



**DR. RAJKUMAR ACADEMY
BENGALURU**

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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

NOVEMBER WEEK 1

03-11-2025 TO 08-11-2025

**INDIA, NEW
ZEALAND
BEGIN FOURTH
ROUND OF FTA
TALKS**

**CENTRE'S
GOVERNANCE
GUIDELINES FOR AI**

**INDIA, BAHRAIN
HOLD TALKS**

**KERALA'S EXTREME
POVERTY
ERADICATION
PROGRAMME**

BRICS PAY

❖ Indian women script history, clinch maiden World Cup title

Context: In testimony to the progress made by the team over the years, Harmanpreet Kaur's unit defeats South Africa by 52 runs in the final; Shafali Verma makes a sensational comeback, with a half-century, two key wickets to seal India's coronation.

- Indian women created history before a packed D.Y. Patil Stadium, winning the Women's ODI World Cup defeating South Africa by 52 runs.
- If the team's astounding run to the final in 2017, slaying giant Australia en route, is often cited as the cornerstone of a revolution, the maiden championship win is the fulfilment of a gritty effort to match promise with performance.
- In the eight years since, progress was agonisingly slow but steady. India's ambitions to dominate world cricket slowly made room for the women.
- Parity in match fees, more fixtures, and the lucrative Women's Premier League helped India rub shoulders with Australia and England.

❖ ISRO launches GSAT-7R, India's heaviest communication satellite

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday successfully launched the Indian Navy's advanced communication satellite GSAT-7R (CMS-03) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

- The indigenously designed and developed satellite, weighing approximately 4,400 kg, is India's heaviest communication satellite to date and marks a major milestone in strengthening the Navy's space-based communications and maritime domain awareness.
- The **ISRO launched the rocket aboard its most powerful launch vehicle, the LVM3, on its M5 mission.** The lift-off took place at about 5.26 p.m. from the second launch pad, and mission control soon confirmed that the satellite had been successfully inserted into a geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO).
- This is the **heaviest Indian-built communications satellite** launched from Indian soil so far.
- **Because of the high mass of the GSAT-7R, the launch vehicle targeted a standard GTO;** once there, the satellite will raise and circularise its orbit using its onboard propulsion systems.
- The Navy said that equipped with state-of-the-art indigenous components, the GSAT-7R would provide robust and secure telecommunication coverage across the Indian Ocean Region.
- Its advanced payload features transponders supporting voice, data, and video links over multiple communication bands, ensuring seamless connectivity between the Navy's ships, submarines, aircraft, and Maritime Operations Centres.
- The launch highlights India's growing self-reliance in space technology and the Navy's commitment to safeguarding national maritime interests, it said.

- It stands as a testament to Atmanirbhar Bharat, enabling the armed forces to operate with enhanced situational awareness and secure, high-capacity communication links in complex maritime environments, it added.
- The launch also demonstrated the capacity of the LVM3 rocket to routinely handle four-tonne-plus satellites to GTO from India, reducing dependence on foreign launchers for heavy communications satellites as well as feeding directly into ISRO's preparations for Gaganyaan, its maiden human spaceflight programme, which plans to use an evolved LVM3 variant.
- "ISRO has successfully launched the heaviest GEO communication satellite from Indian soil," ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan posted on X following the successful launch. "The Indian space sector is soaring high to provide valuable services to the user community in and around the Indian region," he added.

❖ Horticulture sector to get hi-tech boost with Dutch initiative

Context: India's horticultural sector is set to get a hi-tech boost powered by AI for precision, as the Dutch government has embarked on a collaborative project in India to help produce pesticide-free food in state-of-the-art green houses that focus on water conservation and energy efficiency.

- The initiative focuses on technologies and practices that help produce food crops in a climate resilient manner.
- The Dutch horticultural sector has formed a consortium, HortiRoad2India, a public-private partnership, to take forward its initiative in India. The consortium is now ready to forge alliance with stakeholders in India.

Indian requirement

- The Dutch package would offer mid-tech and high-tech green house technologies that include building glass houses instead of conventional polyhouses for high-efficiency and climate resilience.
- However, the choice of mid-tech or high-tech polyhouses would depend on the nature of crops proposed to be grown. While strawberry, coloured capsicum, cherry tomato, micro greens and lettuce are proposed to be grown in hi-tech glass houses, tomato cultivation can be ideally taken place in mid-tech green houses, he explained.



The initiative focuses on technologies and practices that help produce food crops in a climate resilient manner.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sustainable

- "The technology is environmentally and financially sustainable as we use 96% less water when compared with cultivation on open field, and get 30 times more yield (with respect to tomato). We desist from using pesticides, and manage pests only with biological control methods. Also, we do not use genetically modified crops. We prefer disease-resistance hybrid varieties," he says.
- "We want to generate clean food that does not need washing." The main intention is to develop clusters of high-value crop producing green houses near big cities so that the loss in terms of transport could be minimized, he explains.

- “We are now in the process of taking up glass house projects in Bengaluru, Chennai and Punjab along with farmers who are investing on infrastructure,” he says.
- International & Economic Affairs at Policy/economics Department of Dutch government, points out that in India, a large quantum of food is getting wasted due to post-harvest losses. The Dutch initiative would also focus on setting up a chain of cold storage units to prevent this.
- Dutch Consul General to South India Ewout de Wit says the proposed initiative will not only help ensure availability of clean and pesticide-free food for consumers, but would also ensure sustainable incomes to farmers.
- It would turn farming into a more technical profession and create more employment in rural areas, he says. “With this technology, you can set up production units near ports, markets, consumption centres or whatever place is ideal for export,” he points out.

❖ Kerala’s poverty eradication mission now has a helpline

Context: Kerala’s Extreme Poverty Eradication Programme 2.0 (EPEP 2.0), the second phase of the programme, will focus on dynamic identification of families at risk of falling into extreme poverty, implementation of a helpline, and steps to improve the situation of families freed from extreme poverty based on the standards of the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

- Minister for Local Self-Governments, the public will be able to use the helpline to inform the Local Self-Government Department about families facing extreme poverty.
- The EPEP 2.0 document acknowledges that the declaration of Kerala as an extreme poverty-free State is the beginning of a process to ensure that families who came out of extreme poverty are not pushed back into. An EPEP safety net cell will be formed in every local body.

Grassroots involvement

- The 64,006 micro-plans prepared for the extremely poor families in the first phase will be updated and used as the basis for further actions.
- Self-help groups will be formed through Kudumbashree to promote income-generating activities for members of extremely poor families. Voluntary organisations and activists will be made part of the interventions.
- The EPEP 2.0 also has a target of ensuring a social security net for all citizens of Kerala. Monitoring mechanisms will be set up so that the families freed from extreme poverty continue to receive the services provided in the first phase. Health insurance, free medical care, mental health support, skill training and sustainable income generating job opportunities will be provided.

Separate allocation will be made in the State Budget for the continued activities under EPEP 2.0. The plan fund of the local bodies will also be utilised.

❖ ICMR seeks partnersto develop antibody against Nipah virus

Context: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has invited Expression of Interest (EoI) from eligible organisations, companies, and manufacturers for the development and production of monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) against Nipah viral disease.

- The Nipah virus (NiV) has emerged as a major zoonotic threat in India, with repeated outbreaks recorded since 2001. Case fatality rates range between 40% and 75%, depending on the level of clinical care available.
- “The importance of having monoclonal antibody stocks ready for deployment in India cannot be overstated. Given the very high case fatality and absence of licensed vaccines, mAbs represent the only currently feasible biomedical countermeasure,” the ICMR said.

Antibodies serve as PEP

- It added that monoclonal antibodies could also serve as **post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** for high-risk contacts such as healthcare workers exposed without adequate protection, family members in close contact, or laboratory personnel with accidental exposure. Administered early, they can prevent disease onset, as demonstrated in animal models.
- The council further noted that in patients presenting early during infection, monoclonal antibodies may offer therapeutic benefit by reducing viral load and limiting disease progression.
- The ICMR said this initiative aims to build India’s indigenous medical countermeasures against Nipah virus, particularly monoclonal antibodies. “The intent is to take this forward through active collaboration with Indian industry partners for developing an indigenous monoclonal antibody platform. Producing the stock will ensure timely access during outbreak and boost national preparedness for viral threats,” it said.
- The ICMR-National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV), Pune, has already initiated research and development in this direction, with experimental work at an advanced stage.
- As per the latest order, the ICMR and its institutes will provide expert guidance and technical support in R&D for developing monoclonal antibodies against Nipah viral disease at all phases. “This technical oversight by ICMR would accelerate the development of the product and its commercialisation,” it said.

❖ Experts join hands for Ramsar site tag for wetlands in Assam sanctuary'

Context: Conservationists, wildlife officials, academics, and students have got together to push for the Ramsar site tag for two interconnected wetlands in central Assam’s Nagaon district.

- The Rowmari-Donduwa wetland complex is within the 70.13 sq. km Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a part of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve. This complex has been recording more birds than the only two Ramsar sites in the northeast – Assam’s Deepor Beel and Manipur’s Loktak Lake.

- A Ramsar site is a wetland designated as one of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental treaty signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971.
- “Laokhowa and the adjoining Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries function as connectivity corridors for wild animals migrating between the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve and Orang National Park (Kaziranga-Orang landscape),” said Sonali Ghosh, the Field Director of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.
- She said that civil society organisations and students have been researching and monitoring the wetland complex. She said that their efforts have yielded vital data on avian species and the floodplain-marsh ecosystem of the two wetlands, which cover an area of approximately 3 sq. km. An average of 120 species of resident and migratory birds, including globally threatened species such as the knob-billed duck, black-necked stork, and the ferruginous pochard, have been recorded in the wetland complex annually.
- According to the 6th Kaziranga Waterbird Census conducted a few months ago, 20,653 birds of 75 species were recorded at the Rowmari Beel, and 26,480 birds of 88 species were counted at Donduwa Beel.
- Assam Forest Department officials said a proposal has been submitted to make the **Rowmari-Donduwa wetland complex to a Ramsar Site.**

❖ **Tri-services exercise Trishul begins today, to strengthen joint combat preparedness**

Context: The tri-services exercise Trishul will commence on Monday, with the Indian Navy leading the large-scale joint drills alongside the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force across the creek and desert sectors of Rajasthan and Gujarat, extending into the northern Arabian Sea.

- The 12-day exercise is being coordinated by the Western Naval Command.
- According to the Navy, the principal formations participating in the exercise include the Army Southern Command, Western Naval Command, and South Western Air Command, supported by the Indian Coast Guard, Border Security Force, and other Central agencies, underscoring robust inter-agency coordination and multi-domain integration.

Boost interoperability

- More than 20,000 troops, supported by T-90S and Arjun tanks, attack helicopters, missile systems, Rafale and Sukhoi-30MKI fighters, as well as a fleet of frigates and destroyers, will take part in the exercise, said sources. The exercise aims to validate joint operational procedures, enhance interoperability, and strengthen network integration among the services.
- It will feature extensive maritime operations, including amphibious landings using INS Jalashwa and Landing Craft Utility vessels, alongside carrier operations and air-sea coordinated missions with the Air Force, the Navy added.
- A key focus of Trishul, 2025, is on joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; electronic warfare; and cyberwarfare operations.
- The drills will also emphasise the use of indigenous systems and refine strategies to meet emerging security challenges.

• SIR of electoral rolls begins in 12 States and U.T.s today

Context: The Election Commission will begin the enumeration phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 12 States and Union Territories.

- The SIR exercise will cover close to 51 crore voters in **Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep.**
- Among these, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Puducherry will go to the polls in 2026.
- The first round of the clean-up exercise was carried out in Bihar earlier this year, during which more than 68 lakh names were deleted from the electoral rolls.
- The house-to-house enumeration process will take place from November 4 to December 4. The poll body will publish the draft rolls on December 9, after which claims and objections can be submitted from December 9 to January 8. Notices will be issued, and hearings and verifications will take place from December 9 to January 31. The final electoral rolls will be published on February 7.
- **In most of these States, the SIR exercise was last carried out between 2002 and 2004.**
- The poll body has implemented certain changes to the **SIR 2.0**, drawing upon insights gained from the experience in Bihar. Among the most significant changes is the directive that no documents should be collected from electors during the enumeration phase.
- The poll body took this decision after it found in Bihar that a substantial number of voters could be traced to the electoral rolls prepared after the preceding SIR.
- **Secondly, prior to the announcement of the SIR, the poll body had begun the process of matching the current voters' lists with those from the years 2002 to 2004, during which the last SIR was conducted in these states.** This procedure has been referred to as pre-mapping. So most States are expected to have the lists of people whose names were already there in the voters' list, and they are thus not expected to submit any of the 11 indicative documents along with their enumeration forms.
- **Aadhaar has been added as the 12th document, as directed by the Supreme Court, but only as proof of identity and not of citizenship.**
- The **poll body has also amended the enumeration form, incorporating a column where a parent or a relative can provide a signature in the absence of the voter.** This signature will be counter-signed by the booth-level officer (BLO).
- For electors whose enumeration forms have not been returned, the BLO may ascertain a probable cause, including death or duplication, through inquiries conducted with neighbouring electors and document these findings.
- Since the draft electoral rolls will only include the names of those who have submitted the enumeration forms, booth-wise lists of electors whose names have not been included in the draft rolls will be displayed on the notice board of the respective **Panchayat Bhavan or the urban local body office** and at the offices of the block development officers. This will enable the **general public to access the aforementioned voters' lists, along with the probable reasons for the non-inclusion of their names.**

- The electoral registration officers will issue a notice only after the publication of the draft rolls to those electors who could not be linked with the previous SIR in order to ascertain their eligibility.
- **Also, unlike Bihar, the voter rolls of all States will be available for mapping the names of voters and their parents or guardians. This means that voters can check their names in the voter list of any State in the country, not just in the State where they are currently residing.**
- In another modification to the process, fresh voter registrations will be carried out simultaneously during the house-to-house enumeration exercise. The BLO will carry at least 30 blank Form 6s along with blank declaration forms to provide to anyone who seeks to enrol as a new elector.

❖ State announces ₹600 crore fund to push 'Deep Tech Decade'

Context: The Karnataka government said it was entering into a 'Deep Tech Decade' and also announced an investment pool of ₹600 crore to kick off various initiatives to trigger growth in deep-tech across the State.

