



**DR. RAJKUMAR ACADEMY  
BENGALURU**

AN INITIATIVE BY DR. RAJKUMAR FAMILY

# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

**DECEMBER WEEK 2**

08-12-2025 TO 13-12-2025

**CRYPTO  
TRANSACTIONS  
CROSSED  
₹51,000 CR 2024-  
25 IN INDIA**

**INDIA POST'S  
DHURVA  
FRAMEWORK**

**NATIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE  
GRID (NATGRID)**

**CITIZENSHIP  
UNDER CAA**

**PRODUCTION-  
LINKED  
INCENTIVE (PLI)**

**❖ With only 26% deaths having certified cause, Karnataka keen to enhance rate**

**Context: Following concerns that only 26.73% of registered deaths in Karnataka currently have medically certified causes — a major gap affecting disease surveillance and health planning — the State Health Department has issued a set of directives to improve the coverage and quality of Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) reporting in the State.**

- In a circular issued by Harsh Gupta, Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, the department noted that reliable cause-specific mortality data is critical. The MCCD system, mandated under the Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 (as amended in 2023), is intended to provide cause-specific mortality data at the State and national level.
- Mr. Gupta told The Hindu that the recent amendment to the Karnataka Registration of Births and Deaths Rules, 2024, effective from January 16, 2025, has made it mandatory for all government and private health facilities to issue a certificate of the cause of death in Form 4 for hospital deaths and Form 4A for deaths occurring at home or other locations.

**Through e-JanMa**

- All registered hospitals — public and private — must issue medical cause of death certificates in Form 4 for hospital deaths and submit them electronically through e-JanMa to the local registrar, while also providing a copy to the next of kin.
- For deaths occurring outside medical institutions — homes, transit, prisons, old-age homes and similar facilities — attending doctors must issue Form 4A for free.
- Hospitals are also required to report monthly death counts and submit “nil reports” where no deaths occur.
- Local registrars must ensure that every reported death (Form 2) is accompanied by a cause-of-death certificate.
- For non-hospital deaths, priority for issuing the certificate is assigned to the doctor who treated the deceased during the final illness, any doctor familiar with the patient’s medical history or government medical officers (PHCs, CHCs, taluk and district hospitals).
- In medico-legal cases, the certifying doctor must provide the cause of death following an inquest or autopsy. Deaths must be reported and certified within 21 days across rural and urban areas. Private hospitals must report deaths occurring under their care to the respective registrar.
- To ensure compliance and improve data quality, each district will establish a review and monitoring committee headed by the District Health Officer, with experts from clinical and public health departments. The committee will meet monthly to review samples of certificates, support local registrars and hospitals, and organise training.

**Context: After a dip during the pandemic years, over 13,000 new families have taken up sericulture in Karnataka over the past five years, contributing a 43% rise in cocoon production and a nearly 20% jump in raw silk output.**

- Several factors including support from the government, better cocoon prices and better availability of high-quality chawki (carefully reared young silkworms essential for good yields) have helped the industry regain momentum and expanded mulberry cultivation to 1.18 lakh hectares in 2024–25, the largest area under sericulture in 15 years.
- Farmers also believe that demand for Karnataka silk has strengthened after the Centre banned China silk, which earlier dominated the market because of its lower cost. “The price of silk is around ₹7,000 to ₹7,500 a kg now, and in the coming months it may touch ₹9,000. During COVID, it had fallen below ₹2,000,” M. Pemme Kumar, a sericulturist said.
- “Karnataka’s traditional silk belts- Ramanagara and Sidlaghatta which are known for producing some of India’s best cocoons- had witnessed farmers gradually exit sericulture, moving to horticulture over the past decade, largely due to volatile prices and competition from cheaper imported silk. The ban on China silk has brought some stability back to the market,” Bhupat Rajan, another grower said.
- Officials from the Central Silk Board, however, believe that Chinese imports were not the primary reason for the earlier price crash, noting that the price of Chinese silk remains around ₹5,000 a kg.
- The growers pointed out that government support has revived the industry significantly. “The State government raised the incentive for bivoltine cocoon producers from ₹10 to ₹30 a kg in the 2024–25 Budget. This attracted many growers,” Shantamma Nagaraju, a sericulturist said.

#### Reelers in decline

- While demand has strengthened and prices have recovered from the pandemic lows, the sector continues to grapple with a shrinking number of reelers, a link in the value chain whose decline has itself contributed to the higher price of raw silk in recent years, the growers said.
- While the State government had announced an annual subsidy of ₹12 crore for raw silk reelers through the Karnataka Minority Development Corporation during last year’s Budget, many, specifically younger generations, are no longer entering into reeling because of low and irregular incomes, demanding working conditions and lack of mechanisation.
- “Reeling, a labour-intensive process of extracting fine silk fibre from cocoons, is struggling to survive as this altogether lacks machinery and relies on skill, precision and hours of manual labour to produce high-grade yarn,” a grower said.

## ❖ State revises maize procurement norms; raises cap to 50 quintals per farmer

**Context: Following protests by maize growers over procurement limits, the State government on Sunday revised its order on Minimum Support Price (MSP) operations, increasing the maximum quantity that can be purchased from each farmer to 50 quintals.**

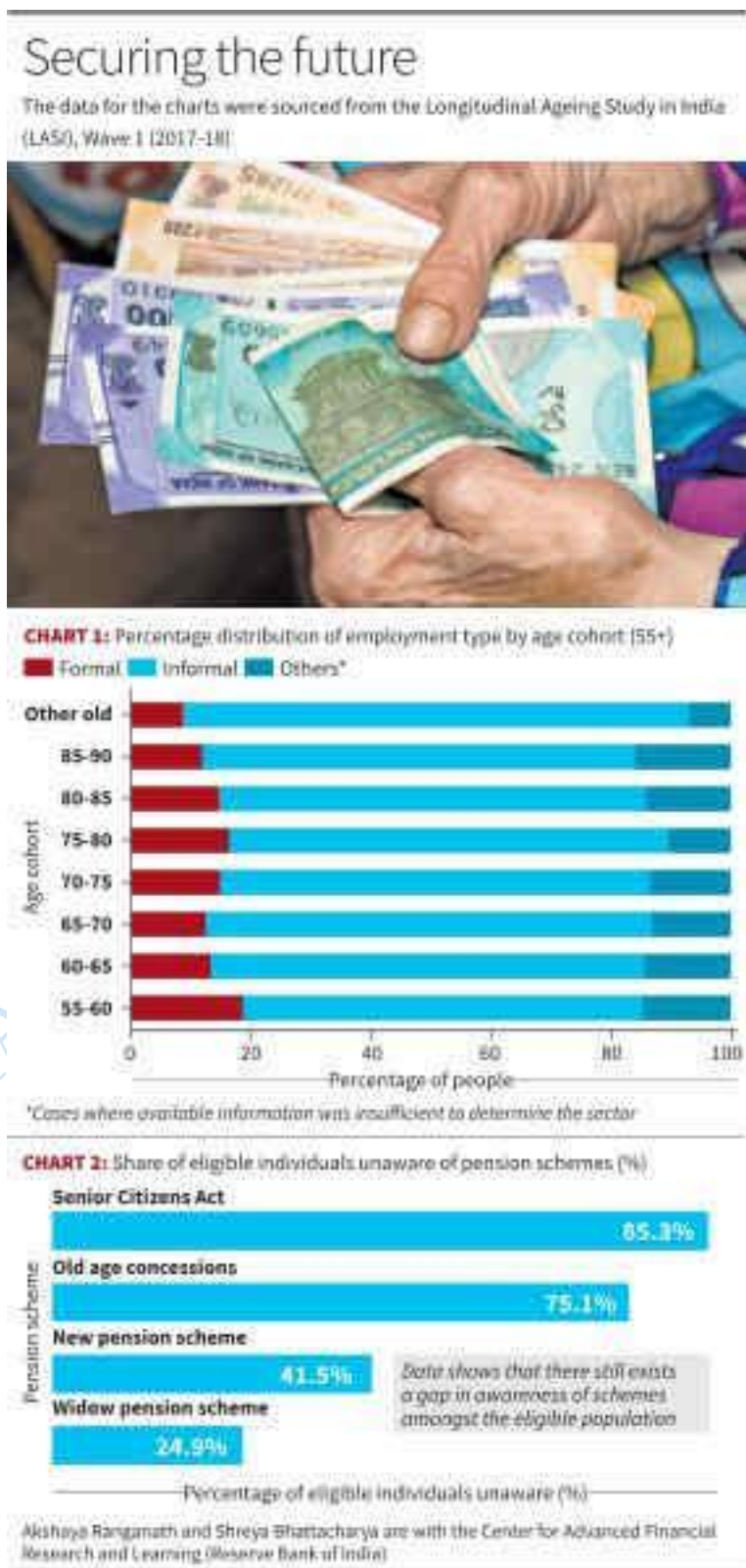
- A corrigendum issued in this regard stated that the earlier cap of 20 quintals per farmer has now been enhanced. Procurement would be based on landholding data available on the FRUITS platform, with up to 12 quintals per acre allowed and a ceiling of 50 quintals per farmer at the support price of ₹2,400 per quintal. The order states that priority will be accorded to procurement through Primary Agricultural Credit Societies located near distilleries.
- The decision comes after maize growers staged demonstrations alleging “unfair treatment” in procurement operations and demanded wider coverage under the MSP window.
- The government had recently permitted poultry feed manufacturers to directly buy maize from growers. In a separate order issued on December 4, the government had allowed poultry feed producers to procure maize directly from farmers at MSP rates for the 2025–26 kharif marketing season. The move is expected to ensure better price realisation, reduce intermediary involvement, and expand marketing channels for growers.
- The decision followed a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah where industry representatives were urged to source an estimated five lakh tonnes of maize.
- The Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders’ Association has committed to initially procure 5,000 tonnes with a 20% advance payment.
- Procurement will adhere to MSP quality specifications with a maximum moisture content of 12% for poultry feed suitability. The government said the latest measure would run parallel with procurement by the Karnataka State Co-operative Marketing Federation, which supplies maize to distilleries.

