligns with the nation's **"Make in India"** and **"Atmanirbhar Bharat"** missions, and supports **decarbonisation goals under the Paris Agreement**.

Did You Know?

- **Seawater contains over 11,000 ppm of sodium**—making it an **inexhaustible source** for battery-grade sodium extraction.

- Na-ion batteries can be especially effective for **climate-resilient power storage** in heat-prone regions like **sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia**.

Autonomous Warfare Unleashed: Operation Sindoor and the Future of India-Pakistan Conflict

Context: In a bold response to the **April 22 Pahalgam terror attack**, India launched **Operation Sindoor** in early May — marking the **first-ever autonomous drone-led military conflict** between **nuclear-armed India and Pakistan**. This four-day engagement showcased the **next generation of warfare**, dominated not by infantry or tanks, but by **artificial intelligence, drone swarms**, and **electronic warfare systems** operating beneath the threshold of all-out war.

The Emergence of Algorithmic Conflict: Latest Developments

Operation Sindoor represented a **strategic and technological leap** in South Asian warfare. From **May 7 to May 10**, both India and Pakistan employed **Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)** such as **armed drones, loitering munitions**, and **electronic decoys**.

Key Highlights:

- **Indian UAVs** like the **Heron MK-II** and **TAPAS-BH-201 (Rustom-II)** conducted **deep surveillance** operations inside Pakistani territory prior to active strikes.

- India executed **nine precision drone strikes**, utilizing **real-time ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)** capabilities.

- **Tactical deception** was employed through **decoy drones** to mislead Pakistani air defence systems and deplete their interceptors.

The operation concluded with a **ceasefire on May 10**, but not before redefining the **nature of conflict in the digital age**.

India's Arsenal in the Skies: Tactical Drone Deployment

India deployed an **advanced mix of indigenous and imported UAVs,** utilizing both **offensive and support platforms** in a highly coordinated sequence:

Types of Drones Used:

- **Nagastra-1**: India's homegrown **loitering munition**.

- **Harop Drones**: Israeli-origin UAVs capable of **autonomous radar-seeking strikes**.

- **Swarm Drones**: Developed by **DRDO and private startups**, used for **radar saturation and spoofing**.

- **Micro and Quadcopters**: Provided real-time video feeds and target tracking through the **Integrated Battle Management System (IBMS)**.

Operational Strategy:

- **Initial waves** used **electronic warfare payloads and decoys** to jam radars and exhaust **Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM)** stocks.

- **Follow-up waves** delivered **precision strikes** guided by ISR data from **Heron MK-II** and **TAPAS drones**.

Noteworthy Incidents:

- A **cricket match in Rawalpindi** was reportedly halted by drone strikes.

- An **HQ-9 SAM system** (Chinese-made) near Lahore was allegedly **neutralised** by an Indian Harop drone.

This display of precision showcased **India's dominance in autonomous engagement**, reducing risk while maximizing impact.

India's Multi-Layered Air Defence: Digital Shield in Action

India's success during Operation Sindoor was heavily anchored in its **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)**, the brain behind India's **modern air defence network**.

Core Capabilities of IACCS:

- Integration of **AWACS, satellites, radar inputs**, and **real-time ISR** feeds.

- Automated response mechanisms for **low-flying drone threats**.

- **Fail-safe redundancy** ensures continued operation even if certain command nodes are targeted.

Countering Pakistani Disruptions:

Pakistan attempted **asymmetric drone swarms** with varying altitudes and timings to **disrupt IACCS nodes**, but India's **resilient mesh network** thwarted these attempts effectively.

Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs):

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
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India also employed **high-powered laser and microwave systems** to disable drones instantly — ushering in **next-gen kinetic defence**.

Supporting Technologies: Tactical Enablers on the Battlefield

Akashteer Command System:

- Developed by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**.

- Ensures **digital coordination** between sensors and firing units for **real-time threat interception**.

- Handles low-altitude UAV threats effectively even during **electronic warfare or comm disruptions**.

Low-Level Air Defence (LLAD) Systems:

- Upgraded Cold War-era platforms now feature **electro-optical sights** and **radar-aided fire**.

- **BSF and Army snipers** also contributed to frontline drone interceptions — a rare use of traditional marksmanship in modern conflict.

Modern Air Defence Additions:

- **SPYDER System**: Armed with **Python-5 and Derby missiles**, deployed for **point defence** against UAVs and cruise missiles.

- **Akash and Akash-NG**: Provided robust **medium-range defence**.

- **Barak-8**: Long-range, co-developed with Israel, defended **high-value targets**.

- **S-400 'Triumf' (Sudarshan Chakra)**: Russia's long-range defence system integrated for **strategic asset protection**.

All systems were integrated via **IACCS**, ensuring **unified response capabilities** across land, sea, and air.

Redefining War: Autonomous Algorithms and Digital Dominance

Operation Sindoor may well be remembered as **South Asia's entry point into autonomous algorithmic warfare**.

Major Takeaways:

- Wars no longer start with **troop mobilizations**, but with **data, drones**, and **algorithms**.

- This operation has **redefined deterrence** — replacing conventional might with **AI-guided precision**.

- **India's doctrine is evolving**, moving toward a **pre-emptive, tech-driven response framework**.

Global Significance:

- This shift mirrors global trends — from **Ukraine's drone use** to **Israel's automated defence grids** — placing India at the forefront of **autonomous battlefield innovation**.

- It also emphasizes the importance of **cybersecurity, electromagnetic spectrum dominance**, and **AI policy** in military strategy.

The Road Ahead: India's Technological Edge in Combat

Operation Sindoor has **set a precedent** — wars of the future will be **data-driven, autonomous, and algorithmically pre-planned**. As India invests further in **quantum communication, AI command systems**, and **hypersonic tech**, the strategic advantage will increasingly favor nations that **innovate in the digital realm**.

The Satavahana Dynasty: A Glimpse into Ancient Deccan Culture and Politics

Context: Recently, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** uncovered **11 ancient inscriptions** in **Peddapalli, Telangana**, which are attributed to the **Satavahana dynasty**. These inscriptions, dating from the **1st BCE to the 6th CE**, are written in **Brahmi script** and **Prakrit language**, offering valuable insights into the political, cultural, and religious practices of the era. These findings also confirm **Telangana's historical ties** to **Asmaka**, one of the **sixteen Mahājanapadas** (ancient Indian republics).

The Satavahana Dynasty: Key Facts

- **Time Period**: **1st Century BCE to the Early 3rd Century CE**

- **Location**: Initially centered around **North Maharashtra** and later expanding to **Karnataka** and **Andhra Pradesh**.

- **Significance**: The Satavahanas succeeded the **Maurya Empire** in the **Deccan** and **Central India**. Though mentioned as **Andhras** in the Puranas, the Satavahanas themselves did not use this term in their inscriptions.

Notable Rulers and Their Achievements:

Simuka (60 BCE - 37 BCE):

- Founder of the **Satavahana dynasty** and recognized as the first ruler in the **Naneghat inscription**.

Gautamiputra Satakarni (AD 106 - 130):

- Regarded as the greatest ruler of the **Satavahanas**.

- Defeated the **Shakas** and obliterated the **Kshaharata** dynasty.

- Expanded the empire from **Malwa** to **Karnataka**.

- Re-struck coins of defeated Kshaharata ruler **Nahapana**, symbolizing conquest.

Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (AD 130 - 154):

- Shifted the capital to **Paithan** (modern-day **Pratishthan**) on the Godavari River.

- Fostered alliances, including a marriage to **Rudradaman's** daughter to stop conflicts with the **Western Kshatrapas**.

Yajna Sri Satakarni (AD 165 - 194):

- Regained lost territories and promoted **maritime trade**.

- His coins depicted **ships**, highlighting the peak of his **maritime activity**.

Cultural and Technological Contributions:

- **Material Culture**: The **Satavahanas** are known for their **iron tools** such as **hoes, ploughshares**, and **arrowheads**, which contributed to agricultural advancements, particularly **paddy transplantation** in the **Krishna-Godavari** delta.

- **Trade**: Urbanization in cities like **Peddabankur** (200 BCE - 200 CE) saw the construction of **brick structures**, **underground drainage**, and **wells**, reflecting the increasing complexity of the region's infrastructure and trade. Roman and Satavahana coins were found in the region, signifying strong **trade relations**.

Social and Religious Life:

- **Social Structure**: Initially a tribal kingdom, the **Satavahanas** became **Brahmanized**, re-establishing the **varna system**. Their society exhibited a **matrilineal influence**, with kings often named after their mothers.

- **Religious Practices**: The **Satavahana rulers** were staunch **Brahmanas**, patronizing **Vedic rituals** and worshiping gods like **Krishna** and **Vasudeva**. However, they were also strong patrons of **Buddhism**, with land grants made to **Buddhist monks** in places like **Nagarjunakonda** and **Amaravati**.

Art and Architecture:

- The **Satavahanas** are noted for their **rock-cut architecture**, including significant **Chaityas** and **Viharas** like the **Karle Chaitya** and **Nasik Viharas**.

- They supported the **Amaravati School of Art**, famous for its detailed and **narrative sculptures** of the **Buddha's life**.

- **Inscriptions** from **Naneghat** and **Karle** highlight their deep religious patronage, especially towards **Buddhism**.

Language and Literature:

- The **official language** of the Satavahanas was **Prakrit**, and their inscriptions were written in the **Brahmi script**.

- The **Gathasattasai**, a **Prakrit text** attributed to King **Hala**, contains **700 verses** and is one of the most notable literary works of the time.

Decline and Legacy:

- The **Satavahana dynasty** started to decline around the **3rd century CE**. They were succeeded by the **Ikshvakus** in the **Eastern Deccan**, who continued many of the Satavahana traditions, especially in their patronage of **Buddhism**.

- Following the decline, the **Pallavas** emerged as prominent rulers in the **southern Deccan**.

Conclusion:

The discovery of these **Satavahana inscriptions** in **Telangana** provides a deeper understanding of the dynasty's **political, religious, and cultural impact**. Known for their **military prowess**, **support for Buddhism**, and **contributions to trade and urbanization**, the **Satavahanas** played a pivotal role in shaping the early history of the **Deccan** region. Their legacy lives on in the **Ikshvakus**, who carried forward the dynasty's cultural and administrative practices, particularly in Buddhist patronage.

Ancient Flames in Stone: Scientists Discover Palaeofire Evidence in the Godavari Basin

Context: In a remarkable discovery, scientists have found **evidence of palaeofires**—ancient wildfires dating back to the **Permian Period (~250 million years ago)**—in the **Godavari Basin**, shedding light on the role of wildfires in shaping Earth's **climate, ecosystems, and coal formation** over millions of years.

What Are Palaeofires?

Palaeofires are **wildfires from prehistoric times**, preserved in the **geological record**. These fossilized fire events provide crucial insights into:

- **Past vegetation dynamics**

- **Atmospheric oxygen levels**
- **Climate evolution**
- **Coal and carbon cycle formation**

The study, which spans from the **Late Silurian Period (443.8–419.2 million years ago)** to the **Quaternary Period (2.58 million years ago to present)**, shows how wildfires have continuously shaped Earth's landscapes and **carbon storage processes**.

Cutting-Edge Techniques Reveal Ancient Fire Signatures:

Researchers employed **advanced scientific methods** to analyze ancient **sedimentary rocks** for signs of wildfire activity:

- **Palynofacies Analysis** – Studied microscopic organic debris in sediments.
- **Raman Spectroscopy** – Examined the chemical composition of charcoal.
- **FTIR Spectroscopy** – Identified organic molecular structures.
- **Rock-Eval Pyrolysis** – Measured hydrocarbon generation potential of the samples.

These methods enabled scientists to identify **three key types of organic matter**:

1. **Translucent Organic Matter (TrOM):** Includes pollen grains and plant fragments.
2. **Palaeofire Charcoal (PAL-CH):** Solid evidence of past wildfires.
3. **Oxidised Charcoal (OX-CH):** Likely transported charcoal altered after the fire.

Key Discoveries and Geological Implications:

- The team successfully **differentiated between in situ (on-site)** and **ex situ (transported)** charcoal—resolving a major geological puzzle about the origin of charcoal in **coal seams**.
- **Stratigraphic layers** revealed clear patterns:
  - **Regressive phases** (falling sea levels): Well-preserved, concentrated charcoal deposits.
  - **Transgressive phases** (rising sea levels): More dispersed and oxidised charcoal, showing greater environmental reworking.
- The **Permian Period's high oxygen levels** made the planet **highly fire-prone**, increasing both the **intensity and frequency** of wildfires. These fires likely influenced **peat formation**, a precursor to coal.

India's Contribution: The Raniganj Coalfield Case:

- The **Raniganj Coalfield** in eastern India was among the **first regions** to show **macroscopic charcoal** in coal seams, confirming the existence of palaeofires in ancient **peat-forming environments** (known as **palaeomires**).

Why It Matters Today:

Understanding palaeofires helps us better comprehend the **global carbon cycle**, including how **carbon was stored** in ancient environments and how wildfires contributed to **long-term carbon sequestration**. This has direct relevance to:

- **Climate change studies**
- **Carbon cycling models**
- **Modern wildfire risk assessments**

Did You Know?

- Earth's highest atmospheric oxygen levels (~35%) occurred during the **late Paleozoic era**, making the **Permian Period one of the most fire-active epochs** in Earth's history.

- Fossil charcoal, though small, is incredibly **resilient**, and can **preserve fire evidence for hundreds of millions of years**.

This research not only **connects India's ancient geological past with global Earth history**, but also offers **valuable lessons** for managing carbon and understanding the potential **long-term impacts of wildfire activity** in our rapidly changing climate.

ITBP Successfully Summits Mt. Makalu – The World's Fifth Highest Peak

Context: The **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)** successfully scaled **Mt. Makalu,** the fifth highest peak in the world.

About Mt. Makalu:

- **Mt. Makalu**, standing tall at **8,485 meters**, is the **fifth highest mountain** in the world.

- It lies in the **Mahalangur range** of the **Nepal Himalayas**, along the border between **Nepal** and the **Tibet Autonomous Region of China**.

- Located **southeast of Mt. Everest**, the mountain is known for its **distinctive pyramid-shaped peak** and **four razor-sharp ridges**.

- The peak rises majestically within the **Makalu Barun National Park**, offering panoramic views of the lush **Barun Valley**—a hotspot of **biodiversity** and **glacial beauty**.

- **Subsidiary Peaks**: Makalu includes **two significant sub-peaks**, **Makalu II** (7,678 m) and **Kangchungtse**, located approximately **3 km** from the main summit.

Historical Significance:

- **First Ascent**: Mt. Makalu was **first climbed in 1955** by a **French expedition** led by **Jean Franco**.

- It remains one of the **most technically demanding peaks** to scale due to its **steep pitches, sharp ridges**, and **exposure to high-altitude weather hazards**.

ITBP's Achievement:

- The **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)** has now **successfully conquered Mt. Makalu**, adding another milestone to its legacy of high-altitude excellence.

- This marks the **6th 'eight-thousander'** scaled by the ITBP out of the **14 peaks above 8,000 meters** on Earth.

- To date, the force has climbed **229 Himalayan peaks**, including:

  o **Mt. Everest (8,848 m)**

  o **Mt. Kanchenjunga (8,586 m)**

  o **Mt. Dhaulagiri (8,167 m)**

  o **Mt. Lhotse (8,516 m)**

o **Mt. Manaslu (8,163 m)**

About ITBP:

- The **Indo-Tibetan Border Police** is one of India's **Central Armed Police Forces**, functioning under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.

- Specialized in **high-altitude operations**, the ITBP is tasked with guarding the **3,488 km-long India-China border** in some of the world's **harshest terrains**.

- Besides security, ITBP personnel are known for their **mountaineering expertise**, **disaster response**, and **rescue missions** in remote, inaccessible regions.

Did You Know?

- **Makalu's name** is derived from the **Sanskrit word 'Maha-Kala'**, a form of Lord Shiva, meaning **'Great Black'**—likely referring to the mountain's **dark, forbidding appearance**.

- The **Barun Valley**, nestled below Mt. Makalu, is one of the **few places on Earth where tropical forests meet ice-covered peaks**, making it a **UNESCO-recognized biodiversity hotspot**.

A Testament to Human Spirit:

The ITBP's successful ascent of **Mt. Makalu** not only highlights **India's mountaineering prowess** but also symbolizes the **resilience, discipline, and courage** of the force that tirelessly guards our borders under **extreme weather and terrain conditions**.