- Addressing a media conference, Minister for IT/BT, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Priyank Kharge said the government's ₹600 crore investment commitment would power the 'Deep Tech Decade', aimed at positioning Karnataka as the deep tech capital of India.
- "This initiative reflects our vision to create a robust deep-tech pipeline supporting entrepreneurs working on technologies such as AI, ML, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing, robotics, and sustainability-driven innovation," he said.
- He further said the government was also in talks with various players in the venture capital industry, including the ones he met last week, to expand the size of this investment pool to ₹1,000 crore or more.
- "It is not that ₹600 crore will be enough for deep-tech growth for the whole decade. We will re-look at the investment required. We will certainly require more funds to create deep-tech and AI startups across the State and for this we are also exploring to create joint funds in collaboration with venture capital players." The Minister further said the blueprint of the rollout and funding was already ready as the State was absolutely serious about retaining its global leadership in the technology landscape.
- According to Mr. Kharge, the ₹600 crore investment earmarked for deep-tech would comprise ₹150 crore for DeepTech Elevate Fund, with a special focus on AI and frontier technologies; ₹80 crore under the Elevate Beyond Bengaluru Fund to promote startups in Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi-Dharwad and Kalaburagi; ₹75 crore through the KITVIN Fund for equity-based investments in deep-tech and AI startups, with funding between ₹50 lakh to ₹2 crore; ₹48 crore for new incubators and accelerators at IIT and IIIT Dharwad and Kalaburagi; and ₹110 crore for business incubators in higher education institutions, nurturing early innovation and entrepreneurship across 11 institutions already cleared by the Cabinet.
- He said the government would explore a fund-of-funds through co-investment models with the VC ecosystem to ensure continuous capital flow and scalability across the deep-tech value chain.

- The Minister further said, the 28th edition of the Bengaluru Tech Summit (BTS 2025), the State's tech exposition scheduled from November 18 to 20 at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC), would feature Future Makers Conclave (FMC).

❖ Need for shift in focus from food security to nutrition security: PM

Context: Modi addresses experts at first Emerging Science Technology and Innovation Conclave, which replaces the Indian Science Congress.

- In his inaugural address at the first Emerging Science Technology and Innovation Conclave (ESTIC), Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India's scientists should generate ideas to move from food security to nutrition security; create biofortified crops to address malnutrition; develop low-cost fertilizers; better map India's genomic biodiversity for personalised medicine; and arrive at new and cheap innovation in clean battery storage.
- "This conclave should make a collective roadmap towards achieving these goals," Mr. Modi said, addressing an auditorium full of representatives from scientific Ministries, and technologists.
- Commencing his speech by congratulating the Indian women's cricket team on their maiden World Cup win, he said the 21st century was an epoch of "unusual changes" that were being shaped by science and technology.

Doubling R&D

- India's expenditure on research and development had doubled in the past decade, the number of patents registered had grown 17 times, and the number of "deep-tech start-ups" risen to 6,000, Mr. Modi said.
- **India had made operational a fund of ₹1 lakh crore via the Anusandhan National Research Foundation, which would help scientists and technologists in the public and private sectors to invest more substantially in research and development,** he said.
- The ESTIC replaces the Indian Science Congress, the oldest congregation of scientists in India, with a history predating Independence. Over the years, the Indian Science Congress had gone into oblivion, with its last session held in 2023.
- The ESTIC continues till November 5, with sessions on quantum science, bio-engineering and energy environment, and climate.

❖ Great Nicobar project: map ready for denotification of tribal reserve

Context: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has prepared a map for the denotification and renotification of tribal reserve land for the Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project, and will soon be finalising the sites for setting up towers in these lands.

- The administration has also said that transit accommodation to initially serve all Great Nicobar Island project staff has been constructed, and that a "Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan" is slated to be finalised by next month.
- The administration made a presentation to this effect to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation's (ANIIDCO) Monitoring Committee

overseeing tribal-related matters for the ₹92,000-crore infrastructure project proposed on the Great Nicobar Island, which includes a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a township. The project is being developed by the ANIIDCO, even as forest and environment clearances issued for the project are under challenge in courts and tribunals.

- In a meeting of the monitoring committee on tribal-related matters held in October, the Tribal Welfare Department of the islands' administration noted that a Geographic Information System (GIS) map had been prepared for the denotification and renotification of land with help from the Forest Department. Additionally, sites for towers will be finalised after consultations with the Assistant Commissioner of Campbell Bay and the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti, the administration body representing the Shompen people.
- Notably, any denotification of tribal reserve land for the GNI project requires that forest rights over it be first settled under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. This finalisation of maps for denotification comes even as the Calcutta High Court is hearing petitions challenging the administration's claim that it had settled forest rights here as per law.

❖ India, Bahrain hold talks on boosting defence, trade ties

Context: India reiterated that the Gaza peace plan of U.S. President Donald Trump will lead to a "lasting" solution to the West Asian conflict.

- Welcoming Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said there are "unprecedented" changes in the West Asian region as well as in the world.
- "So I take the opportunity to reiterate our support for the Gaza Peace Plan which we hope will lead to a lasting and durable solution," said Mr. Jaishankar in his opening remarks.
- A joint statement issued after the meeting of the High Joint Commission headed by Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Alzayani said that India and Bahrain expressed optimism for "enhancing future collaboration in the areas of defence and security". The joint statement also mentioned unequivocal condemnation of "terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirmed strong commitment to combat terrorism, including cross border terrorism."
- The two sides highlighted that India is among the top five trading partners of the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- Both sides agreed to develop a common understanding to commence Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) negotiations, which will help eliminate double taxation, provide tax certainty and promote trade and investment.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Bahrain Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani in New Delhi. PTI

❖ 'Digital arrests' are a very big challenge; victims, mostly elderly, lost ₹3,000 cr. in India alone: SC

Context: The Supreme Court said more than ₹3,000 crore had been scammed by fraudsters from victims, mostly drawn from the elderly population, through "digital arrests".

- A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant was referring to a confidential report submitted by the Union government. Justice Kant, who is the Chief Justice of India-designate, said the report showed that the problem of digital arrests was a “very big challenge”. “Much more than we thought...” Justice Kant observed.
- “The report shows the extent of fraud is very big... ₹3,000 crore was collected from victims in India alone. What would be the suffering at the global level?” Justice Kant asked.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, agreed with Justice Kant, saying digital arrest scam was initially found to be beyond what they had expected.
- Justice Kant said the judiciary would pass harsh and stringent orders to strengthen the hands of the agencies against the fraudsters, “give you all support”. “Otherwise, this problem will magnify, and the victims are aged people,” Mr. Mehta said.
- In an earlier hearing, the Supreme Court had orally mooted tasking the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) with probing the menace of digital arrests orchestrated by fraudsters posing as judges and police officers who use forged documents.
- Attorney-General R. Venkataramani had submitted that these cyber crimes originate from across the border and were fashioned by “money-laundering gangs”.

‘Scam compounds’

- The Solicitor-General had informed that the organised cybercrimes behind digital arrests were generated from “scam compounds” and done at a large-scale level.
- The Supreme Court had originally taken suo motu cognisance of a case of digital arrest of a senior citizen couple in Haryana’s Ambala on the basis of forged orders of the court and probe agencies by fraudsters to extort ₹1.05 crore. However, the court was later informed that there were numerous cases across the country in which innocent people, especially senior citizens, were threatened with “cyber arrests” by criminals, who misuse Artificial Intelligence and other advanced technology to morph courtrooms and police stations, unless they cough up huge sums of money.
- “The impact of the problem is great. There is not only a financial but also a human angle. Gullible people are promised employment abroad and reduced to the status of human slaves. Criminals morph the faces of judges and make calls to victims with the Court rooms shown as the background,” Mr. Mehta had said.

❖ Delhi HC upholds FSSAI ban on ‘ORS’ tagged drinks

Context: The Delhi High Court has rejected a plea challenging the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India’s (FSSAI) decision to ban the use of the word ‘ORS’ (Oral Rehydration Solution) in the naming of any fruit-based, non-carbonated, or ready-to-drink beverages.

- Justice Sachin Datta passed the order on October 31, dismissing a petition by Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories Ltd., which had challenged the FSSAI’s directive restricting the use of the label ‘ORS’ for its brand Rebalanz VITORS.
- On October 14, the FSSAI withdrew all prior permissions for using the term ‘ORS’ in product names or branding unless they met the medical standards.

❖ India, New Zealand begin fourth round of FTA talks

Context: India and New Zealand began the fourth round of negotiations towards a free trade agreement, with the Indian team visiting Auckland until November 7, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced.

- “Negotiations in this round are focusing on key areas, including trade in goods, trade in services, and rules of origin,” the statement added. “Both sides are working constructively to build on the progress achieved in earlier rounds.”

❖ Strong demand lifts manufacturing PMI to 59.2 in October

Context: Manufacturing activity accelerated to 59.2 in October, nearly a 17-year high, driven by strong demand and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate reductions, according to a private sector survey.

- The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index in October was higher than the 57.7 in September, which it said indicated a quicker improvement in the health of the sector.
- October’s 59.2 was just lower than the 59.3 recorded in August, which was the highest in 17-and-a-half years.
- “Manufacturing sector conditions in India continued to strengthen in October, buoyed by GST relief, productivity gains and tech investment,” the report noted.

Rise in new orders

- “A faster increase in new orders boosted growth of output and buying levels, and the latter drove a near-record expansion in input inventories.”
- According to the survey, companies attributed the increase in new orders to “advertising, buoyant demand and the GST reform”.

❖ UAE is supplying weapons to RSF militia, says Sudan’s ambassador to India Eltom

Context: Sudan is not in a state of civil war and is confronting attacks from “non-regional actors” that include the UAE, which is supplying weapons to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia that has been killing civilians in El Fasher city in Darfur in western Sudan, said the Sudanese ambassador to India.

- Addressing a press conference at the Embassy here, Ambassador Mohammed Abdalla Ali Eltom said stopping the supply of weapons by the UAE to the RSF will be the “first step” in “ending the war”.
- “Sudan is not facing a civil war. We are confronting conspiracies of non-regional actors. The RSF is acting like a proxy foreign powers and a few countries in the region are acting as corridors for arms supply to the RSF,” said Mr. Eltom, explaining that the UAE’s weapons are being channelled through Libya and Chad.
- “The militia threatens to destabilise the entire region from the Red Sea to the Central African region. Therefore, the international community must designate the RSF as a terrorist organisation and impose targeted sanctions on them and on all weapons suppliers that are supporting the RSF,” said Mr. Eltom.

- The RSF, which has been carrying out attacks in El Fasher, is using “strategic drones” that are capable of flying for long duration which indicate that state-level armed forces are involved in arming the RSF.
- The Sudanese envoy acknowledged India’s humanitarian assistance to Sudan during the crisis that has been continuing since April 2023. He appreciated India’s decision to maintain the embassy in Sudan despite the violence.
- He also confirmed that an Indian national was captured by RSF in El Fasher as militants entered the city on October 26.

❖ Has cloud seeding been effective?

Context: For the first time in nearly 50 years, Delhi conducted two cloud seeding trials with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) last week. The aim was to induce rain over Delhi to settle the build of smog and particulate matter that had deteriorated the air quality.

What is cloud seeding?

- **Cloud seeding involves spraying a salt mixture into clouds.** The science is that such seeding, which is done by **aircraft fitted with flares that fire the salt mixture into clouds, can induce ice or water vapour within the clouds to form water droplets.** When lots of such **droplets coalesce, they can pour down as rain.**

What has been its history?

- Cloud seeding has been around for at least three quarters of a century with mixed success. Beginning in the 1940s, General Electric scientists William Schaefer and Bernard Vonnegut chanced upon the principle of using dry ice to form ice crystals in their lab freezer. They then decided to experiment on real clouds. It was reported that they successfully made it snow over Pittsfield in Massachusetts, U.S. This got the U.S. government excited and a formal programme called Project **Cirrus** was born. While creating rain was certainly on the back of their minds, the big excitement was the prospect of taming hurricanes, which did not pan out well. In the 1950s and 60s, the use of cloud seeding as a weather modification tool became popular. The Soviets seeded clouds over Leningrad to protect May Day parades — years before China used cloud seeding for clear skies ahead of the inaugural ceremony of the Olympics in 2008. The U.S. launched Project Skywater, dumping silver iodide from planes over the Rockies.

What has India’s experience been?

- Nearly coincident **with Project Cirrus, S.K. Banerji, the first Indian Director General of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), oversaw the first cloud seeding experiments in Kolkata by releasing salt and silver iodide in hydrogen balloons in 1952.**
- Most of these were administered as rockets that were fired from the ground. And while these experiments seemed to suggest that on the days when seeding was done, there was more rain compared to days when there was no seeding, it wasn’t verifiable if the rain was due to natural sources or from the seeding.

- There was even an attempt to conduct such seeding in Delhi in 1962 but it failed.
- It's only from the 1970s that researchers properly started to use planes and fly to the top of the clouds to spray salt solutions. They also studied cloud physics, condensation, what kind of clouds gave rain, which ones didn't, and so on. Several States, when grappling with drought, have experimented with cloud seeding. The results have been sporadic and there was never any systematic way to tell how much rain could reasonably be expected if a certain amount of salt mixture was scattered. There was also less clarity on where exactly one could expect rain. The cost-benefit also was not clear, given that hiring aircraft, pilots, technical personnel and making salt mixtures was expensive.

What was the CAIPEEX?

- Initiated by the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in 2009, Cloud Aerosol Interaction and Precipitation Enhancement Experiment (CAIPEEX) was a systematic scientific investigation to quantify if there were any benefits from cloud seeding.
- For that it actually studied the interior world of clouds, its physics, and water droplet formation for nearly a decade after which from 2017-2019 they physically identified, using radar and other instruments, clouds that were suitable for seeding.
- This experiment was conducted over a drought prone region called Solapur, Maharashtra, and hence a natural test ground to measure enhancement (if there was any). Once the clouds were identified they flew aircraft and fired flares of calcium chloride (no silver iodide used) into some clouds and left others 'unseeded.'
- Their overall finding was that Solapur got an extra 867 million litres of water — which is considerable. In terms of rainfall measured on the ground: seeded clouds gave an average 46% more rain at the seeded locations relative to the unseeded ones.
- Over a 100 square km area downwind, there was 18% more rain in the seed versus unseeded.