## ❖ The evolution of pension reforms in India

**Context: There has been a gradual but decisive shift from a welfare-based social assistance to a more participatory inclusion framework.**

- India’s rapidly ageing population is emerging as a pivotal pension challenge. Today, over 153 million Indians are aged over 60. This is projected to double to 347 million by 2050. While a small section of older Indians has benefited from the rise of formal sector retirement, more than 88% of today’s senior citizens continue to work, in the sprawling informal economy, without access to pensions or reliable social security rather than retiring (Chart 1). We revisit the evolution of pension schemes for financial inclusivity of the Indian informal sector.

- The Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) is a social assistance programme launched in 1995 for persons aged over 65, living below the poverty line (BPL). Subsequent changes expanded scheme eligibility and strengthened financial support, leading to a significant rise in enrolment. It is a first among national-level efforts taken to provide a direct, regular source of income to the older population in the unorganised and economically vulnerable section of society. Similarly, formal sector government employees were covered under the government-sponsored Old Pension Scheme (OPS).
- Research finds that unlike social benefit schemes, contributory pension schemes in developing countries encourage household formal savings behaviour. Announced in Budget 2015-16, the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) is a contributory pension scheme for individuals aged 18-40, where periodic contributions are made to a pension account. At retirement, the accumulated amount, including returns, is disbursed, with the government guaranteeing a minimum pension if returns fall short. Taking into consideration the seasonal nature of informal sector income, especially agriculture, the APY allows for not just monthly but also quarterly and half-yearly instalments.



- For the formal sector, OPS was replaced by the contributory-model New Pension Scheme (NPS) in 2004. The NPS also has a corporate sector model which extends to all corporate sector employees with a savings account. Recently, the NPS 2.0 was launched allowing total allotment to 100% equity and a flexible multiple scheme framework (MSF) — an attractive change for younger high-risk, high-reward-type investors. The APY and NPS models form a comprehensive long-term financial security framework that ensures inclusion in the formal financial system, despite the sectoral divide.

- The Labour Codes introduced a uniform definition of ‘wages’, requiring that basic pay make up at least 50% of total earnings. This closes a long-standing loophole that allowed employers to shrink basic pay by inflating allowances. With pension, gratuity, and social security benefits now calculated on a higher base, workers stand to gain stronger financial protection.
- The progression of pension schemes in India reflects a hierarchical pattern in which each stage builds on the needs identified before it. Through an equity and social-welfare lens, the government first introduced IGNOAPS and OPS to meet the basic needs of older adults. Having secured social protection, the focus shifted to more sophisticated goals such as financial inclusion and savings and investment behaviour through the NPS and the NPS 2.0. To bridge sectoral divide, similar behavioural nudges were extended to informal-sector workers via the APY.
- Many of these schemes are explicitly targeted at BPL individuals, and are therefore designed to extend coverage to informal-sector workers who lack access to formal retirement provisions. However, there still exists a gap in awareness of schemes amongst the eligible population. Our findings from the Longitudinal Ageing Survey of India (LASI) show that as of 2017-18, 42% of individuals aged over 55 were still unaware of NPS and its eligibility criteria and requirements (Chart 2).
- To tackle limited awareness and fragmented access to welfare programs, the e-SHRAM portal was launched as a national database for informal sector workers. Through this, workers can register and obtain information about social security schemes for which they are eligible. Our analysis of the LASI data shows that over age 55, about 75.6% of women and 68% of men work in this sector.
- While this is a significant step towards integrating the informal workforce into the country’s formal social protection system, realising e-SHRAM’s full potential depends on overcoming challenges related to registration, awareness, and effective disbursement of benefits. For instance, registration requires Aadhaar to phone number linkage and a savings bank account, which is susceptible to errors of exclusion. Moreover, according to the Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey of India (2022-23), 63% of the elderly population do not know how to use the Internet. This risks leaving the most economically vulnerable among them behind.
- The evolution of pension schemes in India has seen a gradual but decisive shift from a welfare-based social assistance to a more participatory inclusion framework. While the challenges of unawareness still remain, initiatives such as e-SHRAM signal a data-driven approach to policy targeted at the older age population. The trajectory of these continuing revisions and initiatives will pave the way for inclusive policies and dignify the contributions of the elderly in their later years of life.

### ❖ U.S. official begins five-day India visit to advance strategic partnership

**Context: A day after Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to India, the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Allison Hooker, started her five-day visit on Sunday. The visit will cover New Delhi and Bengaluru and include meetings between Ms. Hooker and senior Indian officials, including Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.**

- “Under Secretary Hooker’s visit will focus on advancing the U.S.-India strategic partnership, deepening economic and commercial ties, including increasing American exports, and fostering collaboration in emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and space exploration,” said the Department of State in an announcement.
- During her stay in New Delhi, Under Secretary Hooker will participate in the Foreign Office Consultations with Foreign Secretary Misri. Her discussion will include regional security, economic cooperation and “shared priorities” in the Indo-Pacific, said the official announcement.
- Ms. Hooker took charge as the Under Secretary of state earlier this year and ever since has held a number of meetings with officials from the region. India was supposed to host the Quad summit in 2025, but the summit meeting has not been scheduled so far, and there is no official information about it.
- In Bengaluru, Ms. Hooker will visit the Indian Space Research Organisation and meet leading figures from India’s space, energy and technology sectors with the goal to “promote innovation in U.S.-India research partnership and explore opportunities for expanded cooperation,” the official announcement said.
- The Foreign Office Consultation comes against the backdrop of the continuation of the penalty tariffs by the U.S. on India. Latest reports suggest that India has made a considerable reduction in the purchase of Russian energy, though relations with Russia remain on track, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 5 describing the bilateral relationship as important as the “Pole Star” (Dhruva Tara).