Keezhadi Excavations: Unveiling the Hidden Legacy of Ancient Tamil Civilization

Context: The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has recently directed **archaeologist Amarnath Ramakrishna**—the former lead of the **Keezhadi excavations**—to **resubmit his excavation report** after incorporating necessary **revisions and clarifications**. This move comes as part of ASI's ongoing scrutiny to ensure that the findings from Keezhadi are accurately documented and scientifically validated.

About Keezhadi: A Window into Ancient Urban Tamil Culture

Located near **Madurai in Tamil Nadu**, along the **Vaigai River**, the **Keezhadi excavation site** has emerged as one of the **most remarkable archaeological discoveries** in South India in recent times.

Historical Significance:

- The site is believed to date back to **between the 5th century BCE and the 3rd century CE**, aligning it with the **Sangam Age**.

- Keezhadi offers compelling evidence of an **urbanized, literate, and industrial society** that thrived in Tamil Nadu long before many classical civilizations.

Key Discoveries:

- **Brick structures**, **pottery inscribed with Tamil-Brahmi script**, **iron tools**, **beads**, and **artisan workshops**.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025

NEWS

Freedom UPSC
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- The findings point to **advanced water management systems**, **textile dyeing**, **metalworking**, and **a high degree of social organization**.

Urbanization Beyond the North: A Paradigm Shift

- Keezhadi has **challenged the conventional belief** that **urban civilization in India** originated exclusively from the **Indo-Gangetic plains**. The site suggests that **southern India experienced independent urban growth**, marking an early phase of **Dravidian civilization** development.

Understanding the Sangam Era

The **Sangam Period** is a culturally rich and historically vital phase in **Tamil history**, roughly spanning from **300 BCE to 300 CE**.

What is Sangam?

- The term **'Sangam'**, derived from the Sanskrit word *Sangha* (meaning "assembly"), refers to the **literary academies** that were believed to be established under the patronage of the **Pandya kings**. These assemblies produced a wealth of classical Tamil literature.

Major Literary Works of the Sangam Age:

- **Tolkappiyam** – The **oldest Tamil grammar text**, covering phonology, grammar, and poetics.

- **Pattupattu** – A collection of **Ten Idylls**, celebrating love, valor, and devotion.

- **Ettuthogai** – The **Eight Anthologies**, which provide insight into social and political life.

- **Padinenkilkanakku** – **Eighteen Minor Works** focused on ethics and morality.

- **Three Great Epics** –

    o **Silappadikaram** (The Tale of the Anklet)

    o **Manimekalai** (Sequel to Silappadikaram)

    o **Civaka Cintamani** (A Jain romantic epic)

Cultural and Academic Impact of Keezhadi:

- The site **strengthens the historical roots of the Tamil language**, showing its use in **inscriptions as early as 6th century BCE**.

- It provides physical validation to the **rich descriptions found in Sangam literature**.

- **Keezhadi bridges the gap** between **literary and archaeological history**, confirming that **urban culture thrived in the South** parallel to or even before similar developments in the North.

Conclusion: A Tamil Legacy Rising from the Earth

Keezhadi is more than just an archaeological site—**it is a testament to Tamil Nadu's ancient sophistication**, literacy, and craftsmanship. As scholars continue to piece together the story through **ongoing excavations and research**, Keezhadi is **reshaping Indian historiography** by showcasing **a vibrant and independent urban culture of the South** that deserves global recognition.

New Dinosaur Discovery in China: Meet Jinchuanloong niedu

Context: A new species and genus of **eusauropod dinosaur**, named *Jinchuanloong niedu*, has been uncovered in **Gansu Province**, China. This discovery is based on a **fossilized partial skeleton**, including a **nearly complete skull**, found near **Jinchang City** in the **Xinhe Formation**—an area rich in Middle Jurassic fossils.

Who Was Jinchuanloong niedu?

This newly identified species represents an **early-diverging eusauropod**, a subgroup of the iconic **sauropod dinosaurs** known for their **long necks, immense size**, and **plant-based diet**.

- *Jinchuanloong niedu* lived approximately **165 million years ago**, during the **Middle Jurassic period**.

- It walked on **four sturdy legs**, had a **long neck and tail**, and thrived as a **strict herbivore** in lush, prehistoric environments.

The Importance of the Discovery:

This find is **paleontologically significant**, as it enhances our understanding of early **sauropod evolution** and diversification during the Jurassic era. The well-preserved **skull** provides rare and valuable data for studying the **anatomy and feeding mechanisms** of early eusauropods.

Sauropods: The Giants of Prehistoric Earth

Sauropods were the **largest land animals** to ever walk the Earth. These gentle giants:

- Had **elongated necks** and **tails,** helping them reach high foliage and maintain balance.

- Lived across a vast timespan—from the **Early Jurassic to the Late Cretaceous**.

- Were **global in distribution**, with fossils discovered on **all continents**, including Antarctica.

Eusauropods, the group to which *Jinchuanloong niedu* belongs, were among the **most successful and widespread sauropods** after a major global warming event in the late Early Jurassic, which led to the extinction of other sauropod lineages.

Famous members of the **eusauropod lineage** include:

- **Shunosaurus** – known for its clubbed tail.

- **Omeisaurus** – a long-necked herbivore from China.

- **Mamenchisaurus-like taxa** – characterized by **extraordinarily long necks**.

A Glimpse Into Earth's Distant Past:

The discovery of *Jinchuanloong niedu* not only adds a new name to the **dinosaur family tree**, but also offers insight into how **ancient ecosystems** functioned during the Middle Jurassic period.

It also underscores the importance of **Gansu Province** as a rich site for fossil exploration and expands our understanding of **dinosaur evolution in Asia**.

Conclusion: A New Star in the Dinosaur Kingdom

With its impressive features and well-preserved fossil, *Jinchuanloong niedu* now stands alongside other **legendary sauropods**, reminding us of the immense biodiversity that once ruled the planet. This discovery reinforces China's growing reputation as a hotspot for **groundbreaking dinosaur research**, and highlights how much more there is to learn from the **mysteries buried beneath our feet**.

Modernising India's Education System: Government's Push for 21st Century Readiness

Context: In a major policy thrust, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** has reiterated the government's commitment to **modernising India's education system** to meet **21st-century challenges**. At the **YUGM Innovation Conclave** held at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**, he outlined a vision for a **future-ready, inclusive, and globally competitive education ecosystem**.

Introduction: A New Era in Indian Education

India is undergoing a **paradigm shift in education**, led by the government's proactive approach to align academic systems with the **knowledge economy** and global standards. Central to this transformation is the **New Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which seeks to prepare Indian youth with the **skills, mindset, and values** needed for global leadership in innovation.

Driving Forces Behind the Reform

The reforms are underpinned by a **trinity of development principles**:

- **Talent**: Unlocking the potential of India's vast youth population
- **Technology**: Integrating digital tools and platforms across the learning ecosystem
- **Temperament**: Fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial spirit

The **NEP 2020**, constantly evolving to meet changing needs, serves as the cornerstone of this educational revolution.

Key Interventions & Infrastructure Overhaul:

National Curriculum Framework:

- Revamping the curriculum for **Classes 1–7**
- Emphasis on **conceptual clarity**, **experiential learning**, and **multilingual education**
- Teaching materials being developed in over **30 Indian languages**

Higher Education Expansion:

- Expansion of **IITs**, **AIIMS**, and other premier institutes
- Launch of **meditech and AI-integrated programs** to bridge industry-academia gaps
- Increased capacity for **STEM and innovation-based disciplines**

Digital Infrastructure: One Nation, One Platform

- Under **PM e-Vidya** and **DIKSHA**, the government is creating a **national digital education backbone**
- Content available in **30+ Indian and 7 foreign languages**, enabling **inclusive access**

Boosting Research, Innovation & Discovery:

Research Parks & R&D Cells:

- Rise in **Research Parks** from **3 in 2014** to **9 currently**, with **13 more planned**
- Nearly **6,000 higher education institutions** now host **R&D Cells**
- Encouragement for a **research-led academic environment**

Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):

- Proposed to become India's apex body for **cutting-edge research funding and policy**
- **Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD)** doubled from ₹60,000 crore (2013–14) to ₹1.25 lakh crore

Lab-to-Market Ecosystem:

- Support for **startups, IP creation, and academic innovation hubs**
- Focus on **commercialising student-led innovations** and **industry collaboration**

Global Academic Engagement & Mobility:

- International expansion of Indian institutions:
    - **IIT Delhi** in **Abu Dhabi**
    - **IIT Madras** in **Tanzania**
    - Plans for **IIM Ahmedabad** in **Dubai**
- **Foreign universities** (e.g., from the US, UK, Australia) invited to set up campuses in India
- Enhanced **student exchange** and **faculty collaboration** with global institutions

Access to World-Class Knowledge:

One Nation, One Subscription:

- Nationwide academic access to **leading global research journals and publications**
- Designed to eliminate institutional paywalls and **democratise access to scientific literature**

India's AI-Driven Educational Future:

AI for Smart Learning:

- Integrated with the **IndiaAI Mission,** educational reforms include:
    - **Personalised learning platforms**
    - **Skill gap identification** through data analytics
    - **Adaptive learning modules** based on student performance

AI is expected to **transform pedagogy**, make learning **more inclusive**, and **enhance administrative efficiency** in educational institutions.

Alarming Drop in Government School Enrolment Across 23 States

Context: A recent review by the **Ministry of Education (MoE)** has revealed a **significant decline in student enrolment** in **government schools across 23 states** for the academic year 2024–25. The trend, first highlighted in the **UDISE+ 2023–24 report**, continues to deepen, triggering renewed concern over the future of public schooling in India.

States with the Steepest Decline:
Among the worst-affected states:

- **Uttar Pradesh** tops the list with a staggering fall of **21.83 lakh** students

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Bihar** follows with **6.14 lakh**

- **Rajasthan** with **5.63 lakh**

- **West Bengal** with **4.01 lakh**

In southern and northeastern India, the trend is also evident:

- **Karnataka**: Drop of **2 lakh**

- **Assam**: **1.68 lakh**

- **Tamil Nadu**: **1.65 lakh**

- **Delhi**: **1.05 lakh**

Midday Meal Participation Also Declines:

The **PM-POSHAN scheme**—formerly the **Midday Meal Scheme**—has also seen **a sharp fall in coverage**, particularly in the same states:

- **Uttar Pradesh**: Meal participation dropped by **5.41 lakh**

- **Rajasthan**: **3.27 lakh**

- **West Bengal**: **8.04 lakh**

- **Delhi**: **97,000** fewer students availed the scheme in 2024–25

Reports from various states indicate a **growing trend of students bringing their own food**, raising concerns over the quality or coverage of school-provided meals.

Possible Causes Behind the Downturn:

1. **Data Cleansing & Methodology Shift** : The government has moved from **school-wise aggregated data** to **student-level Aadhaar-based reporting**. This transition has likely eliminated duplicate or "**ghost entries**," revealing more accurate but lower enrolment figures.

2. **Shift to Private Schools Post-Pandemic**: Several states have noted that parents are increasingly choosing **private schools** in the post-COVID period, **reversing the pandemic-era return** to government institutions.

3. **Declining Trust in Public Services**: Inadequate facilities, staffing shortages, and inconsistent implementation of schemes like **PM-POSHAN** may be driving families away from public schools.

Implications of Declining Enrolment:

- **Nutritional Deficiency Risk**: Reduced participation in **school meal schemes** may impact **children's health, learning, and attendance**.

- **Administrative Gaps**: The shift to **digital, Aadhaar-based tracking** may cause **temporary disruptions**, affecting data accuracy and fund allocation.

- **Policy Review Needed**: The fall calls for **urgent introspection** of existing **education and welfare strategies** to retain children in public education systems.

Ministry of Education's Response:

The MoE has termed the drop a matter of **"deep concern"** and has:

- Asked all states to **submit detailed reports by June 30**

- Urged officials to **enhance the coverage and quality** of school meals

- Directed **re-investigation of enrolment figures** to validate the data

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Page No
232

Understanding PM-POSHAN: A Vital Welfare Initiative

- **PM-POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman)** is a **centrally sponsored scheme** under the Ministry of Education.

- It provides **hot, cooked meals** to **11.20 crore children** from **Balvatika to Class 8** in **10.36 lakh government and government-aided schools**.

- Operates on a **60:40 funding split** between Centre and states (90:10 for NE states).

- Covers **material costs** (pulses, oil, vegetables, etc.) and **100% of grain supply** via **FCI (Food Corporation of India)**.

- Aims to improve **child nutrition**, **school attendance**, and **cognitive development**.

The Road Ahead: Urgent Reforms Required:

The enrolment drop in government schools cannot be viewed in isolation. It reflects broader issues of **trust, delivery, and governance** in India's public education system. Strengthening **infrastructure**, ensuring **teacher availability**, upgrading **digital tools for monitoring**, and **reinvigorating PM-POSHAN** are essential to reversing this trend.

Mizoram Becomes India's First State to Achieve Full Functional Literacy

Context: In a historic achievement, **Mizoram has become the first Indian state to attain Full Functional Literacy**, with a remarkable **literacy rate of 98.20%**, as per the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24**. This milestone places Mizoram above the **95% literacy threshold** defined by the **Ministry of Education** to qualify for *functional literacy*.

What is Functional Literacy?

Functional literacy goes beyond basic reading and writing. It refers to individuals' ability to **read, write, perform basic arithmetic**, and apply these skills effectively in daily life. In today's context, it also includes **digital and financial literacy**, enabling individuals to participate more fully in society and the economy.

ULLAS: A Lifelong Learning Movement

Mizoram's success story is closely linked to the **ULLAS initiative** – *Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society*, officially known as the **Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram** or **New India Literacy Programme (NILP)**.

Here are key highlights of the programme:

- **Type**: **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**

- **Duration**: **2022-2027**

- **Ministry**: **Ministry of Education**

- **Target Group**: Adults aged **15 years and above**, especially those who missed out on formal education

- **Core Components**:

  o **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)**

  o **Critical Life Skills** (including health, hygiene, and disaster management)

- o **Basic Education** (up to Class 8)

- o **Vocational Skills Development**

- o **Continuing Education** (libraries, book clubs, digital learning)

Volunteer-Driven Implementation:

The programme thrives on **volunteerism**, encouraging citizens to contribute through a sense of **Kartavya Bodh** (duty consciousness). **Samajik Chetna Kendras** have been set up using available infrastructure like schools, community halls, and local cultural centers, with schools serving as the operational base.

Educational resources are made accessible in **regional languages** through platforms like the **DIKSHA Portal** and the **ULLAS Mobile App**.

Certification Through FLNAT:

To assess learning outcomes, the **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)** is conducted **twice a year**, or **on-demand**, at local schools. Successful learners are awarded certificates recognizing their achievement.

Mizoram's Feat in National Context:

While **Ladakh** was the first administrative unit (Union Territory) to declare full functional literacy, **Mizoram's achievement as the first full-fledged state** marks a significant stride in India's education reform. It serves as a model for other states aiming to empower citizens through **inclusive, lifelong learning**.

Did You Know?

- According to UNESCO, each year of schooling can increase a person's income by up to **10%**.

- Literacy among adults leads to **lower child mortality**, **higher civic participation**, and **better health outcomes**.

- India aims to make **100% functional literacy a reality** under the National Education Policy (**NEP 2020**), in alignment with **SDG Goal 4**: *Quality Education for All.*

Mizoram's literacy success reflects the power of community participation, inclusive policy, and the transformative vision of NEP 2020. The journey from basic literacy to functional literacy marks not just an educational milestone—but a social revolution.

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Vembanad Lake: A Jewel of Kerala's Natural Heritage

Context: The **Vembanad Lake**, Kerala's largest and longest freshwater lake, is undergoing a significant restoration effort, inspired by the **Namami Gange Programme**. With a **188.25 crore** investment, the project aims to rejuvenate this vital water body over the next **five years**, with ongoing studies influencing potential revisions.

Key Highlights of the Rejuvenation Plan:

- **Collaborative Effort**: The **Alappuzha District Administration** is leading the initiative, supported by **eight specialized subcommittees** covering sectors such as **agriculture**, **fisheries**, **water resources**, **biodiversity**, **sanitation**, and **disaster management**.

- **Restoration Goals**: The plan targets reversing the alarming **27% shrinkage** in the lake's surface area between **1917 and 1990**, caused by **land reclamation**, **sedimentation**, and **encroachment**.

- **Recent Actions**: Efforts have included successful **cleaning drives**, removing **28.72 tonnes of plastic waste** and large amounts of **water hyacinth**, a weed that chokes the water body.

About Vembanad Lake: An Ecological and Cultural Treasure

- **Size and Location**: Vembanad is not only the **longest lake in India** but also the largest in **Kerala**, stretching across **96.5 km**. It spans three districts: **Alappuzha**, **Kottayam**, and **Ernakulam**, covering an impressive area of **2,033 square kilometers**.

