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Daily Current Affairs

To The Point

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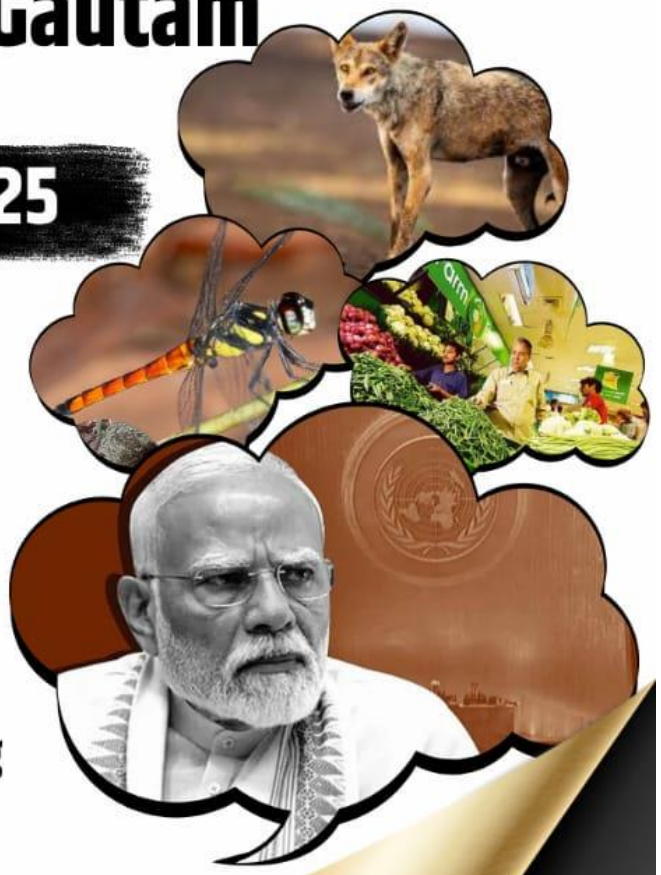
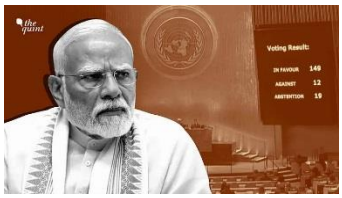


Table Of Content

22 July 2025

GS Paper 2 – Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice

1 India's Strategic Shift at the UN: Rising Abstentions Reflect New Diplomatic Approach



Context: India's voting behavior at the **United Nations** has undergone a notable transformation over the decades. A recent analysis of over **5,500 UN resolutions** from **1946 to June 2025** reveals a striking trend: the percentage of **'yes' votes** by India has dropped to just **56%**—the **lowest since 1955**—while **abstentions** have reached an **all-time high of 44%**.

This marked shift is more than a statistical anomaly; it signals a **strategic recalibration** of India's foreign policy in response to an increasingly **polarised global order** and the complexities of modern multilateral diplomacy.

Historical Evolution of India's UN Voting Patterns:

India's voting trajectory at the UN can be traced across four distinct eras:

- **1946 to Late 1960s**: A **volatile phase**, with 'yes' votes ranging from **20% to 100%**. Abstentions remained between **0% and 40%**.
- **1970 to 1994**: A period of **greater consistency**, with India supporting **74% to 96%** of resolutions. Abstentions were relatively low, at **8% to 19%**.
- **Mid-1990s to 2019**: The country adopted a **stable voting stance**, maintaining 'yes' votes in the range of **75% to 83%**, and abstentions between **10% and 17%**.
- **Post-2019**: A **dramatic shift** began, culminating in **2025** with a **record 44% abstention rate** and a significant fall in 'yes' votes.

Why Is India Abstaining More Often?

1. **The Rise of Global Polarisation:** As geopolitical tensions escalate—particularly among the **United States, China, and Russia**—India faces mounting pressure to take sides. However, as a nation committed to **strategic autonomy**, India increasingly opts for **abstention** to maintain a **neutral, independent posture**.
2. **Complexity of Modern Resolutions:** Former Indian diplomats describe today's resolutions as **"Christmas trees"**—laden with multiple provisions, some of which may **conflict with India's interests or principles**. This structural ambiguity makes **outright support or opposition difficult**, rendering abstention a **pragmatic alternative**.
3. **Assertion of Sovereign Judgment:** Abstention is no longer seen as indecision. For a country positioning itself as a **responsible middle power**, abstaining can be a **diplomatic signal**—a way to express **reservations** without burning bridges or aligning with controversial stances.

