



DR. RAJKUMAR ACADEMY BENGALURU

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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

SEPTEMBER WEEK 3

15-09-2025 TO 20-09-2025

INDIA TO START
PILOT PROJECTS
IN VENEZUELA

WEAK FINANCES
DETER MUNICIPAL
BOND ISSUE

GLP-1 DRUGS FOR
DIABETES

SEBI, RBI IN
TALKS TO BOOST
TRADING



❖ Centre reopens PLI scheme for white goods till Oct. 14, cites market growth

Context: The Union government has reopened the application window for the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for white goods, it said on Sunday, citing market growth and growing industry confidence following the success of earlier rounds of the scheme.

- “The application window for the **PLI Scheme for white goods (Air Conditioners and LED lights) is being reopened** based on the appetite of the industry to invest more under the scheme, which is an outcome of the growing market and confidence generated due to manufacturing of key components of **ACs and LED lights** in India under the PLI for white goods scheme,” the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

More investments

- The application window for the scheme will remain open between September 15 and October 14.
- The release further said that in order to avoid any discrimination, both new applicants as well as existing beneficiaries of the scheme who want to invest more would be eligible to apply, subject to the guidelines.
- So far, the Ministry said, 83 applicants with committed investment of ₹10,406 crore have been selected as beneficiaries under the scheme. **“The investments will lead to manufacturing of components of Air Conditioners and LED lights across the complete value chain including components which are not manufactured in India presently with sufficient quantity,”** it said.
- The **Union Cabinet had given its approval for the PLI scheme for white goods for the manufacture of components and sub-assemblies of ACs and LED lights in April 2021. The scheme was to be implemented over seven years, from the financial year 2021-22 to 2028-29, with an outlay of ₹6,238 crore.**

❖ House panel says govt. must explore feasibility of licensing requirements for AI content creators

Context: A parliamentary committee has recommended that the government explore the feasibility of licensing requirements for AI content creators and making labelling of AI-generated videos and content mandatory, as part of efforts to combat the spread of fake news.

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, chaired by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Nishikant Dubey, also asked the government to devise legal and technological measures to identify and prosecute individuals and organisations disseminating such content.
- The committee’s draft report was recently submitted to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and will be tabled in Parliament during the next session. It also called for “close coordination between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), and other Ministries and departments”.

- While the **committee's suggestions are not binding, its recommendations are often accepted by the government.**
- The panel noted that MeitY has already constituted a nine-member body to examine challenges arising from “the issue of deepfakes”.
- Two ongoing projects in this regard include **fake speech detection using a deep learning framework and the design and development of software to identify deepfake videos and images**, it said.
- **The report observed that advances in technology, particularly in AI, could provide tools to address concerns over fake news. However, the Ministries concerned had conveyed that AI, in its current form, cannot be used for fact-checking as it relies on pre-existing information available online. Instead, AI could help flag potentially fake or misleading content for human review**, the committee said.
- **“AI and machine learning (ML) technologies are increasingly being employed to enhance the ability to detect, verify, and prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation,”** the committee noted, adding that several research projects and initiatives are exploring such uses.
- Calling fake news a “serious threat” to public order and the democratic process, **the committee recommended amending penal provisions, increasing fines, and fixing accountability.**
- It also favoured the **mandatory presence of fact-checking mechanisms and internal ombudsmen in all print, digital, and electronic media organizations.**
- At the same time, it stressed that such measures should evolve through consensus-building among media bodies and other stakeholders.

❖ **99% of goods in 12% GST bracket moved to 5%, says Sitharaman**

Context: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Sunday that the GST regime had benefited both the people and the State governments.

- Speaking on “Tax reforms for rising Bharat” at a joint conclave of the Trade and Industries Association, she said that in the **latest GST reforms, 99% of all the goods in the 12% GST bracket had come under the 5% bracket. “This is a reform which touches the lives of all 140 crore people. The GST rate cuts in the range of 10-13% will reduce the expenses for people and they can use that extra savings elsewhere,”** Ms. Sitharaman said.
- She expressed confidence that the companies would pass on the benefits to the consumers.
- **“When the GST was introduced in 2017, there were 65 lakh taxpayers. Today there are 1.51 crore taxpayers,”** she said.
- “The gross GST receipts which were ₹7.19 lakh crore in 2017 has now touched ₹22 lakh crore. On average, per-month GST collection is ₹1.9 lakh crore or ₹2 lakh crore for Central and State governments which is divided in the ratio of 50:50. If the monthly GST collection is ₹1.8 lakh crore, ₹90,000 crore goes to the States and ₹90,000 crore comes to the Centre. Out of the Centre’s ₹90,000 crore, 41% goes to the States.”

- Ms. Sitharaman said that almost eight months of work had gone into the GST 2.0 reforms and the rate rationalisation had been effected with the cooperation of the Finance Ministers of all States in the GST Council. “GST rates for over 350 items have been reduced,” she noted.
- “Systems have been simplified so that GST registration can be done in three days,” Ms. Sitharaman said. “Another major step is addressing the product classification problems in GST 2.0,” she said.
- “Now we have brought **all food items at 5% or 0%**. So there is no classification problem. We have brought similar classification for one type of goods. We worked on it for eight months looking into each item and what category it should be classified,” Ms. Sitharaman said.
- She said the cut in personal income tax rates, bringing in the new Income Tax Act and the GST reforms had all been done in a span of eight months.
- Speaking at the event, A.R. Unnikrishnan, chairman of the CII Tamil Nadu State Council, and G.S.K. Velu, chairman, Federation of Indian Chambers Of Commerce and Industry and Tamil Nadu State Council, welcomed the GST reforms.
- Linesh Sanatkumar, president, Hindustan Chamber of Commerce, said the **increase in GST rate of paper and paperboard to 18% from 12% had come as a major shock**.
- Tamil Nadu Traders Association president A.M. Vikramaraja flagged the issue of harassment of traders by some GST officials and sought formation of a committee to address the issue.

❖ PM inaugurates India’s first bamboo-based ethanol plant

Context: Golaghat facility billed as world’s first green bamboo bioethanol plant; ₹7,230-crore polypropylene project also initiated at Numaligarh Refinery; the facility aims to reduce dependence on fossil fuels

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored the need for India to be self-sufficient in energy. He was speaking after inaugurating the **country’s first bamboo-based ethanol plant in eastern Assam’s Golaghat district**.
- He laid the **foundation stone for a ₹7,230-crore polypropylene plant at the Numaligarh Refinery. The project will be established near the ₹5,000-crore bioethanol plant, a “zero-waste” facility described as the world’s first to produce ethanol from green bamboo.**
- Terming the bioethanol plant a step toward ensuring energy security, Mr. Modi said the facility aimed to promote clean energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- **“Assam is a land that supports India’s energy efficiency. The petroleum products from Assam are accelerating the development of India.**
- “India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world now. Our energy needs have been increasing with our Viksit Bharat dream. We spend crores of rupees on imports as we are dependent on other countries for energy. We want to change this by trying to achieve self-sufficiency in energy,” the Prime Minister said.

Deep-water exploration

- **“While we are focusing on hydrocarbon exploration, we are also laying stress on green energy like solar,” he said, highlighting the country’s national deep-water exploration mission to look for hydrocarbons under the sea. Referring to the bioethanol plant,** Mr. Modi said it would benefit local farmers and tribal communities.
- “The government will help them grow and procure the products to ensure a win-win situation,” he said. He criticized the erstwhile Congress governments for penalizing people for cutting bamboo, which was earlier categorized as a tree. He said the BJP government removed the ban on bamboo cutting and stressed that the decision was helping the locals in this part of the country.
- Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) officials said **five lakh tonnes of green bamboo would be sourced yearly from four northeastern States, including Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, to produce 48,900 tonnes of ethanol, 11,000 tonnes of acetic acid, 19,000 tonnes of furfural, and 31,000 tonnes of food-grade liquid carbon dioxide.**
- A joint venture of NRL and Finland’s Fortum and Chempolis OY, the plant is expected to give a ₹200-crore boost to Assam’s rural economy.

❖ India must invest more in accelerating diversification of food production: FAO Chief Economist Maximo Cullen

Context: About 40.4% of the Indian population (approximately 60 crore people) are unable to afford a healthy meal, says Maximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

- Dr. Cullen said the number was a significant decrease from the FAO’s assessment in 2023 that 74.1% of India’s population was unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021.
- He said India needed to start to invest more in accelerating the diversification of food production.
- Dr. Cullen said India played a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of zero hunger by 2030 because of the level, size, and population of the country.
- **“Reduction of hunger in India affects the world and affects, of course, South Asia. So India, I think, has a huge role to play.** That’s why we believe it’s so important that they continue and accelerate the transformation. **India needs to move to the higher level — that is access to healthy diets, which right now is 40.4% of the population.** So we need to improve that even more and also to find ways to assure this today and tomorrow,” he said.
- **“The Green Revolution** played its role, but now it’s time to do more. So don’t forget about it, but do more. We need to do more,” Dr. Cullen said.
- On the **FAO’s assessment in 2023 that 74.1% of India’s population was unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021, he said that in 2024, the percentage of the population that could not afford a healthy meal was 40.4.**

- “The methodology is improved. So yes, there is an important decrease. So the **number to compare is basically to look at the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World [SOFI] of this year to look at the previous year’s number**. But yes, there is a significant improvement, but still it’s too high. Healthy diet is diversity. It means fruits and vegetables, proteins, and also means cereals. **More than 40% of the country’s population cannot afford a healthy diet**. So it’s a minimum cost to healthy diet,” the FAO Chief Economist said.

Address the situation

- Dr. Cullen added that the immediate step the Indian government should take to address the situation was **diversification**.
- “India needs to start to invest more in accelerating the diversification of production. To move from **cereals** to high-value commodities. **Pulses** could be an option because they are more nutritious, they also have proteins. So pulses is an option and this is very consistent with your culture. But India should move more to fruits and vegetables and that requires an effort because you will need to substitute at some point,” he said.

Tariff war

- On the tariff war, he said the first problem of tariffs was inefficiencies.
- “You will be more inefficient in the way you move commodities. Because before you were optimising the world, now the world is segmented. The world that wants low tariffs, but the world that has now high tariffs.
- The second issue is uncertainty. The changes of tariffs every day has created a lot of uncertainty and that complicates markets. Although markets have already learned how to manage this uncertainty, so things don’t change too much,” he said.
- He, however, said the impact of food insecurity due to tariffs was not so high, but inefficiencies would be high.
- “But assume they get into a situation where you play tit-for-tat, then this could be very dangerous. It’s not happening at this point, countries are not responding. So let’s see how it evolves, but uncertainty and inefficiencies will make us less resilient for sure, because we will have less places where to have food access because of the tariffs. It will affect farmers, it will affect the smallholders, especially will affect the farmers who are more linked to the markets. But what will happen at the end is that you will have a segmented trade,” he said.

❖ SC stays 'arbitrary' Waqf changes, but upholds Act

Context: Court says judgment based on only a prima facie consideration of the 2025 law, its observations will not prevent parties from making future submissions about the validity of provisions in the Act.

- The Supreme Court struck a balance by staying crucial portions of the **Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which it found “prima facie arbitrary” while refusing to freeze the law in its entirety.**
- In a judgment on a plea for an interim stay of the law, a Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai and Justice A.G. Masih reasoned that **parliamentary legislation was naturally presumed to be constitutional as the lawmakers would only have the public’s best interests in mind, so much so that even discrimination woven into the statute would be based on adequate grounds.**
- However, this reasoning did not stop the court from staying key provisions of the 2025 Act, including the one which required a person intending to create a Waqf to prove that he had been practising Islam for five years.
- The court clarified that the judgment was based on a prima facie consideration of the 2025 law.
- The observations in the judgment would not prevent parties from making future submissions about the validity of provisions in the Act.
- **The court said there was nothing wrong in requiring a person to prove that he had been practising the faith for at least five years, considering that Waqf endowments were misused as a “clever device to tie up property in order to defeat creditors and generally to evade the law under the cloak of a plausible dedication to the Almighty”.**
- However, the Bench found it arbitrary that the law failed to provide a basic mechanism or procedure to ascertain whether the person had indeed been practising Islam for at least five years. Chief Justice Gavai directed the provision to be shelved until the government came up with a mechanism.
- **The court found “totally unconstitutional” a proviso in Section 3C, which mandated that a Waqf would lose its character the moment someone raised a doubt that it was government property.**
- Chief Justice Gavai said though any government property was public asset, and a designated officer had every reason to conduct an inquiry, it could not suddenly cease to be one before the designated officer completes the probe and submits the report.
- The court stayed parts of Section 3C that allowed the designated officer and a State government to unilaterally alter revenue and Waqf Board records, respectively,

changing the status of a Waqf property into a government property. Chief Justice Gavai held that determination of the **title (ownership) of a property came within the ambit of the judiciary, and the executive would be breaching the fundamental principle of separation of powers** by one-sidedly depriving citizens possession of a Waqf property.