- **Local Names**: The lake is known by several names, including **Vembanad Kayal**, **Vembanad Kol**, **Punnamada Lake** (in **Kuttanad**), and **Kochi Lake** (in **Kochi**).

Ecological Importance:

- **River Sources**: Vembanad is fed by **six major rivers**, notably the **Meenachil**, **Achankovil**, **Pamba**, and **Manimala**, which contribute to its vast catchment.

- **Arabian Sea Outlet**: The lake has an outlet to the **Arabian Sea** on its western side, linking it to the broader marine ecosystem.

- **Islands**: The lake is home to several important islands, including **Pathiramanal**, **Perumbalam**, and **Pallippuram**, which are crucial for both ecological balance and tourism.

- **Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary**: On the lake's eastern shore, the **Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary** attracts nature lovers and birdwatchers from across the world.

Cultural Significance:

- **Nehr Trophy Snake Boat Race**: The famous **Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race** (known as **Vallam Kali**) is held annually in August in the **Punnamada** segment of the lake, drawing spectators globally.

International Recognition:

Vembanad is part of the **Vembanad-Kol Wetland**, a **Ramsar site** designated in **2002** for its international ecological importance. This wetland is a critical habitat for numerous species of migratory birds and aquatic life, contributing significantly to Kerala's biodiversity.

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Additional Insights:

- **Tourism**: Vembanad is a central part of Kerala's famous **backwater tourism**, attracting both domestic and international tourists for boat rides, birdwatching, and eco-tourism experiences.

- **Water Quality**: Beyond the lake's aesthetic and cultural value, its water quality directly impacts the livelihood of thousands who depend on it for fishing and agriculture.

- **Sustainability**: The ongoing rejuvenation project aims not only to restore ecological balance but also to **sustain the traditional livelihoods** of the local communities, ensuring that Vembanad remains a vibrant resource for future generations.

The rejuvenation of **Vembanad Lake** is an essential step towards preserving Kerala's natural heritage, balancing ecological restoration with sustainable development. Through these concerted efforts, Vembanad is poised to reclaim its position as one of India's most treasured ecosystems.

Ukraine's Critical Minerals: Powering the Future of Green Tech and Global Security

Context: In a major strategic shift, the **United States and Ukraine** have signed a **critical minerals partnership**. The agreement gives the U.S. **preferential access** to Ukraine's rich mineral deposits and establishes a **joint investment fund** to support **Ukraine's post-war reconstruction** and energy independence.

What Are Critical Minerals and Rare Earth Elements?

Critical Minerals are naturally occurring materials essential to modern technology, clean energy, and national defense. Their **supply chains** are highly vulnerable due to **geopolitical risks** and **limited global sources**.

Rare Earth Elements (REEs) — a subgroup of 17 metals — are indispensable for:

- **Electric vehicle (EV) motors**
- **Smartphones**
- **Missile guidance systems**
- **Wind turbines**
- **Military and aerospace technology**

According to the **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)**, 50 minerals, including **lithium, cobalt, nickel**, and **rare earths**, are considered **critical** due to their:

- **Non-substitutability**
- **High economic importance**
- **Supply vulnerability**

Ukraine's Hidden Treasure Trove:

Ukraine holds **immense untapped potential** in critical mineral reserves, making it a vital resource partner for the West.

Mineral Riches at a Glance:

- **22 of the 34** EU-classified critical minerals are found in Ukraine.
- **Rare Earth Elements**: Includes **neodymium, cerium, lanthanum, erbium, scandium**, and **yttrium**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- **Lithium**: Estimated reserves of **500,000 metric tonnes**, among the **largest in Europe**.

- **Nickel, cobalt, manganese**: Key for **EV batteries** and **energy storage**.

- **Graphite**: Ukraine holds about **20% of global reserves**, vital for **nuclear reactors** and **battery anodes**.

- **Titanium**: Used in **aircraft, satellites, defense**, and **high-performance materials**.

Key Locations:

- **Lithium**: Central, eastern, and southeastern Ukraine

- **Titanium**: Northwestern and central Ukraine

- **Graphite and REEs**: Scattered across central and eastern regions

Strategic Importance: Countering China's Dominance:

China currently controls **over 80%** of global rare earth production, raising major concerns about **monopoly-driven pricing** and **supply chain risks**.

Ukraine's vast resources offer:

- A **secure alternative** for the **EU and U.S.**

- A chance to **diversify the global critical minerals supply**

- Strategic leverage for Ukraine's **economic revival** and **geopolitical relevance**

The Road Ahead: Opportunity & Challenge

- **Investment Potential**: With Western backing, Ukraine could become a **European mining hub** post-conflict.

- **Reconstruction Synergy**: Mineral extraction can **fund rebuilding**, create **jobs**, and boost **exports**.

- **Environmental Concerns**: Sustainable mining practices will be key to **long-term viability** and **global support**.

Summary:

Mineral	Use	Ukraine's Strength
Lithium	EVs, energy storage	One of Europe's largest reserves
Graphite	Batteries, nuclear reactors	~20% of global resources
Rare Earths	Electronics, defense, green tech	Multiple types available across the country
Titanium	Aerospace, defense, industrial alloys	High-grade, strategically located

Egypt in the Spotlight: Strengthening Strategic Ties with India

Context: India and Egypt have taken a significant step in enhancing their bilateral relationship, particularly in the field of **counter-terrorism**. The two nations convened the **4th Joint Working Group Meeting**, reaffirming their commitment to cooperate on security, intelligence sharing, and regional stability.

Egypt: A Strategic Crossroads of Continents

Geopolitical Location:

Egypt is uniquely positioned at the **northeastern edge of Africa**, acting as a crucial link between **Africa, Asia**, and **Europe** through the **Suez Canal**—a globally vital maritime trade route.

- **Capital**: **Cairo**, one of the largest cities in Africa and the Arab world

- **Neighbouring Countries**:

  o **Libya** to the **west**

  o **Sudan** to the **south**

  o **Israel** to the **northeast**

- **Bordering Water Bodies**:

  o **Mediterranean Sea** to the **north**

  o **Red Sea** and **Gulf of Aqaba** to the **east**

Fact: The **Suez Canal**, located in northeastern Egypt, handles over **10% of global maritime trade**, making Egypt a critical player in global logistics.

Key Geographical Features of Egypt:

Terrain and Natural Landmarks:

- **Major Mountain Ranges**:

  o **Red Sea Hills** (Eastern Desert)

  o **Sinai Mountains** (Sinai Peninsula)

- **Highest Peak**:

  o **Mount Catherine** (2,642 m), located in the **Sinai Peninsula**, is Egypt's tallest mountain and a revered pilgrimage site.

- **Major River**:

  o The **Nile River**, the **longest river in the world**, flows **northward through Egypt**, playing a vital role in agriculture, economy, and ancient civilization.

- **Deserts**:

  o **Western Desert** (*Al-Ṣaḥrāʾ al-Gharbiyyah*): Covers about **two-thirds** of the country.

  o **Eastern Desert** (*Al-Ṣaḥrāʾ al-Sharqiyyah*): Lies between the **Nile River** and the **Red Sea**, rich in mineral resources.

Why Egypt Matters Today:

- **Strategic Location**: Controls the **Suez Canal**, crucial for European–Asian trade.

- **Cultural Influence**: A historic hub of **Arab culture**, **Islamic scholarship**, and **ancient history**.

- **Diplomatic Role**: A key mediator in **Middle Eastern peace processes** and **African Union initiatives**.

- **Economic Hub**: Investing in mega projects like the **New Administrative Capital** and **clean energy**, including one of the world's largest **solar farms in Benban**.

Place in News: Chile

Context: A powerful **7.4 magnitude earthquake** recently struck **southern Chile**, prompting a **tsunami alert** across coastal regions. Chile, located in the **Pacific Ring of Fire**, frequently experiences intense **seismic activity**, including **earthquakes**, **volcanic eruptions**, and **tsunamis**.

Political and Geographical Overview:

Location:

Chile lies along the **western edge of South America**, stretching over 4,300 km from **north to south**, making it one of the longest countries in the world.

Boundaries:

- **North**: Bordered by **Peru** and **Bolivia**
- **East**: Shares its longest border with **Argentina**
  - The **Argentina–Chile border** is the **longest in South America** and the **third longest globally**, after:
    - **Canada–USA**
    - **Russia–Kazakhstan**
- **West**: Flanked by the vast **Pacific Ocean**

Geographical Highlights:

- **Andes Mountains** dominate the eastern spine of the country.
- **Atacama Desert** in the north is the **driest non-polar desert in the world**, receiving less than 1 mm of rain per year in some areas.
- Sits on the **Pacific Ring of Fire**, making it prone to:
  - **Volcanic eruptions**
  - **Earthquakes**
  - **Tsunamis**
- **Ojos del Salado**:
  - The **highest active volcano on Earth**, at **6,893 meters**
  - Also the **second-highest peak** in the Western Hemisphere

Economic Importance:

- **Chile is the world's largest producer of copper**, a vital metal for:
  - Electrical wiring
  - Electronics
  - Renewable energy infrastructure
- Located within the **"Lithium Triangle"** (with **Bolivia** and **Argentina**), containing:

o Over **50% of the world's lithium reserves**

o Crucial for **electric vehicle batteries** and **clean energy tec**

Did You Know?

- **Chile was the first South American country to join the OECD** (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

- The **Valparaíso region** is home to the oldest stock exchange in Latin America.

- Chile's **Naval Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service (SHOA)** plays a key role in monitoring Pacific tsunami threats.

Angola: A Nation of Strategic Importance and Growing Defense Ties with India

Geopolitical Overview of Angola:

- **Capital**: **Luanda**

- **Location**: **Southwestern Africa**

- **Neighboring Countries**:

  o **Republic of the Congo** (North)

  o **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (Northeast)

  o **Zambia** (Southeast)

  o **Namibia** (South)

- **Maritime Boundary**: **Atlantic Ocean** (West)
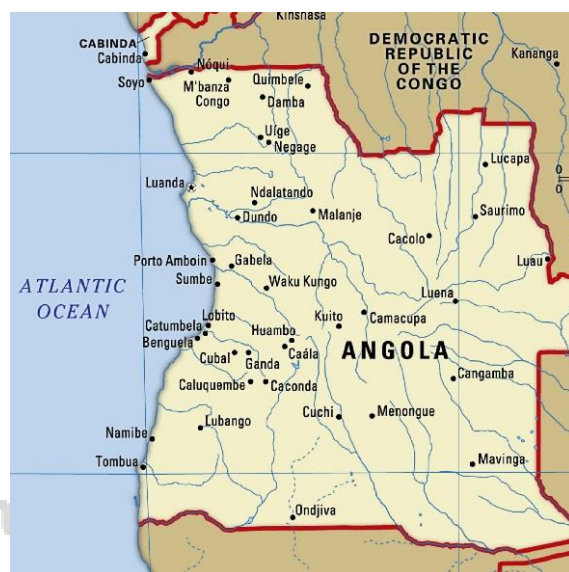
Geographical Features & Natural Resources:

Angola is endowed with **rich natural resources**, which are pivotal to its economy:

- **Petroleum**, **diamonds**, **iron ore**, **phosphates**, **copper**, **feldspar**, **gold**, **bauxite**, and **uranium**.

- Major **rivers** include the **Zambezi**, **Cuango** (Kwango), and **Cuanza** (Kwanza) rivers. The **Cuango River** forms part of the boundary between Angola and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**.

Climate:

- **Tropical Climate** with a marked dry season. The climate is influenced by the **cold Benguela Current**, which flows northwards along the **southern African coast**, bringing cooler air and affecting precipitation patterns.

Angola-India Defense Relations:

- Recently, **India** announced a **$200 million defense credit line** to Angola, marking a significant step in strengthening defense and strategic ties between the two nations.

Extra Insight: Angola's Strategic Position in Africa

Angola, with its strategic location in **southern Africa**, plays a critical role in the region's **geopolitics**. As one of Africa's largest oil producers, Angola has become a vital partner for energy, trade, and defense relations,

especially with countries like **India**, **China**, and **Russia**. The increasing **defense collaboration** highlights Angola's growing importance as a security partner in the **African continent**.

The Maldives: A Fragile Paradise in the Indian Ocean

Context: The **Maldives** is a **sovereign archipelagic nation** located in the **Indian Ocean**, consisting of **26 natural atolls** and over **1,000 coral islands**. The country lies to the **south-southwest of India**, and its **northernmost atoll** is strategically positioned close to the Indian subcontinent.

One of the notable maritime boundaries of the Maldives is the **Eight Degree Channel**, a crucial sea lane that separates the island of **Minicoy** (part of **India's Lakshadweep Islands**) from the northern Maldives. This channel is vital for **commercial and strategic navigation**.

Unique Geographical Features of the Maldives:

- **Coral Origins:** The entire nation is **formed by coral reefs**. It is among the few countries with **no rivers or mountains**, giving it a flat and fragile topography.

- **Reef Ecosystem:** The Maldives boasts the **seventh-largest coral reef system** in the world, contributing about **3.14%** of the **global coral reef coverage**. These reefs support a vibrant ecosystem and are a major tourist attraction.

- **Rising Sea Concerns:** With an **average elevation of only 1.7 meters** above **mean sea level**, the Maldives is one of the **most vulnerable nations** to **sea-level rise** caused by **climate change**. A one-meter rise in sea level could submerge most of the inhabited islands.

Why HADR Exercises Matter:

The joint HADR drill is not just a **military engagement**, but a **humanitarian partnership** aimed at improving **interoperability** in crisis situations like **cyclones, tsunamis**, or **coastal flooding**. These efforts equip both nations with shared strategies for **search and rescue operations**, **medical aid**, and **logistics support** during disasters.

Did You Know?

- The Maldives is the **lowest-lying country** in the world.

- The nation's **exclusive economic zone (EEZ)** spans over **900,000 sq. km**, despite its small land area—making its **marine resources** highly valuable.

- It was the **first country** to hold an underwater cabinet meeting (in 2009) to highlight the threat of **climate change**.

Early Arrival of Indian Monsoon: IMD Signals Possible Advancement in 2025

Context: The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has recently hinted at a **potential early onset** of the **southwest monsoon**, which typically begins over **Kerala around June 1**. Normally, it takes about **10 days** for the monsoon winds to progress from the **Nicobar Islands** to the southern tip of the Indian mainland. This early onset could have significant implications for **agriculture**, **water management**, and **disaster preparedness**.
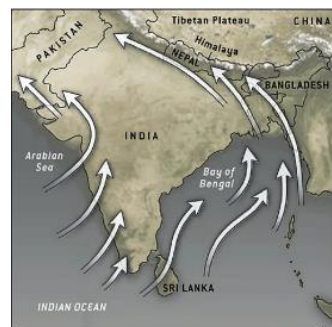
Understanding the Indian Monsoon: Natural Engine of South Asia

- The **Indian monsoon system** is one of the most **complex and powerful weather phenomena** in the world, driven by multiple interacting climatic forces. Here's a breakdown of the key **mechanisms** that generate and sustain the monsoon:

1. **Land–Sea Thermal Contrast**: During summer, the **Indian subcontinent heats up more rapidly** than the surrounding ocean. This creates a **low-pressure zone over land**, drawing in **moist, cool air** from the ocean, which rises and forms **rain-bearing clouds**.

2. **Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ):** The **ITCZ**—a low-pressure belt near the **equator**—**shifts northward** during the summer. This **draws trade winds** towards the subcontinent, feeding the monsoon system and enhancing rainfall, especially over the **Indo-Gangetic plains**.

3. **Tibetan Plateau's Role:** The **elevated Tibetan Plateau** becomes intensely heated, forming a **thermal low** that strengthens **vertical air circulation**, further **intensifying the inflow** of moist monsoon winds.

4. **Tropical Easterly Jet (TEJ):** This **high-altitude jet stream**, active during summer, **supports the monsoon trough**, enhancing both **rainfall intensity** and **geographical spread**.

Oceanic Influencers: ENSO & Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)

El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO):

- **El Niño:** Warms the **central Pacific Ocean**, typically **weakening the Indian monsoon**.
- **La Niña:** Cools Pacific waters and is often **linked with enhanced monsoon rainfall**.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):

- **Positive IOD:** Warmer waters in the western Indian Ocean **boost monsoon rains**.
- **Negative IOD:** Leads to **drier conditions** and **weaker monsoons** over India.

Stages of the Monsoon: From Onset to Withdrawal

Arabian Sea Branch:

- Arrives over **Kerala by June 1**, moves up the **west coast**, soaking regions like **Goa, Maharashtra**, and the **Western Ghats**.

Bay of Bengal Branch:

- Hits **Northeast India** in early June, then spreads across the **Indo-Gangetic plains**. The entire country is generally covered by **mid-July**.