Strategic Abstention in Action:

Although the analysis doesn't cite specific resolutions, India's recent abstentions have commonly occurred on issues like:

- The **Russia–Ukraine conflict**, where India has abstained to **preserve ties** with both the West and Moscow
- **Human rights resolutions** on Myanmar or China, where abstention helps **avoid direct confrontation**

- The **Israel–Palestine** question, where abstention reflects India's attempt to balance its **historic support for Palestine** with **growing ties with Israel**

Each instance reflects a careful balance between **principle and pragmatism**.

Global Implications of India's Voting Shift:

1. **Reinforcing Strategic Autonomy:** By abstaining more frequently, India is reasserting its **non-aligned identity**, distancing itself from the rigid blocs of the Cold War era while embracing a **multi-aligned** approach suited for the 21st century.
2. **Potential Diplomatic Tensions:** This strategy, however, is not without risks. Allies—especially in the West—may view India's **abstentions on value-based issues** as a lack of moral clarity or political commitment.
3. **Balancing Influence and Credibility:** India must strike a fine balance: using abstention to preserve diplomatic room to manoeuvre, while also projecting itself as a **credible, responsible global actor**.

Looking Ahead: What This Means for India's Global Ambitions

India's increasing reliance on **abstention** aligns with its broader ambition to secure a **permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**. As India seeks to play a **greater role in global governance**, its approach to voting reflects a desire to be seen as a **balancer, not a follower**.

In an age of **multipolarity and fractured alliances**, abstention gives India the space to:

- **Preserve critical bilateral relationships**
- **Avoid entanglement in power struggles**
- **Express nuanced foreign policy positions**

Extra Insight: How India Compares Globally

- **China** also often abstains, particularly on humanitarian interventions.
- **Brazil and South Africa**, like India, use abstention as a tool of strategic flexibility.
- **Western nations**, in contrast, generally have lower abstention rates and higher 'yes' votes, reflecting alliance-based voting.

Conclusion: A Recalibration, Not a Retreat

India's record number of abstentions in **2025** is not a sign of retreat from international responsibility. Rather, it reflects a **more mature, strategic diplomatic posture** in a world where clarity is often elusive and stakes are high.

GS Paper 3 – Biodiversity and Conservation

2 Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary Under Threat: Legal Breach Sparks Conservation Concerns

Context: The **Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary** in **Karnataka** is at the center of a major environmental controversy. The **Karnataka state government** has allegedly violated provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, and **Supreme Court directives** by approving a proposal to **denotify nearly 300 sq. km** of this ecologically sensitive area.

Shockingly, the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** failed to uphold its responsibility by not ensuring that the lost forest area is **compensated through equivalent protected land**, as required by legal and conservation norms.

A Sanctuary Rich in Biodiversity:

Declared a **wildlife sanctuary on 23rd November 1974**, Shettihalli spans a diverse and ecologically vital region in **Shimoga (Shivamogga) district** of Karnataka, covering an area of **395.6 square kilometres**. It is home to **a unique blend of flora and fauna**, water bodies, and bird habitats.

One of its most notable features is the **Tunga Anicut Dam**, located within the sanctuary, which serves as a refuge for **otters and numerous species of water birds**.

The sanctuary also encompasses the **Mandagadde Bird Sanctuary**, situated on a **small island in the River Tunga**, a haven for **migratory and resident bird species**.

Ecology and Vegetation:

The forest type in Shettihalli includes:

- **Dry deciduous**
- **Moist deciduous**
- **Semi-evergreen forests**

These forest types together support a wide array of **plant biodiversity**. Prominent species include:

- **Teak (Tectona grandis)**
- **Silver Oak**
- **Indian Thorny Bamboo**
- **Calcutta Bamboo**
- **Asan**
- **Amla (Indian gooseberry)**
- **Sweet Indrajao**, among others

Home to Diverse Wildlife:

Shettihalli is known for its **rich wildlife population**, playing host to several **flagship and endangered species**.