❖ **‘It is essential to nurture inheritance and pass it on to future generations’**

**Context: The world is indeed becoming “more multi-polar”, which makes a compelling case for “deeper multilateralism”, and collectively, prosperity can only come through mutual respect and understanding, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.**

- In his address at the opening ceremony of a key UNESCO meeting on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) at the Red Fort complex here, he also told delegates from various countries that in the “shared quest for progress and prosperity”, it is essential to nurture inheritance, build on it and pass it on to the future generations.
- The 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage will take place at the Red Fort from December 8 to 13.
- Mr. Jaishankar underlined that India, besides being home to many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, has itself undertaken many preservation and conservation projects across the world. A key dimension of that engagement is preservation of intangible heritage.
- “The world is a fundamentally pluralistic landscape, a landscape whose richness lies in its diversity and intricacy. Far from being flat, it has a vast range of specificities and characteristics,” he said. “What humankind has generated over the centuries will only be fully appreciated when that heritage is carefully nurtured,” he said.
- He emphasised that challenges in that context arise when efforts are made to “dominate, to sideline, to dismiss or even to erode”.
- But as “decolonisation” took place and the world began returning to its “natural diversity”, political and economic rebalancing started to unfold, Mr. Jaishankar said.

- “Voices across geographies that were suppressed found expression again. But that process will remain incomplete until there is also cultural rebalancing,” he added.

### ❖ **Cheetah cub from Kuno run over by vehicle in Gwalior**

- A cheetah cub died on Sunday in Madhya Pradesh’s Gwalior district after being hit by a vehicle on the Agra-Mumbai National Highway (NH-46), making it the second death of a big cat at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in just two days.
- Two 20-month-old Indian-born male cubs, offspring of the South African female cheetah named Gamini, had ventured out of Kuno’s boundaries, and were being tracked by a cheetah tracking team and local forest staff, when one of them was hit by a speeding vehicle. The incident took place around 6.30 a.m. when the two cubs were crossing the NH-46 near Ghatigaon in Gwalior.

### ❖ **Rajnath unveils border infrastructure projects**

**Context: Minister inaugurates 125 BRO projects across Ladakh, J&K and seven States, describes them as a testament to the government’s commitment to border infrastructure under vision of Viksit Bharat.**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday inaugurated 125 strategically vital infrastructure projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) from Ladakh, the highest number ever dedicated to the nation in one event.
- The Defence Ministry said the projects, worth around ₹5,000 crore, span the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir and seven States — Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Mizoram. The initiatives comprise 28 roads, 93 bridges, and four other key assets, marking the largest value inauguration in the BRO’s history.
- Addressing the ceremony held on the Darbuk Shyok Daulat Beg Oldie Road at the Shyok Tunnel site, Mr. Singh described the projects as a testament to the government’s commitment to border infrastructure under the vision of Viksit Bharat.
- The 920-metre Shyok Tunnel, a major highlight, is engineered to provide all-weather connectivity to one of the world’s most challenging terrains. He said the tunnel would significantly improve mobility, security and rapid deployment capabilities during extreme winters, when the region experiences avalanches and heavy snowfall.
- Mr. Singh also virtually inaugurated the Galwan War Memorial, built to honour the courage and sacrifice of Indian soldiers. Emphasising the multi-dimensional value of robust border connectivity, he said such infrastructure strengthened national security, enhanced logistics movement, boosted tourism, and generated employment while reinforcing people’s faith in development.
- Referring to Operation Sindoor, the Minister credited strong connectivity for enabling the armed forces to conduct the operation with precision and coordination. He praised the synergy between the forces, civil administration and border residents, describing it as the “unique identity” of the nation.
- Mr. Singh also highlighted the BRO’s humanitarian work in Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Jammu and Kashmir, and acknowledged its technological advancements, including indigenous Class 70 modular bridges developed under Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

- Citing a record BRO expenditure of ₹16,690 crore in FY 2024 25 and an enhanced outlay for FY 2025 26, he reiterated the government's commitment to strengthening border infrastructure and achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing.
- In the past two years, 356 BRO projects have been dedicated to the nation, underlining the organisation's capability across diverse terrains.

**❖ National intelligence grid gains traction as Central agencies, police scour for information**

**Context: The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), a platform for the police and investigating agencies to securely access government and private databases in real time, is getting around 45,000 requests a month, government officials told.**

- The platform, accessible only to security agencies, became operational last year after first being conceptualised in 2009 in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.
- At the recent conference of Directors-General of Police, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Raipur, the law enforcement agencies, including State police, were asked to scale up the use of NATGRID in all investigations.
- The Union Home Ministry has asked States to liberally use the platform to access datasets, which include details of driving licence, Aadhaar registration, airline data, bank records, and also details of social media accounts which share posts on a particular issue.
- Access to NATGRID is now available to Superintendent of Police-rank officers. Earlier, it was only meant to be accessible to 10 Central agencies, such as the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, National Investigation Agency, Enforcement Directorate, Financial Intelligence Unit, Narcotics Control Bureau, and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence.
- Several State police officials told that they faced certain hurdles while accessing the information on the platform.

**Seamless flow**

The National Intelligence Grid was conceptualised in 2009. It became operational last year

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media accounts which share posts on a particular issue

■ Access to NATGRID is now available to Superintendent of Police-rank officers. Earlier, it was only meant to be accessible to 10 Central agencies

**Time consuming**

- An official said that logging on the portal required a lot of time, while another official said they had to wait longer to get the desired information, even though the platform is supposed to provide real-time data.
- The platform, which had been in the works for over a decade and was first envisaged under Congress leader P. Chidambaram, received a fresh momentum under Home Minister Amit Shah in 2019. Under Mr. Shah, the differences between various security agencies were ironed out, and the application was made accessible to even the State police.
- The government is taking several steps to enhance security and maintain the sanctity of data in the wake of repeated cyberattack attempts on critical infrastructure in the country, official sources said.
- In 2024, India witnessed over 20.41 lakh cybersecurity-related incidents, the highest number of incidents since 2020.

- “Instead of security agencies seeking data from multiple sources, NATGRID provides the information on a single platform. The confidentiality of the user is maintained, and the registration of a first information report (FIR) is not necessary. Information can be secured to join the dots during an investigation or to develop intelligence,” said another government official.

### ❖ Top agricultural research body urges varsities to start courses in natural farming

**Context: Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Director-General M.L. Jat has written to the Vice-Chancellors of all State and Central agriculture universities, as well as universities with agriculture departments, urging them to launch undergraduate and postgraduate courses and research programmes in natural farming.**

- Though natural farming was already offered as an elective subject in various institutions and four universities had dedicated courses on the subject, it is the first time that the ICAR has urged all affiliated colleges and State government institutions to introduce courses on the topic.
- In the letter, Dr. Jat said natural farming had emerged as a subject of national importance, aligned with India’s strategic priorities for sustainable agriculture and farmer welfare. He said the B.Sc. (Hons.) agriculture - natural farming programme, developed as per the Sixth Deans’ Committee recommendations and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 guidelines, has already been finalised, approved, and circulated to all agricultural universities. “Some universities have successfully initiated this programme from the academic year 2023-24, marking a transformative milestone in agricultural higher education. I hope remaining universities will introduce this course by next academic year,” he said.
- On strengthening postgraduate education and advanced research on the subject, he said that given the expanding national demand for chemical-free food systems, resilient agro-ecosystems, soil health restoration, and low-emission farming, it was imperative that the State agricultural universities, deemed universities, and Central agricultural universities develop PG programmes in natural farming and allied domains.