Monsoon Retreat:
- Begins from **northwestern India** in **October**. The shift in winds causes **"October Heat"**—hot, humid conditions after rainfall ceases.
- Brings **post-monsoon rains** to **southeastern India**, especially **Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh**.

Monsoon's Impact: Lifeline of India:

Agriculture:

- Powers the **Kharif cropping season**, especially for **rice, maize**, and **pulses**.
- Over **50% of Indian farmland** is **rain-fed**, making monsoon performance **crucial for food security**.

Economy:

- Monsoon-driven agriculture affects **GDP**, **inflation**, **rural incomes**, and **employment**.

Water & Energy:

- Recharges **rivers, lakes, aquifers**, and **hydroelectric dams**, providing water for **drinking**, **irrigation**, and **electricity generation**.

Biodiversity & Culture:

- Sustains **forests**, **wetlands**, and **ecosystems**.
- Central to **cultural traditions**, **festivals**, and **folk practices** celebrating rain.

Disasters:

- **Excess rainfall** often causes **floods**, **landslides**, and **urban waterlogging**—especially in vulnerable, densely populated regions.

Scientific Progress: Strengthening Forecast Accuracy:

Monsoon Mission (2012):

- Launched by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**, this mission focuses on **improving dynamical modeling** for better **medium and long-term monsoon forecasts**.

National Supercomputing Mission:

- Supports **high-performance computing** capabilities to run **complex weather models** for **more accurate monsoon predictions**.

IMD–ICAR Collaboration:

- Delivers **Agrometeorological Advisory Services** to farmers, offering **region-specific weather forecasts** and **farming advice** to boost **climate resilience** in agriculture.

Did You Know?

- The Indian monsoon **directly affects nearly 70% of India's population**, especially those involved in agriculture.
- A **"normal monsoon"** delivers **96% to 104%** of the **Long Period Average (LPA)** rainfall, currently pegged at **87 cm**.
- **2022 and 2023** saw erratic monsoon patterns due to **back-to-back La Niña and El Niño cycles**.

Looking Ahead:

An **early monsoon** in 2025 could bring **early sowing opportunities** for farmers but may also pose **risks of intense early flooding** or **pest outbreaks**. It underscores the importance of **scientific preparedness**, **policy responsiveness**, and **climate adaptation strategies** in an era of growing **weather unpredictability**.

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Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
NEWS
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Anak Krakatau Volcano: Rising Fury of the 'Child of Krakatoa'

Context: Anak Krakatau, meaning "**Child of Krakatoa**," continues to remind the world of the volatile power lying beneath the Earth's crust. Recently, satellite radar analysis revealed that the **volcano's deadly 2018 collapse**—which triggered a destructive tsunami—was **preceded by years of unnoticed ground deformation**, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced monitoring of volcanic activity.

Where is Anak Krakatau Located?

- Nestled in the **Sunda Strait**, between **Java and Sumatra** in **Indonesia**, Anak Krakatau is part of the **volatile Pacific Ring of Fire**—a horseshoe-shaped zone known for its **frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions**. This region houses **more than 75% of the world's active and dormant volcanoes**.

Birth of a Volcano: From Krakatoa's Ashes

- Anak Krakatau **emerged from the sea in 1927**, following the **catastrophic eruption of Krakatoa in 1883**, one of the most violent eruptions in recorded history. That eruption produced an explosion **heard over 3,000 km away**, generated **tsunamis over 30 meters high**, and killed more than **36,000 people**.
- Rising from the submerged remnants of that disaster, Anak Krakatau began its own **stages of growth through frequent strombolian eruptions**—a volcanic activity pattern marked by **regular, explosive bursts of lava**.

Eruptions and Geological Activity:

- Since 1963, Anak Krakatau has **erupted at least nine times**, with most episodes **lasting less than a year**. It is built on **layered deposits of lava, ash, and volcanic rocks**, making it a **classic stratovolcano** with steep sides and powerful eruptions.

The **volcano sits atop multiple magma chambers**, creating a **complex and unstable system** that poses significant risks to nearby populations and coastlines.

The 2018 Collapse and Tsunami Tragedy:

- On **22 December 2018**, a violent eruption led to the **collapse of the volcano's southwestern flank**. The resulting **underwater landslide** displaced enough material to generate a **tsunami**, which struck the coasts of **southern Sumatra and western Java** with **little warning**, killing **over 430 people** and injuring thousands.

What makes this event even more tragic is the **satellite data revelation**: **slow deformation of the volcano's structure had been ongoing for years**, but it went largely unnoticed due to **lack of detailed monitoring**.

Scientific Advances and Monitoring Gaps:

- Recent studies using **Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar (InSAR)** have uncovered **pre-eruption ground movement**, proving that modern satellite tools can be instrumental in **forecasting potential disasters**.
- However, **Indonesia's archipelagic geography and limited resources** mean that many volcanoes are **under-monitored**, putting millions at risk.

Did You Know?

- Anak Krakatau **grows by several meters every year** due to regular eruptions.

- Indonesia has **more active volcanoes than any other country**, with **more than 120 volcanoes currently active**.

The region is part of the **collision zone between the Indo-Australian and Eurasian tectonic plates**, making it one of the **most tectonically active areas in the world**.

Conclusion: A Living Reminder of Earth's Power

Anak Krakatau is not just a geological marvel—it is a **living, growing reminder** of how dynamic and dangerous Earth's interior can be. While its eruptions offer valuable scientific insights, they also underscore the **need for robust early warning systems**, **international cooperation**, and **public awareness** to reduce future risks.

Jenu Kuruba Tribe: Keepers of the Forest and Tradition

Context: In a significant moment for indigenous rights, **Jenu Kuruba families** have begun returning to their **ancestral forest lands** inside **Nagarhole National Park**, marking a powerful step toward reclaiming their cultural and ecological heritage.

Who are the Jenu Kuruba?

The **Jenu Kuruba tribe** is one of India's **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**, residing primarily in the **Kodagu and Mysore districts** of **Karnataka**. Their name comes from the Kannada words **"Jenu" meaning honey** and **"Kuruba" referring to a community**, highlighting their traditional role as **honey gatherers and forest foragers**.

Livelihood and Cultural Identity:

For generations, the Jenu Kurubas have lived in harmony with the forest, drawing sustenance from **non-timber forest produce**, honey collection, small-scale **shifting agriculture**, and **minor forest-based crafts**.

- They live in small forest hamlets known as **"Hadi"**.

- Many also engage in wage labour or small-scale farming outside the forest during non-harvest seasons.

In different regions, they are also known as **"Then Kurumba"** or **"Kattu Naikar"**, reflecting variations in language and local naming traditions.

Social Structure and Leadership:

The **Jenu Kuruba community** follows a **semi-nomadic lifestyle** with a distinct social framework:

- Leadership is decentralized and traditional, led by a **headman (Yajamana)** and a **ritual leader (Gudda)**.

- These leaders manage internal disputes, community affairs, and rituals without interference from **formal law enforcement or religious institutions**.

Their system fosters **self-governance, mutual cooperation, and cultural continuity**, resisting homogenization under dominant societal norms.

Spiritual Beliefs and Expressions:

The tribe's **belief system** centers around **nature and ancestral spirits**. They have **unique deities** and **ritual practices** rooted in the forest ecosystem.

- Their **folk songs and dances** reflect themes of **marriage, farming, mythology**, and **seasonal rituals**.

- These cultural expressions are not only forms of entertainment but also means of preserving **oral history** and **spiritual wisdom**.

Struggles and Reclamation:

In recent decades, the Jenu Kurubas faced **displacement** due to wildlife conservation policies, particularly the creation of **Nagarhole National Park**. Despite their **sustainable relationship with the forest**, they were evicted in the name of ecological protection.

However, their return today is a result of **long-standing advocacy and legal support** under the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, which recognizes the **rights of forest-dwelling communities** to reside and thrive in their ancestral habitats.

Did You Know?

- **PVTGs**, like the Jenu Kurubas, represent **the most marginalized tribal communities** in India, with low literacy rates, health indicators, and economic opportunities.

- The **Jenu Kuruba community** has often collaborated with **conservationists** to demonstrate how **indigenous stewardship of forests** can support biodiversity rather than harm it.

- **Nagarhole Forest**, their homeland, is a critical habitat for tigers, elephants, and many endemic species—underscoring the importance of **coexistence between conservation and indigenous rights**.

Conclusion: A Culture Rooted in the Forest

The story of the **Jenu Kuruba tribe** is one of **resilience, deep ecological knowledge**, and **cultural richness**. As they return to their rightful homes, they not only reclaim their land but also reinforce the idea that **indigenous communities are natural custodians of forests**, not threats to them. Their journey serves as a reminder that **development and conservation must always honor the voices of those who have lived in balance with nature for centuries**.

Iran in the Spotlight: Celebrating 75 Years of Diplomatic Ties with India

Context: As part of commemorating **75 years of diplomatic relations**, **Iran's Foreign Minister** is on a significant visit to **India**, reinforcing the longstanding cultural, economic, and strategic partnership between the two nations.

Where is Iran Located?

Iran, officially known as the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, lies at the **strategic crossroads of West Asia**, acting as a vital geopolitical bridge between the **Middle East**, **Central Asia**, and **South Asia**.

- **Capital**: **Tehran**, a vibrant metropolis and Iran's political, cultural, and economic center.

- **Neighbouring Countries**:

  o **North**: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan

- o **East**: Afghanistan and Pakistan
- o **West**: Iraq
- o **Northwest**: Türkiye
- **Maritime Neighbours**: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

Surrounding Water Bodies:

Iran is uniquely flanked by key bodies of water:

- **North**: **Caspian Sea**, the world's largest inland water body by surface area.
- **South**: **Persian Gulf** and **Gulf of Oman**, crucial for global oil shipping lanes and naval strategy.

Geographical and Climatic Diversity

Iran's landscape is incredibly diverse, shaping its culture, agriculture, and settlement patterns.

- **Climate**: Varies from **arid deserts** to **semi-arid steppes**, with **subtropical** zones along the Caspian coast.
- **Mountain Ranges**:
  - o **Zagros Mountains** (west) form a natural barrier and host oil reserves.
  - o **Alborz Mountains** (north) contain **Mount Damavand** – Iran's **highest peak** at 5,610 meters and the **tallest volcano in Asia**.
- **Major Rivers**:
  - o **Karun River** – Iran's only navigable river, vital for inland trade.
  - o Others include **Dez**, **Karkheh**, and **Diyala**.

Rich Natural Resources:

Iran is renowned for its wealth of **natural resources**, which fuel its economy and geostrategic influence.

- **Hydrocarbons**:
  - o One of the **top five nations** globally in terms of **proven oil and natural gas reserves**.
- **Minerals**:
  - o Rich in **chromium**, **copper**, **iron ore**, **lead**, **manganese**, **zinc**, **sulphur**, and **coal**.
- Iran's **mining industry** is considered one of the **most underexplored** yet promising sectors in the region.

Interesting Facts About Iran:

- **Persian Civilization**: Iran is home to **one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations**, dating back to **circa 7000 BCE**.
- **Cultural Heritage**: Cities like **Isfahan**, **Shiraz**, and **Persepolis** reflect the country's glorious imperial past and architectural marvels.
- **Language**: The official language is **Persian (Farsi)**.
- **Strategic Importance**: Iran sits on the **Strait of Hormuz**, a chokepoint through which nearly **one-fifth of the world's oil trade** passes.

India–Iran Relations: A Historical Connection

India and Iran share deep-rooted **historical, cultural, and linguistic ties**, strengthened by:

- **Shared interests in regional connectivity**, especially through the **Chabahar Port project**.
- Cooperation in **energy, infrastructure, and trade**.
- Common concerns about **regional security**, especially in **Afghanistan** and **West Asia**.

Iran's role as a regional powerhouse—rich in history, resources, and strategic value—makes it a critical partner for India in shaping a secure and prosperous neighbourhood.

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Page No
250

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Manas National Park: A Jewel of the Eastern Himalayas

Context: In a disturbing development, **three individuals have been arrested** for their alleged involvement in the **killing of three wild elephants** inside **Manas National Park**, Assam. The incident has sparked serious concern among conservationists, given the park's status as a critical wildlife habitat and UNESCO site.

Where Nature Meets Conservation: An Overview

Nestled in the **foothills of the Eastern Himalayas** in **Assam**, **Manas National Park** covers a sprawling area of **950 sq.km** and shares its northern boundary with **Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park**. The seamless ecosystem across international borders makes it a vital transboundary conservation zone.

The park derives its name from the **Manas River**, a major tributary of the **Brahmaputra**, which not only nourishes the ecosystem but also serves as the **international boundary between India and Bhutan**. As the river flows into the plains, it splits into the **Beki** and **Bholkaduba** rivers.

Unique Conservation Designations:

Manas is one of the **most prestigious protected areas in India**, having earned multiple conservation titles:

- **UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site** (since 1985)
- **Project Tiger Reserve** (since 1973)
- **Elephant Reserve**
- **Biosphere Reserve**
- **Important Bird Area (IBA)**

It is part of a vast **tiger conservation landscape**, interconnected with other reserves like **Buxa, Nameri, Pakke, and Namdapha**, along with Bhutan's and Myanmar's protected forests — forming a cross-border wildlife corridor.

Topography and Biodiversity:

The park's **altitude ranges from 60 to 1,500 meters**, creating a highly diverse landscape. From lush **tropical forests** to **riverine grasslands**, the variety of ecosystems supports an astonishing range of flora and fauna.

Flora:

Manas is botanically rich, featuring:

- **Sal forests** (Shorea robusta)
- **Semi-evergreen forests**
- **Deciduous forests**
- **Riparian vegetation**
- **Interspersed grasslands and scrublands**

Prominent tree species include **Hoolong, Amari, Dewa Sam, Garjan**, and **Himolu**. The buffer zones also contain patches of older plantations.

Fauna: A Sanctuary for Endangered Species

Manas is renowned for hosting **rare and endemic wildlife**, some of which are **critically endangered**:

- **Hispid Hare**
- **Pygmy Hog** (world's smallest and rarest pig species)
- **Golden Langur** (found only in Bhutan and Assam)
- **Asiatic Buffalo**
- **Indian Rhinoceros**
- **Clouded Leopard**
- **Sloth Bear**
- **Leopard Cat**
- **Bengal Florican** (critically endangered bird)
- **Tiger** (flagship species of the park)

It also supports over **450 bird species**, making it a haven for bird watchers and ornithologists.

Cultural Ties: Indigenous Communities and Conservation:

The park is home to **indigenous communities**, especially the **Bodo people**, who have long-standing ties with the forest. Their traditional knowledge and practices play a key role in **community-based conservation**. Efforts have been made to integrate local participation through **eco-tourism**, **anti-poaching units**, and **forest stewardship programs**.

Challenges and Conservation Efforts:

Despite its prestige, Manas has faced **poaching**, **encroachment**, and **militancy-related disruption**, particularly in the early 2000s. However, significant conservation efforts since then have **revived wildlife populations**, especially tigers and rhinos.

Recent Initiatives:

- Deployment of **smart patrolling systems**
- Collaboration with **WWF and local NGOs**
- Use of **camera traps** for monitoring tigers
- **Translocation of rhinos** from Kaziranga to Manas as part of the Indian Rhino Vision 2020

Conclusion: A Living Legacy That Must Be Protected

Manas National Park is more than just a biodiversity hotspot — it is a **symbol of India's conservation ethos** and **transboundary ecological cooperation**. As threats like **poaching and habitat degradation** continue to loom, it's crucial to strengthen community-led conservation, enhance patrolling, and implement stricter protection protocols.

Safeguarding Manas is not just about saving wildlife — it's about preserving the **ecological integrity of the Eastern Himalayas** for future generations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Floods and Strategic Significance in Central Africa

Context: Recent **devastating floods** have struck the **eastern region** of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, particularly near the shores of **Lake Tanganyika**. These floods have displaced thousands and underscored the region's **vulnerability to climate change**, poor infrastructure, and ongoing humanitarian challenges. The affected areas lie near the borders with **Burundi**, **Tanzania**, and **Zambia**, intensifying regional concerns.

Geopolitical Importance of the DRC:

Location and Borders:

Situated in the heart of **Central Africa**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** is the **second-largest country in Africa** (after Algeria) by land area. It shares land borders with **nine countries**:

- **North**: **Central African Republic (CAR)**, **South Sudan**
- **East**: **Uganda**, **Rwanda**, **Burundi**, **Tanzania**
- **South**: **Zambia**
- **West**: **Angola**, **Republic of the Congo (RoC)**

It also has a narrow strip of coastline along the **Atlantic Ocean**, giving it **maritime access**—a rare advantage for a mostly landlocked region.