Mammals Found in the Sanctuary:

- **Tiger**

- **Leopard**
- **Sloth Bear**
- **Gaur (Indian Bison)**
- **Asian Elephant**
- **Sambar Deer**
- **Spotted Deer**
- **Wild Dogs (Dhole)**
- **Jackal**
- **Bonnet Macaque**
- **Common Langur**
- **Wild Pig**

Avian Diversity:

The sanctuary is a paradise for bird lovers, sheltering species like:

- **Hornbills**
- **Peafowl**
- **Kingfishers**
- **Parakeets**
- **Junglefowl**
- **Bulbuls**
- **Doves and Pigeons**
- **Flycatchers**
- **Swallows**
- **Woodpeckers**
- **Partridges**
- **Babblers**
- **Munias**

Human Settlements and Historical Context:

Interestingly, Shettihalli also accommodates **numerous human settlements**, many of which consist of families **displaced during the construction of the Sharavathi Dam** in the 1960s. These communities have coexisted with the sanctuary ecosystem for decades, though pressures of human activity remain a **challenge to conservation efforts**.

Conservation Concerns and Future Risks:

The proposed **denotification of 300 sq. km** could significantly damage the sanctuary's **ecological balance**, especially at a time when **biodiversity loss and climate change** are accelerating.

Experts warn that such reductions can:

- Fragment animal corridors
- Threaten the survival of **keystone species**
- Reduce the sanctuary's **climate resilience**
- Open doors to **illegal encroachments and developmental pressures**

Moreover, failure to provide **compensatory afforestation or alternate protected areas** violates the **principle of "no net loss"** in biodiversity.

Why Shettihalli Matters More Than Ever:

As India faces increasing environmental challenges, **protected areas like Shettihalli** are crucial not just for wildlife, but for the **ecological security of the region**. They support:

- **Carbon sequestration**
- **Soil and water conservation**
- **Livelihoods through eco-tourism**
- **Flood regulation and microclimatic stability**

Conclusion: A Call for Stronger Action

The developments surrounding Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary underline the need for **stronger environmental governance** and **accountable decision-making**. The sanctuary is not just a forest—it is a **living ecosystem**, a **biodiversity hotspot**, and a **natural heritage site** that deserves protection.

GS Paper 3 – Environment & Biodiversity

3 Lyriothemis abrahami: A Stunning New Dragonfly Species Discovered in Kerala

Context: A remarkable discovery has enriched India's biodiversity records: a **new species of dragonfly**, named ***Lyriothemis abrahami***, has been officially identified in the **forests of Kerala**. Previously mistaken for the closely resembling ***Lyriothemis flava***, this species has now been correctly distinguished and documented, showcasing the importance of **detailed taxonomic studies** in understanding our ecosystems.

Where Nature Hides Her Secrets:

Lyriothemis abrahami was found breeding in **small, water-filled tree holes**, a rare microhabitat in the dense **tropical forests** of Kerala. The species thrives across various forest zones—ranging from **lowland rainforests** to **mid-elevation evergreen and deciduous forests**, at altitudes between **50 m and 1,100 m above sea level**.

This dragonfly's ability to inhabit such specific and often overlooked habitats highlights the **rich yet fragile biodiversity** of the **Western Ghats**, a global biodiversity hotspot.

A Dragonfly with Striking Features:

This species stands out not only for its ecological uniqueness but also for its **distinct physical traits**:

- **Sexual Dimorphism**: Males and females exhibit marked physical differences—a rare feature in many dragonfly species.
- **Males**: Noted for their **uniquely shaped hamules** (secondary genitalia used in mating).
- **Females**: Feature **jet-black bodies** adorned with **striking yellow triangular spots**, offering a visual treat and easy identification in the wild.

Boosting Kerala's Biodiversity Count:

With the discovery of ***Lyriothemis abrahami***, Kerala's total **odonate species count** has risen to **191**, of which a significant **78 species are endemic** to the region. This highlights **Kerala's crucial role** in conserving India's dragonfly and damselfly diversity and underscores the need to continue biodiversity research in lesser-known forest habitats.