- “It is directed that unless the issue with regard to title of the Waqf property in terms of Section 3C of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 is not finally decided in proceedings under Section 83 before the Waqf Tribunal, and subject to further orders by the State High Court, neither the Waqfs will be dispossessed of the property nor the entry in the revenue records and the records of the Waqf Board shall be affected,” the court said. To balance the equities and protect valuable government properties, the court said it was imperative that Mutawallis (managers) of these disputed Waqfs did not create any third-party rights until the final decision of the competent tribunal on the status of property.
- The Bench further directed that **Central Waqf Council would not have more than four non-Muslims out of a total 22**. State Waqf Boards would limit the number of its **non-Muslim members to three out of a total 11**. The court ordered that the Chief Executive Officers of State Waqf Boards must be picked from the Muslim community “as far as possible”.
- **“Right from 1923, in all the Waqf enactments we have referred to, there was a requirement of registration of Waqfs. We are, therefore, of the view that if Mutawallis for a period of 102 years could not get the Waqf registered, as required under the earlier provisions, they cannot claim that they be allowed to continue with the Waqf even if they are not registered,”** Chief Justice Gavai said.
- The court noted that the **Waqf Act, 1995**, had allowed registration without any requirement to provide a formal deed. “If for 30 long years, the **Mutawallis** had chosen not to make an application for registration, they cannot be heard to say that the provision which now requires the application to be accompanied by a copy of the Waqf deed is arbitrary,” the court reasoned.
- The judgment prima facie refused to accept an argument by the petitioners that a Waqf property would lose its status if it was notified as a “protected monument”.

❖ Amid an export surge, trade deficit comes down by 54%

Context: India's trade deficit contracted by more than 54% to \$9.9 billion in August, driven by a surge in merchandise exports, a continued strong performance in services exports, and a significant reduction in merchandise imports.

- The **trade deficit stood at \$21.7 billion** in August last year. The data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed that exports to the U.S. increased to about \$6.86 billion in August 2025, from \$6.7 billion in August last year.
- This is despite the 25% tariffs imposed on Indian exports to the U.S. for most of that month, and 50% for a few days at the month-end.
- “Despite the global uncertainties and the trade policy uncertainties, India’s exporters have done extremely well,” Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said at a press meet. “It shows that the policies of the Government of India have paid off well.”
- **India’s total exports increased to \$69.2 billion** in August 2025, up 9.3% over its level in August last year. Within this, merchandise exports increased to \$35.1 billion in August 2025, compared with \$32.9 billion in August last year, a growth of 6.7%. Services exports increased to \$34.1 billion in August 2025, compared with \$30.4 billion in August last year.
- On the import side, **India’s total imports fell to \$79 billion** in August 2025, compared with \$85 billion in August last year, a contraction of 7%. This was driven by a 10.1% contraction in merchandise imports to \$61.6 billion.
- **Services imports increased marginally to \$17.45 billion** in August 2025 from \$16.5 billion in August last year.
- The relatively strong export performance has meant that the trade deficit in April-August of this financial year stood at \$41.4 billion, down 20.1% over its level in the April-August 2024 period.

❖ Aadhaar is part of statute, can be used by voters, says SC

Context: Section 23(4) of the Representation of the People Act allows use of Aadhaar to authenticate entries

- The Supreme Court said **Aadhaar was part of the right-to-vote statute, and voters were permitted to utilise the unique identity proof to the extent permitted by the law.**
- A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi was responding to submissions intended to portray Aadhaar as inferior to the 11 documents listed by the Election Commission for voter verification during the special intensive revision of Bihar electoral rolls.

- This has come barely a week after the court declared Aadhaar as the **“12th document”** aggrieved voters could attach in their claims and objections for including or excluding names on the voter list.

Plea against order

- Petitioner-advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, who wants the court to rethink its August 8 order listing Aadhaar as the 12th document, said any person could get an Aadhaar, and that they need not necessarily be a citizen.
- **“Aadhaar is not proof of age, citizenship, residence, or domicile,”** Mr. Upadhyay said.
- Justice Bagchi asked then what Aadhaar was meant to prove. Mr. Upadhyay said it was merely a “simple” proof of identity.
- Referring to **Section 23(4) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950**, Justice Bagchi asked if **Aadhaar was not part of the statute which governed the EC with regard to the right to vote and inclusion on the rolls.**
- The Section permits EC officials to use Aadhaar to authenticate entries on the electoral rolls.
- To this, Mr. Upadhyay argued that Aadhaar could not be equated with any of the other 11 documents. “So, are you saying that a land record (one of the 11 documents) is more relevant than Aadhaar?” Justice Bagchi queried.
- The court issued notice on Mr. Upadhyay’s plea, and fixed October 7 to hear arguments on the legality of the special intensive revision. It said its judgment would prevail over anything that may happen.
- Mr. Upadhyay argued the SIR order of June 24 envisaged not only a proof of identity but also supporting evidence of eligibility, including place of birth or residence as per the 1950 Act. Consequently, acceptance of Aadhaar alone, without accompanying proof of place of birth or other eligibility criteria, diluted the intended scheme of the order.
- He also argued in favour of a “pan-India” SIR to root out “foreign infiltrators” who had sneaked their way into the electoral rolls. “Bihar has lakhs of Bangladesh nationals and Rohingyas...” the petitioner-advocate submitted.
- To this, Justice Surya Kant responded that the EC knew the law, and could distinguish between citizens and infiltrators on the voter list.
- Senior advocates A.M. Singhvi and Gopal Sankaranarayanan urged the court to hear their petitions on the validity of the SIR exercise itself. They said the EC was well into conducting SIRs in other parts of the country.

❖ Devadasi survey begins amid confusion over documents

Context: The third survey of devadasis in Karnataka commenced on Monday amid confusion over the list of documents sought by the government to establish the identity. Activists claim many are not even aware that a survey is under way, given inadequate publicity.

- A number of devadasis who went to their respective taluk office of the Women and Child Welfare Department had to return home without completing the survey, since they lacked documents that included the family tree. In some places, server issues slowed down the registration.
- The government has mandated over a dozen documents from those devadasis and their family members who have been left out of the previous surveys or from the families of the deceased devadasis. Confusion seems to prevail in the taluk offices since a self-declaration is also accepted, according to officials.
- Shobha S. Gasthi, a former devadasi and a member of the government-appointed Belagavi district committee, felt that the insistence on the family tree would prevent many from getting benefits. The family tree may take over a fortnight to just apply for and the survey process may be over before people get it, she said.
- She also pointed out that though the survey started, the district committee was yet to meet even once.
- Yamanurappa Halavagli, son of a devadasi and State coordinator of the Karnataka Vimuktha Devadasi Mahila Matthu Makkala Vedike, said: “The survey is not being done transparently. District committees have not been trained before the survey. In fact, in several districts committee itself has not been formed”.
- **The survey of devadasis is being conducted in 15 North and Central Karnataka districts where the system of dedicating women to temple services has been found to be prevailing even after the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1982, was enacted.**
- While the **first two surveys conducted in 1993-1994 and 2008-2009 identified 23,630 and 46,660 devadasis, respectively**, several thousands had been left out since an age criteria of 45 and above had been imposed.
- The current survey follows the **State Human Rights Commission** direction to the government to conduct a fresh survey before October 24.

❖ State govt. extends deadline for receiving applications for start-up programmes

Context: The Department of Electronics, IT and BT has extended the deadline for receiving applications for its flagship start-up programmes: ELEVATE 2025, ELEVATE Unnati 2025, and ELEVATE Minorities 2025.

- In the light of good response from innovators and entrepreneurs across Karnataka, the submission deadline has been extended from September 15 to 17, until 11.59 p.m., according to an official release from the department. Applications must be submitted through the official portal: <https://eitbt.karnataka.gov.in/>
- **The ELEVATE programme is designed to identify and support innovative, early-stage start-ups by providing them with essential resources, including grant-in-aid,** according to a press release.

❖ SC backs move to rid 'waqf by user' of statutory recognition

Context: Top court did not prima facie find any substance in the argument that centuries-old lands, graveyards, dargahs and mosques, recognised as Waqfs through long and consistent usage over the years, will be 'grabbed' by the government.

- The Supreme Court said legislative action to rid 'Waqf by user' of statutory recognition and make registration of Waqfs mandatory cannot be termed "arbitrary", considering the "menace" of encroachment on "huge government properties" over the years.
- "We are of the view that if the legislature in 2025 finds that on account of the concept of 'Waqf by user', huge government properties have been encroached upon, and to stop the menace, it takes steps for deletion of the provision, the amendment, prima facie, cannot be said to be arbitrary," Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, heading a Division Bench, observed in a judgment refusing to stay the entirety of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.
- The SC verdict referred to how the Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board had notified thousands of acres of land belonging to the government as Waqf property.
- The Andhra Pradesh government had failed to get the land back in the High Court, and had to finally appeal to the Supreme Court, which set aside the notification and had held that the lands were vested with the State.
- "After noticing such instances of misuse, if the legislature finds that the concept of 'waqf by user' has to be abolished and that too prospectively, in our view, the same cannot prima facie be said to be arbitrary," the court reiterated.
- Clause (i) of Section 3(r) of the Waqf Act of 1995 had recognised "Waqf by user", which meant a property used for religious or charitable purposes but without any formal written declaration or deed stating its character.

Formal deed must

- The 2025 Amendment Act omitted the concept of “waqf by user” and insisted on a formal Waqf deed.
- The court noted that **mandatory registration of Waqfs was not a new concept. It had been part of the 1995 Waqf law.**
- “We are, therefore, of the view that if for 30 long years, the **Mutawallis [managers of Waqfs]** had chosen not to make an application for registration, they cannot be heard to say that the provision which now requires the application to be accompanied by a copy of the Waqf deed is arbitrary,” the Chief Justice, who authored the judgment, observed.
- The apex court did not prima facie find any substance in the petitioners’ argument that centuries’ old lands, graveyards, dargahs and mosques, which have been recognised as Waqfs through long and consistent usage over the years, would be “grabbed” by the government.
- In this regard, the court recorded the assurance given by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre, that the deletion of clause **(i) of Section 3(r) of the original 1995 Waqf Act would only come into effect prospectively, when the 2025 amendments came into effect.**

❖ **The Amendment Act was notified on April 8, 2025.**

‘Misuse of provisions’

- The Union government, also represented by advocate Kanu Agrawal, had earlier informed the apex court that “shocking” misuse of Waqf provisions had led to “rampant encroachments” on private and government properties.
- The Centre had submitted that encroachments had led to a 116% rise in Waqf lands from 2013 to 2024, a phenomenal high unmatched even in the Mughal period.
- “It is submitted that right before even Mughal era, pre-Independence and post-independence eras, the total of Waqfs created was 18,29,163.896 acres of land in India. Shockingly after 2013, in just 11 years, the addition of Waqf land is 20,92,072.536 acres... The figure of 20 lakh acres is additional and not the total figure. The total comes to 39,21,236.459 acres of land,” the Minority Affairs Ministry affidavit had submitted in the court in April.

Centre’s take

- The government had argued that removing the concept of ‘waqf by user’ in the 2025 amendments did not deprive a Muslim his right to create a Waqf.
- “Under the proviso to Section 3[1][r], no trust, deed or any documentary proof has been insisted upon in the amendment or even prior thereto. The only mandatory requirement for being protected under the proviso is that such ‘waqf by user’ must be registered as on April 8, 2025, as registration has always been mandatory as per the statute governing waqfs since last 100 years,” the Centre had said.
- Only those who evaded registration to avoid being accountable under a statutory regime or reveal transactions of land dealings would be in trouble, the government had maintained in court.

❖ 'Animal acquisitions as per law': SIT formed by top court gives clean chit to Vantara

Context: A Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT), constituted to conduct an “independent factual appraisal” of complaints against Reliance-owned Vantara, a zoological rescue and rehabilitation centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat, has found no statutory irregularities in the acquisition of animals.

- The SIT, headed by former Supreme Court Judge Justice J. Chelameswar, concluded that the acquisitions were in accordance with regulatory laws and recorded the satisfaction of authorities on all statutory compliance.
- A Bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and Prasanna B. Varale noted that the SIT had undertaken a “thorough and extensive investigation” into the complaints and said it had “no hesitation in accepting the conclusion so drawn in the report”.
- “The imports of the animals have been made only after issuance of valid permits. Once the imports of animals is fully documented and supported by valid permits, it is not open for anyone to go beyond the said permits and to dispute the validity attached to such permits or official acts,” the court said. The Bench further said that on a perusal of the SIT report, it was “satisfied” with Vantara’s practices.
- Addressing allegations of misuse of carbon credits, water resources, and financial impropriety, the court said the SIT had found them to be baseless, relying upon responses from agencies such as the CBI, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, and ED.
- The court was hearing two petitions filed by advocates C.R. Jaya Sukin and Dev Sharma, who had alleged irregularities at Vantara on the basis of media reports, social media posts, and complaints from NGOs and wildlife organisations regarding alleged violations of law and the acquisition of animals from India and abroad, particularly elephants.
- The court had instructed the special team to look into grievances raised about the “creation of a vanity or private collection, breeding, conservation programmes and use of biodiversity resources, misutilisation of water and carbon credits, breach of laws of trade in animals or animal articles, wildlife smuggling and money laundering.”