Capital City: Kinshasa, one of the largest French-speaking cities in the world, lies on the banks of the Congo River, directly opposite Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo.

Physical and Environmental Features:

Tropical Climate and Equatorial Position:

- The DRC experiences a **humid tropical climate**, as the **Equator runs through** the country. This leads to high rainfall, especially in the **Congo Basin**, and fosters some of the world's richest biodiversity.

The Congo River System:

- The **Congo River**, the second-longest river in Africa and the **deepest river in the world**, is vital for **transport**, **fishing**, and **hydroelectricity**. Notably, it **crosses the Equator twice**, a rare geographic feature.

The Congo Basin: Africa's Green Lungs:

The DRC lies at the core of the **Congo Basin**, the world's **second-largest tropical rainforest** after the Amazon. Spanning about **500 million acres**, the basin covers parts of six countries:

- **DRC**
- **Cameroon**
- **Central African Republic**
- **Republic of the Congo**
- **Equatorial Guinea**

- **Gabon**

It contains **the world's largest tropical peatlands**, crucial carbon sinks that store more than **30 billion tonnes of carbon**. The degradation of these ecosystems could dramatically accelerate **global warming**.

Natural Wealth and Strategic Minerals:

The DRC is endowed with a **vast range of natural resources**, making it a **global hotspot for mining and geopolitics**:

- **Cobalt**: The DRC produces over **70% of the world's cobalt**, a critical component for **lithium-ion batteries** used in **electric vehicles** and **renewable energy storage**.

- **Copper, Gold, Diamonds, Iron Ore, and Tin**: Abundant but often exploited through **informal or conflict-linked mining**.

- **Lithium and Rare Earths**: Gaining international attention as countries shift to **clean energy transitions**.

However, despite this mineral wealth, **poverty, political instability, and conflict** remain prevalent, especially in **eastern provinces**.

Additional Insights:

- The DRC is part of the **African Great Lakes region**, with lakes like **Tanganyika**, **Albert**, and **Edward** forming part of its eastern geography.

- The country is rich in **biodiversity**, hosting endangered species such as the **mountain gorilla**, **forest elephants**, and the **okapi** (a unique forest-dwelling giraffid found only in the DRC).

- The **Virunga National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is Africa's oldest national park and a crucial sanctuary for **gorillas** and **other megafauna**.

Conclusion:

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** remains a **geopolitically and environmentally pivotal nation**. While the recent floods near **Lake Tanganyika** highlight its **climate vulnerability**, its **strategic location**, **immense mineral wealth**, and **ecological significance** make it central to both **African development** and **global environmental sustainability**.

As the world moves toward a **green economy**, the DRC's future will increasingly shape global conversations on **resource justice**, **biodiversity protection**, and **sustainable development**.

Dongria Kondh: Guardians of the Sacred Niyamgiri Hills

Context: The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has recently called for an **Action Taken Report (ATR)** from the **Chief Secretary of Odisha** regarding the **dire living conditions** faced by over **10,000 families** of the **Dongria Kondh** community. The NHRC intervention highlights serious concerns over the **lack of basic amenities**, infrastructure, healthcare, and livelihood support in this **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)**.

Who Are the Dongria Kondh?

The **Dongria Kondh** are one of the most culturally rich and ecologically connected tribal communities in India. Classified as a **PVTG** by the Government of India, they inhabit the **Niyamgiri hills**, which straddle the districts of **Rayagada and Kalahandi** in southern Odisha.

Origin and Name:

- The term **Dongria** comes from *"dongar"*, meaning **hill** in the local dialect, signifying their deep-rooted connection with the mountains.

- They also refer to themselves as **Jharnia**, or **"keepers of the streams,"** emphasizing their role as custodians of the hilltop water sources.

Spiritual and Cultural Identity:

The **Dongria Kondh** have a unique **polytheistic animist belief system**, where **nature is sacred**. The **hilltops**, **forests**, and **streams** are revered as divine, with **Niyam Raja**, their mythical ancestral deity, considered the **protector and creator** of the Niyamgiri hills.

Cultural Symbols and Practices:

- Their **art and rituals** reflect the landscape, often featuring **triangular motifs** symbolizing the mountains.

- Religious practices are decentralized: every **village and clan** has its own **ceremonial figures**, including the **bejuni (female priest)** and **beju (male priest)**.

- They **do not follow centralized authority**—social cohesion is maintained through strong community bonds and traditional councils.

Language and Lifestyle:

- The community speaks two indigenous languages—**Kui** and **Kuvi**—both of which are **linguistically distinct** from **Odia**, the state language.

- Their dialects are a vital part of their identity and are passed down orally across generations.

Traditional Attire and Identity Markers:

- **Dongria women** wear multiple **nose rings** and **ear ornaments**, while **boys** typically wear **two nose rings**—a cultural marker of their community.

- They also practice **tattooing** and maintain unique **hairstyles**, reinforcing their distinctive visual identity.

Livelihood and Ecological Harmony:

The Dongria Kondh have an economy deeply entwined with **forests and mountains**. They are **traditionally horticulturists** and practice **Podu cultivation**—a form of **shifting agriculture**.

Major Sources of Livelihood:

- **Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)**: They depend on the sustainable collection of products like **honey**, **tamarind**, **mango**, **jackfruit**, **sal leaves**, and **medicinal herbs**.

- **Terraced Farming**: On hill slopes, they grow **millets**, **turmeric**, **ginger**, and **banana**—maintaining an **agro-biodiverse food system**.

Struggles and State Neglect:

Despite their ecological contributions and cultural richness, the **Dongria Kondh** continue to face **institutional neglect**:

- **Lack of roads, schools, and healthcare facilities**

- **Malnutrition and poor maternal health outcomes**

- **Inadequate access to drinking water and sanitation**

These issues have now caught the attention of the **NHRC**, pressing the state government for **urgent and sustained intervention**.

Notable Resistance: The Vedanta Mining Case

The Dongria Kondh became globally known in the early 2000s for their **peaceful resistance against bauxite mining** by **Vedanta Resources**, which threatened their sacred hills.

Historic Victory for Indigenous Rights:

- In 2013, the **Supreme Court of India**, upholding **Gram Sabha consultations**, ruled against mining in **Niyamgiri**, acknowledging the **tribe's cultural and religious rights**.
- This set a **precedent in environmental justice and indigenous sovereignty**.

Way Forward: Preserving People, Culture and Nature

To ensure the **well-being and survival** of the Dongria Kondh, the following measures are crucial:

- **Strengthening the implementation** of the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**
- Promoting **community-led development** respecting their cultural ethos
- Facilitating **mother-tongue education** and preservation of **linguistic heritage**
- Recognizing them as **key stakeholders** in biodiversity conservation and forest governance

Conclusion: The Hills, The People, The Legacy

The **Dongria Kondh** are not just another tribal group—they are **guardians of one of India's last remaining ecological and cultural frontiers**. Protecting their rights, lifestyles, and traditions is **not only a matter of justice**, but also a step toward **sustainable development**, **cultural diversity**, and **environmental resilience**.

Sharp Decline in Birth Rates in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi: Twice the National Average

Context: Recent data from the **Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2021**, released by the **Registrar General of India**, reveals a stark divergence in birth rate trends across Indian states. Notably, **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi** are witnessing a decline in birth rates at **twice the pace of the national average**, signaling an accelerating demographic transition in these regions.

Understanding the Crude Birth Rate (CBR):

The **Crude Birth Rate (CBR)** refers to the number of **live births per 1,000 individuals** in a population within a year. It is a crucial metric in assessing population growth and planning public resources.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** in 2021 remained steady at **2.0**, the same as in 2020. A TFR of **2.1 is considered the replacement level**, needed to maintain population stability.
- The **national crude birth rate** in 2021 was **19.3 per 1,000**, declining annually by **1.12%** from 2016 to 2021.
- In comparison, birth rates declined much faster in:
  - **Tamil Nadu**: ↓ **2.35% annually**
  - **Delhi**: ↓ **2.23% annually**
  - **Kerala**: ↓ **2.05% annually**

- Other states with faster-than-average declines include:

    o **Maharashtra** (1.57%), **Gujarat** (1.24%), **Odisha** (1.34%), **Himachal Pradesh** (1.29%), **Haryana** (1.21%), and **Jammu & Kashmir** (1.47%).

- **States with the slowest decline** include:

    o **Rajasthan** (0.48%), **Bihar** (0.86%), **Chhattisgarh** (0.98%), **Jharkhand** (0.98%), **Assam** (1.05%), **Madhya Pradesh** (1.05%), **West Bengal** (1.08%), and **Uttar Pradesh** (1.09%).

- **Increase in registered births** was noted in 11 states and UTs, including **Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, J&K, Ladakh**, and several northeastern states.

Fertility and Reproduction Trends:

- **TFR above national average** was observed in **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh**, indicating sustained high fertility rates.

- **Gross Reproduction Rate (GRR)** for India stood at **1**, meaning each woman is, on average, having one daughter who survives to reproductive age.

- **States with higher GRR** than the national average include **Bihar, Rajasthan, MP**, and **UP**, reflecting persistent high fertility.

Major Concerns:

1. **Uneven Demographic Transition:** States such as **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh** show a **slow decline in birth rates**, leading to **regional population imbalances**. This may result in **strain on resources**, infrastructure, and public services.

2. **North-South Population Divide:** Southern and western states are nearing or falling **below replacement fertility levels**, while northern and eastern regions remain above, causing a **"two-speed" demographic transition** in the country.

3. **Aging Population in Low-Fertility States:**

States like **Kerala and West Bengal** face the challenge of **rapid aging**, potentially leading to:

- **Shrinking workforce**

- **Increased burden on healthcare and pensions**

- **Need for revised economic and social support systems**

4. **High Fertility Persists in Underserved Regions:** Despite a national TFR of 2.0, high fertility in **Bihar (3.0)** and **Uttar Pradesh (2.7)** points to gaps in **education, healthcare, and awareness**, especially in rural areas.

Way Forward: Policy Recommendations:

- **Prepare for an Aging Society:** Low-birth-rate states must prepare for **elder care**, **pension reforms**, and **health infrastructure for the elderly**.

Reduce Regional Inequalities:

- Invest in **job creation**, **education**, and **infrastructure** in high-growth states to balance national development.

Centre-State Collaboration:

- Ensure **coordinated population policy efforts**, with **flexible funding** mechanisms to support state-specific needs.

Conclusion:

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

India's demographic future is unfolding in **two contrasting directions**—with **southern and western states stabilizing or shrinking**, and **northern and eastern states continuing to grow**. Effective planning, inclusive policies, and data-driven decisions will be essential in navigating this complex population landscape.

Colombia Joins China's Belt and Road Initiative

Context: China and Colombia have officially signed a **Belt and Road cooperation pact**, marking a significant step in strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between Asia's largest economy and one of South America's most strategically located nations.

This move aligns Colombia with China's ambitious **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, a global infrastructure and investment strategy aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and trade across continents.

About Colombia: A Strategic South American Nation

Capital: **Bogotá**

Geographical Location:

Situated in the **northwestern region of South America**, **Colombia** enjoys a **unique strategic position** as the only South American country with coastlines on **both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean**.

Political Borders:

Colombia shares its borders with:

- **Panama** to the northwest
- **Ecuador** and **Peru** to the south
- **Venezuela** to the east
- **Brazil** to the southeast

Geographical Highlights:

- The **Andes Mountains** stretch across its western territory, shaping much of its landscape and climate.
- The **Amazon rainforest** covers the southeastern regions, contributing to its rich biodiversity.
- Home to the **Magdalena River**, Colombia's main waterway that supports inland trade.

Natural Wealth and Resources:

Colombia is endowed with a wealth of **natural resources**, making it an attractive partner for international trade and investment:

- **Petroleum** and **natural gas**
- **Coal** and **iron ore**
- **Nickel**, **copper**, and **gold**
- World-renowned for **emeralds**, with some of the finest quality stones globally
- Strong **hydropower potential**, providing over **two-thirds of the country's electricity**

Why This Partnership Matters:

- **Colombia's inclusion in the BRI** strengthens China's economic footprint in **Latin America**, a region increasingly influenced by Chinese trade, finance, and infrastructure development.

- It opens up potential Chinese investment in **Colombian infrastructure, energy, mining**, and **digital connectivity**.

- Colombia could gain better access to **Asian markets**, advanced technology, and diversified development financing options.

Did You Know?

- Colombia is one of the world's **top five producers of emeralds**, accounting for over **70% of global supply**.

- The country has **more bird species than any other nation**, making it a global biodiversity hotspot.

This strategic cooperation under the **Belt and Road Initiative** is expected to enhance **bilateral economic development**, boost **connectivity**, and foster **greater geopolitical alignment** between **China and Latin America**.

India's Largest Conservation Reserve Declared in Himachal: Tsarap Chu Joins the Biodiversity Map

Context: In a significant step towards ecological preservation, the **Himachal Pradesh government** has officially **notified the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve** in the **Lahaul-Spiti region**, making it **India's largest conservation reserve** with an area of **1,585 sq. km**.

Strategic Location in the Cold Desert Biodiversity Hotspot:

Nestled in the remote trans-Himalayan terrain, **Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve** shares its boundaries with:

- The **Union Territory of Ladakh** to the **north**,

- **Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary** and the **Malang Nala-Lungar Lungpa stretch** to the **east**,

- **Kabjima Nala** to the **south**, and

- The famed **Chandratal Wildlife Sanctuary** to the **west**.

This ecologically vital zone lies at the **confluence of the Unam River and Charap Nala**, acting as a **critical catchment area** for Charap Nallah.

Wildlife Corridor with Rich Biodiversity:

The reserve plays a **pivotal role as a wildlife corridor**, linking **Kibber** and **Chandratal** wildlife sanctuaries—ensuring **genetic flow** and **safe movement** of species across habitats.

It is recognized as one of **Himachal Pradesh's high-density snow leopard zones**. Alongside the elusive **snow leopard**, the region is home to:

- **Tibetan wolf**

- **Bharal** (*blue sheep*)

- **Himalayan ibex**

- **Kiang** (*Tibetan wild ass*)

- **Tibetan argali** (*Great Tibetan sheep*)

The skies of Tsarap Chu are no less impressive, featuring rare high-altitude avian species such as the:

- **Rose Finch**

- **Tibetan Raven**
- **Yellow-billed Chough**

Community-Driven Conservation Governance:

The reserve will be overseen by a **Conservation Reserve Management Committee**, which includes:

- **Forest department officials**
- **Wildlife experts**
- **Local Panchayat representatives**

This participatory model aims to **balance conservation goals with the livelihood needs** of the local communities, many of whom follow traditional **nomadic pastoralism**.

A Boost to Eco-Tourism and Scientific Research:

Given its unique landscape and rich fauna, the reserve is poised to:

- **Promote responsible eco-tourism**
- **Support high-altitude biodiversity studies**
- Encourage **youth-led conservation efforts** through community involvement and awareness campaigns.

Conclusion: A Landmark for India's Cold Desert Conservation

The creation of the **Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve** marks a **new era in Himalayan ecosystem preservation**, showcasing how **biodiversity conservation, indigenous involvement, and ecological connectivity** can go hand in hand. It not only protects fragile mountain ecosystems but also strengthens **India's commitment to global biodiversity targets** under frameworks like the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)**.

Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve Shows New Signs of Life

Context: In a heartening development, **recent camera trap images** from **Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (USTR)** in Chhattisgarh have captured a **renewed vibrancy in wildlife activity**. The footage reveals the **extensive presence of carnivores, herbivores, and omnivores**, showcasing the reserve's critical role as a thriving **biodiversity hotspot** in central India.

Where Nature Meets Strategy: About Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve

Located across the **Gariaband** and **Dhamtari districts** of Chhattisgarh, the **Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve** was established by combining two ecologically significant areas—**Udanti and Sitanadi Wildlife Sanctuaries**.

- **Total Area**: **1,872 sq. km**
- The reserve is strategically positioned to form a **vital forest corridor**, connecting with the **Kanker** and **North Kondagaon** forest divisions, and extending toward the **Indravati Tiger Reserve** in the **Bastar** region. This makes it crucial for **wildlife migration** and **genetic diversity**, especially for large carnivores like the tiger.

Rivers and Ridges: The Reserve's Unique Landscape

The reserve's landscape is sculpted by a **complex river system**, with the **Mahanadi River** being the principal waterway. Its key tributaries—**Udanti, Sitanadi, Indravan**, and **Pairi**—nurture the forest ecosystem and provide essential water sources for wildlife.