Ecological Importance of Dragonflies:

Dragonflies, such as ***Lyriothemis abrahami***, are **key ecological indicators**. Their presence signals the **health of forest and freshwater ecosystems**. Here's why they're vital:

- They are **apex insect predators**, feeding on mosquitoes, flies, and other pest insects.
- They play a role in **controlling vector-borne diseases** by keeping mosquito populations in check.
- Their sensitivity to environmental changes makes them excellent **bioindicators** of **climate shifts, pollution, and habitat degradation**.

In short, when dragonflies thrive, it often means the **ecosystem is thriving** too.

More Than Just a Beautiful Insect: The discovery of ***Lyriothemis abrahami*** is a reminder of the **hidden wonders of the forest** and the importance of continued field research and conservation. As we uncover more such species, it becomes clearer that **protecting habitats like the Western Ghats** is not just about saving wildlife—it's about **preserving ecological balance**, **human health**, and the **natural heritage of future generations**.

GS Paper 3 – Science & Technology

4 INVICTUS Programme: Pioneering Europe's Hypersonic Flight Future

Context: The **European Space Agency (ESA)**, in collaboration with UK-based **Frazer-Nash Consultancy**, has officially launched the **INVICTUS research programme**—a visionary project aiming to develop cutting-edge **hypersonic flight technologies** for the next generation of **reusable aerospace vehicles**.

This initiative marks a significant step toward creating **horizontal launch platforms** capable of operating at extreme speeds, redefining the future of space access and high-speed atmospheric travel.

What is the INVICTUS Programme?

The **INVICTUS programme** is designed to develop and demonstrate **advanced hypersonic technologies**. At its core is a fully **reusable experimental aerospace vehicle** capable of flying at **Mach 5**—that's **five times the speed of sound**.

The programme is funded through ESA's **General Support Technology Programme (GSTP)** and **Technology Development Element (TDE)**, both of which support **strategic innovation** in European space technology.

Key Features of the Hypersonic Vehicle:

- **Horizontal Take-Off Capability**: Unlike traditional rockets, the INVICTUS vehicle will launch and land like an aircraft, making it more versatile and reusable.
- **Mach 5 Speed**: Designed to sustain speeds exceeding **6,000 km/h**, the vehicle will operate in the **hypersonic regime**, significantly reducing travel and launch times.
- **Modular Design**: The vehicle will be **upgradable**, allowing for the **interchange of propulsion systems, materials, and software** across various flight test campaigns.
- **Sustained Atmospheric Flight**: Aimed at mastering long-duration flight at hypersonic speeds within Earth's atmosphere—essential for both **spaceplane concepts** and **high-speed air travel**.

Propulsion Breakthrough: Hydrogen-Fuelled Innovation

One of the most transformative aspects of the INVICTUS programme is its focus on a **hydrogen-fuelled, precooled air-breathing propulsion system**. This technology is:

- **Eco-friendly**: Hydrogen combustion produces **zero carbon emissions**, making it a **sustainable alternative** to conventional jet fuels.
- **Highly Efficient**: Air-breathing systems reduce the need for onboard oxidisers, increasing fuel efficiency and payload capacity.
- **Scalable for Future Applications**: Suitable for a variety of missions, from **hypersonic transport** to **orbital launch platforms**.

This propulsion approach could revolutionize **aerospace engineering** by bridging the gap between traditional aircraft and space vehicles.

Building on ESA's Past Innovations:

The INVICTUS initiative builds upon a foundation of **previous ESA-led technology demonstrations**, integrating lessons from **earlier high-speed flight experiments**. It will provide a **testbed for European industry, academia, and agencies** to validate and refine **emerging hypersonic systems** in real-world conditions.

Why INVICTUS Matters: Strategic and Technological Impact

- **Boosting Europe's Aerospace Competitiveness**: INVICTUS positions Europe as a global leader in hypersonic technology, alongside powers like the US, China, and Russia.
- **Dual-Use Potential**: Technologies developed could have both **civilian and defence applications**, including **rapid global mobility** and **spaceplane operations**.
- **Advancing Reusability**: With the space industry shifting towards **cost-effective, reusable platforms**, INVICTUS aligns with the vision of **sustainable space access**.

Did You Know?

Mach 5 speed means travelling over **1.6 kilometres per second**—fast enough to cross the Atlantic in under an hour. Mastering such speeds with reusable, air-breathing vehicles could revolutionize **space tourism**, **satellite launches**, and even **intercontinental travel**.