What happened in Delhi?

- There were two flights on October 28 when IIT Kanpur flew its own plane and flared clouds. The results were disappointing with no rainfall triggered, though researchers at IITK said that some parts of Delhi reported a 'light drizzle' and a 'small improvement' in air quality. The drawback was the quality of clouds.
- **The CAIPEEX demonstrated that only monsoon clouds which had a certain quantity of moisture could hope to yield sufficient water. Such clouds are absent in the post-monsoon over Delhi.**
- For seven years, there have been various proposals for seeding over Delhi that have been discouraged by scientists due to the winter atmospheric characteristics. IIT Kanpur has however said that it will continue 'trials' during this season.

❖ What are the challenges with the High Seas Treaty?

Context: The High Seas Treaty was ratified by over 60 countries in September; it will now be enforced in January 2026. The treaty sets rules to preserve and use

What is the treaty about?

- The **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, as the High Seas treaty is formally referred to**, creates an all-inclusive framework to govern and manage common marine biodiversity.
- It identifies Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs) as the common heritage of humankind, insisting on a fair and equitable sharing of benefits.
- Besides, the Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs) include Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that can be recognised to protect biodiversity.
- This will help in improving climate resilience and provide food security, combining science and indigenous knowledge.
- The treaty also entails Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for events potentially affecting these areas, especially when cumulative and transboundary impacts are taken into account.
- The first steps for the treaty began two decades ago. **In 2004, the UN General Assembly formed an ad-hoc working group to fix the gap in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982, which did not have clear guidelines on protecting BBNJ. By 2011, states had agreed to negotiate on four key issues, mainly MGRs, ABMTs, EIAs, and capacity building and technology transfer. Following this, four Intergovernmental Conference sessions were held between 2018 and 2023. The parties to these discussions finally reached an agreement in March 2023, which led to the adoption of the treaty in June 2023.**

What are the major issues?

- **First** is the uncertainty over the principles of “common heritage of humankind” and “freedom of the high seas.” The “common heritage principle” supports equitable access and benefit-sharing of marine resources for all, while the “freedom on the high seas” stresses on unrestricted rights of states to carry out navigation, resource usage and research activities. However, the common heritage principle is only applicable partially, especially when it comes to MGRs. This shows a compromise instead of a resolution. It also creates ambiguity in exploration, research and benefit sharing.
- **Second**, is the use of MGRs. The governance of MGRs was earlier not defined, raising concerns over “biopiracy” and unfair exploitation by developed countries. Developing nations were concerned that they would be excluded from the profits of scientific discoveries from the high seas. The treaty now includes a framework on sharing monetary and non-monetary benefits, but with no clear details on how such benefits will be calculated or shared.
- **Third** is the reluctance of big powers to get engaged. The treaty is under threat due to non-participation from the U.S., China, and Russia, who are yet to ratify the treaty.
- **Fourth**, is interaction with multilateral institutions. The treaty must coexist and not ignore existing international institutions, such as the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). The BBNJ

agreement must also blend with existing international treaties to prevent legal conflicts and lead to more fragmentation of ocean governance.

What next?

- The treaty provides more clarity to the UNCLOS provisions, focusing on science-based requirements for EIAs, ABMTs and benefit sharing.
- However, the ambiguous language in the MGRs and the common heritage of humankind principle challenge the execution of the treaty.
- There is a need for dynamic management of MPAs, and regular monitoring. To deliver the BBNJ, linking climate-biodiversity with the ocean will be crucial for resilient management.

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❖ SIR second phase begins in nine States, three U.T.s

Context: The exercise will cover 51 crore voters; West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee alleges 'silent, invisible rigging', while ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu moves Supreme Court, terming the exercise 'arbitrary'.

- The Election Commission launched the second phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in nine States and three Union Territories, covering around 51 crore voters, with booth-level officers distributing enumeration forms to electors.
- The exercise, however, drew sharp opposition from several parties. West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee led a rally in Kolkata, alleging “silent, invisible rigging”, while the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu challenged the exercise in the Supreme Court, calling it “arbitrary, unreasonable, and prone to disenfranchising voters”.
- The 12 States and Union Territories where the SIR is being conducted are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

❖ State releases new Skill Development Policy

Context: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah unveiled Karnataka's new Skill Development Policy 2025–32, here.

- Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Bengaluru Skill Summit, the Chief Minister said the policy came with a seven-year strategic blueprint, backed by a robust outlay of ₹4,432 crore.
- “This aims to position Karnataka as a global hub for a skilled, inclusive, and future-ready workforce,” he added.
- Mr. Siddaramaiah also said that his government has been, since 2023, redefining its skilling vision to align with the demands of a rapidly changing, post pandemic, global economy.
- According to Sharanaprakash Patil, Minister for Medical Education, Skill Development, Entrepreneurship & Livelihood Ends, the new Karnataka State Skill Development Policy 2025–32 aims to train 3 million youth by 2032.
- “This policy document will serve as the backbone for the state's skilling vision, integrating schemes, improving quality and aligning with the \$1 trillion economic goal,” he added while speaking at the opening session of a two-day Skill Development Summit which began on Wednesday.
- The policy also envisages to increase women's ITI enrolment to 33%, to double district-level skilling capacity, and to strengthen global placement linkages through the International Migration Centre–Karnataka (IMC-K).
- It focuses on lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling, with strong industry collaboration through apprenticeships and partnerships. It also proposes special interventions for women, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities, and the informal workforce.

- Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Chief Minister D.K Shivakumar said Karnataka's commitment to global partnership in knowledge sharing was critical to shape its workforce development. He said the State produced more than 1.6 lakh engineering graduates annually through 270 colleges and operated 1,160 ITIs, contributing to a robust talent pipeline for domestic as well as global enterprises.
- The Skill summit is being organised by the Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (KSDC), Karnataka Skill Development Authority (KSDA) and the Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM). The Hindu is a media partner of the event.

❖ Bengaluru among 3 Indian cities of 33 worldwide to reimagine urban spaces for a hotter future

Context: As Indian cities experience record-breaking temperatures, three major urban centres i.e. Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai, have joined a global coalition of 33 cities committed to addressing one of the most serious impacts of the climate crisis: extreme heat.

- Announced on the first day of the C40 World Mayors Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Cool Cities Accelerator will help urban leaders protect residents, safeguard economies, and redesign cities for a hotter future.
- The initiative brings together 33 founding cities representing over 145 million people from every region of the world, including Austin, Boston, Buenos Aires, Freetown, London, Nairobi, Phoenix, Paris, Singapore and others, all committed to protect residents and transform urban spaces for a hotter future by 2030, said a release.
- C40 established the Accelerator with support from The Rockefeller Foundation, and with implementation support from ClimateWorks Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Z Zurich Foundation and Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Extreme heat is already the deadliest weather-related hazard worldwide, responsible for nearly half a million deaths each year. Without decisive action, the number of people exposed to life-threatening urban heat is projected to increase five-fold by 2050, said the release, adding, "The vast majority of deaths caused by extreme heat are preventable through timely access to cooling, hydration, medical care, public health interventions, and improved infrastructure. These preventable deaths typically occur when individuals are not adequately protected during periods of dangerously high temperatures."
- The Cool Cities Accelerator provides a science-based, practical framework for cities to take both immediate and long-term action. Participating cities will collaborate, share best practices, and issue progress reports on protecting residents by establishing clear heat leadership, strengthening early warning systems, and ensuring access to cooling during emergencies within two years, as well as transforming cities for the future by improving building standards, expanding urban tree cover and shade, and future-proofing critical infrastructure within 5 years.
- In support of the Cool Cities Accelerator, The Rockefeller Foundation is providing a grant of approximately \$1 million to develop the targets for heat adaptation and provide technical assistance for cities to implement solutions that mitigate the dangerous effects of extreme heat, the release added.

Context: A professor at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has summited the highest volcanic peaks of four continents in the last one year, with the latest being accomplished on October 24 when she successfully climbed Pico de Orizaba in Mexico – the highest volcanic peak in North America.

- Arpita Patra who is a professor at IISc's Department of Computer Science and Automation has climbed the highest volcanic peaks of four continents: Mt. Kilimanjaro (5,895 metres), Africa in July 2024; Mt. Elbrus (5,642 metres), Europe in August 2024; Mt. Giluwe (4,367 metres) Oceania in May 2025; and Mt. Pico de Orizaba (5,636 metres) in North America.



Arpita Patra began her mountaineering journey in 2024. She then did a course at the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sport in Arunachal Pradesh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Childhood dream

- Prof. Patra, who has been with the IISc since 2014, said that mountaineering was a childhood dream which she had not been able to pursue. “This was a childhood dream which I could not pursue earlier as I come from a very humble background and grew up in a very small village in West Bengal.
- Growing up, my focus was on completing my studies following which I pursued a career in academics. In 2024, I started my mountaineering journey when I summited Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Elbrus.”
- Following this, I did a course at the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sport in Arunachal Pradesh.”
- She said that summiting the Pico de Orizaba marks a major milestone in her mountaineering journey.
- Her journey to summit Pico de Orizaba started on October 19 and she completed it on October 24, along with her guide.

Challenging climb

- “I had earlier climbed the highest mountains of three continents. Pico de Orizaba was, by far, the most challenging climb I have undertaken. The ascent was technically demanding, involving glacier travel and a relentless 45-degree incline up the conical volcanic slope.
- On summit day, we gained nearly 1,450 meters of elevation, climbing from 4,200 m to 5,636 m via the Jamapa Glacier route on the northern face. What makes this achievement particularly meaningful to me is that I am not a full-time mountaineer,” she said.
- In preparation for the expedition, Prof. Patra said that on a daily basis she followed a four hour workout routine which involved either running, cycling or swimming along with strength building exercises.

Context: Karnataka currently stands at a unique demographic crossroads: over 60% of our population is below the age of 35, and nearly 1.2 crore young people will enter the workforce in the next decade, said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah while inaugurating the Bengaluru Skill Summit, the State's maiden initiative to train and nurture its most precious asset, the human capital.

- Addressing the audience here, he said, "This is an extraordinary opportunity if we equip this generation with the right skills, mindset, and confidence."
- He said the Bengaluru Skill Summit, a new annual exposition created by the State to focus on skill development, reskilling and deskilling was more than an event.
- "It is a movement to prepare our people for careers in a rapidly transforming world. This event is part of the commitment by the government to bring together the best minds from industry, academia, start-ups, and the youth to re-imagine the future of skills, jobs, and innovation," the Chief Minister said.
- The summit will showcase emerging funding models, technological enablers, and partnerships that will shape the next decade of skilling in Karnataka.
- "This is how we will turn Karnataka's demographic strength into a demographic dividend, and ensure that every youth becomes a builder of the new Karnataka," he said.
- In his inaugural address, he said, "the Buddha once compared the head to the seat of wisdom, the heart to the source of compassion, and the hands to the instrument of service. Only when the head, heart, and hand work together does a person become complete. This harmony of intellect, empathy, and ability is what true skill development must aim for."
- Karnataka has always been at the forefront of skilling, and the State was among the first in India to create a dedicated Department for Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood in 2016-17. He also clarified that it was (initiation of this event) not a bureaucratic move, it was a visionary step to unify all skill initiatives under one umbrella, with one mission, to make Karnataka Skills Gateway to the World. However, he said skill was not built in a day, it was built through patience, perseverance, and continuous practice.
- Giving a snapshot on the State's various initiatives towards skill development, Mr. Siddaramaiah said, through Chief Minister Kaushalya Karnataka Yojana (CMKKY), the target was to train 5 lakh youth, but the State exceeded that target.
- Between 2013 and 18, the State started 100 new ITIs, upgraded 104 ITI buildings, and introduced 11,835 short-term and 19,500 long-term training programmes through Government Tool Room and Training Centers, he said.
- Under Yuva Yuga, the State imparted advanced digital skills on over 1.10 lakh youth in IT, electronics, and animation sectors. Karnataka also conducted 16 mega job fairs, connecting over 52,000 youth to employment opportunities, and 75 Mini job melas

❖ SWR launches 'MUTS Sahayak' ticketing scheme

Context: In a bid to streamline the ticketing process, South Western Railway (SWR) has launched the Mobile Unreserved Ticketing System (MUTS) Sahayak Scheme at the KSR Bengaluru Station. This makes SWR the first railway zone in the country to introduce the initiative.

- Under the scheme, trained MUTS Sahayaks will use MUTS handheld devices to issue unreserved tickets to passengers. The move is aimed at easing congestion at ticket counters and providing commuters with a quicker, hassle-free option for purchasing tickets, according to officials.

NSG-1 category station

- The KSR Bengaluru is among five NSG-1 category stations identified by the Railway Board for the pilot implementation of the MUTS Sahayak model.
- “The launch of the MUTS Sahayak Scheme marks an important step towards enhancing passenger convenience through the use of technology. By enabling Sahayaks to issue unreserved tickets through handheld MUTS devices, we are providing passengers with an additional ticketing option and reducing the pressure on conventional counters,” said Manjunath Kanamadi, Chief Public Relations Officer, SWR.

❖ Viksit Bharat scheme to generate 3.5 cr. jobs

Context: The Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PMVBRY) has earmarked a budget of ₹99,446 crore with an ambitious target of generating over 3.5 crore new jobs across the country.

- In this regard, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), Regional Office, Bengaluru, conducted a training programme for its staff to enhance outreach efforts towards establishments for coverage under the scheme, which is aimed at promoting employment generation and formalisation of the workforce.
- The PMVBRY, launched under the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, provides incentives both to employees and employers to encourage formal job creation.
- Under the scheme, first-time employees will receive an incentive equivalent to one month's wage (up to ₹15,000), paid in two instalments after six and twelve months, provided they are registered under EPFO and a monthly gross salary up to ₹1 lakh, said an official release.

❖ SC flags misuse of POCSO Act to punish adolescent relations

Context: The court mulls directions to raise awareness of provisions of the Act, and sexual equality among students, asks States and U.T.s to respond.

- The Supreme Court expressed concern over the growing misuse of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act to criminalise consensual adolescent relationships, and said it was considering issuing directions to spread legal awareness of the subject.