Topography at a Glance:

- **Number of Named Mountains**: **19**

- **Highest Peak**: Deo Dongri

- **Most Prominent Mountain**: Atānga Dongar

This mix of **rivers, hills, and forest cover** makes USTR a diverse and resilient ecosystem, supporting a rich range of flora and fauna.

Lush and Layered: Forest Types and Flora

The reserve features two major forest types, as per **Champion & Seth (1968)** classification:

- **Tropical Peninsular Sal Forest**

- **Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Mixed Forest**

The ground is layered with **grasses, saplings, bushes**, and **shrubs**, creating a **multi-tiered vegetation structure** that supports various life forms, from **insects and reptiles to large herbivores and predators**.

Wildlife Wonders: Rare and Endangered Fauna

Apart from being a tiger stronghold, USTR plays a **critical conservation role** for several **endangered and elusive species**:

- **Bengal Tiger**

- **Wild Buffalo** – USTR, along with **Indravati Tiger Reserve**, shelters one of the **last surviving populations** of this **highly endangered species**.
- **Indian Wolf**
- **Leopard**

- **Sloth Bear**

- **Mouse Deer** (Indian Chevrotain)

Conservation Fact: The **Wild Water Buffalo (Bubalus arnee)** is the **State Animal of Chhattisgarh**, making its protection in USTR a matter of both ecological and cultural significance.

Why USTR Matters: Beyond Biodiversity

- **Ecological Connectivity**: Serves as a **key linkage** between **tiger habitats** in central and eastern India.

- **Climate Resilience**: Forests like USTR act as **carbon sinks**, aiding climate mitigation efforts.

- **Cultural Value**: The region is home to several **tribal communities**, for whom the forest is a source of **livelihood and spiritual connection**.

Tourism Potential: With proper planning, the reserve could become a **model for sustainable ecotourism**, balancing conservation with community development.

Conclusion: A Reserve on the Rise

The recent wildlife sightings in **Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve** are not just ecological milestones—they are **symbols of hope**. As India continues to strengthen its conservation policies and restore wildlife habitats, reserves like USTR demonstrate how **science-based management, community engagement, and ecological awareness** can together revive even the most threatened ecosystems.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Argentina in Focus: A Land of Natural Wonders and Strategic Geography

Context: Argentina, the second-largest country in South America, is a land of **geographical diversity, ecological significance**, and increasing global importance. From its snow-capped **Andean peaks** to its fertile **Pampas plains**, Argentina combines natural beauty with geopolitical relevance.

The White Giant Under Threat: Perito Moreno Glacier

One of Argentina's most iconic landmarks, the **Perito Moreno Glacier**, also known as the **"White Giant"**, is located in the **Los Glaciares National Park**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in **Patagonia**.

- The glacier is currently experiencing **ice loss due to calving**, a process where chunks of ice break off from the edge.

- Despite being one of the few glaciers globally that has remained relatively stable, climate change is now putting its future at risk.

Political Geography: Strategic Location in Southern South America

- **Capital**: **Buenos Aires**

- **Boundaries**:
  - **West**: **Chile**
  - **North**: **Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil**, and **Uruguay**
  - **East**: Bordered by the **Atlantic Ocean**

- The **Argentina–Chile international boundary** is the **third-longest land border** in the world, after those of **USA–Canada** and **Russia–Kazakhstan**.

- **Ushuaia**, a city in southern Argentina, is considered the **southernmost city on Earth**, making it a gateway to Antarctica.

Geographical Features: From Peaks to Plains

Argentina's terrain is shaped by a dramatic variety of landscapes:

- **The Andes Mountains** in the west, home to **Cerro Aconcagua** (**6,960 m**), the **highest peak in South America**.

- **The Pampas**, vast treeless grasslands, are the **agricultural heartland** of Argentina, producing wheat, corn, and beef.

- **Patagonia Plateau** in the south features arid steppes, glacial lakes, and subantarctic environments.

Climate Zones:

- **Temperate** in most regions

- **Arid and semi-arid** in the southeast

- **Subantarctic** in the far southwest

Insight: Argentina's climatic diversity allows it to host ecosystems ranging from **tropical forests in the north** to **glacial zones in the south**.

Economic Relevance: A Lithium Powerhouse

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Argentina is rapidly gaining attention for its **strategic mineral resources**, particularly **lithium**, a key component in batteries for electric vehicles and renewable energy storage.

- **3rd in the world** in **lithium reserves**
- **4th in global lithium production**
- Part of the **"Lithium Triangle"**, along with **Bolivia and Chile**, which holds over 50% of the world's lithium reserves

Global Relevance: With the rise of clean energy technologies, Argentina is poised to play a **critical role in the global energy transition**.

Rivers and Water Systems:

- The **Río de la Plata**, formed by the confluence of the **Paraná and Uruguay Rivers**, is one of South America's most important estuaries.
- These rivers support **transport, trade**, and **hydroelectric energy production**, and are crucial for **agriculture and urban development**.

Conclusion: Argentina – A Nation of Geographical Majesty and Strategic Significance

With its breathtaking natural landscapes, vital mineral resources, and important geopolitical location, **Argentina stands as a crucial player** in environmental, economic, and strategic affairs. Whether it's the **melting glaciers of Patagonia**, the **agricultural richness of the Pampas**, or its **emerging lithium economy**, Argentina offers a compelling case for **global attention and climate action**.

New Caledonia in Crisis: Political Talks Collapse Amid Rising Tensions

Context: A recent high-level effort by **France's Overseas Minister** to establish a **new political framework** in **New Caledonia** has failed, leaving the territory in **deep political uncertainty**. The breakdown comes amid growing tensions over independence and governance in this **strategically vital French overseas territory**.

New Caledonia: An Overview

Located in the **Southwestern Pacific Ocean**, about **1,500 km east of Australia**, **New Caledonia** is a **French overseas territory** comprising:

- The **main island of Grande Terre** (home to the capital **Nouméa**)
- The **Loyalty Islands** (Ouvéa, Lifou, Tiga, and Maré)
- The **Belep Archipelago**, the **Isle of Pines,** and several smaller islets

With a population of just over **270,000 (2019 census)**, approximately **39% are Indigenous Kanaks**, while the rest include communities of **European, Polynesian, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Algerian descent**.

Status: New Caledonia is considered one of the **European Union's Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)**, though it is **not part of the EU**, the **Eurozone**, or the **Schengen Area**.

Historical Background: From Colonization to Referendums

- Originally inhabited by the **Kanak people**, the territory was **annexed by France in 1853**.
- Post-World War II, **Kanaks gained French citizenship**, but a wave of **French migration in the 1960s** turned them into a **minority in their own land**, fueling a strong **pro-independence movement**.

- Violent unrest in the 1980s led to peace agreements:
  - **Matignon Agreements (1988)**
  - **Nouméa Accord (1998)**, which laid out a roadmap for **three independence referendums**.

Referendum Results:

- **2018 & 2020**: Majority voted to **remain with France**.

- **2021**: Held amid **COVID-19 concerns**, the vote again favored France, but was **boycotted by pro-independence Kanak groups**, deepening the divide.

Why New Caledonia Matters to France:

1. Strategic Geopolitical Footprint:

New Caledonia gives France a **critical military and diplomatic presence** in the **Indo-Pacific**, a region witnessing growing influence from **China, the U.S., and Australia**. It strengthens France's:

- **Maritime domain** in the Pacific

- **Regional influence** through strategic alliances

2. Rich in Natural Wealth:

- Holds **25% of the world's nickel reserves**, essential for industries like **batteries, electric vehicles, electronics, and stainless steel**.

- Resource control is central to both **local economic aspirations** and **French industrial strategy**.

3. Environmental Importance:

- Its **lagoons and coral reefs** are designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site (2008)**, recognized for exceptional **marine biodiversity** and ecological value.

Current Challenges and the Road Ahead

With the failure of recent talks, the region faces:

- **Rising separatist sentiment** among Kanak communities

- **Economic instability**, particularly in the nickel industry, which is facing price volatility and environmental pressure

- A possible **constitutional crisis** if France pushes ahead with reforms without local consensus

Looking Forward:

- **Dialogue and trust-building** between French authorities and Kanak leaders will be crucial.

- France may need to revisit the terms of autonomy and **consider broader self-governance models**, including **shared sovereignty** or **a phased transition**.

Sagarmatha Sambaad: A Call for Global Action to Save Mountain Ecosystems

Context: India's **Union Environment Minister** recently addressed the inaugural **Sagarmatha Sambaad** in **Nepal**, a global dialogue focused on the urgent need to **protect fragile mountain ecosystems**, particularly the **Himalayas**. At the event, India presented a comprehensive **Five-Point Global**

Action Plan aimed at building resilience and fostering cooperation across nations that share mountain terrains.

Understanding the Spirit of Sagarmatha Sambaad:

- **"Sagarmatha"**, meaning **"Head of the Sky"**, is the Nepali name for **Mount Everest**, the world's highest peak.

- **"Sambaad"**, meaning **dialogue**, emphasizes the need for **collective conversation and cooperation**.

- The platform symbolizes **ecological responsibility**, recognizing mountains as **climate sentinels and cultural icons**.

Key Messages from India's Address:

1. **Shared Heritage and Responsibility:** India underscored the **deep cultural, ecological, and strategic ties** among **Himalayan nations**, stressing the importance of collaborative efforts.
2. **Climate Inequity:** Despite housing **25% of the global population**, **South Asia contributes only 4%** to historical **CO$_2$ emissions**, yet it faces **disproportionate climate impacts**.
3. **Shortcomings of the Developed World:** Developed countries are **falling short on climate finance**, **technology transfer**, and **capacity-building commitments**, jeopardizing climate justice for developing nations.
4. **Wildlife Conservation Push:** India called for **transboundary cooperation** under the **International Big Cats Alliance**, particularly for iconic species like **snow leopards, tigers, and leopards.Project Snow Leopard** was highlighted as a **model of community-driven conservation**.

India's Five-Point Global Action Plan:

1. **Strengthening Scientific Collaboration:**

- Promote joint research on **glacier dynamics**, **cryosphere science**, and **mountain biodiversity**.

- Establish **data-sharing platforms** for transnational environmental monitoring.

2. **Building Climate Resilience:**

- Invest in **climate-adaptive infrastructure** in mountainous regions.

- Develop **early warning systems** for disasters like **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**.

- Encourage **risk-resilient development practices**.

3. **Empowering Mountain Communities:**

- Center policies around the **welfare of indigenous communities**, recognizing their **traditional ecological knowledge**.

- Promote **green livelihoods** like **sustainable tourism**, handicrafts, and **herbal medicine harvesting**.

4. **Mobilizing Green Finance:**

- Ensure **predictable and adequate funding** under **UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement**.

- Create mechanisms to **ease access to climate finance** for **developing mountain nations**.

5. **Recognizing Mountain Ecosystems Globally:**

- Ensure that the **special vulnerabilities and contributions of mountain regions** are reflected in **global climate negotiations**, SDGs, and **international reporting frameworks**.

Why the Himalayas Matter:

1. **Climate Moderator:** Act as a **climatic barrier**, blocking cold winds and influencing **Indian monsoons**, which are vital for agriculture and water security.
2. **Lifeline Rivers:** Source of the **Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus**, which sustain the livelihoods of **over a billion people** in South Asia.
3. **Biodiversity Reserve:** Home to a rich array of flora and fauna, including **endangered species** like the **snow leopard**, **red panda**, and **Himalayan monal**.
4. **Cultural and Spiritual Hub:** The Himalayas are sacred in **Hinduism and Buddhism**, hosting pilgrimage sites such as **Kailash Mansarovar**, **Badrinath**, and **Amarnath**.
5. **Geostrategic Frontier:** Act as a **natural border** with **China, Nepal, and Bhutan**, playing a critical role in **India's national security and diplomacy**.

India's Initiatives for Mountain Conservation:

National Mission on Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)

- Part of the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.
- Focuses on **glacial monitoring**, **ecosystem conservation**, and **climate adaptation** in Himalayan states.

Secure Himalaya Project: In partnership with **UNDP**, supports **biodiversity protection** and **sustainable livelihoods** in high-altitude states like **Ladakh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh**, and **Uttarakhand**.

Project Snow Leopard: Promotes **community-based conservation** for snow leopards and their habitat through **science and local engagement**.

International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA): A **global India-led initiative** to protect endangered big cats across **transboundary regions**, focusing on **conservation cooperation** and **data sharing**.

Final Thought: From Dialogue to Action

The **Sagarmatha Sambaad** is more than just a conversation — it's a **call to action**. As **climate change intensifies**, mountain ecosystems are at grave risk. India's comprehensive plan emphasizes **collaboration, resilience, and justice**, recognizing that **protecting the Himalayas is not just regional but a global imperative**.

Irula Tribe: Guardians of Ancient Wisdom and Nature

Context: In the village of **Kunnapattu**, Tamil Nadu, the **Irula tribe**, who have lived on ancestral land for generations, now face **eviction threats** and **lack legal ownership**. Despite their deep-rooted presence, nearly **half of the Irula families** remain without **official recognition or land rights**, sparking concern over **tribal displacement** and the erosion of **indigenous heritage**.

Who Are the Irula?

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS
NEWS

The **Irula** (also spelled Iruliga or Erular) are one of **India's most ancient tribal communities**, belonging to the **Dravidian ethnolinguistic group**. Predominantly found in the **Nilgiri Hills** of **Tamil Nadu**, and parts of **Kerala and Karnataka**, they are the **second-largest Adivasi group in Tamil Nadu**.

They are officially listed under the **"Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)"**, reflecting their **low socio-economic development**, **geographical isolation**, and **unique cultural practices**.

Names and Identity:

The Irulas refer to themselves as **Erlar** or **Poosari**, and are also locally known as **Eralollu**, **Shikari**, or **Pujari**, names that often reflect their **reputation as hunters**, **healers**, or **spiritual practitioners**.

Language and Religion:

- **Language**: The Irulas speak **Irula**, a distinct dialect related to **Tamil** and **Kannada**, and part of the **Dravidian language family**.

- **Belief System**: They follow a **pantheistic tradition**, believing in **spirits inhabiting nature, humans, and objects**.

- Their chief deity is **Kanniamma**, a **virgin goddess** closely associated with the **cobra**, symbolizing **protection, fertility, and healing**.

Traditional Lifestyle:

Irula communities live in compact settlements called **"mottas"**, often built on **hill slopes** and surrounded by **dry fields, forest patches, or plantations**.

Traditional Occupations:

- **Snake Catching**: The Irulas are globally renowned for their **legendary skill in tracking and catching venomous snakes**. They can identify snakes from **tracks, smell, and droppings** — a rare, inherited expertise.

- **Venom Extraction**: Their work is essential for **anti-venom production**. The **Irula Snake Catchers' Industrial Cooperative Society**, established in 1978, supplies over **80% of India's snake venom**, crucial for producing **anti-snake venom (ASV)**.

- **Healing and Traditional Medicine**: Their **ethnobotanical knowledge** makes them vital contributors to **natural healing and forest medicine**.

- **Forest Livelihoods**: They sustainably gather **wild honey**, **firewood**, **resins**, and **medicinal plants**.

- **Cattle Rearing and Farming**: Many Irulas also engage in **animal husbandry** and small-scale **subsistence agriculture**.

Cultural and Environmental Significance:

- Irulas are known as **eco-warriors**, preserving the **delicate balance between humans and wildlife**.

- Their practices support **biodiversity conservation**, especially in **forest ecosystems**.

- The cobra, revered in their culture, plays a **spiritual and ecological role**, helping control rodent populations and maintaining crop health.

Challenges Faced:

Despite their invaluable contributions, the Irula community faces:

- **Landlessness** and **eviction threats**

- **Social marginalization** and **discrimination**

- **Limited access to education**, healthcare, and basic infrastructure

- **Cultural erosion** due to modern development and loss of traditional practices

Did You Know?

- The Irula tribe's work is recognized globally; they've been featured in **National Geographic** and **BBC documentaries** for their snake-catching expertise.

- Venom collected by Irulas is used not only in anti-venom but also in **medical research** for **neurological and cardiovascular drugs**.

- Their **snake-catching methods** are **non-lethal**, ensuring that snakes are **safely released back into the wild**, making them models of **sustainable wildlife interaction**.

Preserving the Irula Legacy:

The Irulas represent a **living link to India's ancient traditions**, offering a model of **coexistence with nature**, **indigenous medicine**, and **wildlife conservation**. Protecting their **land rights**, **cultural heritage**, and **livelihoods** is not just a matter of justice — it is essential for the **sustainable future** of India's environment and diversity.