Looking Ahead: A New Chapter in Aerospace Exploration

The **INVICTUS programme** isn't just a research effort—it's a bold **technological leap** toward the future of aerospace mobility. By blending **reusability, sustainability, and speed**, INVICTUS is set to reshape how we think about **spaceflight and high-speed atmospheric travel** in the decades to come.

GS Paper 3 – Economy

5 Why Food Inflation Is Set to Stay Low in India

Context: In a positive economic development, **India's consumer price index (CPI) inflation** eased to **2.1% in June 2025**, placing it **below inflation rates in the US (2.7%) and the UK (3.6%)**. Even more striking was the trend in **food inflation**, which **contracted by 1.1%** in India, while food prices **rose** by **3% in the US** and **4.5% in the UK**.

This marks **India's lowest food and retail inflation since January 2019**, offering much-needed relief to households and the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, which grappled with stubborn inflation during **2023–2024**.

What Is Food Inflation and Why It Matters:

Food inflation tracks the year-on-year increase in prices of essential food items and forms a significant component of the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**. In India, CPI is calculated by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** and directly impacts:

- **Household budgets**, especially for low- and middle-income families
- **Monetary policy** decisions by the RBI
- **Consumer confidence and economic stability**

It covers staples such as cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs, meat, and edible oils.

Abundant Monsoon Spurs Record Harvests:

The turnaround in food inflation is largely due to the **exceptionally strong 2024 monsoon**, which delivered **7.6% above-normal rainfall**. This surplus boosted **kharif and rabi crop yields**, improving supply and easing pressure on food prices by early 2025.

The **2025 monsoon** has continued the trend, arriving **early over Kerala on May 24** and delivering **7.1% above the long-period average (LPA)** by **July 20**. Except for a few regions—including **Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Marathwada, Assam, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh**—most parts of India have received **above-normal rainfall**.

Cereal Stocks Surge: Wheat and Rice Supply Stabilized

One of the strongest indicators of food inflation control has been the **rebound in wheat stocks**:

- **Wheat inventories** in government godowns rose to **358.78 lakh tonnes (lt)** as of July 1, 2025—**a four-year high**, up from **282.61 lt** a year earlier.
- **Procurement** increased to **300.35 lt** in April–June 2025, compared to **266.05 lt** in 2024 and **187.92 lt** in 2022.
- **Rice stocks** are also at record highs, ensuring sufficient supply for the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**.

This robust stockpile allows the government to **intervene in markets if prices rise**, something that wasn't possible during the previous inflationary spikes.

Shift in Cropping Patterns: A Strategic Realignment: While crops like **pigeon pea (arhar)**, **soyabean**, and **cotton** saw reduced sowing due to **price volatility and pest threats**, farmers have increasingly shifted to **maize**, which has become more lucrative thanks to demand from:

- **Ethanol blending programmes**
- **Animal feed**
- **Starch and food processing industries**

Despite the dip in some oilseeds and pulses, India is mitigating shortages with **record imports**.

Imports and Duty Cuts Keep Prices in Check:

To stabilise the domestic market, the government has:

- **Imported 72.56 lt of pulses** and **164.13 lt of vegetable oils** in 2024–25
- **Extended zero-duty imports on key pulses till March 2026**
- **Reduced import duties** on major edible oils

These steps ensure **ample domestic availability**, helping control prices even amid minor supply disruptions.

Fertiliser Shortages Pose a Lingering Risk:

Despite a promising start to the cropping season, a **fertiliser shortfall** has emerged as a concern. The strong monsoon has driven up demand, but **stock levels have dropped**:

- **Urea** stocks fell from **103 lt to 61.22 lt**
- **DAP (Di-ammonium phosphate)** reduced from **19.18 lt to 12.98 lt**

This decline is primarily due to **reduced imports from China**, which imposed **export restrictions**. For instance:

- China's **urea exports to India** fell from **21.48 lt to just 1.04 lt**
- **DAP exports** dropped from **22.87 lt to 8.43 lt**

These constraints have driven **DAP prices up sharply**, from **$525 to $810 per tonne**, raising concerns over **input costs and potential yield losses** if the shortfall persists.