- A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and R. Mahadevan observed that while adjudicating bail pleas, it had repeatedly come across instances where stringent provisions of the law were being invoked as a form of retribution in situations not envisaged by its framers.
- The judges stressed the need for greater legal awareness, particularly among male adolescents, who are often at the receiving end of such prosecution.
- “The POCSO Act is being misused in cases concerning consensual relationships between adolescents,” Justice Nagarathna remarked, adding that parents frequently lodged complaints against boys involved in such relationships with girls of similar age. “We should spread awareness among boys and men about the legal provisions,” she said.
- The court was hearing a writ petition filed by senior advocate and petitioner-in-person Aabad Ponda, who had attributed the rise in sexual offences and crimes against women to inadequate education on gender equality. Accordingly, he had urged the inclusion of early sensitisation on gender parity and legal literacy in school curricula.
- Earlier, the court had directed the Centre to indicate steps taken to include the concept of sexual equality and moral education in school syllabi, observing that “ethical and behavioural training on how men should treat women with respect” must be a vital part of education.
- The Bench noted that several States and Union Territories, including Telangana, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir, were yet to file their responses. Granting them “one last opportunity”, the court said it would consider issuing directions to promote awareness regarding the POCSO framework once all responses were received.

❖ ‘India-Israel ties are defined by trust, must ensure global approach to fight terrorism’

Context: Against the backdrop of growing concern over the fragile ceasefire in Gaza Strip, Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar held talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

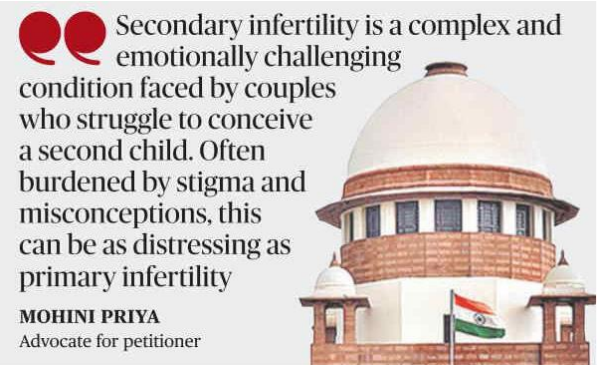
- Starting the conversation at Hyderabad House, Mr. Jaishankar said the India-Israel ties were marked by a “high degree of trust” and “reliability”. He said India-Israel counter-terror cooperation was “essential”.
- “India and Israel have a strategic partnership and particularly in our case, that term has a real meaning. We have stood together in testing times. And we have created a relationship with a high degree of trust and reliability,” said Mr. Jaishankar. He said the two sides should work for “ensuring a global approach of zero-tolerance towards terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations”.
- The two Ministers presided over the signing of an agreement between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Foreign Ministry of Israel for training of diplomats.
- After the meeting with Mr. Doval, Mr. Sa’ar said, “We discussed ways to cooperate and confront our common challenges, especially the mutual threat of terror. We are building a long-term strategic partnership between Israel and India.

- Mr. Jaishankar expressed support for business-level cooperation between the two sides, adding, “Our businesses are very keen to explore opportunities in Israel, and we would certainly like to give that more attention.”
- Diplomatic sources had told that Israel will undergo a major construction and infrastructure boom in the near future, for which it would require globally available expertise, including from relevant sectors in India.

❖ SC to review surrogacy ban on couples with one child

Context: Centre says there is no basic right to surrogacy, which involves the use of another woman’s body; petitioner cites secondary infertility is emotionally taxing, notes India has no one-child policy.

- The Supreme Court decided to examine whether a law banning married couples facing secondary infertility from using surrogacy to have a second child amounts to a state restriction on the reproductive choices of citizens.
- The Union government has supported the constitutionality of the legal provision, Section 4(iii)(C)(II) of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, arguing that availing surrogacy cannot be claimed as a fundamental right. It has contended that surrogacy involves the use of the womb of another woman, the surrogate mother, and should be availed only after all other options to attain parenthood have failed, including natural birth and assisted reproductive technologies (ART).
- **“The Constitution does not recognise a right over another individual’s body. Thus, the right to avail surrogacy cannot be claimed as a fundamental right and exists purely as a statutory right subject to conditions/restrictions prescribed in the 2021 Act,”** the government submitted in the top court.



‘Emotional toll’

- Appearing before a Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna on Tuesday, advocate Mohini Priya, representing a couple facing secondary infertility and seeking to use surrogacy, argued that the state cannot interfere in the private lives and reproductive choices of citizens.
- “Secondary infertility is a complex and emotionally challenging issue that many couples face when they struggle to conceive a second child after having successfully given birth to one or more children previously. This condition, often shrouded in stigma and misconceptions, can be just as distressing as primary infertility,” Ms. Priya submitted.
- The lawyer submitted that the definition of “infertility” in the context of surrogacy both in the ART Act and the Surrogacy Act was not restricted to primary infertility. She urged the court to read down Section 4(iii)(C)(II) to allow couples with secondary infertility to have a second child through surrogacy.

Balancing interests

- The government pointed to the proviso to the Section, which offers an exception for couples with a child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from a life-threatening disorder or a fatal illness with no permanent cure. This applies whether their existing child is biologically theirs, adopted, or through surrogacy.
- “This is a well-considered provision which balances the interests of an intending couple who may have a genuine, grave need to have a second child through surrogacy, while ensuring that a surrogacy procedure is not availed and a surrogate mother does not undergo an entire pregnancy when the intending couple already has a healthy, living child,” the Centre said, backing the restriction.

‘No one-child policy’

- Justice Nagarathna orally remarked in court that the restriction imposed under the provision was “reasonable”. The judge, on one occasion, referred to the burgeoning population of the country.
- Ms. Priya noted that the country does not have a “one-child policy”, insisting that couples could ensure the best interests of their first child while availing of surrogacy for a second child. She referred to the Adoption Regulations, 2017 under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, which allow three children of any gender to be adopted.

❖ Online tournaments may be excluded from gaming ban: SC

Context: The Supreme Court orally indicated that regular competitions and tournaments may be excluded from the ambit of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 as they do not come under the definition of “betting and gambling”.

- The 2025 law bans real money games, related banking services, and advertisements.
- A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K.V. Viswanathan was hearing a request made by a “chess player” who plays the game online as a “livelihood”, and said he was about to launch an app.
- “India is a strange country... you say you are a player, it is your only source of income and you want to join these proceedings here... Are you betting or gambling?” Justice Pardiwala asked counsel for the player.
- Counsel, speaking on behalf of his client, said he was a chess player who participated in “tournaments”.
- “Then there is no problem for you [from the Act]. They [the government] do not object to tournaments... Tournaments are completely excluded... So why come here?” Justice Pardiwala questioned the chess player. Additional Solicitor-General N. Venkataraman, appearing for the Union government, remarked the petitioner “does not play tournaments”.
- Counsel for the petitioner denied his client was into betting or gambling. He said these were online tournaments organised by companies.
- Justice Pardiwala agreed to club the plea with other petitions filed by online platforms challenging the new law.

- The court scheduled the case for a detailed hearing on November 26 even as senior advocate C.A. Sundaram and advocate Rohini Musa, appearing for the platforms, conveyed urgency.

❖ Food systems huge violators of planetary limits: study

Context: Warning that food systems are the largest contributor to the breaching of planetary boundaries, accounting for five of seven breached boundaries, the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable and Just Food Systems has, in a report, called for placing justice at the centre of all food systems transformations.

- India performed poorly on nitrogen overloading and pesticide pollution, straying from the global requirement of having 50-60% of intact nature, leading to loss of ecological functioning, the report stated. The report said under 1% of the world's population lives in a "safe and just space" meeting food needs sustainably.

❖ After visit to Vantara, global wildlife panel recommends India pause animal imports

Context: A committee of CITES, the globe's most influential agreement on wildlife conservation, whose strictures on the cross-border movement of protected animal species inform national wildlife laws, has recommended that India's wildlife authorities pause the issue of permits that allow endangered animals to be imported by zoos, and wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.

- This, CITES says, should be in place until India comprehensively reviews its practices and ensures that "due diligence is exercised systematically and consistently", and animal trade is not carried out in "violation of the Convention".
- The recommendations are part of a report prepared by a CITES-designated committee after a visit to the Greens Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (GZRRC) in Jamnagar, a part of the Vantara animal rescue and rehabilitation centre affiliated to the Reliance Foundation. The Radha Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust (RKTEWT) is also a part of Vantara, and while primarily focused on elephant welfare, also has permissions to manage other imported species of fauna.
- It also noted that it "could not find evidence" that the facility brought in animals for commercial purposes nor evidence that animals being imported to India lacked import, export, and re-export CITES permits.

Due diligence

- The committee's report, uploaded on October 31 on the CITES website, noted that "...several imports [by GZRRC and RKTEWT] still raise questions regarding the origin of the specimens... the use of source and purpose-of-transaction codes, and the exercise of due diligence by India".

❖ India can be a beacon of how AI can be used for social good: OpenAI official

Context: OpenAI, a San Francisco-based AI research and deployment firm that created ChatGPT, has introduced IndQA, a new benchmark for evaluating AI systems on Indian culture and languages.

- The company said its mission was to make AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) benefit all of humanity, across languages and cultures. Some 80% of people worldwide do not speak English as their primary language and yet most existing benchmarks that measure non-English language capabilities fell short, the firm noted.
- That means, existing multilingual benchmarks like MMMLU are now saturated, which make them less useful for measuring real progress.
- In addition, current benchmarks mostly focus on translation or multiple-choice tasks. They don't adequately capture what really matters for evaluating an AI system's language capabilities — understanding context, culture, history, and things that matter to people where they live.
- That's why IndQA, a new benchmark designed to evaluate how well AI models understand and reason questions that matter in Indian languages, across cultural domains.
- "We are rolling out IndQA. Built in collaboration with 261 experts across 12 languages, IndQA fills a key gap by enabling fair and rigorous evaluation that reflects India's cultural and linguistic diversity," said Srinivas Narayanan, CTO, B2B Application, OpenAI .

❖ Indian satellites: laden with features

Why are India's communications satellites so heavy

On November 2, ISRO launched the GSAT-7R satellite for the Indian Navy. The satellite's launch mass was 4,410 kg — rendering the launch the heaviest of a communications satellite from Indian soil.

- India's communications satellites are heavy because they combine wide coverage, high power, and long service life in one spacecraft.
- To serve the entire country and nearby seas, the communications payload needs to support many channels across multiple frequencies, including the C, Ku, and Ka bands. These in turn require many large deployable antennas, high-power amplifiers, waveguides, filters, switches, and either many analog transponders or flexible digital processors.
- The antennas and pointing mechanisms also need to hold tight alignment in space, so their structure and thermal control systems add more mass.
- The satellites' high throughput demands several kilowatt of electrical power available for 12-15 years, so satellites carry large solar arrays, large batteries, and power-conditioning units, plus structures to shield them in space.
- The spacecrafts' long life demands redundancy, ergo they're fit with duplicate computers, radios, and power units.
- Getting to the geostationary orbit (GTO) adds more mass in propellant. The GTO is a highly elliptical orbit; once a rocket places a satellite in this orbit, the satellite will use its own propulsion to move into a geostationary (like GSAT-7R) or geosynchronous orbit.

- The satellite also needs to perform station-keeping manoeuvres and manage its momentum. The chemical propulsion systems still common on many Indian satellites thus need significant quantities of fuel for these tasks.

❖ How BRICS is challenging SWIFT

Context: The BRICS grouping's motivation to challenge Western financial dominance is driven by a desire for greater financial sovereignty and reduced exposure to U.S. sanctions. However, navigating the maze of individual countries' ambitions with respect to their own payment systems could dent early progress towards this goal.

- For over a decade, the BRICS have taken a series of steps showing their increasing determination to reduce dependence on the dollar-dominated international financial system.
- The Fortaleza Summit in 2014 marked the beginning of this process with the grouping taking the initiative of setting up financial institutions to meet not only their needs but also of other developing countries.
- The New Development Bank, the BRICS' development bank, and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, their lender of last resort, was the first time developing countries had established financial institutions, until then, the exclusive preserve of advanced countries.
- The following year, after the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia for deployment of its troops in Crimea, the BRICS grouping decided to explore the potential of expanding the use of their national currencies in inter se transactions.
- In 2017, the grouping agreed to communicate closely to enhance currency cooperation, including through currency swap, local currency settlement, and local currency direct investment. At the turn of the decade, the grouping agreed to set up the BRICS Payments Task Force to develop systems to facilitate transactions between member countries.
- This step seemed to come together at the Kazan Summit in 2024 wherein BRICS leaders underscored the importance of “strengthening of correspondent banking networks within BRICS and enabling settlements in local currencies in line with BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative”.



Challenging status quo

- The BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, or BRICS Pay is the most concrete step that the grouping has taken to explore the possibility of reducing their dependence on the “SWIFT network”, the messaging system used by over 11,000 banks and financial institutions worldwide for international money transfers, and which is controlled by the G-10 central banks.
- BRICS' motivation to challenge Western financial dominance is driven by a desire for greater financial sovereignty and reduced exposure to U.S. sanctions. The decision to include Iran in the grouping in 2024, a country that has long faced similar sanctions, lent further relevance to this objective.

- However, the development that attracted most attention was the symbolic step taken by the BRICS during the Kazan summit to unveil a BRICS banknote.
- This symbolic move ignited discussions about the intent of emerging economies to move away from the dominance of the dollar.
- This was especially so since it raised the hackles of the then President-elect Donald Trump who threatened to impose 100% tariffs on members of the grouping if they were to “create a new BRICS currency, [or] back any other currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar”.