Nagarhole Tiger Reserve: A Jewel of Karnataka's Wild Heart

Context: In a significant assertion of indigenous rights, **52 Jenu Kuruba tribal families** residing within the **Nagarhole Tiger Reserve (NTR)** in **Ponnampet taluk, Kodagu district**, have recently installed a board in their **haadi (hamlet)**. The board proclaims their **entitlement to land** under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, bringing to light the ongoing tension between **conservation and indigenous habitation** in protected areas.

About Nagarhole Tiger Reserve:

The **Nagarhole Tiger Reserve**, also known as **Rajiv Gandhi National Park**, is one of **India's premier wildlife habitats**, renowned for its **thriving tiger and elephant population**. It is located in the districts of **Mysore and Kodagu** in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**.

Strategic Location

- Positioned near the **tri-junction** of **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala**, making it ecologically and politically significant.

- It forms part of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**, a **UNESCO-recognized World Heritage Site**.

- **Flanked by:**

  o **Bandipur Tiger Reserve** (southeast)

  o **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary** (southwest)

Geographical & Hydrological Significance:

- Named after the **Nagarahole River** (meaning "serpent stream" in Kannada), which winds through the reserve before merging with the **Kabini River**.

- **Rivers:**
    o **Kabini River** forms the **northern boundary**
    o **Moyar River** borders it to the **south**

A Unique Ecological Confluence:

Nagarhole lies at the **junction of the Western and Eastern Ghats**, creating a **transition zone rich in biodiversity** and endemic species.

Vegetation Profile

- **Eastern part:** Dominated by **dry deciduous forests**

- **Western region:** Receives more rainfall and features **tropical moist and semi-evergreen forests**

- **Swampy meadows ('Hadlu')** within the forest are lush with grasses and sedges, attracting numerous **herbivores**

Floral Diversity:

The forest hosts a wide array of plant species, including:

- **Rosewood**

- **Indian Kino Tree**

- **Sandalwood**

- **Indian Laurel**

- **Clumping Bamboo**

- **Giant Clumping Bamboo**

Faunal Richness: Sanctuary of Giants

Nagarhole is a **critical habitat for large mammals**, particularly:

- **Bengal Tigers**

- **Asian Elephants** – Nagarhole boasts the **largest population of wild Asian elephants in South Asia**

- **Gaurs (Indian bison)**

- **Sloth Bears**

- **Golden Jackals**

- **Dholes (Indian wild dogs)**

- **Four-horned Antelopes**

It is also home to over **250 species of birds**, many of which are endemic or migratory, making it a **birdwatcher's paradise**.

Human-Wildlife Coexistence: A Complex Reality

While Nagarhole is globally celebrated for its wildlife, it is also **home to tribal communities** such as the **Jenu Kurubas**, who have lived in these forests for generations.

- The **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, recognizes their **traditional forest dwelling and livelihood rights**.

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- However, conservation efforts and increasing tourism often clash with the **tribes' rights and access to forest resources**.

Conclusion: Balancing Conservation and Community Rights

The **Nagarhole Tiger Reserve** stands as a **symbol of India's ecological wealth**, but also as a **test case for inclusive conservation**. The recent move by the Jenu Kuruba families underscores the importance of **harmonizing wildlife protection with tribal empowerment**.

As India continues to lead in **biodiversity conservation**, respecting and integrating **indigenous wisdom and rights** will be crucial in ensuring that these protected landscapes thrive **not just for wildlife, but for all life**.

Australia in the Headlines: Devastating Floods and Strategic Significance

Context: Australia, with its capital at **Canberra**, is currently grappling with a **"once-in-a-century" flood crisis** that has left over **50,000 people stranded**. This extreme weather event has caused widespread disruption, highlighting the growing frequency of **climate-related disasters** in the region. Emergency services are on high alert as large parts of the country battle **inundation**, **power outages**, and **mass evacuations**.

Australia: A Geopolitical and Environmental Overview

Geographical Location and Position:

Located between the **Indian and Pacific Oceans**, **Australia** is both the **smallest continent** and the **sixth-largest country** in the world. It occupies a strategic maritime position in the **Southern Hemisphere**, acting as a vital player in **Indo-Pacific geopolitics**.

- To the **northwest**, it is separated from **Indonesia** by the **Timor Sea** and the **Arafura Sea**.
- To the **northeast**, it borders **Papua New Guinea** across the **Coral Sea** and **Torres Strait**.

Australia's **exclusive economic zone (EEZ)** is one of the largest globally, giving it significant maritime influence.

Political Structure: A Blend of Tradition and Federalism

Australia operates under a **federal parliamentary democracy** with a **constitutional monarchy**. It is a **Commonwealth realm**, meaning its **head of state** is the **British monarch**, represented locally by the **Governor-General**.

- The government is divided between the **federal** and **state/territory** levels.
- The **Prime Minister** is the head of government, while the **Parliament** is bicameral — comprising the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**.

This system offers a unique combination of **British constitutional legacy** and **modern federal governance**.

Physical Geography: Land of Extremes

Australia's landscape is incredibly diverse and often extreme:

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Page No
270

NEWS

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May 2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- Over **one-third** of the country is covered by **deserts**, forming part of the vast **Outback**.

- The **Great Dividing Range**, running along the eastern coast, is the most significant mountain system.

- Other notable ranges include the **Macdonnell Ranges** in central Australia.

Key **rivers** that support agriculture and ecology include:

- **Murray-Darling River System** — Australia's most important agricultural basin

- **Murrumbidgee River** and **Lachlan River**

Natural Wonders: Australia's Global Treasures:

Australia is home to one of the world's greatest ecological marvels — the **Great Barrier Reef**. Located off the coast of **Queensland**, it is:

- The **largest coral reef system** in the world

- A **UNESCO World Heritage Site**

- Host to thousands of marine species, making it a hub of **biodiversity**

However, this natural wonder is under increasing threat from **climate change**, **coral bleaching**, and **pollution**.

Additional Insight: Australia's Role in Global Affairs

- **Economic Strength**: A member of the **G20** and **OECD**, Australia has a high-income economy driven by sectors like **mining**, **agriculture**, and **services**.

- **Defence and Diplomacy**: Australia is a key member of alliances like **QUAD (with India, Japan, USA)** and **AUKUS (with UK, USA)**, reinforcing its central role in Indo-Pacific security.

- **Climate Challenges**: From **bushfires** to **floods**, Australia is increasingly vulnerable to **extreme weather events**, pushing the nation to reassess its environmental and disaster management strategies.

Conclusion: Australia at a Crossroads

As Australia navigates the aftermath of a devastating flood, the nation finds itself at a critical juncture — balancing **environmental resilience**, **geopolitical responsibilities**, and **sustainable development**. From its rich biodiversity to its strategic maritime position, Australia continues to play a pivotal role on the world stage.

Keoladeo National Park: A Haven for Birds, Turtles, and Biodiversity

Context: Keoladeo National Park, renowned as the **"Paradise of Birds"**, is now gaining recognition for another ecological marvel — it has become a thriving **sanctuary for turtles**. The park now shelters **8 out of the 10 turtle species** found in **Rajasthan**, adding to its growing significance as a **multi-species conservation hub**.

Overview: Jewel of Bharatpur, Rajasthan

NEWS
To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Situated in **Bharatpur**, **Rajasthan**, **Keoladeo National Park** was originally established in the **late 19th century** as a **royal hunting ground** by **Maharaja Suraj Mal**. It was officially declared a **bird sanctuary in 1956**, and later designated a **national park in 1981**. The park takes its name from an **ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva**, located within its premises.

- **Area**: Covers approximately **29 square kilometers**
- **Landscape**: A rich mix of **woodlands**, **wetlands**, **marshes**, and **grasslands**
- **Ecological Status**:
    - Recognized as a **Ramsar Wetland Site** (since 1981)
    - Declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in **1985**

Strategic Location: A Migratory Marvel

Keoladeo is situated along the **Central Asian Flyway**, a critical migratory route for **migratory waterfowl** and other bird species. Each year, from **October to March**, it becomes a temporary home for **birds from as far as Siberia, China, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan**.

- Hosts over **360 species** of **resident and migratory birds**
- Notable migratory visitors include:
    - **Siberian crane** (critically endangered)
    - **White spoonbills**
    - **Gadwalls**
    - **Pintails**
    - **Asian open-billed storks**
    - **Oriental ibises**
    - **Common teals**, **shovellers**, **tufted ducks**

Flora: Dry Deciduous Diversity

The park features a **dry deciduous forest ecosystem**, interspersed with wetland vegetation. **Medium-sized trees and shrubs** dominate the forested areas.

- Common Trees:
    - **Kadam**
    - **Jamun**
    - **Babul**
    - **Kandi**
    - **Ber**
    - **Kair**
    - **Piloo**

These trees support nesting and roosting for various bird species, especially during the breeding season.

Fauna: Beyond the Birds

While it is a birdwatcher's paradise, Keoladeo is also a **thriving ecosystem** for a wide range of **mammals and reptiles**:

- **Reptiles**: **Pythons**, **monitor lizards**, **various snake species**, and now prominently, **turtles**
- **Mammals**:
  o **Sambars**
  o **Chitals (spotted deer)**
  o **Blackbucks**
  o **Jackals**
  o **Fishing cats**

This diverse presence makes the park an excellent example of **wetland and terrestrial ecosystem integration**.

Conservation Legacy and Ecotourism Potential:

Keoladeo stands as a model for **wetland restoration and biodiversity conservation**. Formerly a man-made wetland created through the construction of **Ajan Bund**, the park is a remarkable example of how artificial interventions can support natural ecosystems when managed sustainably.

- **Ecotourism** and **bird photography** are major attractions.
- It supports **local livelihoods** through guided tours, birdwatching, and conservation education.

Conclusion: A Dynamic Biodiversity Hotspot

From being a royal hunting ground to becoming a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, **Keoladeo National Park** has evolved into a beacon of **conservation excellence**. Its growing role in protecting not just birds but also **turtles and other species** underscores its value as a **multifaceted wildlife reserve**. As climate change and habitat loss threaten global biodiversity, Keoladeo remains a **critical sanctuary** offering hope, resilience, and ecological inspiration.

How India's Coastline Grew Without Adding Any Land

Context: In a surprising update, the **Ministry of Home Affairs** in its **2023–24 report** has revised India's total **coastline length to 11,098.8 km**, a major jump from the earlier figure of **7,516.6 km**. But this increase has **nothing to do with territorial expansion or land reclamation**. Instead, the jump highlights an intriguing mathematical phenomenon known as the **"coastline paradox."**

Recalculated Coastline of India

Understanding the Coastline Paradox:

The **coastline paradox** reveals that the **length of a coastline depends on how precisely it's measured**. The finer the scale (or smaller the measuring unit), the longer the coastline appears.

- **Euclidean Geometry**, used in traditional mapping, assumes **smooth lines and curves**, making coastlines appear shorter.
- But in reality, **coastlines are jagged, irregular, and fractal-like**. They have **self-similar patterns** that repeat at various scales—a concept rooted in **Fractal Geometry**, introduced by **Benoît Mandelbrot**.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs
May 2025
NEWS
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

- In theory, if one were to **measure the coastline down to the size of a water molecule**, the length could approach **infinity**. That's the paradox.

This revision, therefore, reflects **mathematical accuracy**, not physical expansion.

New-Age Mapping: Precision Meets Technology:

The extended coastline is the result of **cutting-edge mapping technologies and a more refined methodology**, spearheaded by agencies like the **National Hydrographic Office (NHO)** and the **Survey of India**.

What's New in the Measurement Process?

- **Finer Scale**: Mapping at a **1:250,000 resolution** using **Electronic Navigation Charts**.

- **Advanced Tech**: Utilized **GIS**, **satellite altimetry**, **LIDAR-GPS**, and **drone-based imaging**.

- **Highwater Line Reference**: Based on **2011 tide data**, giving a more accurate representation of the coast.

- **River Mouth Closure**: Rivers and creeks were "closed" at a **fixed inland point** to prevent artificial inflation.

- **Islands Counted**: Even **tidal islands** exposed during low tide were added to the total.

- **Scheduled Updates**: From **2024–25 onward**, this data will be **revised every 10 years**, ensuring continuous accuracy.

Why This Matters: Implications of a Longer Coastline

1. **Strengthened Disaster Resilience:** India's eastern coast is frequently hit by **cyclones and tsunamis**—think **Cyclone Fani or Yaas**.
   More accurate coastal maps improve:

   - **Early warning systems**

   - **Evacuation planning**

   - **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)** demarcations

     This helps build **climate-resilient infrastructure** in vulnerable areas.

2. **Boosting the Blue Economy:**

A longer coastline enhances the **scope of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, opening doors to:

   - **Offshore energy** (wind, oil, gas)

   - **Marine fisheries and aquaculture**

   - **Bioprospecting**

   - **Deep-sea mining**

     This supports major initiatives like **Sagarmala**, **Bharatmala**, and **port-led industrial corridors**.

3. Better Urban Planning and Coastal Governance: Updated coastline data feeds into:

   - **Urban zoning laws**

- **Port planning and dredging**

- **Shoreline management programs**

  Coastal states like **Tamil Nadu**, **Odisha**, **Gujarat**, and **Kerala** can now make **more informed investment and infrastructure decisions**.

Key Challenges and the Road Ahead:

1. Constantly Changing Coastlines:

Coastlines are **dynamic systems**, shaped by:

- **Tidal action**

- **Sediment transport**

- **Erosion and deposition**

- **Sea-level rise**

  This makes **periodic revisions** essential to maintain up-to-date coastal maps.

2. Need for Cross-Agency Collaboration:

Effective coastal management requires **seamless coordination** among multiple agencies:

- **National Hydrographic Office**

- **Survey of India**

- **Ministry of Earth Sciences**

- **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**

3. Investing in Technology: Continued upgrades in **mapping technologies**—such as **hyperspectral imaging**, **AI-powered data analytics**, and **real-time satellite monitoring**—are crucial.

4. Capacity Building: There's an urgent need to **train and upskill** professionals in:

- **Coastal engineering**

- **Environmental science**

- **Geospatial technologies**

  to manage and secure India's long and vital coastline.

Interesting Fact: India's Maritime Legacy

India has a rich maritime history dating back to **Indus Valley ports** like **Lothal**. Today, with **13 major ports and 200+ minor ports**, India's coast plays a pivotal role in trade, culture, and connectivity.

Conclusion: Precision Unlocks Potential

The revision of India's coastline from **7,516.6 km to 11,098.8 km** is more than a number—it's a reflection of **scientific accuracy, technological progress, and better governance**. By embracing the **mathematics behind nature**, India is better prepared to **manage disasters, grow its blue economy, and plan smarter cities**—all while preserving its precious coastal ecosystems.

Mozambique in Focus: A Nation Caught in Crisis Amid Strategic Geopolitical Importance

Context: Over **25,000 people** have been forced to flee from **northern Mozambique** amid a **triple crisis** involving **armed insurgency**, **frequent extreme weather events**, and **post-election unrest**. This humanitarian emergency has drawn global attention to the region's fragile stability and urgent need for coordinated aid efforts.

Where is Mozambique?

Mozambique is a **southeastern African nation** with a **strategic coastline** along the **Indian Ocean**, making it a key player in regional maritime trade and geopolitical dynamics.

- It is separated from **Madagascar** by the **Mozambique Channel**, an important shipping route.

- **Capital**: **Maputo**, located in the southern part of the country.

- **Bordering Nations**:

  o **North**: **Tanzania**

  o **Northwest**: **Malawi** and **Zambia**

  o **West**: **Zimbabwe**

  o **Southwest**: **South Africa** and **Eswatini (Swaziland)**

Geographical Highlights:

Mozambique is characterized by **diverse landscapes**, including **rivers, highlands, and coastal plains**:

- **Major Rivers**:

  o **Zambezi River** – The **longest river** in Mozambique, vital for agriculture, hydroelectric power, and transportation.

  o **Limpopo River** – Another crucial river flowing into the **Indian Ocean**, supporting rural livelihoods.

  o **Ruvuma River** – Marks part of the border with **Tanzania**.

- **Highest Point**: **Mount Binga**

  o Elevation: **2,436 meters**

  o Located in the **Chimoio Highlands**, near the **Zimbabwean border**, offering unique biodiversity and potential for eco-tourism.

Did You Know?

- Mozambique is home to one of **Africa's largest natural gas reserves**, with offshore projects attracting significant international investment.

- The country has a **rich colonial history**, having been under **Portuguese rule** until it gained independence in **1975**.

- **Bazaruto Archipelago**, off the coast of Mozambique, is a renowned **marine conservation area** and diving hotspot.

Why Mozambique Matters:

Beyond its current challenges, **Mozambique plays a critical role in regional stability and economic integration** in **Southern Africa**. It is a member of key organizations such as the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** and the **African Union (AU)**.