❖ PM to launch campaign for women and child healthcare

Context: In an effort to improve healthcare service, the Centre is set to launch the ‘Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyaan’ (healthy woman, strong family campaign), along with the eighth ‘Poshan Maah’ (nutrition month) on September 17.

- Prime Minister Modi will launch the initiative jointly led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

❖ India gets licence to scour Indian Ocean for precious metals

Context: India has bagged an exploration contract from the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to look for a class of precious metals in the northwest Indian Ocean.

- This is the first licence granted globally for exploring polymetallic Sulphur nodules in the Carlsberg Ridge, M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences.

- The agreement with the Jamaica-based ISA was signed in Delhi.

• **These nodules are concentrations of rock found in the deep ocean and said to be rich in manganese, cobalt, nickel, and copper.**

• The **Carlsberg Ridge** is a 3,00,000-sq.km stretch that lies in the Indian Ocean, specifically in the Arabian Sea and northwest Indian Ocean. It forms the boundary between the Indian and Arabian tectonic plates, extending from near Rodrigues Island to the Owen fracture zone.

- For exploration in areas part of the 'high seas' or part of the ocean that is so far away from any country, that it is not part of their territories, countries must obtain permission from the ISA. Currently, 19 countries have such exploration rights.
- India too had applied in January 2024 for exploration rights in two regions of the Indian Ocean. While one in the **Carlsberg Ridge has been granted, the second – the Afanasy-Nikitin Sea (ANS) mount – is yet to be approved.** The ANS is located in the **Central Indian Ocean, and the territory has been claimed by Sri Lanka for exploration rights. While countries can claim up to 350 nautical miles from their coasts as their 'continental shelf', those in the Bay of Bengal can, in theory, claim up to 500 nautical miles as per the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).**

Earlier exploration

- **Previously, India had obtained such exploratory rights from the ISA in the Central Indian Ocean Basin.**
- The **first was signed in March 2002** and is set to expire on March 24, **2027**, after two extensions.
- The **second was for polymetallic sulphides in the Indian Ocean Ridge.** It was signed on September 26, 2016, with validity **till September 2031.**

❖ 'PhonePe's Indus Appstore installed in 10 crore devices'

Context: PhonePe's Indus Appstore, the firm's domestic alternative to Google Play and Apple's App Store, is installed on 10 crore devices, the company announced.

- The milestone has been possible due to agreements the firm struck with phone makers like Xiaomi and Alcatel, which allowed it to be pre-installed on handsets. Since its unveiling, the store has been able to offer apps distributed elsewhere, as it relies on aggregators authorized by most app developers.

❖ 'AI-led efficiencies can contribute to 8% GDP growth target'

Context: Skilling workers whose roles are threatened by AI is key, NITI Aayog said in the report Artificial Intelligence-led efficiencies in industries could be key in contributing to an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 8% in the coming years, NITI Aayog said in a report.

- “Accelerating AI adoption across industries to improve productivity and efficiency could bridge 30-35% of the gap between the current rate of growth and the 8% target,” the public policy think tank said in the report.
- Individual industries must leverage AI to introduce efficiencies; candidates that are primed for this include pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, automobiles and financial services, it said.
- **“AI has reduced the cost of producing the next molecule [for the pharmaceutical industry] by approximately 10 times and crashed the time that it takes — roughly 10 years — by roughly 50%,”** Koshir Daka, a senior partner at McKinsey said at the report unveiling, adding that this could give India an opening to invent a clutch of drugs at a global stage in the near future.
- The unveiling is among a series of events building up to February 2026’s AI Impact Summit, to be hosted by India.
- “The impact that AI can have, not just on India’s economy but the global economy, is so profound and so significant that we need to take the leadership position in this area,” IT Secretary S. Krishnan said.
- Skilling workers whose roles are threatened by AI is key, the report said, recommending “mapping job shifts annually, embedding lifelong learning into career pathways, scaling MSME digital upskilling, and protecting gig and platform workers.”

❖ Vaishali retains Grand Swiss title, qualifies for Candidates

Context: R. Vaishali is the champion once again at the FIDE Grand Swiss. In one of the most prestigious events in the chess calendar, the 24-year-old from Chennai showed her class.

- She was a surprise winner in the women’s section of the last edition of the tournament on the **Isle of Man in 2023**. This time around, in the Uzbek city of Samarkand, she retained her title, and thus booked a ticket for next year’s Candidates tournament, the qualifying event for the World championship.
- She has ensured that at least three of those eight female Candidates would be Indian. That is quite a feat. (Koneru Humpy and Divya Deshmukh are the others).
- In the last Grand Swiss, the male champion was also from Indian – Vidit Gujrathi -- but this time around, there was disappointment for the country. The two Candidates slots have been won by Anish Giri and Matthias Bluebaum, by finishing as the champion and runner-up in the open section. Nihal Sarin was in a good position to take one of those spots for much of the tournament, but he faltered towards the end.
- But Vaishali’s brilliant effort should bring joy to Indian chess, which is continuing to rise and rise. And it is another great boost to the women’s game, coming as it does less than two months after Divya’s World Cup triumph.

- Divya rightly chose to compete in the open section of the Grand Swiss – as she had already qualified for the Candidates – and played above her strength. She and Vaishali should inspire the Indian girls.

❖ Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, says UN commission

Context: United Nations investigators concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza in a bid to “destroy the Palestinians”, accusing Israel’s Prime Minister and other top officials of incitement.

- The **UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which does not speak on behalf of the world body**, found that “genocide is occurring in Gaza”, commission chief Navi Pillay said. “The responsibility lies with the State of Israel.” The report, immediately slammed by Israel, marks the **first time a UN-mandated investigative body has concluded the country is committing genocide.**
- Israel has since the start of the war in Gaza faced genocide accusations from NGOs and independent UN experts. Ms. Pillay said she believed the facts presented by the commission should prompt “high-level leaders at the UN also to call this what it is, the genocide”.
- Israel “categorically” rejected the report, with the Foreign Ministry describing it as “distorted and false” and calling “for the immediate abolition of this Commission of Inquiry”.
- **After the report was published, UN rights chief Volker Turk said it was up to the courts to determine whether genocide was taking place, but warned: “We see the evidence mounting.”**
- The commission published its latest report nearly two years after the war erupted in Gaza following Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack inside Israel. Israel’s retaliatory campaign has displaced virtually the entire Gaza population and has killed nearly 65,000 people, according to figures from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza that the UN considers reliable.
- **The report came as Israel launched a ground assault on Gaza City, where the UN has declared a full-blown famine.**
- The commission concluded that Israeli authorities and forces had since October 2023 **committed “four of the five genocidal acts” listed in the 1948 Genocide Convention.**
- These are “killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group”.
- The investigators said explicit statements by Israeli civilian and military authorities and their patterns of military action “indicated that the genocidal acts were committed with intent to destroy... Palestinians in the Gaza Strip as a group”.
- They concluded that Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant have “incited the commission of genocide and that Israeli authorities have failed to take action against them to punish this incitement”.

❖ India, U.S. to push for early conclusion of a trade deal

Context: India and the U.S. held “positive and forward looking” discussions here on the proposed Bilateral Trade Agreement between the two countries, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

- The Ministry added that the two sides decided to “intensify efforts” towards an early conclusion of a “mutually beneficial” trade agreement.
- A team of officials from the office of the United States Trade Representative, led by Brendan Lynch, the chief U.S. negotiator, held discussions with the Indian side, led by Rajesh Agrawal, Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce.

The meeting lasted for about seven hours.

- In a separate statement, the U.S. Embassy spokesperson said that Mr. Lynch had a “positive meeting” in Delhi with Mr. Agrawal to “discuss next steps in bilateral trade negotiations”.
- “Acknowledging the enduring importance of bilateral trade between India and the U.S., the discussions were positive and forward looking covering various aspects of the trade deal,” the Commerce Ministry said in a statement. “It was decided to intensify efforts to achieve early conclusion of a mutually beneficial Trade Agreement,” it added.
- The statement, however, stopped short of disclosing the date of the next round of formal negotiations.
- The meeting, Mr. Agrawal had clarified, was not an official round of negotiations, but a meeting to discuss how to take the talks forward.
- According to sources in the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the talks will now continue virtually once the U.S. team returns home.

❖ Gehlot returns KTCDA (Amendment) Bill, 2025; seeks clarification from govt.

Context: Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has returned the Karnataka Tank Conservation and Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2025, seeking clarification from the State government on its proposal to reduce the size of buffer zones for smaller waterbodies. The Bill was passed in the Monsoon Session of the legislature.

- Mr. Gehlot said that he has received objections from the Bengaluru Town Hall Association with a request not to give his assent to the **Karnataka Tank Conservation and Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2025.**
- **As per the Bill, the buffer zone is sought to be removed for tanks spread across less than five guntas while setting a three-metre buffer for tanks with an area between five guntas and one acre, six metres for tanks between one acre and 10 acres, 13m for tanks between 10 acres and 25 acres, 24m for tanks between 25 acres and 100 acres, and 30m for tanks that are bigger than 100 acres.**
- **For primary canals, the government has proposed to bring down the buffer zone from the current 30m to 15m. And for secondary canals from 15m to 10m and for tertiary canals from 10m to five metres.**
- Mr. Gehlot told the government, “As per the expert’s opinion, the existing lake buffer zone of 30m is itself insufficient, and the real requirement is nearly 300 metres to

achieve ecosystem balance. If anything, the buffer zone should be increased, not decreased.”

- He added that the government had not consulted an expert committee and people about the implication of this amendment.
- **“It is in violation of the Constitution and settled law, and is harmful for every citizen, affects the citizens’ right to water security and a healthy environment,”** he said.
- It is necessary to get clarifications from the State government about the issues raised by Bengaluru Town Hall and ‘also know whether this amendment will result in a really adverse effect’, he stated while returning the file to the government and directing it to re-submit the file along with clarifications.
- Bengaluru Town Hall stated that the association is pleased to learn that the Governor has returned the amendment, which, it claims, ‘threatens the 45,000 lakes in Karnataka’.
- **“That the State government could so frivolously attempt to make amendments that have such large-scale apocalypse-like consequences for both nature and the population of the State shows that the government is not working in the interests of the people of the State.** This needs to change immediately. The government needs to be held accountable, “said Sandeep Anirudhan, convenor for Bengaluru Town Hall.

❖ **Constitutional clarity: Presidential Reference proceedings boost case against delays by Governors**

Context: The hearings on the Presidential Reference that followed the Supreme Court judgment on April 8, 2025, clarifying the constitutional position on the powers of the Governor and the President in providing assent to Bills passed by State Assemblies, have largely confirmed that Governors should not indefinitely withhold assent to such Bills.

- Addressing the 14 questions posed in the Presidential Reference, the observations of the five-judge Bench largely converged on the constitutional principles elucidated in April.
- The question by the Chief Justice of India, B.R. Gavai, on whether the Court should “sit powerless” while Governors make “competent State legislatures defunct” echoed the core concern in the April judgment — that constitutional offices cannot paralyse democratic governance through inaction.
- While States’ counsel largely argued along political lines based on which parties governed them, this did not detract from the thorough examination of **Articles 200 and 201** during the proceedings.
- The argument that the **Constitution’s silence on specific timelines in these Articles does not grant unlimited discretion to Governors remains compelling.**
- When the Solicitor-General argued that Governors serve as a “check on hasty legislation”, the Bench’s response also indicated the tension between this position and democratic principles. Justice Vikram Nath’s observation, that Governors “cannot sit over the wisdom of the legislature indefinitely”, was succinct.

- That only Opposition-ruled States have faced prolonged delays, as pointed out by Kerala's counsel, suggests the constitutional framework itself is not ambiguous but that its application has become selective.
- The **Bench's examination of why judicial review applies to Governors' recommendations under Article 356 (President's Rule) but supposedly not to actions under Article 200 (assent to Bills) highlighted potential inconsistencies in arguments defending unlimited discretion for Governors.**
- The proceedings related to the questions posed in the Presidential Reference demonstrate why the April judgment's framework remains constitutionally sound and necessary to maintain the balance between federal cooperation and State autonomy.
- The question from these hearings is on why the Centre chose this unusual route. As scholars have established, an advisory opinion by the Court under **Article 143 does not override a binding judgment under Article 141.**
- If the Centre genuinely sought clarity on the April judgment, well-established judicial procedures such as review petitions or curative petitions were available. When the Court's final reply to the Reference is received, the Centre should accept the constitutional boundaries that the April judgment and these proceedings have reinforced, rather than continuing to pursue powers that would alter the delicate federal balance that the Constitution has established.