Building BRICS Pay

- Amid these developments, the possibility that holds out maximum promise is BRICS Pay. This sentiment was reflected in the grouping’s Rio Summit Declaration earlier in the year wherein they “agreed to continue the discussion on the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, and [acknowledged] the progress made by the BRICS Payment Task Force (BPTF) in identifying possible pathways to support the continuation of discussions on the potential for greater interoperability of BRICS payment systems”.
- Clearly, BRICS is in a good position to develop a new financial network. Besides the strong motivation to bypass the dollar-dominated system and avoid Western sanctions, these countries have the necessary infrastructure to put in place BRICS Pay.
- The Russian System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS), the Chinese Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), India’s Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Brazil’s Pix system are well-equipped to support the proposed network. Of course, the interoperability of these systems is essential for creating a cohesive BRICS-led payment infrastructure that can rival SWIFT in scope and reliability, albeit within a more limited geographic and political bloc.
- A prototype demonstration of BRICS Pay was unveiled in Moscow in October 2024, marking an important landmark in the project’s progress. Expectedly, Russia is most enthusiastic about this project, but the remaining original BRICS nations seem to be more circumspect because of interests in promoting their own platforms globally.
- India’s UPI is accepted in nine countries, but is yet to find acceptance within BRICS. China’s increasing clout in the international financial system and the prominence its currency (the RMB) has received after it was included in the basket of currencies making up the Special Drawing Right has increased the acceptance of CIPS, which currently has participants in more than 120 countries, including all BRICS members with the exception of India.
- Brazil’s Pix system, introduced in 2020 and operated by the country’s central bank, is used across several Latin American countries. While navigating through the maze of ambitions of individual countries to promote their own payment systems could dent the progress towards an early realisation of BRICS Pay, Mr. Trump’s aggressive intent, particularly against members of the grouping, could force them into a political understanding towards launching their payment system, sooner than expected.

Context: With the credibility of India's electoral processes at stake, the success of the nationwide Special Intensive Revision relies on leveraging technology and administrative efficiency to eliminate duplicate entries and ensure that every vote counts.

- After the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Bihar, which faced sharp criticisms from political parties and eventually the Supreme Court, the Election Commission of India (EC) has now announced a nationwide SIR, referred to herein as SIR 2.0. This exercise has been purported to be a paperless, people-friendly, and procedurally robust undertaking.
- With nearly one billion voter entries, a digital approach is not only inevitable but essential. The electoral roll is no longer a static, State-wise record; it is a dynamic national database whose precision defines the integrity of India's elections. Yet, despite judicial caution, one persistent issue remains unresolved — the double or multiple listing of a single voter.
- This problem, affecting countless citizens who shift residences, is not about fraud but rather procedural lapses that erode confidence in the system. A recent case involving a voter (Prashant Kishor), whose name appears in both the Bihar and West Bengal rolls, illustrates the flaw.
- While the SIR in West Bengal is yet to begin, such duplication defeats the core purpose of the Bihar exercise — ensuring that no voter listed in Bihar remains enrolled elsewhere. It questions the credibility of the SIR process and undermines trust in the voter database.

Governing duplicate entries

- Under the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950, duplicate entries technically constitute a violation, though such lapses are rarely intentional.
- Many law-abiding citizens, simply by shifting residence, unintentionally find themselves in breach of the Act through no fault of their own.
- This underscores the urgent need for a systematic, technology-driven correction mechanism within the EC's digital framework to make SIR 2.0 robust, reliable, and error-free.
- **The RP Act, 1950, defines the framework for maintaining integrity of electoral rolls and preventing duplication. Under Section 22(b) of the Act, if a voter changes residence within the same constituency, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) should transpose the entry to the appropriate part of the roll.**
- When a voter moves to another constituency, Section 23(2) governs inclusion in the new roll. It mandates that the ERO, if satisfied that the applicant is entitled to be registered, shall direct inclusion of the applicant's name in the new roll.
- The section further requires that if the applicant is already registered in the roll of another constituency, the concerned ERO must inform the officer of that constituency, who shall then strike off the applicant's name from that roll.
- To ensure the uniqueness of every voter's registration, Sections 17 and 18 explicitly prohibit multiple registrations — no person may be listed in more than one constituency, or more than once in the same constituency. Violations constitute an

offence under electoral law. Duplication often occurs when a voter's name is added at a new place of residence but not simultaneously deleted from the previous one.

- In essence, the Act places the primary responsibility on the EROs to ensure that transposition, inclusion, and deletion are carried out accurately, promptly, and simultaneously. This process is crucial in preventing duplicate registration and ensuring the credibility, transparency, and integrity of the national electoral database.
- The EC has consolidated the above provisions related to change of residence and correction of voter details in Form 8, used for transposition or correction of entries. A change of address request may fall under four categories: (I) No change in constituency or polling station, (II) No change in constituency but a change in polling station, (III) Change in constituency within the same State, and (IV) Change in both constituency and State. The most frequent cause of double entries arises in Type IV cases, where a voter relocates to another State. The new entry may either retain the same EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) number or generate a new one. For instance, Bihar voter (Prashant Kishor)'s double entry involves different EPICs, whereas the author has encountered several cases where both entries shared the same EPIC.
- In such situations, accountability for failing to delete the old entry lies squarely with the concerned EROs, whose prompt coordination was essential to prevent duplication in the national electoral roll. Another source of duplication arises when a voter uses Form 6 —meant for new inclusion without declaring the existence of a registration elsewhere. A false declaration constitutes a legal violation, with accountability shared by both the voter and the officials responsible for verification.

Decoding the procedure

- The backbone of India's electoral roll is ECINet — a fully digital, nationwide system managed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune. With records of nearly one billion voters, ECINet ranks among the world's largest dynamic databases. Each voter is identified by a unique EPIC number, ensuring a single verifiable entry per individual. ECINet can detect duplicates, flag inconsistencies, and facilitate corrections through authorised verification. It should also be extended to incorporate a voter's update history for complete traceability.
- The EC and C-DAC deserve credit for developing robust search and verification APIs that enable efficient detection of duplicates. Ideally, any double entry should automatically trigger an alert for review and deletion upon verification. With such tools available, there is little justification for the persistence of duplicate records. Whether SIR is paper-based or paperless, the real challenge lies in database accuracy and administrative responsiveness. In a digital framework, detection and deletion should be instantaneous.
- Ultimately, most cases of duplicate entries stem from the failure to delete older records, whether linked to the same or different EPIC number. This recurring problem reflects not a technological shortcoming but an administrative lapse — a failure of timely coordination and accountability within the electoral machinery.

The way forward

- SIR 2.0 must not degenerate into another bureaucratic ritual. India cannot afford another exercise mired in procedural inertia. The gaps are administrative, not technological. ECINet already holds the potential and should be further enhanced through seamless integration with Aadhaar, the only credible pan-India database for independent verification.
- Before SIR 2.0 begins, electoral data must be cleaned, duplicates flagged, and deleted. With proper use of technology, this can become a trust revolution — one where transparency, verification, and integrity are built into the system. The focus must shift decisively to software-led validation, digital audit trails, and real-time corrections. The ECINet should function as a reliable public utility — intuitive, glitch-free, and responsive. A real-time dispute resolution mechanism is needed to replace long queues and unanswered complaints.
- With a transparent, self-correcting feedback system in place, future SIRs will be unnecessary and electoral rolls will stay perpetually accurate, updated, and verifiable. Only then can India move from ‘verification by ritual’ to ‘verification by design’.

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❖ New York gets its first Mayor-elect of South Asian origin

Context: Zohran Mamdani made history by becoming New York City's first Muslim and South Asian-origin Mayor-elect, and its youngest since 1917, topping off a stunning grassroots campaign led by the message of affordability and upending a political class dominated by wealthy donors.

- In his victory speech before a jubilant crowd in Brooklyn, the 34-year-old declared: “We have toppled a political dynasty... tonight, New York has stepped from the old into the new.” Quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” speech, Mr. Mamdani said: “Standing before you, I remember the words of Jawaharlal Nehru. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.”
- He defeated both a Republican challenger, Curtis Sliwa, and former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who was backed by a coalition of billionaires who spent millions to block Mr. Mamdani’s rise.
- More than two million New Yorkers voted, the highest turnout for a mayoral contest in more than 50 years, according to the New York Board of Elections.
- Mr. Mamdani won 50.4% of the votes, while Mr. Cuomo, running as independent, won 41.6%. Mr. Sliwa won 7.1%.



Historic win: New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani with his wife and parents after his speech in Brooklyn. GETTY IMAGES

New York gets its first Mayor-elect of South Asian origin

❖ Wildlife Board for diverting forest land

Context: The Standing Committee of the State Wildlife Board has recommended forwarding the proposal to divert forest land from the Sharavathi Lion-tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary, to the National Board for Wildlife for approval.

- The Standing Committee of the Board, chaired by Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre, decided to forward to the National Board for Wildlife the proposal for diversion of 0.976 hectares of forest land
- The Standing Committee of the State Wildlife Board has recommended forwarding the proposal to divert forest land from the Sharavathi Lion-tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary, to the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for approval.
- The Standing Committee of the State Wildlife Board, chaired by Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre, which met, decided to recommend the proposal for diversion of 0.976 hectares of forest land.
- A proposal to release forest areas of the Sharavathi Lion-tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary for approval by the Standing Committee of the NBWL was submitted to the State government through the Parivesh portal last September.

Approved

- The committee also approved various road construction and widening proposals linked to the Sharavathi Lion-tailed Macaque Sanctuary, the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary Eco-Sensitive Zone, and the Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary with the condition that project plans ensure that there is no harm to wildlife.

- The Minister directed that while granting approval to any project in forest and wildlife sanctuary areas, proposals should mandatorily include measures to reduce risks and ensure no harm to wildlife.
- On the proposal to establish a leopard conservation reserve in Chittapur, Mr. Khandre directed officials to conduct a field inspection and submit a detailed report.
- Mr. Khandre also directed officials to fix a radio collar on the elephant captured near Kerekatte in Chikkamagaluru district and release it back into the forest. The elephant had reportedly caused the death of two persons in Kerekatte range of Kudremukh Wildlife Division in Sringeri taluk on October 31.
- The Minister instructed the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests to invite former Indian cricket team captain Anil Kumble, who is the ambassador of the Karnataka Forest Department, and for wildlife conservation to attend future meetings of the Department.

❖ Centre's governance guidelines for AI call for trust and safety

Context: Advocating a hands-off approach to the regulation of artificial intelligence, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on Wednesday released the India AI Governance Guidelines.

- The document is a significantly changed revision of a framework put out for consultation in January.
- The report was drafted by a panel formed in July and headed by Balaraman Ravindran, the head of the Department of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. The broader group that worked on the previous framework was headed by Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay K. Sood.
- The guidelines will “be a cornerstone in developing AI for India, and can be a role model for AI governance globally”, Abhishek Singh, Additional Secretary at the Ministry, said.
- The report emphasises seven principles for AI: trust; people-centricity; “responsible innovation”; equity; accountability; understandability of LLMs; and “safety, resilience and sustainability.” Mr. Ravindran stressed that the governance guidelines seek to signal India’s largely hands-off approach to AI.
- The report has six recommendations also: expand access to AI infrastructure and “leverage the power of digital public infrastructure for scale, impact and inclusion”; build capacity by skilling in AI; “adopt balanced, agile and flexible frameworks” as far as regulating AI is concerned; mitigate risks by looking at “India-specific” factors that need to be addressed; boost accountability in the AI ecosystem by requiring “greater transparency... about how different actors in the AI value chain operate”.
- “We are calling this the AI Governance Guidelines, not AI regulation or anything like that, because we don’t want it to be viewed as something that throttles AI adoption in India,” he said.
- While the previous framework laid emphasis on minimising risks inherent in deploying AI, the current model scales this back to promoting innovation with guardrails. The report also strips away much of the previous work done by NITI Aayog and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that was foundational to the earlier draft framework’s approach.

- In the long term, the report says, new laws should be drafted based on “emerging risks and capabilities” of AI systems. Responding to reports on the government considering a new AI law, IT Secretary S. Krishnan said that there were no immediate plans, but as and when there would be an urgent need for such legislation, the government would act swiftly.
- The AI guidelines are separate from a draft amendment to the IT Rules, 2021.

❖ **Skilling treated as extracurricular activity: NITI Aayog CEO**

Context: Skilling is still treated as an extracurricular activity in India and yet to be treated as part of mainstream education, said B.V.R Subrahmanyam, CEO, NITI Aayog.

- “Skilling is yet to be part of our country’s education system, unfortunately. This is at the root of the problem India is currently facing. Since our curriculum lacks general employability skill training, a majority of our population remains hugely unskilled, doing very low paying jobs or even staying unemployed,” he lamented, while delivering the keynote address at Bengaluru Skill Summit, being organised by the Government of Karnataka.
- Addressing a gathering of law/policy makers, educators, industry leaders, and start-ups, he said, India as a whole has to think differently and focus on skilling its people of all ages: young, old, students, women and farmers and others.
- The country’s 50-crore farmers have to be also trained otherwise the magic of agriculture won’t happen again.
- “We are actually putting people in silos and treating skilling as something separate. Actually, skilling has to be an integral part of the education system and skilling has to be thrown open to people of all ages — 20, 30, 40, 50 or 60 years,” he suggested.
- India was in a sweet spot, the country was at an important inflection point, with a positive growth trajectory, even geopolitics was also favouring India and the country has to invest in its demographic dividend, Mr. Subrahmanyam insisted adding, “If we don’t, our demographic advantage can be a curse for us. Only a skilled, employable, well-earning workforce having productive-livelihood will power India to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047, with each individual expected to contribute \$18,000 (per capita income) to the economy.”
- According to Mr. Subrahmanyam, the country required integrated academic, skill and vocational training schools and institutes on a large scale. Many have done wrong education and taken up courses and wasted their time, and now they are 35 or 40 years old and think their life is over.
- He suggested a system that would map skill sets, bring people and job roles on a common platform and establish interoperability (communication) between different educational platforms which would eventually help create diverse career roadmaps, define skill sets, identify newer job roles and create huge employment opportunities for a skilled workforce.
- On the impact of artificial intelligence on employment opportunities, Mr. Subrahmanyam added that AI would remove roles and not jobs.

❖ FATF releases updated asset recovery framework; India played a key role, says ED

Context: The global inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has released the “Asset Recovery Guidance and Best Practices” guidelines, which provide a comprehensive and updated framework to strengthen the global system for asset recovery against financial crimes.