**KPSC SADHANA**  
ONE COURSE MANY KARNATAKA STATE GOVT EXAMS

**ADMISSIONS OPEN**

**AND MANY MORE EXAMS!**

- RTO/MVI
- CTI
- PSI
- REVENUE INSPECTOR
- ASST. ENGINEER
- SUB-REGISTRAR
- EXCISE SI
- AO/AAO
- STASTICAL INSPECTOR
- ACCOUNTS ASST.
- FDA/SDA
- PDO

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GENERAL KANNADA  
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**PSI Paper 1**  
ESSAY  
TRANSLATION  
PRECISE WRITING

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## ❖ T.N. urges CWMA against permitting projects not recognised by CWDT

**Context: The Tamil Nadu government on Monday urged the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) to initiate appropriate steps against Karnataka, which has been consistently facilitating cultivation by implementing projects that have not been recognized by the final verdict of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT), as well as by the judgment of the Supreme Court (SC).**

- An official release issued by the Tamil Nadu government said Secretary of the Water Resources Department, J. Jayakanthan, and Chairman of the Cauvery Technical Cell, R. Subramanian, represented Tamil Nadu in the 46th meeting of the CWMA chaired by Chairman S.K. Haldar and made the submission.
- Tamil Nadu also urged the CWMA to get information about these projects, it said.
- Officials representing Tamil Nadu also requested the CWMA to ensure that Biligundlu received 7.35 tmc of water due for December, in view of the storage and considerable inflow into reservoirs in Karnataka.
- They informed that the storage in Mettur dam was 87.55 on December 8 and that inflow was 4,282 cusecs and the outflow was 2,986 cusecs for drinking water and industrial purposes.
- The CWMA was also informed that the crops have been affected due to the heavy rains received in districts in the Cauvery delta region last month and due to cyclone Ditwah in the first week of December.
- Officials were involved in ascertaining the actual loss incurred by farmers.

## ❖ 'Provide assurances' that Indians won't be targeted 'selectively': MEA to China

**Context: Reaffirming India's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Ministry of External Affairs on Monday urged Chinese authorities to "provide assurances" that Indian citizens will not be targeted "selectively" while they "travel" or "transit" through China.**

- The remarks from the Official Spokesperson of the Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, came approximately a fortnight after an Indian citizen was detained at the Shanghai International Airport, where Chinese authorities refused to recognise her Indian passport as she hailed from Arunachal Pradesh.
- In addition, the Ministry advised Indian nationals to exercise "due discretion" while transiting through China.
- "We expect the Chinese authorities to provide assurances that Indian citizens transiting through Chinese airports will not be selectively targeted, arbitrarily detained or harassed and that regulations governing international air travel would be respected by the Chinese side," said Mr. Jaiswal. "The MEA would advise Indian nationals to exercise due discretion while travelling to or transiting through China."
- Official sources said that Monday's statement which came during a weekly press briefing indicated that New Delhi is displeased by China's repeated assertions over Arunachal Pradesh. An official source said Monday's statement was aimed at reminding China of India's "firm" position on Arunachal Pradesh, which includes the ancient Buddhist region of Tawang as well as vast segments of the Eastern Himalayas.

- The possibility of harassment of Indian nationals in Chinese airports had grown after Pema Thongdok of Arunachal Pradesh announced on social media on November 23 that she was detained at Shanghai airport for “over 18 hours”.

### ❖ **Putin’s India visit: China seeks stronger trilateral ties**

**Context: China reacted positively to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to India, framing the three countries as an important part of the Global South and said sound trilateral ties are conducive to regional and global peace and stability, besides their own national interests.**

- “China, Russia and India are emerging economies and important members of the Global South,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing in Beijing, reacting for the first time to Mr. Putin’s high-profile visit to New Delhi last week and his interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Mr. Guo said that the three countries maintaining sound relations are not only in line with their own interests but also conducive to regional and global peace. Mr. Putin’s visit was watched closely, considering Beijing’s close and strong ties with Moscow.

### ❖ **RS clears Bill to impose cess on pan masala units**

**Context: The Rajya Sabha passed the Health Security and National Security Cess Bill after a debate, where Opposition members argued that the Bill is an encroachment upon the rights of States.**

- In her reply to the debate, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said cess as the percentage of the gross tax revenue during the erstwhile United Progressive Alliance regime was 7% and in 2025-26, it was 6.1%. “Far lower cess is being collected now than what was collected under the UPA,” she said, countering the charges that the revenues collected by the Centre as cess were not divided with the States.

#### **‘Clarify on allocation’**

- The Bill seeks to impose a cess on manufacturing units of tobacco product pan masala, which will be used to augment expenditure on national security and public health. During the debate, the Opposition asked the government to clarify how allocation will be made to States and Union Territories from the cess as health is a State subject.
- AAP member Ashok Kumar Mittal said the share of cess had increased in the revenue collection of the Central government. “This is causing so much loss to States. The August 25 report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General says the Central government has failed to transfer ₹3.69 lakh crore worth of cess collection to intended reserve,” he said, and added that Section 21 of the Bill provided that any court would take cognisance of a crime only when the commissioner of that department permitted it.
- Trinamool Congress member Saket Gokhale and CPI(M) member John Brittas too expressed similar concerns. DMK member Kanimozhi N.V.N. Somu said Tamil Nadu would never allow the State’s rights, revenues or autonomy to slowly get chipped away under the guise of reforms.

## ❖ India ramps up humanitarian aid for cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

**Context: As part of the ongoing Operation Sagar Bandhu, launched to provide urgent search and rescue and humanitarian assistance & disaster relief (HADR) to Sri Lanka, the Indian Navy has deployed four additional ships — INS Gharial, LCU 54, LCU 51 and LCU 57 — to deliver relief material to regions affected by Cyclone Ditwah.**

- Earlier, INS Vikrant, INS Udaygiri and INS Sukanya had extended critical support, including relief supplies and heli-borne search and rescue operations. According to the Indian Navy, the three LCUs reached Colombo in the morning of December 7. INS Gharial was slated to arrive at Trincomalee on Monday to continue the humanitarian mission.

## ❖ 'Fire count gives a skewed picture of stubble burning'

**Context: A research outfit, iForest, studied multiple satellite datasets that said while government claims over a 90% reduction in Punjab and Haryana, burnt-area measurements show only a 30% decline.**

- The use of 'fire counts,' — satellite-derived estimates of active fires — to gauge the extent of stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana may be misleading.
- The Environment Ministry has repeatedly claimed that fire counts in Punjab and Haryana fell by 92% and 90% respectively since 2021, citing this as evidence of a sharp decline in stubble burning and proof of the effectiveness of measures in the two states.
- However, when data from a different satellite were used to compute another parameter called 'burnt area' — the actual land area affected by fire — the reduction was more gradual, around 30%, falling from about 31,500 sq. km in 2022 to 19,700 sq. km in 2025 (as of November 25), says a study by iForest, a research outfit, that analysed data from multiple satellites used to track stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana.
- "The government should stop using fire counts as a proxy for gauging a decline or increase in stubble burning," said iForest CEO Chandra Bhushan, adding, "The smoke that is detected by satellite sensors offers better representation of the land burned. Small fires are often missed by satellites."
- Currently, all of India's official estimates rely on data provided by the Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modelling from Space (CREAMS) of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) and are built on NASA's Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on the Terra and Aqua satellites and the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) on the Suomi-NPP satellites.
- These satellites orbit earth's poles and observe India only at fixed times of the day, from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. Their sensors are only able to capture active fires and unable to compute the actual number of fires over, say, a 24-hour period.
- "These monitoring gaps have far-reaching implications. Fires missed by polar-satellite sensors lead to underestimated emissions, mischaracterised aerosol and particulate-matter loads, and incorrect simulations of air-quality dynamics across India," a press statement from iForest noted.