❖ **Foodgrain, fruit, and vegetable yield rose this year: Agriculture Minister**

Context: Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that foodgrain output as well as fruit and vegetable production had seen a significant rise this year from those of the previous year.

- He was speaking to presspersons after a two-day National Conference on Agriculture – Rabi Campaign, a joint meeting between the Union and State Agriculture Departments to prepare the road map for the upcoming winter seasonal crops.
- **“The Central government has set a production target of 362.5 million tonnes for 2025-26, up from 341.55 million tonnes last year. The country's total foodgrain production reached 353.96 million tonnes in 2024-25, an increase of 21.66 million tonnes (6.5%) over the previous year. The country achieved a record harvest in key crops such as rice, wheat, maize, groundnut, and soybean. This output was 12.41 million tonnes higher than the set target of 341.55 million tonnes,”** Mr. Chouhan said.
- The conference discussed topics such as climate resilience; quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides; horticulture, and natural farming. It also decided to boost pulses and oilseeds productivity and focus on integrated farming systems.
- He said the Centre and States will continue their coordinated efforts to ensure agricultural growth and farmers' welfare.
- On the flood situation, he said the government is making every possible effort to assist those affected in **States such as Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Assam, and parts of Haryana.** “The Centre will leave no stone unturned in supporting the States/Union Territories,” the Minister said, adding that efforts are being made to ensure timely and adequate disbursement of insurance benefits to farmers covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

❖ Committee on simultaneous polls to meet economists

Context: The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on reviewing legislation aimed at introducing simultaneous polls will be meeting economists Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Arvind Panagariya, and Surjit S. Bhalla in its next meeting scheduled for September 24.

- The panel chairman and senior BJP leader, P.P. Chaudhary, said that the panel wanted to review the economic implications of simultaneous elections.
- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in April that **India's GDP would increase by 1.5% with simultaneous polls.**
- Former President Ram Nath Kovind, who chaired the high-level committee on simultaneous elections, quoted similar figures.

❖ Top court asks who will decide that a religious conversion is 'deceitful'

Context: Petitioner-advocate seeks a ban on such conversion; NGO's counsel seeks a stay of 'Freedom of Religion' Acts, which, he says, are getting more and more strident as courts grant bail and bring relief to persons accused and arrested under them

- The Supreme Court asked a petitioner seeking a complete ban on "deceitful" religious conversions who exactly will decide whether an inter-faith marriage is fraudulent or not.
- Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai agreed with senior advocate C.U. Singh, appearing for an NGO questioning the validity of the increasingly stringent anti-religious conversion laws across 10 States, that the court sits to examine the constitutionality of laws, and not to make laws.
- Petitioner-advocate Ashwini Upadhyay said his petition was against religious conversion through allurements and duplicity. Mr. Upadhyay argued that one had the right to propagate religion under **Article 25 of the Constitution, but not to convert through fraud or force.**
- Highlighting the risk his plea posed to the freedom of conscience enshrined in the Constitution, Chief Justice Gavai pointedly asked, "But who would find out that a religious conversion was deceitful or not?"
- Mr. Singh, appearing in the case along with senior advocate Indira Jaising and advocate Vrinda Grover, said that States such as **Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand, and Karnataka had enacted copycat "Freedom of Religion" Acts one after the other, with Rajasthan recently coming up with one.**
- "The batch of laws are characterised as Freedom of Religion Acts, but they contain everything but freedom. They are virtually anti-conversion laws," Mr. Singh submitted.
- He sought a stay of these laws, which were getting more and more strident as courts grant bail and bring relief to persons accused and arrested under them.
- The court scheduled the case after six weeks to consider the question of stay of the implementation of the Acts.

Frivolous complaint

- Mr. Singh said recent amendments made in these Acts empowered third parties to file criminal complaints against couples in inter-faith marriage. The punishment under these laws included a “minimum 20-year sentence or a maximum of life imprisonment”. The bail conditions were on a par with the draconian **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**. The burden of proof was on the convert to prove that he or she was not forced or “allured” to change faith, senior counsel argued.
- “For anybody who marries inter-faith, bail becomes impossible. These are Constitutional challenges... It is not just marriages but any normal church observances or festivals, mobs may come...” Mr. Singh submitted.
- Additional Solicitor-General K.M. Nataraj said the case was coming up for hearing after three years, “and suddenly they [the petitioners] are asking for stay”.
- In 2023, while hearing the case, the court had refused to refer to the Law Commission the question whether “forcible conversion” should be made a separate offence relating to religion under the **Indian Penal Code**.
- **The government had even opposed the locus standi of the NGO, Citizens for Justice and Peace**, represented by Mr. Singh, to move the court against these laws.
- Mr. Singh had, however, argued that these State laws amounted to undue interference in a person’s right of choice of faith and life partner. He said each State’s law was used by the other as a “building block” to make a more “virulent” law for itself.
- The petitions have argued that these **State laws have a “chilling effect” on the right to profess and propagate one’s religion, enshrined in Article 25.**

❖ On WHO essential medicines list, GLP-1 drugs for diabetes, weight loss may become cheaper

Context: With the World Health Organization (WHO) updating its Model Lists of Essential Medicines (EML) to add the GLP-1 class of drugs for diabetes with associated comorbidities such as obesity, access to these drugs might just become easier. Listing a medicine on the EML is one step in a series of actions that can lead to lower costs, better affordability, and greater access.

- The 25th meeting of the WHO Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines was held from May 5 to 9. It reviewed scientific evidence showing that a group of medicines called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists can help people with type 2 diabetes — especially those who also have heart or kidney disease — and concluded that **semaglutide, dulaglutide, liraglutide, and tirzepatide** would be added to the EML. These drugs are used as glucose-lowering therapy for adults with type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease or chronic kidney disease and obesity.

High price

- According to the WHO, the rationale for including these drugs is very clear: **diabetes and obesity are two of the most urgent health challenges** facing the world today.
- According to statistics from 2022, over 800 million people live with diabetes, with half going untreated. At the same time, more than one billion people worldwide are

affected by obesity, and rates are rising fast especially in low- and middle-income countries.

- The prices of these drugs are so high that access is limited. “A large share of out-of-pocket spending on non-communicable diseases goes toward medicines, including those classified as essential and that, in principle, should be financially accessible to everyone,” Deusedit Mubangizi, WHO Director of Policy and Standards for Medicines and Health Products, says.

Good step forward

- While appreciating the move, Anoop Mishra, head, Fortis C-DOC Hospital for Diabetes and Allied Sciences, New Delhi, lends a reality check: “It is a good move; however, in India these types of drugs will benefit only a small number of people, while other life-saving, low-cost essential medicines for diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, applicable to a large number of people, remain largely unavailable.”
- On the other hand, V. Mohan, chairman, Dr. Mohan’s Diabetes Specialties Centre (DMDSC), provides an energetic response: “I’m very happy that WHO has included the GLP-1 class of drugs. The fact that even a conservative organisation like the WHO has included these rather expensive drugs in their EML, shows how compelling the evidence is. Apart from the glucose lowering effect, they have tremendous effect on weight reduction and obesity management.” He points out that recently, injectible semaglutide has been approved for metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, associated with weight, and for improving cardio-metabolic health.
- R.M. Anjana, managing director, DMDSC, says: “It will surely help improve access and affordability. But will it be useful as a first line drug? This maybe not for everyone...as there are various subtypes of diabetes. But for those in whom it is indicated, it’s a good step forward.”

❖ At UNHRC, India condemns violation of Qatar’s sovereignty

Context: India defended Qatar’s sovereignty at the UN Human Rights Council. Addressing a UNHRC session in Geneva, India’s Permanent Representative Arindam Bagchi referred to the September 9 Israeli bombing of Doha, and said India “unequivocally” condemned the attack.

- **“India is deeply concerned about the recent attacks in Doha** and their impact on the security situation in the region. We unequivocally condemn the violation of the sovereignty of Qatar. Such actions threaten peace, stability, and security not only in the region but across the world,” said Mr. Bagchi in his statement, which, however, did not name Israel.
- **India’s reiteration of its position on the Israeli strike on Qatar** came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he had called Qatar’s ruler Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani and said, “India condemns the violation of the sovereignty of the brotherly state of Qatar. We support resolution of issues through dialogue and diplomacy, and avoiding escalation.”
- In India’s first response, the External Affairs Ministry, in a statement, took note of the “Israeli strikes” and said India was “deeply concerned by this development”.

❖ To cut imports, govt. to pick 100 items for local manufacture

Context: The government is in the process of finalising a list of 100 products that India imports in large amounts but has domestic capacity to manufacture, a Commerce Ministry official said.

- The aim is to support these sectors — which include **engineering goods, plastics, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals, among others** — and encourage the private sector to expand its capacity so as to substitute imports with domestic production.
- “We are focusing on reducing the dependency on certain geographies so that supply-chain disruptions would not happen,” the official said, on the condition of anonymity as this exercise has not yet been completed.
- “We are trying to see that our dependency regarding critical items should not be adversely impacted,” the official said.
- “We have identified about 100 products where we have huge imports and at the same time we have some domestic capacity,” he added. “We feel that those imports could be replaced by the domestic capacity by improving the capacity utilisation of those manufacturing facilities within the country.”
- The idea, he added, was to focus on the concepts of **‘Swadeshi’ and ‘Atmanirbharta’**.

❖ ‘More crude coming from Western Hemisphere’

Context: India has developed resilience to navigate global turbulences, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said, adding this has been bolstered by “more and more” crude oil coming into the global market from the Western Hemisphere and more gas expected to enter the market from 2026-27.

- Referring to the geopolitical scenario, Mr. Puri, speaking at **KPMG’s annual energy conclave ENRich 2025**, stated while the world was undergoing turbulence, “we [India] deal with the issues that we have direct control over but today we have resilience to navigate them partly because there is enough oil available in the world”.
- **India and its oil sector** have been facing headwinds triggered by U.S. President Donald Trump’s **50% tariffs** imposed on Indian products.

❖ Simple Energy makes country’s first rare earth free motors

- Initial public offering-bound electric scooter maker Simple Energy on Tuesday said it has started commercially manufacturing the country’s **first rare earth-free motors** at its Hosur, Tamil Nadu, production facility.

❖ DRL introduces new acidity drug

- Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories (DRL) introduced South Korean firm HK inno.N Corporation’s acid peptic diseases drug Tegoprazan in India.

❖ ECI to roll out SIR in State after September 25

Context: Amid the row over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is gearing up to launch an SIR of voter lists in Karnataka, anytime after September 25.

- Commission expects the voting percentage in urban centres such as Bengaluru to go up in future polls after the completion of the exercise; SIR was last conducted in State in 2002; notification for 2025 SIR is expected shortly; number of voters is expected to increase from 3.5 crore to 5.5 crore.
- Amid the row over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, the Election Commission of India (ECI), after over two decades, is gearing up to launch an SIR of voter lists in Karnataka, anytime after September 25.
- **In Karnataka, the SIR was last conducted in 2002, and the notification for the 2025 SIR is expected shortly.**
- **After conducting the SIR exercise to remove dead, migrated, and duplicate voters from the electoral roll, the voting percentage in urban centres like Bengaluru, which is significantly lower compared to the State average, is expected to increase in future elections. While there were approximately 3.5 crore voters in 2002, the ECI estimated the number to increase to around 5.5 crore in 2025.**
- During the SIR exercise, the updating of electoral rolls, including additions, transfers, and deletions to the electoral rolls through Forms 6, 7, and 8, will be frozen.
- The BLOs to be roped in include school teachers, Anganwadi workers, and State and Central government officials.

How SIR process will unfold

- The Election Commission freezes the 2025 electoral rolls once the notification is issued.
- Two sets of "pre-filled" enumeration form of the voters in the current electoral list will be given to the BLOs, who in turn will hand them over to the respective voters in the polling booth. Each enumeration form is unique and comes with a QR code.
- The BLOs have been asked to visit the locked houses thrice. They will drop the physical enumeration forms on the premises if it is still locked and try to make enquiries from neighbours to contact the voter.
- The voters have to submit self-attested documents along with one set of enumeration form to the BLOs. The voter has the option to update his/ her photo.
- The BLOs will give an endorsement to the voter on the other set of enumeration form, which forms a document for the voter to flag the issue of his/ her name missing from the voters list, if it happens in future.
- The voter has to provide a

signed declaration form. A false declaration is punishable under the Representation of People Act, 1950.



- The voter can submit the enumeration form at only one place, to help weed out duplication.
- Camps equipped with Wifi facility will be established in every gram panchayat/ ward to assist the BLOs in the SIR exercise
- Those unable to do it physically can get the enumeration form online and complete the process of document submission online.
- Those born before July 1,

- 1987, can give one of the 12 listed documents. Those born after July 1, 1987, have to submit one of the 12 documents, along with one of the 12 documents of both parents.
- The Election Commission will use photo-similar entry and demographic-similar entry softwares to identify duplicate voters.
- Cases of orphans not having documents or those who do not have documents will be dealt with by the district election officer or elector registration officer.
- After the submission window, the Election Commission will publish draft electoral rolls and invite objections. The final electoral roll will be published later. The entire process is expected to be completed within 3 months.
- The electoral rolls will be published both in Kannada and English in 17 Assembly constituencies, Kannada and Urdu in two constituencies and Kannada and Marathi in 11 constituencies. In the rest of 194 constituencies, electoral rolls will be in Kannada.