- “The guidance follows up on one of the most significant global reforms to the FATF standards on confiscation and international cooperation in over three decades. It outlines practical measures for policymakers and practitioners to identify, trace, freeze, manage, confiscate, and return assets derived from criminal activity,” the Enforcement Directorate (ED).
- The ED stated that India played a prominent role in the development of both the revised FATF standards and the guidance document.
- “The document contains multiple examples from cases investigated by the ED, which are cited as models of effective asset recovery practice and inter-agency coordination. This recognition reflects the increasing international standing of India and the ED in the global discourse on asset recovery and financial crime enforcement,” it said.
- The new framework expands the definition of asset recovery to cover the entire process from the identification of criminal property to its eventual confiscation and return.
- “For the first time, the FATF has mandated that countries provide for non-conviction-based confiscation, enabling authorities to recover criminal assets even in the absence of a criminal conviction where prosecution is not possible or practical,” the agency said.
- The guidance also promotes the adoption of tools such as extended confiscations and unexplained-wealth orders that require individuals to show the lawful origin of their assets when there is reasonable suspicion of criminal linkage. Greater emphasis has been placed on provisional measures to secure assets at an early stage and prevent their dissipation.

❖ Sikh relic brought to Patna from Delhi after over 300 years

Context: An important holy relic related to the Sikh faith, the sacred Jore Sahib, the footwear of the 10th Sikh Guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj, and his wife, Mata Sahib Kaur Ji, had an unusual journey of 1,500 kilometres from New Delhi to Patna after a gap of more than 300 years.

- It was established on November 1 at the Takhat Sri Harmandir Ji Patna Sahib.
- The establishment of the reliquary at Patna Sahib, the birthplace of Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, is being seen as a major event in the Sikh faith, as the private custodians of the relics have offered them to the larger Sikh congregation.
- The relics were scientifically validated by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and a system for transporting and further preservation of the relics was created. The provenance of the relics were authenticated by the Union Ministry of Culture via carbon dating. Interestingly, the private custodians of the relics are related to the family of the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri.

- “Our ancestors were in the service of Guru Maharaj with the holy Jore Sahib ‘Charan Suhawa’ more than 300 years ago...,” Mr. Puri said in a post on X at the conclusion of a yatra.

❖ **Stubble-burning area in Punjab 20% lower than last year’s in three major districts: data**

Context: While instances of stubble burning in Punjab in October were at a five-year low, the area that was actually set afire in three major districts — Amritsar, Taran Taran and Ferozpur — was likely 20% less than last year’s, according to data sourced by The Hindu from a satellite-imagery firm and a senior official formerly with the Punjab Pollution Control Board.

- However, the first fortnight of November is historically when farm fires in Punjab peak and there may well be a surge in the burnt area.
- The government regularly shares daily data on the fire count but does not disclose burnt area. The link between fire counts and burnt area is significant for an accurate picture on efforts to curb farm fires, which in previous years have contributed as much as 35% of the daily winter pollution load in Delhi.
- Last November,— triggering the Supreme Court to order increased scrutiny — that Punjab’s claims of a reduction in farm fires, by publicising only fire counts caught on satellite, did not capture reality. The area actually burnt in Punjab had increased in 2023 (19.1 lakh hectares) compared to 2022 (15.4 lakh hectares). This was likely due to farmers burning stubble after satellite-passes to avoid detection. In 2024, the burnt area was nearly the same as 2023, at 19.4 lakh hectares.
- This year, satellite imagery of farm fires over Punjab only began emerging around October 10 — almost a month-long delay — due to heavy rain and flooding during most of September, contributing to a delayed harvest. Between October 13 and 28, the three districts were responsible for 515 fire events detected by satellite, about 55% of the 933 such events in the State. During the period, 2.46 lakh hectares were burnt in these districts, according to an analysis shared with by Noida-based Suhora Technologies, a space-analytics company with expertise in using satellite imagery for a variety of applications.
- Krunesh Garg, who had served as the Member Secretary, Punjab Pollution Control Board, until September 2025 and has for years monitored and implemented measures to address stubble burning, told that data with him showed “the three districts at the same time last year reported 3.15 lakh hectares of burnt area”. “If it is indeed 2.46 lakh hectares, that is a reduction and is certainly a positive sign...it shows that measures implemented in the last five years have started to show results,” he added. He said that Amritsar and Taran Taran belt (north-east Punjab) typically saw fires start early and conclude by October-end. “I believe whatever burning that usually happens in those regions has already concluded,” he noted.
- Couldn’t establish what proportion of cultivated area in the three districts of Amritsar, Taran Taran and Ferozpur has been harvested.
- In the week from October 28 to November 4, fire counts have sharply spiked from 993 to 2,839 — nearly three times higher than the cumulative October figure. Still, this is nearly half of the fire count logged at the same time last year and about a fifth of

figures from 2023. The spike was attributed to the window for sowing wheat — the rabi crop — fast closing and available till November 15.

❖ Chinese varsities dominate QS Asia rankings; India slips

Context: China has overtaken India as the most-represented location in the QS World University Rankings: Asia 2026, according to the rankings released this week.

- While India added 132 universities and institutes to the list this year, taking its tally to a record high of 294, China added 259 institutions, bringing its total to 394.
- In the last two editions, India had the highest number of universities and institutes in the rankings, ahead of China. This year, a total of 1,526 universities were ranked, of which 557 are new entries.

Among the top 100

- Seven Indian institutions feature in the top 100, with the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, ranked highest at 59, followed by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and the IITs in Madras, Bombay, Kharagpur, and Kanpur, along with the University of Delhi.
- China, meanwhile, has 25 universities in the top 100. While India retained the same number of institutes in the top 100 as last year, their rankings declined. The IIT-Delhi slipped from 44 in the 2025 rankings to 59 this year.
- Delhi University fell from 81 to 95, the IISc from 62 to 64, and the IIT Madras from 56 to 70.
- The top 10 positions in the 2026 rankings were dominated by universities from Hong Kong, Singapore, and China.

❖ 'Highest' FPI sell-off signals waning confidence in India

Context: Unless corporate performance improves significantly, foreign investors won't find India attractive for investments, say experts; tepid corporate profitability has more to do than just stock returns.

- Foreign investors have sold ₹1.5 lakh crore worth of Indian stocks as of November 4, 2025, according to NSDL data. Continued selling will make this the largest sell-off in about 20 years.
- “India benefitted from investors leaving China, but this benefit has run out,” said Mike Coop, Chief Investment Officer, EMEA at Morningstar Investment Management.
- “I think India was like the mirror image of China when the latter collapsed, and people thought it was uninvestable. India boomed and benefited from the reshoring from China to India. We have reached the end of that and probably, that’s not a great starting point for Indian equities. The valuation level has not been positive as it was,” he said.
- “On a PE basis, Indian markets have remained expensive relatively to peers in most years [in the past nine years],” said Dhananjay Sinha, CEO and co-head of Institutional Research at Systematix, an Indian financial services firm. Price to earnings (PE) ratio is a measure used to determine if the price of a stock justifies its

earnings to the shareholder. “Currently, Indian stocks are trading 22 times their earnings,” Mr. Sinha said.

- A section of experts though believes that the market is past the stage of expensive valuations and may now be ready for better returns. “Over the last year, returns have been weak in India, whereas returns in many other parts of the world have been much stronger,” Pranjul Bhandari, Chief Economist ASEAN, HSBC, said.
- “Today, we are seeing our relative valuation actually going back to long term average. It’s not looking too rich,” she added.
- “This is because investors have understood that earnings growth can’t be in teens when the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth is in single digits. A more realistic expectation may trigger foreign investors to return and an improvement in market returns might be around the corner,” Ms. Bhandari said.
- Despite divergent views, there is consensus among experts that corporate India’s profits must grow at a faster pace. For FPI participation to revive, either corporate earnings growth must quicken to 15-20% or valuations must compress significantly, Mr. Sinha said. “Currently, trailing earnings over the past 4-6 quarters are flattish, while forward expectations for the next two years are only approximately 10-11%; hardly enticing, especially amid visible downside risks,” he added.

FDIs trend lower

- While FPIs are selling, net foreign direct investments (FDI) also trend lower. Total foreign investment, which includes portfolio and direct investment as a share of gross domestic product (GDP), hit a 25-year low in 2024-25, he said. What makes this more concerning is that, FPIs who invest in India based on their conviction in the economy’s long-term growth redeemed for the eighth consecutive week as of October 31, 2025, according to Sunil Jain, V-P of Elara Capital.
- A low-performing corporate sector has consequences beyond just the stock market. “Elusive private capital expenditure and slowing household incomes are inter-linked trends that have curtailed private demand and lending growth. These issues, persisting for years and recently intensifying, have been partly offset by government spending on infrastructure and household transfers. Amid intensifying de-globalisation, India’s structural growth outlook faces considerable risks,” Mr. Sinha reiterated.
- Adding credence to his views, the World Bank, in its World Development Report 2024, highlighted the need for sweeping institutional reforms in the absence of which developing economies like India can run the risk of slowing down before it becomes a high income economy, a phenomenon that economists call “The Middle Income Trap.”
- That being said, conversations about middle income trap happen all over emerging economies in Southeast Asian economies and is not exclusive to India. With policy reforms, India can reduce the risk of structural economic slowdown, Ms. Bhandari asserted.

Context: Agricultural technology sharing and methods to increase output are a "big part" of the negotiations between New Zealand and India on a free trade agreement (FTA), New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment Todd McClay.

- India and New Zealand began the fourth round of negotiations towards an FTA on Monday, with the Indian team visiting Auckland until Friday. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal also visited New Zealand on Wednesday to discuss various issues with Mr. McClay.
- Speaking to reporters in Auckland along with Mr. Goyal, Mr. McClay said that New Zealand had been innovating over the years and working with its farmers to find ways to produce more and to increase its farmers' incomes.
- "Prime Minister [Christopher] Luxon has directed me in our discussions and negotiations to make sure New Zealand does its part to help Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi meet his commitment to increasing the earnings of Indian farmers by 50% by 2030," Mr. McClay said.
- "So a lot of the science that we have developed here to help them produce more is available to us in cooperation with India and that's been a big part of our discussion around the negotiation so far," he added.
- Negotiations with India regarding agriculture have been tricky as the Indian government has been steadfast in protecting the interests of its farmers.
- This has been a speed bump in negotiations with the U.S., European Union, and even the United Kingdom.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal with New Zealand Trade Minister McClay. FILE PHOTO

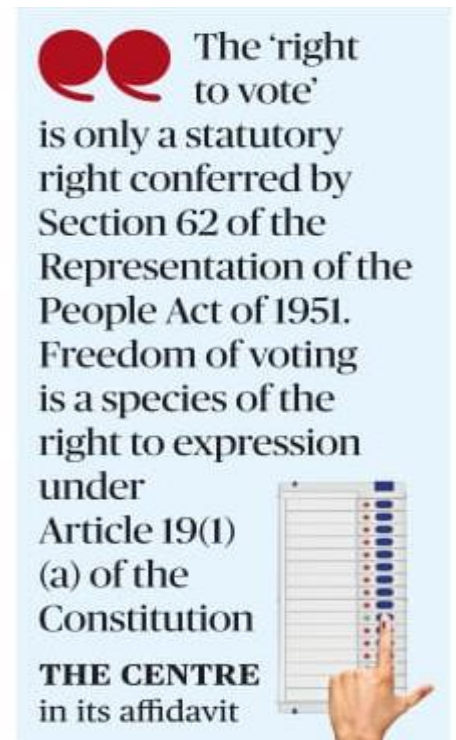
'Challenges remain'

- "It's fair to say that on both sides, there are always challenges in a trade negotiation," Mr. McClay acknowledged.
- "What Minister [Piyush] Goyal and I have agreed is that rather than our negotiators arguing, we will find solutions together. And so far, I think we've made great progress."
- Neither Minister was forthcoming about a deadline by which the deal would be finalised.

❖ Centre says right to vote different from freedom of voting

Context: The Centre has argued in the Supreme Court that the 'right to vote' in an election is different from the 'freedom of voting', and while one is a mere statutory right, the second is a part of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

- The case was listed before a Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant for hearing. However, the Bench did not assemble.
- The Centre was responding to a petition seeking to declare Section 53(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and Rule 11 read with Forms 21 and 21B of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, which apply to 'uncontested elections', ultra vires the Constitution for violating freedom of speech and expression under **Article 19(1)(a)**. Section 53(2) kicks in when the number of candidates equals the number of seats to be filled in an Assembly or Lok Sabha election.
- In such cases, the provision instructs a Returning Officer (RO) to declare all such candidates as duly elected by filling in Form 21 (in case of a general election) or Form 21B (in case of an election to fill a casual vacancy).



Prevents voters' right to exercise NOTA

- The petitioners, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, represented by advocate Harsh Parashar, and the Association for Democratic Reforms, through advocates Prashant Bhushan and Neha Rathi, submitted that the RO's declaration without conducting a poll prevented citizens from expressing their right to vote the 'None of the Above' or the NOTA option and voice their dissatisfaction about the contesting candidate.
- Both the government and the Election Commission of India have responded to whether declaration of a sole candidate without taking any poll was a violation of the electors' right to express their unhappiness by voting NOTA.
- The Centre's affidavit in court began with a fundamental lesson on the difference between 'right to vote' and the 'freedom of voting'. It said the 'right to vote' was only a statutory right conferred by Section 62 of the Representation of the People Act of 1951, and subject to the limitations given in the statute. **Freedom of voting, on the other hand, was a "species of the right to expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution".**

Context: As the sugarcane growers' protest demanding a Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of ₹3,500 per tonne in the State's northern sugar bowl turned the heat on the government, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah blamed the Centre for the problem and wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking an urgent meeting with him to address the issues.