The unfolding crisis underlines the need for a **multi-dimensional approach**—combining **humanitarian aid**, **conflict resolution**, **climate resilience**, and **democratic stability**—to ensure peace and development in this vital African nation.

How the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) Helped Trigger India's Early Monsoon in 2025

Context: The **early onset of the southwest monsoon** over **Kerala on May 24, 2025**, has drawn keen attention from climate scientists and meteorologists. One of the **key atmospheric phenomena** responsible for this unusual timing is the **Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)** — a powerful eastward-moving pulse of clouds, rainfall, and winds.

According to the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, the presence of the **MJO in a favorable phase** over the **Indian Ocean** significantly enhanced rainfall conditions, triggering the early advance of the monsoon over southern India.

What Is the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)?

The **Madden-Julian Oscillation** is a **large-scale tropical weather pattern**, discovered in **1971** by **Roland Madden and Paul Julian**. It consists of a **moving system of enhanced and suppressed rainfall**, cloudiness, and winds that travels **eastward along the equator**.

- The MJO moves at a speed of **4–8 metres per second**, completing a global circuit in approximately **30–60 days**, and sometimes extending up to **90 days**.
- It alternates between an **active phase**, which **boosts rainfall and cloud formation**, and a **suppressed phase**, which **reduces precipitation**.
- Its effects are strongest in the **tropics**, between **30° North and 30° South**, but can also influence weather patterns in **mid-latitude regions**.

Why Is MJO Crucial for the Indian Monsoon?

India lies well within the tropical belt, making the **MJO a major influencer of monsoon activity**. During its **active phase**, the MJO strengthens:

- **Cloud convection**
- **Cyclonic circulation**
- **Rainfall intensity**

When the MJO is favorably positioned over the **Indian Ocean**, it increases the likelihood of **early or stronger monsoon onset**.

How MJO Triggered the Early Monsoon in 2025:

In **late May 2025**, the MJO entered **Phase 4** — associated with the **central Indian Ocean** — with an **amplitude above 1**, signifying strong activity.

- **Phase 4** is typically linked with **heavy rainfall and enhanced atmospheric convection** over the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.

- This setup led to the **formation of low-pressure systems**, frequent **cyclonic disturbances**, and widespread **cloud development**, all of which supported the **early arrival of the southwest monsoon** over Kerala.

Additional Factors That Contributed to the Early Monsoon:

1. Transition Toward La Niña:

- **El Niño conditions** were observed weakening in early 2025.

- Climate models began pointing to a potential **La Niña phase**, which is generally associated with **stronger, wetter, and sometimes earlier monsoons** in India.

2. Strong Cross-Equatorial Winds:

- In May, robust winds from the **southern hemisphere** cross the equator into the **Arabian Sea**.

- In 2025, these **winds were more intense and better organized**, pushing **moisture-rich air** quickly toward India's west coast.

3. Above-Normal Sea Surface Temperatures:

- The **Arabian Sea** and **Bay of Bengal** recorded **higher-than-average sea surface temperatures**, leading to:
  o Enhanced **heat and moisture availability**
  o Intensified **convection and cloud bands**
  o Increased chances of **monsoon-supporting low-pressure systems**

Looking Ahead: Managing the Impacts of Early Monsoons

While an **early monsoon** offers **agricultural benefits** such as timely sowing and extended crop cycles, it also brings **climate uncertainties**:

- **Increased variability** in rainfall distribution

- **Flood risks** in certain regions

- **Potential for long dry spells** later in the season

As **climate change** continues to alter weather systems, it's essential for India to:

- **Strengthen forecasting models**

- **Invest in early warning infrastructure**

- **Promote adaptive agricultural planning**

In Summary:

The early arrival of the **2025 monsoon** was a result of **complex interactions** between atmospheric and oceanic systems. The **Madden-Julian Oscillation**, alongside **La Niña signals**, **warm seas**, and **strong wind patterns**, played a defining role in shaping this year's monsoon timeline.

Churdhar Wildlife Sanctuary: A Sacred Jewel of the Shivaliks

Context: In a recent update, the **Himachal Pradesh Forest Department** has **put on hold** its decision to impose a **visitor fee** for entry into the **Churdhar Wildlife Sanctuary**, located in the **Sirmaur district**. The move follows public and environmentalist concerns and will be reviewed for further clarity and implementation.

To the Point
Monthly Current Affairs

May
2025

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Churdhar Sanctuary: Where Nature Meets Spirituality

Nestled in the **Shivalik range** of the mighty Himalayas, the **Churdhar Wildlife Sanctuary** is one of Himachal Pradesh's most captivating natural havens. Established in **1985**, it spans an area of **56 sq.km.,** wrapping around the towering **Churdhar Peak**, also known as **Choordhar**—the **highest peak in the outer Himalayas**.

Spiritual Significance of Churdhar Peak:

Standing tall at **3,647 metres (11,965 feet)**, the **Churdhar Peak** offers **breathtaking panoramic views** of the **Gangetic plains**, the **Satluj River**, and even distant **Badrinath** in the north. At its summit lies a **revered temple dedicated to Lord Shiva**, making the sanctuary a **popular pilgrimage destination** as well as an ecological treasure.

Rich Floral Diversity: A Natural Pharmacy:

The sanctuary is **renowned for its herbal richness**, especially species known for their **medicinal and aromatic properties**. Key plants include:

- **Wild Himalayan Cherry**
- **Aloe Vera (locally known as Dhrit Kumari)**
- **Amaranthus spinosus (Chulai)**

These herbs are traditionally used in **Ayurvedic remedies** and add immense **ethnobotanical value** to the region. The sanctuary is also covered with lush **oak and deodar forests**, providing a cool and verdant canopy.

Thriving Fauna: A Refuge for Himalayan Wildlife

Churdhar is home to a **diverse range of Himalayan fauna**, including:

- **Musk Deer** – a shy and endangered species
- **Himalayan Black Bears** – frequently spotted in higher altitudes
- **Leopards** – the elusive predators of the hills
- **Monals** – the vibrant **state bird of Himachal Pradesh**

The sanctuary serves as a **critical habitat** for these species and plays a key role in **biodiversity conservation**.

Why Churdhar Matters: Ecological and Cultural Legacy

- The sanctuary is part of the **Western Himalayan Biodiversity Hotspot**.
- It is a significant **watershed zone** supporting rivers and springs that benefit surrounding villages.
- Due to its **spiritual relevance**, Churdhar sees a **high influx of pilgrims and trekkers**, making **eco-tourism management crucial** for its preservation.

Conclusion: A Sanctuary Worth Preserving

Churdhar Wildlife Sanctuary is more than a destination—it's a **living symbol of Himachal's natural wealth and spiritual heritage**. Balancing tourism with conservation, especially through sustainable visitor policies, will be key to **protecting its fragile ecosystem** for generations to come.

Panama: A Strategic Hub Backing India's Global Aspirations

Context: Panama, with its **capital city Panama City**, has recently made headlines by **supporting India's bid for a permanent seat** on the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**. This endorsement strengthens India's growing global stature and reflects Panama's commitment to international diplomacy and multilateral cooperation.

Geopolitical Location:

Situated in **Central America**, Panama occupies the **Isthmus of Panama**—a narrow strip of land that serves as a **natural bridge between North and South America**. This location makes Panama a **strategic geopolitical point**, influencing trade and connectivity between continents.

- **Western Border**: **Costa Rica**
- **Eastern Border**: **Colombia**
- **Northern Coastline**: **Caribbean Sea**
- **Southern Coastline**: **Pacific Ocean**

The Panama Canal: A Global Trade Artery

One of Panama's most iconic features is the **Panama Canal**—a **man-made marvel** that connects the **Atlantic and Pacific Oceans**. It is recognized as one of the **most vital maritime routes** in the world, rivaling the **Suez Canal** in strategic importance.

- The canal **reduces travel distance** for ships by thousands of kilometers, saving both time and fuel.
- Over **14,000 ships transit the canal each year**, carrying around **5% of global trade**.
- Operated and managed entirely by Panama since 1999.

Additional Insights & Fun Facts:

- **Currency**: The official currency is the **Balboa**, but the **US Dollar** is also widely used.
- **Language**: The official language is **Spanish**.
- **Biodiversity**: Panama hosts **over 10,000 species of plants** and is considered a **biodiversity hotspot**.
- **Economy**: Panama has one of the **fastest-growing economies** in Latin America, largely due to **banking, logistics, and canal revenues**.
- **Cultural Bridge**: Panama's culture is a vibrant mix of **indigenous, African, and Spanish influences**.

Panama, small in size but immense in influence, continues to play a **pivotal role on the world stage**—both as a **crucial trade hub** and as a **diplomatic supporter** of global democratic representation.

Antibiotic Access Crisis Against CRGN Infections

Context: A recent study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* has raised alarm bells over the **severe lack of access to effective antibiotics** for **carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative (CRGN)** infections in India. The study reveals that **only 7.8% of affected patients** in India received appropriate treatment, underscoring a critical gap in managing **multi-drug resistant infections**.
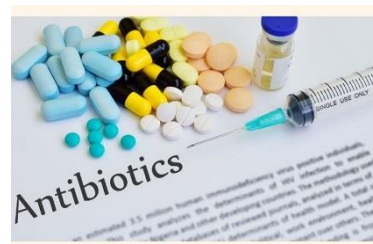
Key Findings: Antibiotic Access and CRGN Infections

Limited Access to Effective Antibiotics:

- The study examined **1.5 million CRGN cases** across **eight low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)** in 2019.

- In **India alone**, out of **nearly 10 lakh CRGN infections**, fewer than **1 lakh patients** received correct antibiotic treatment.

- **Only 7.8%** of Indian patients were treated appropriately—slightly above the **6.9% average** for the studied LMICs (India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan, and South Africa).

- This **treatment gap** is estimated to have resulted in **approximately 3.5 lakh deaths** in India.

Barriers to Proper Treatment:

The study identified multiple obstacles:

- **Insufficient diagnostic infrastructure**

- **Lack of standardized treatment protocols**

- **Poor antibiotic availability and affordability**

Recommendations by the Study:

- A **dual approach** is essential:

  o **Preserve** existing antibiotics through **responsible usage** (antibiotic stewardship).

  o **Ensure access** to effective treatments for all patients in need.

- **Regulatory reforms**, improved diagnostics, and **supply chain interventions** are vital.

- Urges countries to **bridge the access gap** and **strengthen healthcare capacity** to combat resistance.

Understanding CRGN: A Public Health Threat

What is CRGN?

Carbapenem-Resistant Gram-Negative (CRGN) bacteria are pathogens that have developed **resistance to carbapenem antibiotics**, which are often the **last resort** for treating severe, multi-drug resistant infections.

Mechanism of Resistance

- CRGN bacteria produce **carbapenemase enzymes**, which **neutralize antibiotics**, rendering treatment ineffective.

- Resistance spreads via **horizontal gene transfer**, rapidly affecting hospital and community settings.

Examples of CRGN Pathogens:

- *Escherichia coli*

- *Klebsiella pneumoniae*
- *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*

These bacteria can cause:

- **Pneumonia**
- **Bloodstream infections (sepsis)**
- **Urinary tract infections (UTIs)**

Why CRGN is Dangerous:

- Infections are **difficult to treat**, with **limited alternative options**.
- Linked to:
  - o **High mortality**
  - o **Prolonged hospitalizations**
  - o **Escalating healthcare costs**
- **Global health agencies**, including WHO, list CRGN as a **top priority pathogen**.

Gram Staining: Classifying Bacteria

Basics of Bacteria:

- **Bacteria** are **unicellular prokaryotes**, lacking a true nucleus.
- Key components: **cell wall, DNA, cytoplasm, flagella, ribosomes**, etc.
- Classified into:
  - o **Gram-positive bacteria**
  - o **Gram-negative bacteria**

The Gram Staining Technique:

A widely used method to **differentiate bacteria** based on **cell wall structure**:

- **Gram-positive bacteria**: Have a **thick peptidoglycan wall**; stain **violet**.
- **Gram-negative bacteria**: Have a **thin wall with an outer membrane**; stain **red or pink** due to the loss of crystal violet during decolorization.

Conclusion: An Urgent Call to Action

The fight against **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** hinges on:

- **Strengthening global healthcare systems**
- **Ensuring equitable access to effective antibiotics**
- **Investing in research, diagnostics, and drug development**

World Health Assembly 2024 Adopts Historic Pandemic Agreement

Context: In a landmark move, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** has formally adopted the **first-ever international Pandemic Agreement** during the **78th World Health Assembly (WHA)** held in **Geneva, Switzerland**. The legally binding pact is designed to enhance **global readiness, response, and equity** in tackling future pandemics—drawing lessons from the unprecedented challengesof the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

What is the WHO Pandemic Agreement?

After **three years of intense negotiations**, WHO Member States have unanimously agreed to the **Pandemic Accord**, a global legal framework intended to ensure the world never faces a pandemic unprepared again. This **historic accord**, once ratified by **at least 60 countries by 2026**, will come into full effect—marking a turning point in **international health cooperation**.

Understanding the World Health Assembly (WHA):

The **World Health Assembly** is the **governing body** of the WHO, comprising delegates from all 194 Member States. It meets annually to:

- Set **global health priorities**
- Approve **WHO budgets and strategic work plans**
- Elect the **Director-General of WHO**
- Adopt **international agreements** under **Article 19** of the WHO Constitution

The WHA has previously been instrumental in key health victories, including:

- **Eradication of Smallpox (1980)**
- **International Health Regulations (IHR)** – global health security framework
- **Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2003)** – first global health treaty
- **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework (2011)**

Key Objectives of the Pandemic Agreement:

The newly adopted agreement centers around the principles of **equity, transparency, solidarity**, and **scientific cooperation**, while firmly upholding the **sovereignty of nations**. Its primary aims include:

- **Enhancing early detection and rapid response** to emerging health threats
- Strengthening **national pandemic prevention plans**
- Ensuring **equitable access to vaccines, treatments, diagnostics**, and health products
- Promoting **transparency** in information and pathogen sharing

Major Features and Provisions:

1. **Legal Framework with Global Significance:** This is only the **second legally binding agreement** adopted under **Article 19** of the WHO Constitution—the first being the **Tobacco Control Convention** in 2003.
2. **Prevention, Surveillance & Preparedness:**

Member States will be guided to:

- Establish robust **surveillance systems**
- Invest in **routine immunization**, lab safety, and **zoonotic disease monitoring**
- Address **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** and strengthen **early-warning systems**

3. **Equitable Production & Distribution:**

The agreement encourages **sustainable local manufacturing** of health tools to avoid overreliance on a few countries. It aims for:

- **Timely scale-up** of medical production during pandemics
- **Fair distribution** guided by public health needs

4. **Technology Transfer and Innovation Access:**

A major emphasis is placed on **voluntary technology sharing**, especially with **low- and middle-income countries**. Mechanisms include:

- Licensing and financial incentives
- Creation of **regional tech hubs** supported by WHO
- Building local manufacturing capacity

5. **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) System:**

The **PABS system** will enable rapid sharing of **pathogen data** with researchers and manufacturers. In return:

- Manufacturers must reserve **20% of their output for WHO** (10% donated, 10% at affordable prices)
- **Open to global manufacturers**, promoting transparency and cooperation

6. **Global Supply Chain and Logistics Network:**

To avoid supply shortages seen during COVID-19, a **WHO-coordinated logistics network** will be created to:

- Distribute medical supplies based on urgency and equity
- Enhance transparency in **supply and demand forecasts**

Protecting National Sovereignty:

The agreement **does not empower WHO to override national laws** or enforce measures like lockdowns, vaccine mandates, or border closures. Each country retains **full autonomy** in how it implements the agreement within its jurisdiction.

U.S. Absence: A Notable Omission

A significant concern is the **absence of the United States** from the final agreement. U.S. negotiators withdrew from the process, partly influenced by earlier decisions under the Trump administration to disengage from the WHO. Experts warn this could **limit the agreement's global impact**, though efforts continue to bring the U.S. back into the fold.

Additional Insights and Global Implications:

- According to the **Global Preparedness Monitoring Board**, the world faces a **27% chance of a pandemic** as deadly as COVID-19 in the next 25 years.
- The pandemic caused a **global economic loss of over $12.5 trillion**—highlighting the urgent need for preventive frameworks.
- The agreement aligns with the **UN's Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**, reinforcing health as a universal right.

A Step Toward a Safer Future:

The **WHO Pandemic Agreement** represents a **monumental shift in how the world addresses global health threats**. With its emphasis on **solidarity, scientific cooperation, and equity**, it sets the foundation for a **more resilient and inclusive global health system**.

As countries move toward ratification and implementation, this agreement could very well become the **bedrock of future pandemic resilience**—preventing history from repeating itself.