- To arrive at their burnt area estimates, iForest used data from the Multi-Spectral Instrument of the Sentinel satellite. Though also a polar-orbiting satellite, passing over India only about once in five days and whose data is available only with a lag of eight to 15 days, it is the only one of its kind able to calculate 'burnt area' at a resolution of 100m by 100m.
- Another set of satellite data used in the analysis was the Meteosat 8 and 9, with the sensors Spinning Enhanced Visible and Infrared Imager (SEVIRI). Unlike the other satellites, this one is 'geostationary,' meaning it continuously looks at the same spot and can, thus, provide data every 15 minutes.
- "While it might not provide accurate information on fire counts, this satellite data clearly showed that since 2022, most of the fires were concentrated in the evenings - outside the detection time of the polar satellites. Which means that the true number of fires in the state has been undercounted," said Mr Bhushan.

### ❖ 7 states contribute more to total taxes than their share from devolutions

**Context: Seven States contribute a higher share in total tax collections in the country than their share in what they get back from the Centre as devolution, an analysis of data shared by the government in Parliament shows.**

- Data shared by the Ministry of Finance to the Rajya Sabha showed that Uttar Pradesh accounted for 4.6% of the total tax collected in the country between 2020-21 and 2024-25, but received 15.8% of taxes shared by the Centre during this period.
- That while U.P. had the highest positive difference, where the share in devolution exceeded the share in taxes collected, Maharashtra had the biggest negative difference, where the share in taxes collected exceeded the share in devolution. Maharashtra contributed 36.1% of total revenue but received 6.65% of the Centre's tax devolution in the period 2020-21 and 2024-25.
- The other States with negative differences include Karnataka, whose share in total taxes collected exceeded its share in devolutions by 8.8 percentage points, Haryana (4.3 pps), Gujarat (3.5 pps), Tamil Nadu (2.95 pps), Telangana (1.4 pps) and Goa (0.04 pps). On the other hand, Bihar's share in devolution exceeded its contribution to total taxes by 8 pps, Madhya Pradesh's by 5.5 pps, and Rajasthan by 3.55 pps.

### ❖ 'Crypto transactions crossed ₹51,000 cr.in 2024-25 in India'

**Context: The value of cryptocurrency transactions in India crossed ₹51,000 crore in 2024-25, up 41% over the previous year, an analysis of data shared with Parliament showed.**

- The data, shared by the Ministry of Finance in reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, showed that the government collected ₹511.8 crore as Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on crypto transactions in 2024-25. As the rate of TCS is 1% on every transaction, this means the value of total transactions that year stood at ₹51,180 crore.

- Under the Finance Act 2022, the government had introduced a provision in the Income Tax Act 1961, which has been retained in the I-T Act 2025, mandating a 1% TDS on any transfer of Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) or cryptocurrencies. The government had collected TCS worth ₹221.3 crore in 2022-23 and ₹362.7 crore in 2023-24, implying transactions worth ₹22,130 crore and ₹36,270 crore were conducted in those two years, respectively.

### ❖ What is the India Post's DHRUVA framework?

#### ✚ What will be the use cases of the Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address (DHRUVA)?

- The Department of Posts in May proposed a framework called Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address, or DHRUVA, which would allow for the standardisation and sharing of physical addresses through “labels” that resemble email addresses. DHRUVA will also help with “effective governance, inclusive service delivery, and enhanced user experience,” the postal department said. The government has put out a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023 to enable DHRUVA. This follows the release of DIGIPIN, a 10-digit alphanumeric pin code based on location coordinates.

#### ✚ What is DHRUVA?

- DHRUVA is being proposed as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) along the lines of Aadhaar and UPI. The service would allow a range of players — from logistics players like India Post to e-commerce and gig platforms like Amazon and Uber — to receive a “label” instead of users having to fill out an address. The label would then be authorised by the end user, which would then allow the platform in question to receive both the “descriptive” address, and the “geo-coded” DIGIPIN.
- DIGIPIN is an open-sourced location pin system, which India Post developed in-house. Every 12 square metre block in India has its own unique DIGIPIN. India Post hopes that, at least within the postal network, it can be useful in rural areas where precise descriptive addresses may not always be available (or possible), and would help mail delivery personnel with a precise location as a fallback, in addition to the PIN code.
- DHRUVA's ecosystem envisions entities like Address Service Providers who would generate a proxy address or label (like amit@dhruva); Address Validation Agencies who would be able to authenticate addresses; Address Information Agents who would act as intermediaries where users would be able to manage consent for providing their addresses; and a governance entity, along the lines of the National Payments Corporation of India, that would oversee the whole framework.

#### ✚ How will DHRUVA be used?

- India Post said that a key use case would be consent-based data sharing, where people tokenising their addresses (like UPI addresses tokenise bank accounts) can “regulate when their address information can be accessed, and the duration for which it can be accessed through a consent framework.” Another useful feature will be updating addresses, allowing users to shift routine deliveries seamlessly when they move houses.

- DHRUVA would thus allow users to share their addresses with digital platforms, public and private. The Department said that this would also help users with “service discovery,” by allowing intermediaries to show what doorstep services are available at their location. Since the architecture of such a framework would require data collection, Dvara Research, a non-profit policy research group focusing on issues like financial inclusion, said that a draft law would be needed to authorise it.

#### ✚ Will it help urban governance?

- Beni Chugh, who leads Dvara’s Future of Finance Initiative, argued that it was unclear if the system would be helpful in enabling urban governance, as the addresses it envisioned were linked to people, and not independently surveyed structures. “The current design relies on collecting personal information along the addresses, which, makes it necessary to have a consent-based mechanism for address sharing,” Ms. Chugh pointed out.
- “However, if citizens consented not to share addresses or generate address codes, it could result in incomplete datasets of built infrastructure or population. This could reduce the effectiveness of this DPI for urban planning and governance mechanisms. In most parts of the world, digitisation of addresses does not include personal information which preempts the need for users’ consent and allows for richer datasets.”



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## ❖ Citizenship under CAA only if claims verified: SC

**Context: Act provides rights to persecuted religious minorities, but their claims must clear official review, says court after petitioner flags panic among refugees from neighbouring nations after SIR began.**

- The Supreme Court said conferment of rights associated with Indian citizenship to people claiming to be religious minorities who fled persecution from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh and protected under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, would be wholly dependent on whether their claims turn out to be true.
- The court said that though the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, had introduced changes in favour of granting “enforceable rights” to persecuted religious minorities from these countries, every such claim would have to be enquired into and verified by the authorities.
- The oral observations from a Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi came on a petition filed by an NGO, Aatmadeep.
- The NGO submitted that these groups, especially those who had fled Bangladesh and were living in West Bengal, were petrified that the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls would render them stateless.
- Chief Justice Kant said the conferment of Indian citizenship was not a given for CAA applicants. They should fulfil certain conditions, and in due course, could apply for inclusion in the voters’ list, the Chief Justice said.
- The court, however, issued notice to the Election Commission and the Centre, seeking a response. It posted the case for hearing next week.
- The NGO, in its petition filed through advocate Anish Roy, **submitted that the proviso to Section 2(1)(b) of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) exempted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014, from being considered “illegal migrants”. These communities were Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians. Section 6B of the CAA allows these persons to apply for grant of certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation.** The NGO argued that **those who apply for naturalisation should not be deprived of citizens’ rights and privileges.**
- However, the petition said the authorities had delayed the issuance of the citizenship certificates. This, coupled with the non-recognition of acknowledgment receipts during the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR), has created a serious constitutional crisis.
- “The affected persons, already recognised by Parliament as persecuted minorities of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who entered India deserving protection and integration, are now exposed to the risk of statelessness, social exclusion and disenfranchisement,” the petition alleged.
- Chief Justice Kant said “You are claiming that you are entitled by virtue of these amended provisions in the CAA to become citizens of this country. But you have not been conferred citizenship so far... The amended provisions might have conferred some enforceable rights in your favour to seek citizenship, but each and every statutory requirement has to be determined, like, do you belong to any minority in that country;



### Fear of statelessness

Key issues raised in the petition regarding persecuted minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan

- The delay in issuing citizenship certificates, combined with the non-recognition of acknowledgment receipts during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR), has created a “serious constitutional crisis”
- The affected persons — recognised by Parliament as deserving protection and integration — are now exposed to the risk of statelessness, social exclusion, and disenfranchisement.
- The acknowledgment receipt generated upon online submission of an application for a certificate of naturalisation must be treated as valid provisional proof of pending citizenship determination, at least for the SIR

were you resident of the country of which minority were permitted to come to India; and in what capacity have you come to India.