- In the letter that was released to the press, the Chief Minister sought to draw the Prime Minister's attention to the ongoing agitation by sugarcane farmers in North Karnataka, particularly in Belagavi, Bagalkote, Vijayapura, Vijayanagara, Bidar, Gadag, Hubli-Dharwad and Haveri districts.
- He pointed out that the **FRP fixed by the Central government for the 2025-26 season stands at ₹3,550 per tonne for a basic recovery rate of 10.25%**. "However, after deducting the mandatory harvesting and transport (H & T) costs, which range between ₹800 and ₹900 per tonne, the effective payment reaching the farmer is only about ₹2,600 to ₹3,000 per tonne. But due to sharp increases in fertilizer, labour, irrigation and transport costs, this pricing structure has rendered sugarcane cultivation economically unsustainable," he said.
- He argued that the root of the problem is the Central policy levers, the FRP formula, the stagnating **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for sugar, export curbs on sugar and the under-utilised ethanol offtake from sugar-based feedstock.
- Pointing out that it was the **Centre that had the authority to revise the FRP, he argued that the State only had the powers to ensure that the sugar factories adhered to the FRP norms.**
- "To respond constructively, we request that the Union government should immediately enable a central notification to allow States to fix or endorse a net price to farmers after H&T or mandate that mills absorb H&T so that ₹3,500/tonne net becomes feasible," he said. The letter also sought recalibration of the recovery rate linked calculation of FRP, revision of sugar MSP above ₹31 per kg, export window to relieve mills of unsold stocks, increased ethanol allocation and assured procurement from Karnataka's sugar-based capacity.
- The decision to write to the Prime Minister was taken at the State Cabinet meeting. The Ministers and district officials had managed to convince the sugar factories to offer an FRP of ₹3,200 per tonne at sugar recovery percentage of 11.25, and ₹3,100 at sugar recovery percentage of 10.25, he said.
- He expressed concern that the Centre had increased the sugar recovery percentage to 10.25 from the level of 9.5 during the erstwhile NDA regime for determining the FRP. This would affect States that had low sugar recovery percentages, he said. He alleged that though Karnataka was producing 271 crore litres of ethanol a year, the Centre had given permission for the oil companies to buy only 47 crore litres from the State.

❖ NITI Aayog member advocates for Unified Water Reuse Standards

Context: Vinod K. Paul, a member of NITI Aayog, said that India needs a unified national standard to assure the public about the quality and safety of treated water.

- Speaking at the two-day workshop on 'Reuse of treated water', Dr. Paul mentioned that deliberations are under way to formulate an integrated policy at the national-level for this purpose.
- Jointly organised by the State government and the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), the workshop spotlighted the critical decline in India's per capita water availability, now below 1,400 cubic metres, and the pressing need for a unified national framework to promote water reuse.
- Dr. Paul called for ambitious national targets: 50% reuse by 2030 and full reuse by 2045. Currently, only 11 States have formal reuse policies, highlighting the urgency for a comprehensive national strategy.
- Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh showcased Bengaluru's efforts, including the rejuvenation of 110 lakes and a goal to achieve 100% water reuse and rainwater harvesting by 2028.
- The BWSSB, which supplies 2,225 million litres of water daily, treats 1,350 MLD through 34 sewage treatment plants (STPs), with 12 more under construction, she said.
- Tushar Giri Nath, Additional Chief Secretary of the Urban Development Department, emphasised the economic potential of treated water, proposing a rebranding of STPs as 'resource recovery centres'.
- This shift could elevate the BWSSB's revenue from ₹190 crore to ₹1,000 crore annually, he said.
- The workshop also featured technology exhibitions and expert panels discussing global best practices, policy development, and innovations in sustainable water reuse. On November 7, delegates will visit the Cubbon Park tertiary treatment plant and the KC Valley project.

❖ Tenth-century inscription dating to Ganga dynasty reign found on outskirts of Mysuru

Context: A 10th-century inscription from the Ganga dynasty reign has been found inside the Mahalingeshwara Temple at Nadanahalli on the outskirts of Mysuru.

- The inscription, dating back to the time of Butuga II, a ruler from the dynasty, was discovered on the wall to the right and faces east inside the temple. The six-line inscription was carved on white granite which is two feet wide and two-and-a-half feet tall.
- "This inscription, dated 948 A.D., is inscribed in the Kannada script. It is believed that during the reign of Butuga II, his bodyguard, Maremma, may have donated the garden to the temple tax-free and entrusted its management to the village chief Vijaketa Gavunda.
- The full text of the inscription cannot be stated as it is corrupted. However, since the inscription references 'Vijaketa Gavunda Dise', it can be inferred that the

management of the garden was entrusted to Vijaketa Gavunda, the chief of the village,” said a statement here.

- Further, the embossed painting of the temple is symbolically engraved on the inscription, confirming that it was a donation related to the temple, the statement added. “Since the Shiva Linga in the Mahalingeshwara Temple, where the inscription was found, is in the Ganga architectural style and the inscription is from the Ganga period, it can be understood that this donation is related to the Mahalingeshwara temple,” the statement further said.
- An embossed sculpture of a cow feeding its calf is also carved at the end of the inscription, which is 1,076 years old.

❖ Cabinet approves policy to help set up 25,000 start-ups in five years

Context: Policy aims to ensure that at least 10,000 of the targeted 25,000 start-ups are set up outside Bengaluru, says Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil.

- The Karnataka Cabinet approved the Karnataka Startup Policy 2025-30 that seeks to develop the State as a global innovation centre and help set up an additional 25,000 start-ups.
- Briefing presspersons after a Cabinet meeting, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil said the policy seeks to set aside a budget of ₹518.27 crore over the next five years to offer financial support to start-ups.
- The policy aims to ensure that at least 10,000 of the targeted 25,000 start-ups are set up outside Bengaluru, Mr. Patil noted.
- The policy will seek to create an appropriate ecosystem and work towards building the necessary infrastructure and ensure the availability of the required skilled manpower, he said.
- The Cabinet also approved a proposal to modify the composition of the **INDIRA (Integrated Nutrition and Dietary Initiative for Revitalising Anna Bhagya Beneficiaries) food kit under the Anna Bhagya scheme to provide additional quantum of toor dal in proportionate to the cost of the earlier proposed green gram**, the Minister said.

Teachers' vacancies

- The Cabinet gave clearance to a proposal for shifting the 67 vacancies of Urdu primary school teachers that were reserved for the OBCs to the general merit category as an one-time measure as no eligible candidates from the OBCs had applied for these posts, the Minister said.
- The Cabinet gave administrative approval for the comprehensive operation and maintenance of various sewage treatment plants in Bengaluru at a cost of ₹49.91 crore.

Context: Enumerators have been trained to use apps to help in digital collection and faster processing of Census data; self-enumeration portal is open to the public in pre-test areas till today.

- The Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India launched two mobile applications this week in preparation for the trial phase of the country's first digital Census in 2027.
- The pre-test for the first phase, House Listing and Housing Operations (HLO), when a total of 30 questions on housing amenities will be asked, will be held in select areas across the country from November 10 to 30.
- The enumerators, including block development officials, revenue officials, and government schoolteachers, have been trained to collect data on the two applications available on Google Play Store: Digital Layout Map (DLM) and Census 2027 - Houselist. The apps are compatible with both Android and Apple phones, and can only be downloaded by authorised personnel.

Public participation

- The self-enumeration portal is available for testing from November 1 to 7.
- "To encourage public participation, a Self-Enumeration facility will be made available through the Census Portal from 1st to 7th November 2025, allowing individuals residing in the areas selected for Pre-Test to submit their details online through the website <https://test.census.gov.in/se>, prior to field visits by enumerators," a government statement said.

Digital mode

- The DLM app's description explains the evolution of India's Census, the world's largest data collection exercise, into a digital operation.
- "Until the 2011 Census, data was collected on paper schedules, with layout map sketches prepared manually. These paper records were later digitised through scanning, a process that was both time-consuming and prone to inconsistencies. With the upcoming 16th Census of India, a historic transformation is taking place. For the first time, Census operations are being carried out in digital mode, ensuring improved accuracy, faster data availability, and enhanced monitoring. A crucial part of this transition is the preparation of Digital Layout Maps and the geo-tagging of all buildings within each Houselisting Block (HLB)," it says.
- It adds that the DLM app replicates the traditional methodology followed by supervisors and enumerators for drawing notional sketches for houselisting blocks, the primary unit for data collection, while introducing digital efficiency, accuracy, and real-time monitoring capabilities.
- The app will record building coordinates (latitude and longitude for each structure), the names of localities, roads or streets, building numbers (if available; otherwise, temporary Census house numbers will be assigned by enumerators), building names (if available), building type (pucca or kutcha), building use (residential, partly residential, and non-residential), landmarks (mandatory), number of floors, and number of Census houses.

- The description emphasised that “no personal information of the residents/ occupants of the buildings are collected through this app.”
- The description for the House Listing Operation app says it was developed as part of the Census of India 2027 to modernise and streamline the data collection process. Both phases of the Census — houselisting and population enumeration — will be completed between April 1, 2026 and February 28, 2027.

❖ CAG plans to create two new cadres for more centralisation

Context: The Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) of India has granted in-principle approval for the creation of two new specialised cadres for more centralisation.

- These cadres are within its Indian Audit and Accounts Department, and they will be called the Central Revenue Audit (CRA) Cadre and the Central Expenditure Audit (CEA) Cadre.
- Explaining the benefits of centralisation, K. Subramaniam, Deputy Auditor General (Human Resources, Industrial Relations, Content Delivery Network), said specialisation in the cadre of the CRA and the CEA will lead to deeper domain expertise in revenue and expenditure audits.
- “This reform, which will come into effect from 1st January 2026, aims to build deeper professional expertise and further improve the quality of audit of Central Government finances,” according to a press statement issued by CAG.
- At present, the audit of Central receipts and expenditure is undertaken by multiple offices with cadre control dispersed across multiple State Civil Audit offices leading to fragmentation. The new cadres will consolidate over 4,000 audit professionals out of the total strength of the CAG at 42,000. This measure will also help reduce dependence on deployment and manage manpower in a more flexible manner.

❖ Talks on with RBI, lenders for big, world class banks, says FM

Context: You need an ecosystem and also an environment in which more lenders can operate and grow, according to Nirmala Sitharaman. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Centre is holding discussions with the lenders and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for creating a ‘lot of big and world-class banks.’

- “We will have to sit and talk with the Reserve Bank and also with the banks themselves to see how they want to take it forward and also discuss with the RBI about how they have an idea of taking or idea of building larger banks,” she said at an event.
- “That work has already commenced. We are discussing with RBI, we are discussing with banks.”
- “It is not by creating from among those which exist today just by amalgamation, that can also be one of the ways but you need an ecosystem and also an environment in which more banks can operate and operate to grow,” she emphasised.
- “So, that environment is actually well established in India but I need it to be a bit more timely. So, some work is happening on it.”

- Since 2017, the government had been facilitating merger of public sector banks to become stronger and further consolidation is on. Under regulatory supervision, private lenders are being strengthened and foreign banks are being encouraged to invest in Indian banks to improve capital base as well as bring in higher levels of corporate governance and financial prudence into the banking ecosystem.

India is capable

- To another question on the impact of global uncertainties and protectionism by way of tariffs on India, she said “I do not want to sound too ambitious or give a statement of overconfidence but I can very clearly see India has shown its capability. In spite of global uncertainties, people of India have responded to next generation GST reforms and every sector saw it even on the first day [September 22, 2025].
- Earlier, she told the gathering the world was today facing slower globalisation, fragile supply chains and rising climate transition costs.
- “These external shocks test the resilience of our economy and underline the need for stronger domestic capabilities and diversified trade partnerships.
- “To sustain high growth, we must invest in people. Our workforce needs continuous upskilling and reskilling to meet the demands of emerging technologies and global competitiveness, ensuring higher labour productivity and better-quality jobs,” the Finance Minister said.

❖ India to unveil SAF national policy: Naidu

Context: The Centre will soon release a national policy on Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), Minister for Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu said, as he emphasised on India’s unique position as an agriculture powerhouse to cater to the rising global demand for the fuel.

- SAF refers to aviation fuel derived from non-fossil sources.
- At a FICCI event, he said the global need for SAF was 2 million tonne which by 2040 would rise to 183 million tonne. “As an agricultural powerhouse with over 750 million tonne of available biomass, India has the capacity to become the global leader in SAF production”.
- India has a surplus of 213 million tonne of agricultural residue along with adequate manufacturing capacity, he said.
- To achieve 1% blending of SAF by 2027, India will require 30 million litre, while the 2% target for 2028 translates to 62 million litre. Local oil makers collectively have an annual production capacity of 70 million litre. “We are well on course to meet the domestic demand and even emerge as a global production player in SAF”.

❖ Trump’s nuclear test threat risks upending global test ban regime

Context: On October 29, just minutes before his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Busan, South Korea, U.S. President Donald Trump said the U.S. would “start testing our nuclear weapons on an equal basis with other nations”. Back in the U.S., Mr. Trump repeated his claims in an interview. “Russia is testing; China is testing, but they don’t talk about it... And certainly North Korea has been testing. Pakistan has been testing.”.

- Mr. Trump is correct about North Korea, which has tested multiple nuclear weapons in the new century. But other nuclear powers, including the U.S., China and Russia, have maintained a moratorium on weapons testing since the 1990s. They, however, have tested weapons that can carry nuclear warheads.
- Mr. Trump's announcement came immediately after Russia announced that it successfully tested a nuclear-powered cruise missile (Burevestnik) and an undersea torpedo (Poseidon). Both are designed to overcome American missile defence systems and can carry nuclear warheads. But those were not nuclear detonation tests.
- The last time Russia tested a nuclear weapon was in 1990, when the Soviet Union was still alive. The last American nuclear bomb test was held in 1992, and the last Chinese test was in 1996.
- In 1996, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) banned all nuclear tests, but it never came into force as the required number of countries did not ratify it. The U.S. and China have signed the treaty but never ratified it. Russia had signed and ratified it, but in 2023, amid mounting tensions with the U.S., it decided to de-ratify it.

Debate in the U.S.

- Russia remains the world's largest nuclear power with an inventory of 4,309 warheads, according to the Federation of American Scientists.
- The U.S. comes second with 3,700 weapons, while China is believed to have more than 1,000 warheads.
- Historically, the U.S. has carried out the most number of nuclear tests — 1,030 detonations, followed by the Soviet Union (715) and the French (210). China has conducted more than 45 nuclear tests. In total, there have been 2,056 nuclear tests since 'Trinity', the first nuclear detonation by the U.S.
- In the U.S., the debate on whether the country should resume nuclear tests has been raging for some time. Those who support tests argue that it is important to bolster the country's nuclear deterrent — tests can prove that nuclear arsenals actually work, and provide critical data allowing countries to build more powerful, compact and specialised warheads.
- On November 2, U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright said the U.S. would not resume nuclear weapons tests but would conduct "subcritical tests". A subcritical test uses conventional explosives to compress fissile material (Plutonium 239), without triggering nuclear chain reaction or explosion. But Mr. Trump, in another interview, clearly said, "We are going to test nuclear weapons like other countries do."