List of documents to be accepted

1. Any identity card/ pension payment order issued to regular employee/ pensioner of any Central / State government or PSU.
2. Any identity card/ certificate/ document issued in India by government/ local authorities/ banks/ post office/ LIC/ PSUs prior to 01/ 07/ 1987.
3. Birth certificate issued by the competent authority.
4. Passport.
5. Matriculation/ educational certificate issued by recognised boards/ universities
6. Permanent residence

- certificate issued by competent State authority.
7. Forest right certificate.
8. OBC/ SC/ ST or any caste certificate issued by the competent authority.
9. National Register of Citizens (wherever its exists)
10. Family register, prepared by State/ local authorities.
11. Any land/ house allotment certificate by government.
12. Aadhaar is to be accepted and utilised as a proof of identity and not as a proof of citizenship as directed by Supreme Court.

SEC voter list

- While the Karnataka government has allowed the State Election Commission (SEC) to draw up a voter list of its own for the local bodies election, the Election Commission sources said that the matter did not concern them.
- “The SEC is also a constitutional body and if they decided to have one, they can have one. Kerala has a voter list of its own. Till now, the SEC in Karnataka has been taking our rolls. It does not affect us. It is not within our purview,” sources in the commission said.

❖ Panchamasalis to go with ‘Hindu’ for religion

Context: The Lingayat Panchamasali community, which has now three religious Peethas in Karnataka, has decided to go with “Lingayat Panchamasali” nomenclature during the socio-educational survey (caste census) in the State.

- The demographically-strong Lingayat Panchamasali community, which has now three religious Peethas in Karnataka, has decided to go with “Lingayat Panchamasali” nomenclature during the forthcoming socio, economic and educational survey (caste census) in the State. And despite differences on the issue of how to name the religion, the community has decided to stick with “Hindu” in the religion column “for the time being.”

❖ Amid U.S. tariffs row, PM pushes local production

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to buy only made-in-India products and traders to sell only indigenously manufactured goods as he laid the foundation stone for the country’s first PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) park in Madhya Pradesh’s Dhar district.

- His remarks came a day after the latest round of talks on an India-U.S. trade agreement, amid tensions over U.S. tariffs on Indian products, even as U.S. President Donald Trump extended birthday greetings to Mr. Modi.
- “This is the season of festivals, and at this very time, we must remember the mantra of Swadeshi and incorporate it into our lives. I have a humble request to my 140 crore fellow countrymen: whatever you buy, it should be made in our country,” Mr. Modi said at Bhainsola in Dhar.
- Saying he wants to build a developed India by 2047, he added, “Whatever our businesspersons sell must be made in our country. Now we must make Swadeshi the foundation of a developed India. This will happen when we proudly buy products made in the country. We must first determine whether the product is made in the country. When we do this, our money remains in the country and leads to the development of the country.”

❖ Those in age group of 70 and above to get AB-ArK benefits

Context: The Karnataka government has provided the necessary clearances for extending the benefits of Ayushman Bharat Arogya Karnataka (AB-ArK) health insurance scheme to senior citizens aged 70 and above. A notification regarding this was issued.

- The notification states that the benefits of this scheme will be provided to all individuals aged 70 years and above, without considering any income ceilings.
- However, these beneficiaries cannot enrol under other free medical schemes of the government, barring ESIS.
- While those in this age group can enrol themselves by submitting an application to the authorities, the process of receiving applications will continue throughout the year, states the notification.
- There is a separate module for registering beneficiaries in this age group in the mobile phone application (Ayushman application) and the web portal (beneficiary.nha.gov.in). Upon registration, they would also be given a unique Ayushman card, the notification states.

❖ EU-India partnership set for upgrade

Context: EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas releases strategic agenda on trade, technology, security, defence and climate; however, India's military exercises with Russia and its continued purchase of Russian oil are seen in Brussels as potential obstacles to the deepening of the relationship with New Delhi.

- The European Union has set out a plan to upgrade its strategic ties with India, even as it warned that India's military exercises with Russia and its purchase of Russian oil are risks to the growing strategic ties between Brussels and New Delhi.
- The European Commission and the EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas released 'A New Strategic EU-India Agenda' on Wednesday in Brussels, and urged the European Parliament and Council (i.e., the heads of member states) to adopt it.
- Ms. Kallas called India a "crucial" partner for the EU, as she outlined the strategy that encompassed trade, technology, security, defence and climate. She was speaking at a televised press conference in Brussels on Wednesday.
- **The document declared that "the EU and India have the potential and determination to shape one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century".**
- Brussels and New Delhi are in the midst of negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA), with the EU's trade chief Maroš Šefčovič visiting New Delhi last week for talks with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.
- "We are also negotiating an agreement of exchange of classified information and deepening ties between defence industry [sic]," Ms. Kallas said, adding that there were hesitations here among the College of Commissioners (comprised of Commissioners from the 27 EU countries).
- With Russia escalating its attacks on Ukraine in recent weeks, the Europeans are grappling with how to navigate New Delhi's closeness to Moscow.
- **"India's participation in Russia's military exercises and its purchase of Russian oil stand in the way of closer ties, because ultimately, our partnership is not only about trade, but also about defending rules-based international order,"** Ms. Kallas said.

- “It is of utmost importance to the EU that any enablement of the war be curtailed,” the strategy document says.
- The negotiations with New Delhi would address these challenges with the aim of adopting a joint roadmap at the next EU-India summit in early 2026, according to Ms. Kallas.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “delighted” by the adoption of the new strategic document. “We remain committed to an early and peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict,” he said, reflecting on his phone call on Wednesday with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.
- India and the EU have been seeking to bolster ties in the face of increasing geopolitical uncertainty and challenges in their trade relationships with the U.S.
- **Trade between India and the EU has grown over 90% in the last decade**, Mr. Šefčovič said at Wednesday’s press conference, but the two sides had just “scratched the surface”, according to the Commissioner. Brussels and New Delhi are hoping to conclude a trade deal by the end of the year.
- Mr. Šefčovič said he was in frequent touch with Mr. Goyal but wished that there had been “more progress” on talks during his visit to New Delhi last week. He also said that Indian trade negotiators have a reputation for being “tough”.

Tariff barriers

- On the question of agricultural tariffs, Mr. Šefčovič said that the issue was not about numbers but rather about whether what was being offered was commercially meaningful, after taking into account tariff and non-tariff barriers. He cited India’s Qualitative Control Orders (QCOs) as an example and said they were something the EU should consider in its negotiations.
- The 14th round of trade talks is due to take place in Brussels from October 6-10.
- Quizzed specifically on India’s participation in the recent Zapad-2025 military exercises led by Russia, Ms. Kallas said she had spoken to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday. She reiterated that exercises with Russia and buying oil were issues to the relationship.
- “The question is always whether we leave this void to be filled by somebody else. So we try to fill it ourselves,” she said in response to the question on cooperation with India. She responded similarly, when quizzed on India’s apparent détente with China.
- The College of Commissioners had agreed that the EU should deepen ties with India to “not really push them into Russia’s corner”.
- Ms. Kallas cited the principle of ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’ several times, including when asked about how the trade talks would be impacted if India did not take on board the EU’s concerns regarding Russia.

❖ EVMs to have colour photos of candidates soon, says EC

Context: Beginning with the Bihar Assembly election, ballot papers on the electronic voting machines will display colour photographs of the candidates, the Election Commission.

- The revised guidelines for EVM ballot papers issued by the EC mandated that the **serial numbers of candidates be displayed more prominently**.
- The guidelines have been revised under Rule **49B of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 — pertaining to the design and printing of EVM ballot papers — to enhance their clarity and readability**.
- The new guidelines say, “Henceforth, **photographs of candidates will be printed in colour on the EVM Ballot Paper**. The candidate’s face will occupy three-fourths of the photo space for better visibility.”
- “The upgraded EVM Ballot Papers will be used in the upcoming elections, starting with Bihar,” the EC added in a statement.
- In a note issued to the Chief Electoral Officers of all States and Union Territories, the EC said the photographs of the candidates shall be printed in colour, unless the candidate has provided only black and white photographs. The photograph printed on the ballot paper will measure 2 cm in breadth and 2.5 cm in height.
- **The serial numbers of candidates/NOTA will be printed in the international form of Indian numerals. The font will be in bold, and its size will be 30.**
- For Assembly elections, pink-coloured paper of specified RGB values shall be used.
- The note said the names of not more than 15 candidates shall be arranged on one sheet of a ballot paper and NOTA option will be placed after the last name of the panel. If the number of contesting candidates together with the NOTA option is fewer than 16, the space below the panel after this shall be kept blank, the EC said.

Government press

- **Printing of EVM ballot paper shall be done preferably at a government or semi-government printing press.** However, in case a government/semi-government press is not available or does not have the required capacity, private printing press(es) with required capacity can be selected after following due procedure and adequate provision and safety of the process shall be ensured as per the existing instructions, the note said.

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❖ Despite issues, online RTI queries may cross one million in 2025

Context: The Union government may have made it cumbersome to file Right to Information (RTI) applications online, but that has not deterred transparency activists and the general public from seeking information.

- Every month, thousands of RTI applications, sometimes more than one lakh, are being filed with the Union government and other public authorities, show data provided by the Department of Personnel and Training, which runs the RTI online portal.
- This has come even as the website deals with increased failure rates, besides adding a 'speed-breaker' in the form of a one-time passcode before an application is filed.
- The number of applications filed are growing each year, with 7,09,323 requests in 2022, 8,44,262 in 2023, and 9,64,813 applications in 2024, representing a 14-19% yearly growth. Already, 7,66,167 requests have been filed so far in 2025, and the numbers could exceed one million this year. These numbers do not represent all RTI applications sent to the Central government, as many are filed physically. Besides, the State governments and the Election Commission maintain separate portals.
- The **RTI portal was launched in 2013**, and in recent years users have complained of lengthy downtimes and payment failures.
- Users have also reported long wait times for receiving OTPs.



❖ CAG to launch AI system for auditing and efficiency

Context: The Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) is developing a large language model (LLM) to help auditors access decades of institutional knowledge, thereby improving efficiency and consistency in audit analysis using the system powered by artificial Intelligence.

- The system's first version is expected to be ready by November.
- Previous inspection reports will be used to train the model. The LLM will strengthen institutional capabilities in analysing large datasets, generating documents, including inspection reports, and assisting auditors in preparing comprehensive reports.
- Digitisation process at the Centre and States will soon facilitate remote or hybrid audits of most government agencies and departments.
- The CAG has also developed the 'Connect Portal'. The site will provide 10 lakh audit entities with a unified digital interface to directly respond to audit queries, observations, and inspection reports, making the entire process transparent.
- It will be launched during the annual conference of State Finance Secretaries on Friday.

❖ COP30 talks loom as major emitters dither on updating climate goals

Context: Ahead of the 30th edition of the climate talks scheduled in Belem, Brazil, in November, major emitters appear to be dithering on declaring updated climate goals.

- **Only 29 out of 195 countries have so far submitted their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).** These are **voluntary targets, updated every five years by countries to regulate fossil fuel emissions.** So far, **all countries that are signatory to the United Nations climate convention have submitted NDCs detailing emission targets upto 2030.**
- **The European Union, a bloc of 27 member nations, and historically the group that has been a leader in advocating that countries undertake ambitious cuts to fossil fuel production, is yet to evolve a consensus among its member countries on what their NDCs should be.**
- **EU members are set to vote this week on two climate agreements. One of them is an internal, legally binding commitment to reduce emissions by 90% by 2040, and be on the path to carbon neutrality by 2050. The other is to agree on a 2035 target, to time with the NDC requirements of COP30 (30th Conference of Parties).**
- EU's climate negotiations: That there was "disagreement" among its member countries that were yet to be ironed out, with some major EU member countries, including France and Germany, preferring that a vote on the matter be postponed.
- They indicated, however, that the EU would announce its updated NDC before COP30 commences on November 10.
- Andre Lago, COP President and veteran Brazilian diplomat, said that this would be an "implementation" COP rather than stressing on a headline-grabbing cover text to signal forward movement on ambition. New coalitions on a leadership role appear to be forming.
- **The 2015 Paris Agreement, which 195 countries have ratified, requires countries to submit updated NDCs every five years to show the steps undertaken by them to keep average temperatures from rising, "as far as possible", above 1.5 degree Celsius by the end of the century, and certainly below 2 degree Celsius.**



❖ Top court seeks CBI probe into tiger poaching ring

Context: The Supreme Court asked the Union government, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and State of Maharashtra to explain the presence of a well-organised, transnational poaching syndicate threatening the survival of India's tigers in their own heartlands of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

- A Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai took serious note of a writ petition filed by petitioner-advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal who highlighted the report of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the Maharashtra government which has unearthed the existence of a well-oiled network of tiger poachers and international

traffickers in the big cat's body parts and wildlife trophies in violation of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

- **India is home to more than 70% of the world's wild tiger population. Both Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh host some of the most critical tiger reserves and corridors.** The court has also issued formal notice to the National Tiger Conservation Authority.
- The petition referred to media reports of poaching gangs in central India catering to clientele in Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, and providing illegal products such as 'bone glue' made by pressure-cooking tiger bones and prized in Southeast Asia as a traditional remedy. Mr. Bansal has sought a CBI investigation into the inter-State menace of poaching.
- "The case reveals a massive financial trail involving hawala operations and cross-border smuggling, thereby raising issues not only of environmental concern but also of national security and international obligations. By its very nature, the case goes beyond the jurisdiction of any single State or forest department and calls for the involvement of investigative agencies," the petition submitted.
- **The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, a Central government agency, had issued a "red alert"** in February to field directors of tiger reserves across the country, urging them to intensify patrolling to stop poaching of big cats.