- The CJI said if the government has made a law, there would be a mechanism that would follow to implement the law.

## ❖ State drafts law on menstrual leave

**Context: Even as the High Court is set to hear arguments on behalf of the State on Wednesday on its November 20 notification on menstrual leave, the State government has readied a Bill to give legislative teeth to the provisions.**

- In what is the first-ever such legislation, the State government has drafted the Karnataka Women Well Being Leave Bill, 2025. It provides menstrual leave not only for working women in the formal sector, but also for female students in educational institutions, transgenders, ASHAs, anganwadi, and midday meal personnel, and those working in mines. The Bill is expected to be introduced in the ongoing legislature session.
- Bill expands the scope of those eligible for leave, but also proposes setting up a Karnataka Women Well Being Authority
- In the first-ever such legislation proposed in the country, the Karnataka government has readied the Karnataka Women Well Being Leave Bill, 2025, which provides menstrual leave not only for working women in the formal sector but also for female students in educational institutions, transgenders, ASHAs, anganwadi, and midday meal personnel, and those working in mines.

### Guidelines on menstrual leave

■ Only <b>one day</b> of menstrual leave will be provided in a month, not exceeding <b>12 a year</b>	<b>Duties of employer</b>
■ The person cannot seek menstrual leave if she is on other leaves in the same period	Provide bio-degradable sanitary pads, menstrual cups, tampons or such material in restrooms
■ A person can work from home, work via videoconferencing, if she does not wish to take the leave and if the establishment has the facility	Ensure provision of waste dustbins, tissue paper, toilet papers, newspapers etc. for the safe and easy disposal of pads
■ Eligibility ends either on attaining menopause or by <b>52</b> , whichever is earlier	Observe May 28 as Menstrual Hygiene Day.
■ Unutilised menstrual leave <b>cannot be accumulated</b> and rolled into the subsequent months	

### Age criteria

- An earlier Government Order had covered the private sector, and last week the government brought its workers under its ambit. Instead of 18 as a minimum age criteria prescribed earlier, the Bill does not propose any lower minimum age limit, but the upper age limit has been capped at 52 or till menopause.
- While the working women will get one-day leave per month, the menstrual leave for students will be upto two days in a month and consequently 2% relaxation in the attendance for menstrual issues in educational institutions.

### WFH facility

- If the employee does not chose to avail of the leave, she will be entitled for work from home if the facility is available. Not mandating a doctor's certificate, the leave can be availed through a request on e-mail.
- The proposed Bill is likely to be cleared in the Cabinet on Thursday, following which it will be introduced in the legislature, sources said. This will be the most comprehensive legislation proposed so far in the country.
- When asked if the Bill was in response to the ongoing case in the Karnataka High Court, sources said that the government was working on the Bill for some time now.

- Among other things, the Bill proposes setting up Karnataka Women Well Being Authority, which will be headed by the chairperson of the Karnataka State Commission for Women to redress grievances arising out of complaints.
- Labour officer in the district will be the enforcement officer.

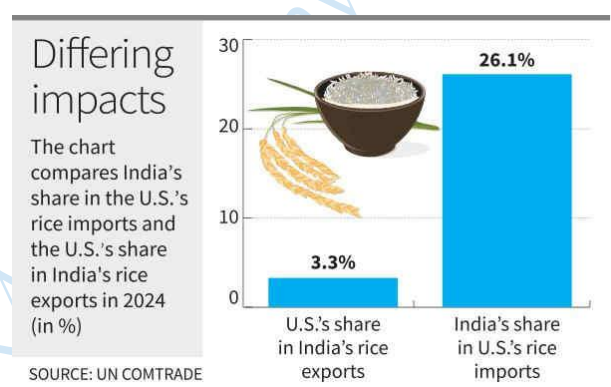
### Penalty clause

- A penalty of upto ₹5,000 for each contravention of the provision has been proposed for those who deny menstrual leave, ill treat or discriminate against menstruating women.

## ❖ Trump mulls tariffs on rice from India

**Context: Days before a U.S. team of negotiators is to visit India to discuss tariffs, U.S. President Donald Trump has hinted at imposing further tariffs on India, this time on rice, to prevent it from “dumping” rice in the U.S.**

- However, an analysis of trade data between the two countries shows that such tariffs would hurt the U.S. far more than India since only about 3% of India’s rice exports go to the U.S., whereas Indian rice makes up more than one-fourth of the quantity imported into the U.S.
- In other words, for rice, the U.S. is not a major export destination for India, but India is a major import source for the U.S.
- A U.S. team of negotiators led by Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Rick Switzer would be in New Delhi on December 10-12 to discuss tariffs. The U.S. has currently imposed a total of 50% tariffs on imports from India.
- Mr. Trump made his rice tariff comments during a White House meeting in which he unveiled a \$12 billion package to support American farmers.
- At a meeting in the White House, when a farmers’ representative complained that India, Thailand and other countries were “dumping” rice in the U.S., Mr. Trump asked the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent: “Why is India allowed to do that? They have to pay tariffs. Do they have an exemption on rice?” Later, he said the issue can be solved “so quickly with tariffs” on these countries that are “illegally shipping” into the U.S.
- According to data with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India exported rice worth \$391.74 million to the U.S. in 2023-24, which makes up about 3.1% of India’s total rice shipments. India exports rice to 179 other countries.
- On the other hand, according to data from the World Integrated Trade Solutions website, India accounted for about 26% of the \$1.6 billion worth of rice the U.S. imported in 2024.
- “President Trump’s threat to impose new tariffs on Indian rice looks driven more by domestic politics than by trade logic,” Ajay Srivastava, former Director General of Foreign Trade, said.



## ❖ Aditya-L1 joins global effort revealing why the 2024 solar storm behaved unusually

**Context: India's first solar observatory Aditya-L1, along with six U.S. satellites, in a major breakthrough, has revealed why the May 2024 solar storm also known as Gannon's storm behaved so unusually.**

- In May 2024, the earth faced the strongest solar storm in more than two decades, which disturbed Earth's environment severely.
- The solar storm is composed of a series of giant explosions on the Sun, called coronal mass ejections (CMEs). CMEs are like massive bubbles of hot gas and magnetic energy thrown out from the Sun into space. When these bubbles hit Earth, they can shake our planet's magnetic shield and cause serious trouble for satellites, communication systems, GPS, and even power grids.
- According to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), during the May 2024 solar storm, the Sun's magnetic fields, which are like twisted ropes inside a solar storm, were breaking and rejoining within the storm.
- "Usually, a CME carries a twisted "magnetic rope" that interacts with Earth's magnetic shield as it approaches Earth. But this time, two CMEs collided in space and squeezed each other so firmly that the magnetic field lines inside one of them snapped and rejoined in new ways, a process called magnetic reconnection," ISRO said. It added that this sudden reversal of the magnetic field made the storm's impact stronger than expected.
- "At the heart of this discovery is India's first solar observatory, Aditya-L1, which joined forces with six U.S. satellites (NASA's Wind, ACE, THEMIS-C, STEREO-A, MMS, and NASA-NOAA joint mission DSCOVR)," the ISRO said.
- "Thanks to precise magnetic field measurements from India's Aditya-L1 mission, scientists were able to map this reconnection region. They found that the area where the CME's magnetic field was tearing and reconnecting was enormous — about 1.3 million km across, i.e., nearly 100 times the size of Earth. It was the first time such a giant magnetic breakup and rejoining had ever been seen inside a CME," it added.
- This discovery is expected to enhance the understanding of how solar storms evolve as they travel from the Sun to Earth.