Did You Know?

India is the **second-largest producer of rice and wheat globally**, but it is also the **largest importer of edible oils**. Hence, global commodity prices and trade flows play a critical role in **domestic food inflation trends**.

Conclusion: Outlook Remains Positive but Watchful

India's food inflation outlook remains **optimistic**, supported by:

- **Record harvests**
- **High buffer stocks**
- **Strategic imports**
- **Duty reductions**

However, **fertiliser shortages** and **future monsoon patterns** remain **uncertain variables**. Vigilant policy support, timely imports, and responsive market interventions will be essential to **keep food inflation in check** and ensure **price stability** through the rest of 2025 and beyond.

GS Paper 1 – Geography

6 Slovenia: A Picturesque Alpine Nation Embracing Progressive Values

Context: In a significant and sensitive policy shift, **Slovenia has become one of the latest countries to legalise assisted dying**, granting terminally ill adults the **right to end their lives** if they are suffering from **unbearable pain**. This progressive legislation reflects Slovenia's alignment with a growing number of nations embracing **individual dignity and choice in end-of-life care**.

Where Is Slovenia? A Crossroads of Europe

Slovenia is a small yet stunning country located at the intersection of **Central and Southeastern Europe**. It shares borders with:

- **Austria** to the north
- **Hungary** to the northeast
- **Italy** to the west
- **Croatia** to the southeast

In addition to its land borders, Slovenia also enjoys a **short but scenic coastline along the Adriatic Sea**, offering both Alpine charm and coastal allure.

Geography and Natural Beauty:

More than **40% of Slovenia's landscape is mountainous**, making it a haven for hikers, nature lovers, and winter sports enthusiasts. The country is shaped by four major European geographic zones:

- The majestic **European Alps**, including the **Julian Alps**
- The **karstic Dinaric Alps**, known for their caves and limestone formations
- The fertile **Pannonian and Danubian plains** and rolling hills
- A narrow but stunning **Mediterranean coastline**

Its highest peak, **Mount Triglav** (2,864 metres), is not only a natural landmark but also a national symbol proudly featured on the country's flag and coat of arms.

Climate: Diversity Across a Small Nation

Slovenia's climate is surprisingly varied for its size:

- **Mediterranean climate** along the coast with mild winters and hot summers
- **Continental climate** inland, with warm summers and cold, snowy winters in the valleys and plateaus

This climatic diversity supports a rich biodiversity and varied agricultural output.

Natural Resources and Rivers:

Slovenia is endowed with several **natural resources**, including:

- **Lignite** (a type of coal)
- **Lead and zinc**
- **Forests and building stone**

- Significant **hydropower potential** from its many rivers

Major rivers include the **Sava** and the **Drava**, both of which play crucial roles in hydroelectric generation and irrigation.

Economy: A Modern, High-Income Market

Despite its small size, **Slovenia boasts a well-developed market economy**. It is one of the most prosperous nations in Eastern Europe, with strengths in:

- **Services and international trade**
- **Automotive parts manufacturing**
- **Pharmaceutical production**
- **Electrical appliances and precision engineering**

The country is a member of the **European Union**, the **Schengen Area**, and the **Eurozone**, which has helped boost trade and investment.

Ljubljana: Slovenia's Cultural and Political Heart

The capital city, **Ljubljana**, is a charming blend of **Baroque architecture**, **modern urban design**, and **green public spaces**. It's known for:

- A vibrant **cultural scene**
- Historic **castle and riverfront cafés**
- Strong focus on **sustainability and environmental planning**—Ljubljana was named the **European Green Capital** in 2016

Did You Know?

Slovenia is home to **over 10,000 caves**, with **Postojna Cave** and **Škocjan Caves** being world-famous attractions. The **Škocjan Caves** are a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and among the largest known underground canyons in the world.

Conclusion: A Nation of Natural Wonder and Progressive Spirit

From its **Alpine peaks** to its **Adriatic shores**, **Slovenia** is a country that blends **natural splendour** with a **forward-thinking society**. Whether it's promoting **sustainable urban living**, fostering a **strong industrial base**, or taking bold steps in **social legislation**, Slovenia continues to make a mark on Europe—not just as a travel destination, but as a **modern, compassionate, and innovative nation**.