❖ 'First round of FTA talks with Russia bloc EAEU likely in Nov.'

Context: The first round of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes Russia, is likely to take place in early November, according to the Russian embassy. However, this is yet to be confirmed by the Indian government.

- In addition, the next two months are going to see rounds of FTA talks between **India and the EU, Chile, Peru, and a review of the FTA with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**.
- In a statement, the Embassy of Russia in India said Minister in charge of Trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission Andrey Slepnev met Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on September 15.
- "The Ministers agreed on an approach under which the first round of negotiations is set to take place in early November this year in India and focus on discussing the core aspects of the future deal," the statement said. "It will be preceded by intensive consultations between the Commission, Indian partners, and the EAEU Member States." The Indian government, however, has not confirmed the date of the first round of negotiations.

❖ India to start pilot projects in Venezuela

Context: India will start pilot projects in Venezuela in "priority areas" such as agriculture, pharmaceuticals and digital public infrastructure, officials here conveyed to Raul Hernandez, Vice-Minister for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies of Venezuela, who paid a four-day visit to India.

- “Both sides agreed to carry out pilot projects in the priority areas of Venezuela. Training and capacity building in the AI and related areas were also discussed, with Venezuela showing keenness to send its technical personnel for courses in India.
- Discussions were also held on other bilateral issues of mutual interests such as space, pharmaceuticals and tourism among others,” said an official source about Mr. Hernandez’s visit which coincided with rising tension between the U.S. and Venezuela after President Donald Trump accused Caracas of sending narcotics into the U.S.
- Mr. Hernandez met Secretary (East) P. Kumaran of the Ministry of External and also met heads of prominent institutions including National Institute of Smart Governance (NISG), UIDAI for AADHAR Digital identity system, NeGD for DigiLocker, AI BHASHINI.
- The discussions held here coincided with consultation that Indian Ambassador P.K. Ashok Babu held with Venezuela’s Minister of People’s Power for Agriculture and Lands, Julio Leon Heredia where India-Venezuela cooperation in agriculture and livestock sectors were discussed.
- According to the Ministry of External Affairs, in 2024-25, India-Venezuela bilateral trade was around \$1.8 billion, with Indian exports at \$216 million and imports at \$1.6 billion.



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❖ Attack on one of us is an attack on both, says Saudi-Pak. pact

Context: **Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan** have signed a mutual defence pact that defines any attack on either nation as an attack on both — a key accord in the wake of Israel's strike on Qatar last week.

- The **kingdom has long had close economic, religious and security** ties to Pakistan, including reportedly providing funding for Islamabad's nuclear weapons programme as it developed.
- Analysts — and Pakistani diplomats in at least one case — have suggested over the years that Saudi Arabia could be included under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella, particularly as tensions have risen over Iran's atomic programme.

Signal to Israel

- But the timing of the pact appeared to be a signal to Israel, West Asia's only nuclear-armed state, which has conducted a sprawling military offensive since Palestinian nationalist Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel stretching across Iran, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Syria and Yemen.
- The pact marks the first major defence decision by a Gulf Arab country since the Qatar attack.
- Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed the pact with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.
- While not specifically discussing the bomb, the **agreement states "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both"**, according to statements issued by both Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry and the state-run Saudi Press Agency. "This agreement... aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," the statement said.
- A senior Saudi official, speaking on condition of anonymity, seemed to suggest that **Pakistan's nuclear protection was a part of the deal.**

❖ Will study pact to protect India's interests: MEA

Context: Hours after Pakistan signed a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, India said it was aware that the pact had been under consideration. The External Affairs Ministry said India would study its implications for "our national security" and "regional stability".

- Hours after Pakistan signed a mutual defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, India has said that it was aware of the development and reiterated its commitment to "comprehensive national security".
- The Indian response came after Saudi Arabia and Pakistan issued a joint statement during the visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Riyadh that said, "Any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both."

- “The government was aware that this development, which formalizes a long-standing arrangement between the two countries, had been under consideration. We will study the implications of this development for our national security as well as for regional and global stability. The government remains committed to protecting India’s national interests and ensuring comprehensive national security in all domains,” said the Ministry of External Affairs in response to the Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence agreement.
- Following talks between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the two sides issued a joint statement on September 17 in which they highlighted bilateral relations over the past nearly eight decades and said, “This agreement which reflects the shared commitment of both nations to enhance their security and to achieving security and peace in the region and the world, aims to develop aspects of defense cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression.” The agreement states that any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.
- On September 15, Mr. Sharif had participated in the extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit held by the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Doha**, where Israel’s September 9 bombing of Qatar was condemned.
- **Saudi Arabia has close ties with India and had sent Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubair to New Delhi, hours after India targeted locations inside Pakistan under Operation Sindoor on May 7.** He also visited Pakistan after his unannounced visit to Delhi.

Saudi Arabia, one of the top energy suppliers to India, is also a major employer of Indian blue and white collar expat workers in the Gulf and, in recent years, has gradually built military relations as well.

- However, in comparison, the Saudi relations with Pakistan have been marked prominently by the generous support that Riyadh extended to Pakistan, especially after the humiliating defeat in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Saudi Arabia first came to Pakistan’s rescue with a \$300 million assistance that King Faisal extended after meeting Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Foreign Minister in Riyadh in 1974.
- Over the years, Pakistan has intensified defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia and in recognition of that, Saudi Arabia conferred the prestigious King Abdulaziz Medal of Excellent Class on then Pakistani Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa in 2022.

❖ **Award in B. Saroja Devi’s name**

- The State government has instituted an award in the name of actor B. Saroja Devi.
- The award titled “**Abhinaya Saraswati**” will be given **to women who have rendered a minimum of 25 years of service in the Kannada cine world.** The award will carry a cash prize of **₹1 lakh and a silver plaque.**

❖ Approximation exercise to be taken up to identify beneficiaries of ABVV

Context: Karnataka's Health Department will take up an approximation exercise to identify beneficiaries for the Ayushman Bharat Vay Vandana (ABVV) scheme, which promises free medical treatment to all senior citizens aged 70 and above, regardless of their economic status. A government notification on the rollout of the scheme in the State was issued on September 17.

- The implementation of ABVV was put on hold in Karnataka due to a lack of clarity on fund-sharing between the Centre and the State.
- **Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY), the Centre has been providing support to 69 lakh families based on the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) data with a 60:40 sharing ratio between the Centre and State.**
- With several States already rolling out the ABVV scheme, there has been a growing demand for its implementation in Karnataka as well. Now, following a workshop organised by the Centre last month, officials stated that the Health Department sought the State Cabinet's approval to conduct an approximation exercise to identify senior citizens through proxy indicators.
- "While the Centre currently supports the SECC-linked 69 lakh families under existing health schemes, there are many eligible families that fall outside this database. Since it is impossible to identify them using outdated SECC identifiers, we are working on an approximation exercise to cover those left out," Harsh Gupta, Principal Secretary (Health and Family Welfare).

Proxy indicators

- Pointing out that the Centre has also advised other States to use their own methods of identification, Mr. Gupta said: **"In Karnataka, we are adopting proxy indicators such as families with children studying in government schools or anganwadis, recipients of widow or disability pensions, MNREGA wage earners, and people who have undergone procedures or availed themselves of treatment at government hospitals. These are practical indicators of identifying the poorest of the poor and most vulnerable in the absence of updated survey data."**
- "We estimate that about 17 lakh additional families [with over 24 lakh senior citizens] will be included through this approximation. Based on past experience, only 7% to 8% of these families will actually seek treatment in a given year,".

Fund sharing

- On the fund sharing pattern, Mr. Gupta said: **"The financial model is likely to follow a 60:40 cost-sharing ratio between the Centre and the State.** Based on our calculations, we will submit the data to the Centre, seek their approval, and then begin implementation once the Cabinet gives its clearance. "Once we get clearance, the rollout can begin within weeks,".
- In November last year, Mr. Gupta wrote to the Union Health Secretary, pointing out that the State is entitled to receive ₹36.58 crore from the Centre for the scheme, as per the existing 60:40 sharing ratio.

- He said the **aim is to ensure that senior citizens are not denied healthcare because of financial barriers. “Our approximation method is a step towards covering those who were left out of the SECC framework,”** he asserted.

E-cards

- To simplify access, the State will not mandate pre-registration or physical cards. Instead, an electronic health card (e-cards) will be generated instantly at the time of hospital admission, linked to the patient’s mobile number and accessible through WhatsApp. This avoids unnecessary inconvenience to citizens, he added.

❖ ‘I believe in true secularism, in all religions,’ CJI says putting the quietus on a controversy

Context: After 48 hours of incessant social media outrage over his oral remarks made in a hearing on a damaged Lord Vishnu idol, Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai broke his silence to clarify in open court that he believes in all religions, visits sites of worship of every faith, and firmly trusts in “true secularism”.

- “Someone told me the other day that the comments I made are being portrayed in social media. I believe in all religions. I respect all...” Chief Justice Gavai said to the assembled courtroom when the Bench re-assembled after the lunch break.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, who was present, said he had known the Chief Justice for over a decade and knew of his visits to “temples and religious places of all religions”.
- Chief Justice Gavai added to Mr. Mehta’s response by saying that he had visited dargahs and gurdwaras too. “I believe in true secularism, in all religions,” the CJI reiterated.
- On September 16, the **court was hearing a petition seeking directions to reconstruct/replace or rejuvenate the seven-foot Lord Vishnu idol at the Javari temple, which forms a part of the Khajuraho group of monuments, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Madhya Pradesh.**
- Declining the plea, the CJI, speaking for the Bench with Justice Vinod Chandran, had orally remarked that this was purely public interest litigation.
- “Go and ask the deity himself to do something. If you are saying that you are a strong devotee of Lord Vishnu, then you pray and do some meditation,” the CJI was reported to have told the petitioner, Rakesh Dalal.
- The CJI explained that his remarks were intended to convey that the **court could not possibly intervene as the area was a protected monument. He noted that the comments had been taken out of context. “We said it is within the monuments controlled by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and how can we pass orders,”** he explained.
- The Chief Justice said the petition had come up when the waqf case was still fresh in his mind. He referred to an **ASI report which had led to the insertion of a provision in the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025.**

❖ Army scales up induction of drones, aims to make every soldier a drone operator

Context: The Army is rapidly scaling up the induction of drones and counter-drone systems, with multiple units already operational and drone centres established at premier training institutions.

- The Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, visited one such facility at Likabali in Arunachal Pradesh, underscoring the Army's focus on operationalising drone capabilities.
- The initiative aims to make drone operations a standard soldier capability across all arms of the Army. Training institutions include the Indian Military Academy (Dehradun), Infantry School (Mhow), and the Officers Training Academy (Chennai).
- According to officials associated with the training, the concept is captured in the idea of "Eagle in the Arm" — that every soldier should be able to operate a drone just as he carries his weapon. Depending on mission needs, drones will be deployed for combat, surveillance, logistics, and even medical evacuation, while counter-drone systems are being inducted in parallel to create layered protection.
- **The Army chief had earlier, during the 26th Kargil Vijay Diwas at Dras (July 26), announced that every infantry battalion will have a drone platoon, artillery regiments will be equipped with counter-drone systems and loiter munitions, and composite Divyastra batteries will be raised to boost precision and survivability.** "Our firepower will now increase manifold in the coming days," Gen. Dwivedi had said.
- This dual thrust — arming soldiers with drones while strengthening counter-drone defences — reflects the Army's recognition that unmanned systems are no longer niche but essential elements of modern warfare.