## ❖ 'India has to move from service provider to a product nation'

**Context: India's maiden full-fledged summit on supercomputing kicks-off in Yelahanka, featuring advanced computer technologies by 175 firms.**

- India has a huge need to move from a service provider to a product nation, taking advantage of emerging technologies, including quantum computing, high performance computing and artificial intelligence, said Ashwini Vaishnaw, Minister for Railways, Information and Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology.
- The Minister was addressing online supercomputing experts and entrepreneurs and policy makers gathered from across India and overseas at the inaugural ceremony of the maiden edition of Supercomputing India 2025 (SCI 2025) held at the Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT), Yelahanka.

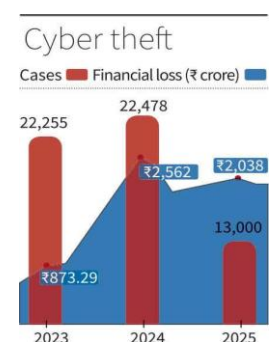
- Speaking on the occasion, Jitin Prasada, Minister of State for Electronics & Information Technology, highlighted that the government has various mission mode programmes which have been initiated as part of moving towards a product nation.
- Responding to a query on why quantum computing has suddenly received so much hype, Thomas Zacharia, senior vice president, technology partnership at AMD, on the sidelines of the conference, told The Hindu that this technology has been demonstrated as useful in specific cases, and increasingly becoming relevant in recent years.
- “So the excitement is that, while it has been a promise, today quantum computing can be utilised for very specific and important applications that cannot be done in any other way, which is why it’s exciting,” he explained.
- However, he agreed every technology has a hype cycle, but what we’re talking about here is that quantum computers have very good systems for quantum mechanical systems. So a certain class of problems can be effectively solved using quantum computers. And today, if we have demonstrated with a sufficient number of qubits that we can get real life solutions to where it is applicable, Mr. Zacharia explained.
- SCI 2025 is India’s first comprehensive conference on high-performance computing, artificial intelligence and quantum computing, organised by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under the aegis of the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) and joined by global collaborators.

### ❖ 57,000 cybercrime cases registered in State in last three years: Parameshwara

**Context: Karnataka has witnessed over 57,000 cybercrime cases in the last three years, accounting for financial fraud to the tune of ₹5,473 crore, according to Home Minister G. Parameshwara.**

#### In numbers

- Replying to BJP member Cement Manju during Question Hour in the Assembly, he said 22,255 cybercrime cases had been filed in 2023 in Karnataka amounting to financial fraud of ₹873.29 crore. In 2024, the number of registered cybercrime cases stood at 22,478, accounting for financial fraud of ₹2,562 crore. So far, in 2025, these cases have stood at 13,000 with a financial fraud of ₹2,038 crore.
- So far, it had been possible to recover only ₹627 crore in these cases of cybercrime, he said, while pointing out that more than 10,700 cases had been solved so far.
- The statistics provided by the Minister shows that Bengaluru city tops the list of cities in terms of cybercrimes in 2025 by accounting for 9,326 cases. Among the districts, Bengaluru Urban district accounted for 384 cases, followed by Vijayapura (340), Tumakuru (243), Ramanagara district (192), Udupi district (171), Mysuru city (166) and Mysuru district (56).
- Listing the efforts by the State government to curb cybercrimes, the Minister said Karnataka had created a cyber vertical led by a DGP like the CID and Prisons Department for the first time in the country. As many as 43 cyber police stations had been set up crack down against cybercrime, he said.



## Online betting

- Dr. Parameshwara said that incidents of online betting had increased both within the country and abroad. He said the State government had tried to bring changes to the existing legislation to ban online betting.
- But the Online India Gaming Federation had got a stay from the courts against such changes. The State had now approached the Supreme Court and the case had been listed for December 19, he said. Though the Centre too had brought in a legislation to curb online betting, that legislation too had been stayed, he said.

## ❖ Govt. to give ₹5 lakh each to 23 kambalas

**Context: The State government has decided to support kambala (slush track buffalo race) by providing financial assistance of ₹5 lakh each to 23 kambala events a year in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts.**

- Announcing this in the Assembly while replying to Congress member Ashok Kumar Rai during Question Hour, Law Minister H.K. Patil said a sum of ₹5 lakh would be given to each of the kambala events.
- Earlier, the Minister said financial grant had been earmarked for 10 kambala events and that the government was considering increasing it to 20 events. However, all the members from the coastal region, cutting across party affiliations, urged the government to increase it to 23 kambalas, as that would encourage tourism and traditional sport in coastal region. The Minister finally agreed to their demand.

## • Ensure free content access for LLMs, says working paper

**Context: It says data crawlers for training artificial intelligence models should not be restricted; instead a copyright society should be set up to collect royalties for members and non-members of body**

- A government working paper released on Monday suggested that AI large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT should, by default, have access to content freely available online, and that publishers should not have an opt-out mechanism for such content.



**LLMs and copyright**

A committee formed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is accepting public comments on a working paper for 30 days

- The core proposal suggests that LLMs should be allowed to freely access all publicly available online content
- A royalty system has been recommended instead of restrictions
- However, publishers are already concerned about AI regurgitating content. Some are already suing AI firms (e.g., DNPA vs OpenAI)
- There may be pushback from AI firms over the cost burden, while publishers may resist flat royalty distribution

- Instead, a copyright society-like non-profit should be set up to collect royalties for both members and non-members of that body.
- The working paper, authored by a committee formed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), is not final, and is accepting public comments for 30 days. The document is one of the main indicators of how the Indian government is thinking of balancing copyright holders' fears that AI systems will regurgitate content they invested in without remuneration, and the interests of LLM developers who have routinely consumed massive amounts of data online to train their models.

- Nasscom, which was represented in the DPIIT's committee, dissented, arguing that forced royalties would amount to a "tax on innovation", and said that "mining" or scraping the Web for data must be allowed for freely available content without paywalls, and that both "crawlable" and access-restricted content providers should have options to "reserve" their content from being mined for LLM development.

### **Opt-out not feasible**

- The committee rejected Nasscom's dissent, arguing that small content creators may not have the means to actually enforce such opt-outs.
- The Digital News Publishers Association, which represents traditional news media outlets with a digital presence, including The Hindu, has sued ChatGPT maker OpenAI in the Delhi High Court for copyright infringement. OpenAI denies the allegations. The working paper argues that it may not be prudent to await the outcome of this and other similar litigation.
- The recommendations, if put in place through a law, will eliminate any allegations of improper access to data, by blessing all access, provided a fee is paid. This model is similar to the "compulsory licensing" framework in place for radio stations in India, which are empowered to play music without negotiating rights for them, as long as a statutorily prescribed fee is paid to the rights holders.
- This balancing may face pushback from AI developers and content creators; the former may argue against anything that increases development costs as few AI firms are even profitable at the moment, leaving little appetite to share revenues. Content creators may resist a flat fee if they feel their inputs are more valuable in training a model than those of other royalty recipients.
- A payout to the copyright society set up for distributing AI riches to content creators, will be distributed by considering factors such as Web traffic and social indicators, like how respectable a publisher is. Any decision can be taken to the the court, the working group says.