Devastating effects

- The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, signed by the Soviet Union, the U.S. and the U.K., banned all nuclear test detonations in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater. Since then most tests were conducted underground. Even subterranean tests, experts say, could cause devastating environmental damages, including total destruction of ecosystems at test sites and contamination of soil, air and water.
- If the U.S. starts testing weapons, it could cause a domino effect on other nuclear powers. There were reports that China had made preparations at Lop Nur, where Mao detonated China's first bomb in 1964, in case it decides to resume testing. Russia was unambiguous in its reaction. "If they begin testing, naturally we will do the same," Russia's Security Council chief Sergey Shoygu said on October 31.

- If the U.S. and Russia resume tests, China could do the same. And if China does it, India will come under internal pressure to start testing its weapons. Then Pakistan may not stand out. A new phase of nuclear arms race would begin, with long-term consequences for humanity.

❖ **Why the nomination process needs reform**

- The Representation of the People Act (RP), 1951 mandates that only qualified candidates can contest an election. However, the process of verifying said qualifications has accumulated complexity over the years, with too much importance being laid on procedural technicalities than actual ‘defects of a substantial character’

Kannan Gopinathan

- A young woman from Dadra and Nagar Haveli called last week about the recent municipal council elections. This is a district in which I once served as Collector and Returning Officer. Her father’s nomination for municipal councillor had been rejected with no hearing or chance at verification. She asked, “Sir, is this how elections work?” The honest answer is yes. And that is the problem.
- One often hears about how nominations of candidates contesting elections are rejected over technicalities without any chance for clarification. However, the fact of that matter is that such rejections are lawful. The most undemocratic part of India’s electoral process occurs before a single vote is cast — at the stage of nomination scrutiny.

The politics of procedure

- India’s electoral nomination process vests extraordinary discretion in a single official — the Returning Officer (RO).
- The Representation of the People Act (RP), 1951, particularly Sections 33 to 36, and the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, govern the nomination process. Section 36 authorises the RO to scrutinise nominations and reject those deemed invalid.
- The RO’s power under Section 36(2) to conduct a “summary inquiry” and to reject nominations for “defects of a substantial character” is extraordinarily wide, and largely un-reviewable before polling, since Article 329 (b) bars courts from interfering mid-election. The law says no nomination should be rejected for defects not of a substantial character.
- But there are no written guidelines on what is substantial. And the only remedy to protest it is an election petition after the polls, when the damage is irreversible. In a democracy, this absolutism dressed in legal language has the potential to become a tool of political exclusion.
- In Bihar this year, a Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) candidate’s nomination was rejected for leaving some fields blank. Last year in Surat, Opposition candidates were eliminated after proposers denied signatures, delivering a Lok Sabha seat unopposed. In the 2019 elections in Varanasi, decorated BSF jawan Tej Bahadur Yadav was rejected because he could not obtain an Election Commission certificate overnight. In Birbhum, former IPS officer Debasish Dhar was kept off the ballot when his no-dues certificate from the government was delayed. Yet, there is no publicly available consolidated dataset on rejection grounds, patterns, or party-wise breakdowns. This opacity shields the weaponisation of procedure.

Procedural traps

- Section 36 of the RP Act mandates that only qualified candidates can contest. However, the process of verifying qualification has accumulated complexity over the years. Well-intended judicial interventions have paradoxically worsened the problem. Supreme Court directions mandating detailed affidavits on assets, liabilities, and criminal cases were meant to ensure transparency, yet each new disclosure requirement added another opportunity for technical rejection. For example, in *Resurgence India versus Election Commission (2013)*, the Supreme Court held that false declarations lead to prosecution but don't invalidate nominations, only incomplete ones do. This means that a candidate who lies but fills all columns stays on the ballot, and one who makes a good-faith error can be rejected. The system now punishes incomplete declarations more harshly than dishonest ones.
- A missing signature, a mismatched electoral number, a form filed at 3:05 PM instead of 3:00 PM, a blank column in an affidavit, a delayed oath, a missing no-dues certificate — any of these can end a candidacy. The burden of proof thus lies entirely on the citizen seeking to exercise a legal right, and not on the official denying it. This is constitutionally backwards. The right to be voted for is the necessary twin of the right to vote. Without candidates to choose from, the ballot is ritual without substance. The first principle must be that every qualified citizen has a presumptive right to contest. That right can be denied only when the RO establishes, with clear evidence, a substantive constitutional or statutory disqualification. Technical paperwork errors cannot be a reason for disqualification.

Some of the common procedural technicalities on which nominations are rejected include:

- The oath trap: Every candidate must take an oath before a specified authority after filing nomination but before scrutiny. If its too early, it's invalid, and if too late, the nomination is rejected. Moreover, if it is not before the specified authority, your form is again bound to be rejected.
- The notarisation trap: Every Form 26 affidavit (an affidavit which needs to be filed by the candidate along with nomination papers) must be notarised by a specified authority. Not having done so can result in rejection of the nomination.
- The certificate trap: Along with nomination papers, the candidate is liable to submit no-dues certificates from municipal bodies, electricity boards, or other government departments; clearance certificates from the Election Commission for government servants; and various other bureaucratic attestations, each of them a veto point when it comes to the time of scrutiny. Thus, each issuing office becomes a potential chokepoint where deliberate delay can eliminate a candidacy.
- These procedures, once designed as safeguards, have turned into potential opportunities for delay and manipulation.
- Here, bureaucratic compliance is being rewarded over democratic legitimacy.

Facilitation, not filtration

- Other democracies show a different approach. In the U.K., ROs help candidates fix errors before deadlines. Canada mandates a 48-hour correction period. Germany requires written notice of problems, time to remedy them, and multiple appeal layers.

Australia encourages early submission to allow corrections. The common idea being that officials are facilitators, not sentinels.

- India also has a checklist system. The RO Handbook instructs ROs to point out defects at the time of filing and record them in a checklist. But this checklist has no legal standing. The Handbook itself clarifies that the checklist “will not prevent the Returning Officer from pointing out other defects, if any, discovered later during scrutiny.” A nomination can be marked defect-free at filing, yet rejected at scrutiny for defects the RO discovers later. The candidate has no right to rely on the checklist, and the RO faces no legal obligation to honour it. The checklist thus remains as an illusion of transparency without offering any real protection to the candidate.
- The RO’s role must shift from discretion to duty. When a deficiency exists, the RO must issue a detailed written notice specifying the exact error, the legal provision violated, and the correction needed. Candidates must get a guaranteed 48-hour window to fix it after receiving this notice.
- The law must thus classify deficiencies into three categories: (1) technical or paperwork defects such as missing signatures, blank affidavit columns, clerical errors, no-dues certificates etc. These cannot justify rejection; (2) matters requiring verification of authenticity such as disputed signatures, challenged documents etc. These require investigations before rejection; and (3) constitutional and statutory bars. These should lead to immediate and absolute disqualification. Moreover, every rejection order must be reasoned. The RO must specify which exact requirement was not met, which provision of law was violated, what evidence supports the finding, and why the defect is substantial enough to justify rejection.

A digital solution

- The Election Commission of India (EC) can build a nomination system that is digital-by-default; one that doesn’t depend on excessive paperwork. This is not to argue for a digital-only framework, but a digital-by-default framework that can eliminate disqualifications based on blank columns and misspelt names or typos. The entire nomination process could move to an integrated online portal linked with the electoral roll. The system could automatically validate voter ID, age, and constituency details. Oath, affidavit submission, proposer verification, and deposit payment could all be digital. Moreover, every nomination’s progress such as when it was filed, verified, deficiency notified, corrected, accepted or rejected, should be visible on a public dashboard with timestamps and reasons.

Upholding democracy

- When a nomination is rejected arbitrarily, two rights are violated: the candidate’s right to contest and the voters’ right to choose. The world’s largest democracy deserves a nomination process that is modern, fair, and inclusive, where the burden of proof is on the state to justify exclusion, not on citizens to prove their right to participate.
- The EC should work towards a citizen-friendly nomination process that would end the bureaucratic red tape around disqualifications for blank columns, wrong payment modes, misplaced signatures, misspelt names and typos, no dues certificates or a delayed oath. It should work towards a simplified process that removes the possibility of using procedure as politics.

❖ State enhances sugarcane FRP by ₹100; farmers call off strike

Context: Farmers will now get ₹3,300 per tonne, excluding harvesting and transportation cost, against the FRP of ₹3,200 fixed by the Centre. State government and sugar mills will contribute ₹50 each.

- After marathon meetings with farmer leaders and representatives of sugar mills, chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the Karnataka government announced an enhancement in the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane by ₹100 per tonne. Following this, farmers withdrew their protest.
- **The farmers will now get ₹3,300 per tonne (excluding harvesting and transportation cost) as against the FRP of ₹3,200 per tonne that has been fixed by the Centre. In the increased amount, the State government and the sugar mills will contribute ₹50 each.**

All-party delegation

- The State government also decided to take an all-party delegation, which will also include farmers and sugar mill representatives, to the Centre to press for **increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for sugar, the FRP for sugarcane, the limit for export of sugar and ethanol production and distribution.** The decision came after nearly seven-hour meetings with representatives of mills and farmer leaders.
- The farmers have been protesting since October 30 seeking an increase in the FRP across **sugarcane growing districts of Belagavi, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Haveri, and Kalaburagi.**
- **In May, the Centre announced a FRP of ₹3,550 per tonne at the sugar recovery rate of 10.5%.**
- As many as 81 mills operate in Karnataka, of which **one is in the public sector**, while 11 are in the cooperative sector, and the rest are in the private sector.
- The State government estimates that about 6 crore tonnes of cane will be crushed this year as against the 5.6 crore tonnes last year.
- “Both farmer leaders and sugar mill representatives have explained their problem owing to the Centre’s policy. The farmers are opposed to the FRP fixed at ₹3,100 for sugar recovery rate at 10.25% and ₹3,200 at the rate of 11.25%. We have decided to take a delegation to the Centre to discuss the issue. **Though the sugarcane yield differs from district to district, the ₹100 hike per tonne will be implemented uniformly,**” the Chief Minister told presspersons.
- He said that the **sugar mills have agreed to pay ₹3,250 per tonne as the FRP, and that the government will contribute another ₹50 per tonne. “Based on recovery rate, the FRP will be fixed in different districts.**
- The sugar mills have asked the government to revisit the proposal to impose 60 paise tax per unit on the power being sold by them, and will consider it.
- Farmers have urged the government to open a laboratory to check the recovery rate in front of sugar mills. They have also pointed out dues towards farmers by some factories.

❖ 'T.N.'s vision for inclusive economy will make blueprint for nation'

Context: In 2047, when India marks its centenary year of Independence, Tamil Nadu's vision for sustainability and an inclusive economy will also become the blueprint for the nation, said Srivats Ram, former chairman of CII Tamil Nadu and managing director of Wheels India, in Chennai.

- The State has been at the forefront of renewable energy for many years. "At present, we are **third in terms of the total renewable energy [capacity] in the country.**
- The State is **first in terms of wind capacity.** It could continue to focus on this sector, and this will [benefit] the manufacturing ecosystem," he said.
- He said the southern States are advancing in tandem. "We can make significant progress by working on sustainability and towards enabling future growth. Sustainability is a profitable venture, something that is not spoken about," he added.

❖ 10 Bills reserved for President, 170 granted assent: Raj Bhavan

Context: Clarification seeks to counter 'unfounded and factually incorrect' claims that the Tamil Nadu Governor has been delaying assent to Bills passed by State Assembly.

- The Raj Bhavan said Governor R.N. Ravi had reserved 10 Bills for consideration by the President, as they were contrary to the provisions of the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations framed under an Act of Parliament. They were "considered beyond the remit of the State Legislature", it said in a statement.
- The Governor had granted assent to 81% of the 211 Bills received as of October 31, 2025, the statement added.
- The 10 Bills were initially withheld by the Governor, and the decisions were conveyed to the State government. However, they were adopted again by the Assembly and submitted to the Governor, according to the statement.
- The clarification was issued after "certain unfounded and factually incorrect allegations" were made in the public domain that the Governor was delaying assent to Bills passed by the Assembly, the release said.
- Between September 18, 2021, and October 31, 2025, a total of 211 Bills were received by the Governor, of which 170 were granted assent, while 27 were reserved for the President's consideration. Of the 27 Bills, 16 were reserved for the President's consideration "at the request of the State government". While four Bills were returned, two were withdrawn by the government.
- Of the 170 Bills cleared, 73 were granted assent within a week; 61 within a month; 27 within three months; and nine after three months. Eight Bills were received in the last week of October this year, and they were under consideration, the Raj Bhavan said. These details, it said, would "demonstrate the falsity of the claims made on social media and in the public domain".
- The Governor had examined every Bill with due diligence to uphold the rule of law and protect the interests of the people of Tamil Nadu, the Raj Bhavan said. He had always acted in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, and had been performing his constitutional duties with "utmost sincerity, transparency, and commitment, and with complete fairness, diligence, and respect for democratic processes", it added.

❖ Trump hints at possible India visit next year, calls Modi a 'great man'

Quad summit: India will host leaders from Australia, Japan, and the United States for the Quad summit in New Delhi after the 2024 summit was held in the U.S. However, the dates for the summit are yet to be announced.

- Meanwhile, President Trump once again claimed that India has stopped buying from Russia.
- Mr. Trump imposed 25% reciprocal tariffs and an additional 25% levies for New Delhi's purchases of Russian oil, bringing the total duties imposed on India to 50%. India had described the U.S. action as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable".
- Mr. Trump also reiterated his claim that he stopped the war between India and Pakistan in May using trade.

❖ HAL inks \$1-billion deal with GE Aerospace for 113 fighter jet engines

Context: Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) on Friday sealed a \$1-billion deal with American defence major GE Aerospace to procure 113 jet engines for its Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

- The firming up of the deal came notwithstanding a downturn in India-U.S. relations after the Trump administration slapped a 50% tariff on Indian goods.
- Under the deal, the delivery of the **F404-GE-IN20 engines will begin from 2027 and the supplies will have to be completed by 2032**, officials said.
- The size of the deal is learnt to be close to \$1 billion (approximately ₹8,870 crore). HAL said it has entered into an agreement with General Electric Company to acquire the engines and support package for execution of 97 **Light Combat Aircraft Mk1A programme**.
- The Defence Ministry in September had finalised a ₹62,370-crore deal with the state-owned aerospace major to procure 97 **Tejas MK-1A light combat aircraft for the Indian Air Force**.

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