❖ U.S. to revoke waiver on Chabahar port sanctions

Context: Decision will hamper India's plans for regional connectivity, investment of over ₹200 crore in the project in Iran; move comes just days after U.S., India had signalled rapprochement on trade issues

- In yet another harsh measure by the Donald Trump administration, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced on Thursday that the country was revoking its waiver of sanctions over the Iranian port of Chabahar within 10 days, ending a special waiver given to India in 2018.
- The decision, among a number of other moves by the U.S. to impose "maximum pressure on Iran", including designating several entities involved in Iran's oil trade, will affect India's plans to develop the Shahid Beheshti terminal at the Chabahar port as an alternative trading route for India, circumventing Pakistan, to send cargo to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) did not respond to requests for a comment on the development, which could severely hamper India's plans for regional connectivity.
- President Trump had first announced that he planned to end the waiver given to India in his previous term, on February 5 this year, as he signed an executive order mandating Mr. Rubio to "rescind or modify" all such orders that provided any relief to Iran.

- “Consistent with President Trump’s maximum pressure policy to isolate the Iranian regime, the Secretary of State has revoked the sanctions exception issued in 2018 under the **Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA) for Afghanistan reconstruction assistance and economic development**, effective September 29, 2025,” the State department said in a statement.
- **“Once the revocation is effective, persons who operate the Chabahar port or engage in other activities described in the IFCA may expose themselves to sanctions under the IFCA,”** it added.
- Earlier this month, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had discussed intensifying India’s engagement with Iran on Chabahar during a conversation with Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani over telephone. According to an Iranian official release issued in Tehran, Mr. Doval discussed “expanding cooperation in economic ties, security and defence relations, and advancing the Chabahar port project,” adding that the two sides would meet in Delhi soon.

- According to a note issued by the **Shipping Ministry in 2024, India has spent about ₹200 crore of a total allocation of ₹400 crore on the Chabahar project since 2016.**
- **“The port recorded a 43% rise in vessel traffic and a 34% increase in container traffic in 2023-24”** the note said.

- The imposition of sanctions on Chabahar is the fourth such round of sanctions the Trump administration has passed that directly affects India, and comes just days after the two sides had signalled a rapprochement on trade issues.
- In 2017-18, India had conceded to the U.S.’s demand to end all oil imports from Iran and then from Venezuela. India has not so far agreed to cutting down its imports of oil from Russia this year, despite the U.S.’s demand and imposition of a penalty tariff of 25% on all Indian goods in addition to a 25% “reciprocal tariff” already in place.
- The sanctions will cost India in terms of its investment in the Iranian port, for which the Modi government signed a 10-year lease agreement in May 2024.

❖ **‘Weak finances deter municipal bond issue’**

Context: The weak balance sheets of municipal bodies are a challenge in the development of municipal bond market in India, said Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairperson Tuhin Kanta Pandey.

- **“Municipal bonds have been a cornerstone of city-level development, enabling urban local bodies to raise long-term funds for essential projects such as water supply, sanitation, transport, and waste management... challenge lies in project readiness and credibility. Many municipal bodies struggle with weak balance sheets or delayed clearances,”** he said at an event here.
- “While the municipal bond market in India is still at a nascent stage, its potential is immense.”
- He called for measures to develop the capital market and make it attractive for institutional and retail investors to invest in municipal and green bonds.

Asset monetisation

- He also emphasized on the need to expand asset monetization.
- **“There is a need to accelerate asset monetization in various sectors such as roads, railways, ports, airports, energy, petroleum and gas and logistics. State Governments, barring a few, are yet to crystallize asset monetization plans to provide further boost to infrastructure creation.”**
- He highlighted the **development of the Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) into a new asset class.**

❖ Switching LPG connections mobile telephony way, PNGRB seeks views

Context: The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has invited stakeholder and consumer comments on an LPG interoperability framework that would allow households to draw refills from distributors of other PSU oil companies, similar to mobile number portability.

- The move follows more than 17 lakh consumer complaints annually, mainly about refill delays.
- PNGRB noted while oil marketing companies address grievances, consumers cannot migrate to another distributor.
- “While interoperability has been adopted in telephony with much success, the same has not happened in LPG,” the regulator said. Citing reports that highlighted supply disruptions and prolonged delay in refill deliveries, the regulator said safeguarding consumers from service failures and ensuring uninterrupted access to this essential fuel is necessary.
- There may be other reasons too — consumer’s freedom of choice on the LPG company/dealer being one, especially when the cylinder price is same. PNGRB said it was seeking steps to facilitate timely access to refills — by enabling consumers to be served from the nearest available distributor via improved coordination and flexible delivery arrangements within existing network.
- While porting was discussed in the past, the move was given up. Switching distributor or company involves surrendering the equipment and some cost to the consumers.
- When it is done during times of disruption and as a temporary measure there will be practical issues, especially on how refills and pressure regulator, which differ from one company to another, are deposited with the concerned company, sources in the industry said.

❖ SC cites Preamble to reject plea against Banu Mushtaq opening Dasara in Mysuru

Context: The Supreme Court reminded a petitioner, who did not want “Muslim” Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq to inaugurate the historical Mysuru Dasara festivities, about the **Preamble which enshrines secularism, liberty of thought and faith, as well as equality and fraternity as ideals cardinal to national unity.**

- Dismissing the petition, a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta asked the petitioner, Bengaluru resident H.S. Gaurav, whether he had read the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. “What is the Preamble of the Constitution?” Justice Nath asked Mr. Gaurav, represented by senior advocate P.B. Suresh.
- Mr. Suresh said the inauguration of Dasara festivities at Chamundeshwari temple on September 22 had two aspects — the **“ribbon-cutting”, which was a secular activity, and then the inaugural pooja before the temple deity, an essentially Hindu religious and spiritual activity.** The latter would involve lighting of lamps before the sanctum sanctorum of Goddess Chamundeshwari, along with the offering of flowers and other traditional items to the deity.
- “Inviting her was a purely political act by the State,” the senior counsel argued. **The petition contended that having a Hindu dignitary perform the pooja was part of the essential religious practice protected under Article 25 of the Constitution.**
- It argued that the Karnataka High Court, while dismissing the case on September 15, erred in not seeing that **“Ms. Mushtaq belongs to the Muslim community and is therefore a non-Hindu. As such, she cannot perform rituals before the deity, which is against established Hindu religious and ceremonial practices”.**
- **But Justice Nath indicated that the event was conducted by the State of Karnataka. The State was secular, and “maintained no religion of its own” as observed by a Constitution Bench in a 1994 judgment in the M. Ismail Faruqui case over the validity of the Ayodhya Act.**
- **The 1994 judgment had begun by quoting Swami Vivekananda’s “religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realisation”.**
- “This is a State event and not a private programme... The State cannot distinguish between A, B or C religion,” Justice Nath emphasised.
- The court refused to oblige the petitioner’s demand to direct the State to give an undertaking that Ms. Mushtaq would not be a part of the pooja. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Karnataka, appreciated the court’s reasoning while dismissing the petition.
- The Supreme Court had in **Kesavananda Bharati and S.R. Bommai judgments** upheld secularism as a **“basic feature of the Constitution”.**
- **In R.C. Poudyal judgment,** the court had observed that **although the term ‘secular’ was not present in the Constitution before its insertion in the Preamble through the 42nd Constitution Amendment in 1976, “secularism essentially represented the nation’s commitment to treat persons of all faiths equally and without discrimination”.**

- The court had succinctly laid down in a **2024 order in Dr. Balram Singh versus Union of India that the State's neutral attitude to all religions did not prevent it from intervening to "eliminate attitudes and practices, derived from or connected with religion, which impede development and the right to equality"**.

❖ Pak. to share its nuclear programme with Saudi

Context: Pakistan's Defence Minister said the country's nuclear programme "will be made available" to Saudi Arabia if needed, under the countries' new defence pact, marking the first specific acknowledgment that Islamabad had put the kingdom under its nuclear umbrella.

- Defence Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif's comments underlined the importance of the pact struck this week between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which have had military ties for decades.
- Mr. Asif made the comments while answering a question on whether "the deterrence that Pakistan gets from nuclear weapons" will be made available to Saudi Arabia.
- Pakistan's Defence Minister said the country's nuclear programme "will be made available" to Saudi Arabia if needed under the countries' new defence pact, marking the first specific acknowledgment that Islamabad had put the kingdom under its nuclear umbrella. Defence Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif's comments underlined the importance of the pact struck this week between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which have had military ties for decades.
- **The move is seen by analysts as a signal to Israel, long believed to be West Asia's only nuclear-armed nation. It comes after Israel's attack targeting Hamas leaders in Qatar last week killed six persons and sparked new concerns among Gulf Arab nations about their safety amid the Israel-Hamas war that's devastated the Gaza Strip and set the region on edge.**
- Speaking in an interview, Mr. Asif made the comments while answering a question on whether "the deterrence that Pakistan gets from nuclear weapons" will be made available to Saudi Arabia. "Let me make one point clear about Pakistan's nuclear capability: that capability was established long ago when we conducted tests," Mr. Asif said. "What we have, and the capabilities we possess, will be made available to (Saudi Arabia) according to this agreement," he added.
- The two countries signed a defence deal declaring that an attack on one nation would be an attack on both.

❖ Enrolment to State board schools dips

Context: The enrolment of children in government, aided and private-unaided schools following the State Board curriculum in Karnataka has been declining sharply year-on-year. Compared to the previous year, the enrolment of schoolchildren declined by 5.22 lakh across the State Board schools this year.

- The enrolment in government schools declined by about 2.54 lakh, while in aided schools it decreased by 77,000 and by 1.7 lakh children in unaided, private schools.

- The admission process of schoolchildren from classes 1 to 10 in government, aided and unaided schools across the State for the year 2025-26 was completed on July 31, 2025 and 99,47,261 students enrolled this year. In 2024-25, 1,04,69,944 (1.04 crore) children were enrolled in schools. In 2023-24, 1,05,94,694 (1.05 crore) children had enrolled in schools in the State.
- In 2025-26, 38,20,393 children enrolled in government schools, 11,09,583 in aided schools, 46,66,722 in private unaided schools and 3,50,563 in other schools (run by the social welfare and minorities departments). However, in 2024-25, around 40.74 lakh children were enrolled in government schools, 11.86 lakh in aided and 48.36 lakh in private unaided schools.
- According to data, from 2023-24 to 2025-26, enrolment decreased by about 7.26 lakh in government schools.

Private schools

- The number of students in private schools during the same period decreased by only 31,000.
- Interestingly, although the number of children in private schools in the State increased by 1.39 lakh in 2024-25, compared to 2023-24, there has been a decline of 1.7 lakh children this year.
- Educationists are of the opinion that the decrease in the birth rate and others factors are the main reason for the decrease in the enrolment in schools.
- “The birth rate has decreased due to various factors. At the same time, the decline in enrolment in government schools is a matter of concern. If government schools are to survive, the government should take steps to increase enrolment,” said development educationist V.P. Niranjanaradhya. He stressed on developing basic infrastructure, filling teacher vacancies and providing quality education.

Errors in SATS?

- The Associated Managements of Primary and Secondary Schools in Karnataka (KAMS), an organisation of private school managements, alleged that the number of student enrolment has fallen due to “technical errors” in the Student Achievement Tracking System (SATS)
- K.V. Trilok Chandra, Commissioner of Public Instruction, said, “The decline in enrolment of children in schools is a serious issue. Therefore, emphasis has been placed on the development of basic infrastructure and quality education to attract children to government schools. In this regard, the government has taken steps to increase the number of KPS school and taken other initiatives.”

❖ ‘Deepika Student Scholarship’ to give ₹30K per year to 37,000 students

Context: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched the ‘Deepika Student Scholarship’ programme of the Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Azim Premji Foundation, to support higher education of girl students.

- The **scholarship provides ₹30,000 per year to girl students who have completed SSLC and Pre-University Course (PUC) in government schools and colleges and have enrolled in any general degree, professional degree, or diploma course.**

- It will benefit over 37,000 students starting 2025-26. If more than 37,000 eligible students enroll, the government will provide scholarships to all qualified applicants.
- Chief Minister said, “Azim Premji, a renowned IT guru of our State, has undertaken many public works through the Foundation. He is providing aid for distribution of eggs and banana for government and aided schools children.”

Premji’s dream

- Azim Premji, founder of Azim Premji Foundation, said, “About 25 years ago, when I started the Foundation, my dream was for every child in India to get a good school education. In this period, I have seen more and more children go to school. When I meet school students, they tell me now that they want to go to college. This makes me happy. So I decided to start a scholarship programme for girls who want to go to college.”
- Higher Education Minister M.C. Sudhakar said, “It is highly commendable that Azim Premji, one of India’s most successful entrepreneurs, is using 50% of his earnings for social and educational work through his foundation. The students can apply for this scholarship online. The last date for registration is September 30, 2025.”

❖ As India and Canada reset ties, NSAs hold talks on security cooperation

Context: Indian and Canadian National Security Advisers (NSAs) and security teams held talks on enhancing bilateral cooperation in Delhi, two years after bilateral ties were ripped apart by Ottawa’s allegation that Indian government officials were linked to the killing of Khalistani activist Harjeet Singh Nijjar.

- “This is part of the regular bilateral security consultations that happen between the two countries,” said Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.
- “It was also an opportunity and occasion for them to follow up on the discussions that happened between Prime Minister [Narendra Modi] and [Canadian] Prime Minister [Mark] Carney in Kananaskis on the sidelines of G-7 in Alberta [in June this year],” he added.
- The day-long talks between NSA Ajit Doval and Nathalie Drouin, the Canadian National Security and Intelligence Adviser, did not focus on the Nijjar case, which is now in trial court. Instead, they discussed moving ahead on sharing information and counter-terror cooperation, as well as India’s requests for the extradition of a number of Khalistani activists wanted in cases registered in India.
- The Canadian delegation included Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs David Morrison, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner Mike Duheme, and senior diplomats from Global Affairs Canada.
- Significantly, many officials on both sides of the table had been part of the stormy meetings held in 2023, when Canada had claimed it had “credible evidence” that Indian government agents were connected to the assassination of Nijjar who was shot dead outside a Toronto-area gurudwara in June 2023.
- In particular, a meeting in Singapore between Mr. Doval and his previous counterpart had ended with both sides trading charges, and subsequently expelling each other’s diplomats for espionage.

- The repairing of ties began only earlier this year, after Mr. Carney invited Mr. Modi to the G-7 summit, and both sides decided to restore their High Commissioners and restart the trade talks suspended by Canada two years ago.

Khalistani threats

- The talks in Delhi came a day after a Khalistani group laid “siege” to the Indian Consulate in Vancouver, to protest what it called “espionage and surveillance by Indian diplomats” and also targeted the newly arrived Indian High Commissioner to Canada, Dinesh Patnaik, on posters. Mr. Patnaik and Canada’s High Commissioner to India Christopher Cooter took charge of their missions last week, and are expected to present their credentials in Ottawa and Delhi later this month.
- Asked whether India had taken up the latest threats with the visiting Canadian delegation, Mr. Jaiswal said that the security of diplomatic missions is the responsibility of the host government.
- “As and when there is a concern, we do take it up with our [counterparts] in Canada to ensure that there is adequate security of our diplomatic premises,” Mr. Jaiswal said.
- Mr. Morrison also held talks with MEA Secretary (East) P. Kumaran on resuming all dialogue mechanisms suspended since 2023, including on trade, defence and other issues and address the problems for visas due to the downsizing of diplomatic staff strength.

❖ 474 registered unrecognised parties taken out of EC’s list

Context: A total of 474 more Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP) have been de-listed for flouting norms, including not contesting elections in the last six years, as part of a comprehensive and continuous strategy to clean up the electoral system, the Election Commission (EC).

- The EC had, in the first phase, de-listed 334 RUPPs on August 9.
- “In continuation, in the second phase, ECI de-listed 474 RUPPs on September 18, based on non-contestation in elections conducted by ECI continuously for 6 years. Thus, 808 RUPPs have been delisted in the last 2 months,” the poll body said in a statement.
- After the de-listing process, **at present, 2,046 RUPPs remain. Political parties in the country are registered with the EC under the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.**

❖ UAPA tribunals uphold ban on J&K Ittihadul Muslimeen, Awami Action Committee

Context: Two tribunals constituted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have upheld the Union Home Ministry’s ban of the Awami Action Committee (AAC), headed by Kashmir’s influential cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and Jammu and Kashmir Ittihadul Muslimeen (JKIM), led by Shia leader Masroor Abbas Ansari.

- The tribunals, both headed by Justice Sachin Datta, observed that through the material and evidence placed before them, **they found that there was ample justification to declare the two groups unlawful associations under UAPA, 1967.**

- “Thus, this Tribunal, having followed the procedure laid down in the UAPA and its Rules and having independently and objectively appreciated and evaluated the material and evidence on record, is of the firm and considered view that there is sufficient cause for declaring the organisation as an unlawful association under Section 3(1) of the UAPA,” the identical order issued by the tribunals read.
- On March 11, while declaring the two groups banned, the Home Ministry said the AAC and the JKIM were indulging in unlawful activities that were threatening the integrity, sovereignty and security of the country. It said the two groups have been involved in mobilising funds for perpetrating unlawful activities, including supporting secessionist, separatist and terrorist activities in J&K.
- These groups show sheer disrespect towards the constitutional authority and constitutional setup of the country through their activities. The outfits were involved in promoting and aiding the secession of J&K from India by involving in anti-national and subversive activities and sowing seeds of disaffection among people, the Ministry said.
- The AAC and the JKIM were exhorting people to destabilise law and order, encouraging the use of arms to separate J&K from India and promoting hatred against the established government, it said.
- The tribunal referred to a chargesheet by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a case pertaining to terrorist and secessionist activities that have plagued J&K since the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

❖ Farm machinery firms urged to reduce prices after GST cut

Context: The Union government has asked agricultural machinery manufacturers to reduce their product prices in line with the revised Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates, so that the benefit directly reaches farmers “with full transparency.”

- Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, after a meeting with farm machinery manufacturers here, said the reduction in GST rates was a significant step that would have a widespread impact.
- Representatives from the Tractor and Mechanisation Association, Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers Association, All India Combine Manufacturers Association, and Power Tiller Association of India, among others, participated in the meeting.
- Mr. Chouhan said the GST on agricultural machinery, earlier at 12% and 18%, has been reduced to 5%. As a result, tractors will now be cheaper by ₹41,000 to ₹63,000, a four-row paddy transplanter by ₹15,400, and a four-tonne-per-hour multi-crop thresher by ₹14,000.
- He said the measure would promote mechanisation of agriculture. “Suggestions from manufacturer associations will be considered while framing future plans,” he added.

Welcomes move

- According to a government release, the machinery associations welcomed the decision, assured faithful implementation of the Minister’s directions, and reiterated their commitment to farmers’ welfare.

❖ 'SEBI, RBI in talks to boost trading in corporate bond index derivatives'

Context: The Securities and Exchange Board of India and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are in advanced talks to encourage trading in corporate bond index derivatives to deepen the debt market, a top SEBI official.

- “Corporate bond index derivatives trading is another frontier. Good discussions are ongoing between SEBI and the RBI, and we are hopeful that we will see progress soon.”
- Secondary bond trading volumes, at about ₹1.4-lakh crore a month, lag equity markets that trade similar volumes in a single day.
- This is even as bond issuances have picked up pace, with nearly ₹10-lakh crore raised in FY25 and ₹3.5-lakh crore already issued till July this fiscal.
- **SEBI had first cleared the way for futures in corporate bond indices in January 2023, by allowing stock exchanges to introduce Cash-Settled Corporate Bond Index Futures (CBIF) contracts on indices of corporate debt securities rated AA+ and above.**
- The idea is to renew the push by collaborating with the RBI, as the earlier attempt failed to gain traction. “If we can make bond trading more comparable to equity trading — in settlement, platforms, even trading culture — we might well see this investment class take off,” he said.
- Outstanding corporate bonds have also grown steadily, rising from ₹17.5-lakh crore at the end of FY15 to ₹53.6-lakh crore as of March 2025. “But the market remains dominated by institutional investors — banks, insurers, provident funds, mutual funds. Retail and foreign investors remain on the fringes,” he said. The municipal bond market remains nascent. Since 2017, only 16 issuances worth ₹3,134 crore have been made — equivalent to just 0.02% of GDP.

❖ Kerala eyes seafood sector partnerships with EU

Context: A two-day blue economy conclave held at scenic Kovalam here where Kerala and the European Union (EU) discussed future partnerships in the marine products sector has grabbed attention just when the prohibitory U.S. import tariffs have been posing stiff challenges to the Indian seafood sector.

- Inaugurating the conclave, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said his State was “embracing the vision of blue economy” and the EU collaboration would help expand opportunities for its fisheries sector.
- ‘Blues Tides - Kerala-European Union Blue Economy Conclave,’ organised by the State Fisheries Department, was attended by the Ambassadors to India of several EU member nations.

‘Exciting area’

- The Kerala-EU partnership, the CM said, would have a strong foundation built on mutual respect and shared values. The seafood sector was one of the most exciting areas where Kerala can collaborate with EU, given the latter’s ‘global leadership’ in marine technologies, ocean governance and sustainability frameworks.

- The Ambassador of European Union to India, Herve Delphin said the EU had suggested to the CM a 'joint platform and nodal point' be created for making the collaboration between the regions smooth.
- **A survey by a Kerala government-backed think tank showed the three-year average value of marine product exports from Kerala to the U.S. had risen from ₹513 crore during the three fiscals from 2014-15 to 2016-17 to ₹1,093 crore during 2022-23 to 2024-25.**

❖ EU proposes new Russia sanctions, Indian entities likely to be part of list

Context: The European Commission announced that it was proposing a sanctions package, the 19th since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, to member states for approval. The bloc's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, suggested that Indian entities would be impacted. The move comes two days after the EU announced that it was upgrading its relationship with India as a strategic priority.

- "These new sanctions will also squeeze Russia's access to technologies, including AI and geospatial data, as well as critical resources that feed weapons production.
- This includes those received from foreign suppliers, including **China and India**," Kaja Kallas, the EU's top diplomat said on Friday in a televised statement. Indian entities have been subject to Russia-related EU sanctions in previous rounds.
- U.S. President Donald Trump has increased pressure on Europe to stop energy trade with Russia. Last week, Trump administration officials had attempted to persuade the EU to apply tariffs on India and China for their trade with Russia. The EU however has focused on the more traditional sanctions approach and thus far not announced Russia-related tariffs on India or China.
- The Commission , proposed a total ban on imports of Russian LNG by January 2027, according to EU president Ursula Von der Leyen.
- Last Saturday, Mr Trump had said the U.S. would also increase sanctions on Russia if the EU imposes tariffs on China and NATO countries stop buying Russian oil. While EU countries have significantly scaled back their imports of Russian oil in recent years they still import other commodities (for instance iron and steel, fertilizer, nickel) from Russia.
- The new package will also sanction another 118 vessels part of Russia's "shadow fleet", i.e., thought to carry out trade, breaking existing sanctions of the EU. It will also include transactions bans on banks in Russia and third parties and sanctions on certain crypto platforms.
- "...When speaking directly with partners that speak to Russians, they say that among the first Russian request is sanction relief. So we know that our sanctions are an effective tool of economic pressure and we will keep using them till Russia comes to the negotiation table with Ukraine for just and lasting peace," Ms. Von der Leyen said.

❖ Sports: Jefferson-Wooden completes sprint double; Lyles' 200m reign continues

- The latter emulates Bolt with fourth straight gold in the event; Pichardo reclaims triple jump crown in dramatic fashion; Benjamin and Bol delight.



Stamping their class: Pichardo pulled off a stunner while Lyles again consigned compatriot Bednarek to the second spot. AP, REUTERS

- Noah Lyles scorched to a fourth successive World championships 200m gold as he delivered his trademark drive to the line to triumph in 19.52 seconds, pipping compatriot and perennial bridesmaid Kenny Bednarek, who timed 19.58.
- **The American held four fingers in the air after crossing the line as he matched Usain Bolt, who won four-in-a-row from 2009-15.**
- As Lyles, sporting a new crazy bleached hair look, celebrated, Bednarek looked distraught as he now has two World and two Olympic silvers in the event.
- Bryan Levell took bronze in a personal best 19.64, edging Olympic champion Letsile Tebogo, to win Jamaica's first medal in the event since Bolt did the sprint double in 2015.
- Later, Lyles' compatriot Melissa Jefferson-Wooden became the first woman since Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce in 2013 to complete the sprint double at the Worlds with victory in 21.68 seconds.
- The 24-year-old American ran the fastest time of the year to cap a brilliant season with another gold to add to the one she won in the 100m. Britain's Amy Hunt was a distant second to take silver in 22.14, while bronze went to double defending champion Shericka Jackson of Jamaica in 22.18.
- The 2022 champion Pedro Pichardo reclaimed the men's triple jump after an extraordinary finale as Italy's Andrea Dallavalle thought he had snatched it with a huge final jump of 17.64m, only for the Tokyo Olympics winner to respond with a massive 17.91 metres. Cuba's Lazaro Martinez, silver medallist in 2023, finished third with 17.49.
- Femke Bol, who had won eight races in a row, put the seal on a fantastic season by retaining the 400m hurdles crown in emphatic style as the Dutchwoman stormed home in 51.54 seconds. Jasmine Jones of the U.S. took silver in 52.08, while Slovakian Emma Zapletalova got bronze in 53.00.
- Olympic champion Rai Benjamin stormed to victory in the men's event in 46.52 to finally clinch his first World title after two silvers and a bronze.
- The 28-year-old American had a few nervous moments after initially being disqualified for crashing into the final hurdle and affecting other athletes as he raced for the line. Benjamin's appeal was upheld, however, and he was restored to the top of the time-sheet. Brazil's 2022 champion Alison Dos Santos finished second in 46.84 ahead of Qatar's Abderrahman Samba (47.06s). Norway's world record holder Karsten Warholm, gunning for a fourth title, finished fifth.

-----All the best! -----