### **❖ SC asks Centre to give nationwide data on missing children**

**Context: The Supreme Court directed the Union government to furnish six years of nationwide data on missing children and to appoint a dedicated officer in the Union Home Ministry to ensure effective coordination with the States and Union Territories in compiling such information.**

- A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and R. Mahadevan was hearing a public interest litigation petition filed by the non-profit organisation Guria Swayam Sevi Sansthan, which highlighted the rising number of children who remain untraced across several States.
- The court had earlier directed all States and Union Territories to depute dedicated officers to oversee cases of missing children and to ensure that such details are promptly uploaded on the Mission Vatsalya portal administered by the Women and Child Development Ministry.

- Appearing for the Centre, Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati informed the Bench that all States and Union Territories had appointed such officers and uploaded their particulars on the portal. She noted, however, that the effective dissemination of information and coordinated use of the platform remained essential to securing meaningful outcomes.
- The Bench observed that the Home Ministry itself had not nominated a dedicated officer to oversee cases of missing children, despite being the central coordinating agency. It accordingly directed the Ministry to appoint such an officer within two weeks and to upload the officer's details on the Mission Vatsalya portal.
- "We find that the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Union of India has not appointed a dedicated nodal officer for cases of missing children for the purpose of Mission Vatsalya, and hence an officer may be nominated as a dedicated nodal officer, whose details may also be uploaded on the Mission Vatsalya portal," the court ordered.

### ❖ 'Rise in global use of Aadhaar-like ID systems dangerous'

**Context: Fifty-four civil society groups and over 200 individual signatories have put out an open letter pushing back against the expanding use of Aadhaar-like digital identity systems in countries other than India.**

- The two-page letter was signed by organisations such as Internet Freedom Foundation; the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan; JNU Students Union; Safai Karmachari Andolan; and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). It was also endorsed by individuals such as former Amnesty International India chair Aakar Patel, activist Jean Drèze, and constitutional law scholar Gautam Bhatia.
- The Centre has promoted digital identity systems such as Aadhaar around the world as a key plank of digital public infrastructure, a concept that India is promoting with both policy support and open source tools, such as those provided by the Modular Open Source Identity Platform (MOSIP). MOSIP, which was largely developed by the IIT Bengaluru, does not use the same technology as Aadhaar.
- Some countries engaged with MOSIP at various degrees include Morocco, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, and Uganda.

### ❖ Cyclone impact sparks fresh calls in Sri Lanka to recast IMF agreement

**Context: As Sri Lanka reels from Cyclone Ditwah's devastation, calls to revisit the ongoing International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, which critics say imposes punishing austerity, are growing louder.**

- At least 638 people died — 191 remain missing — and millions were affected by torrential rains, unprecedented flooding, and multiple landslides that battered Sri Lanka late November. The climate disaster, one of the worst the country has witnessed, has dealt a sharp blow to the island's tentative recovery, three years after it declared bankruptcy amid a financial meltdown.
- Last week, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa urged the Anura Kumara Dissanayake government to renegotiate the IMF deal in the wake of the climate catastrophe, calling for immediate talks with the Fund to suspend or amend conditions that aggravate the people's hardships.

- A UNDP study in 2022–23 found that the crushing economic crisis in 2022 had left over half of the island’s population “multidimensionally vulnerable”. Although Sri Lanka has since achieved relative fiscal stability, the condition of the country’s poor — hit hardest by IMF-prescribed spending cuts — has worsened.
- In the wake of the recent natural disaster, over 70 civil society groups and activists across Sri Lanka have called for renegotiation of the IMF deal, debt, and climate justice. “While a majority of people are reeling under austerity measures, including regressive tax hikes, subsidy cuts, and inadequate social security measures, the Government of Sri Lanka has become a prisoner of the ongoing Extended Fund Facility programme of the IMF,” said their statement, issued on December 8, 2025.

### **‘Urgent revision’**

- “The IMF controlling government spending not only restricts the ability of the government to respond to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, but severely impedes investment in infrastructure, recuperating livelihoods, and adapting to further climate change impacts,” they contended, demanding an “urgent revision” of Sri Lanka’s debt restructuring agreement, a “massive” debt reduction, a halt on subsidy removals, and an immediate standstill on current and future debt servicing for the country’s recovery.
- In 2026, the government must service debt totalling over \$2 billion, while it tries to lift the country out of the deluge, whose full impact is yet to be ascertained. Some development experts have observed that recovery might prove harder than after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004.
- Recognising the challenge, President Dissanayake told Newsweek magazine in an interview published on December 8: “Initial estimates indicate that the damage may well be beyond any natural disaster that our island has endured. So we will have to service debt while simultaneously rebuilding from climate disasters. This is why debt sustainability frameworks for climate-vulnerable countries must change.”
- Weighing in on Sri Lanka’s predicament, former President of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed recently noted that the climate calamity makes it “impossible” for Sri Lanka to stay aligned with the IMF programme. “When Sri Lanka faced its financial crisis in 2022, the IMF approved a four-year Extended Fund Facility after months of negotiation. Yet the Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) failed to account for climate shocks,” he said in a social media post, as the cyclone’s impact began unfolding.
- Not just Sri Lanka, but several climate-vulnerable, debt-distressed countries are in a similar plight. The Climate Vulnerable Forum — an international alliance of over 70 highly climate-vulnerable countries — has long called for reforming the DSA to properly value resilience investments and natural capital, and for a reformed G20 Common Framework that includes automatic debt standstills in response to climate shocks, said Mr. Nasheed, who is also the Secretary-General of the Forum.

### **Emergency financing**

- However, there are no signs yet that the Sri Lankan government may veer away from the IMF programme. In fact, the government has sought a \$200 million Rapid Financing Instrument from the Fund. An IMF spokesman confirmed that Sri Lanka’s request for emergency financing will take precedence over the scheduled fifth review of the ongoing Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

- Meanwhile, activists have demanded that the government urgently prioritise equitable relief, focusing on economically and socially marginalised communities most affected by the disaster. “The highest [number of] casualties were reported from Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya districts — areas especially prone to landslides and home to already marginalised and vulnerable working-class tea plantation workers,” the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice, a network of feminist activists across Sri Lanka, said in a statement. Demanding universal social protection schemes, the Collective called for urgent negotiations with the IMF and other creditors “to cancel debt repayment and reverse austerity policies in this crisis context.”

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## ❖ Over ₹1.8 lakh crore invested under PLI schemes: govt.

**Context: The various production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes active in the country have resulted in actual investment of over ₹1.88 lakh crore across 14 sectors as of June, the Commerce and Industry Ministry.**

- In its year-end review, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade said that investments through the PLI schemes had resulted in incremental production and sales of over ₹17 lakh crore and employment generation of over 12.3 lakh, including both direct and indirect employment.
- The DPIIT said so far it had recognised 2,01,335 start-ups under the Startup India scheme, with these start-ups having created more than 21 lakh jobs.

## ❖ Bill providing for penalty, jail for hate speech tabled in Assembly

**Context: The Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, which prescribes penalty and imprisonment for hate crime, was tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday amid stiff resistance by Opposition members. In all, 12 Bills were tabled in the House.**

- The Bill tabled by Home Minister G. Parameshwara seeks to curb and prevent dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and crimes that cause disharmony and hatred in society against any person or group of persons or organisations.
- **It defines hate crime as communication of hate speech, by making, publishing or circulating or any act of promoting, propagating, inciting or abetting or attempting such hate speech to cause disharmony or feelings or enmity or hatred or ill-will against any person dead or alive or group of persons or an organisation. It also seeks to punish whoever commits hate crime with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one year and which may extend to seven years with a fine of ₹50,000.**
- For any subsequent or repetitive offences, the punishment shall not be less than two years which may extend to 10 years with a fine of ₹1 lakh. The Bill seeks to provide adequate compensation to victims.
- Talking about the Bill with reporters later, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said: "This is on our agenda as we need to maintain peace and law and order in the State. Hate speech is not acceptable in any civic society."
- In all, the Assembly saw the tabling of 12 Bills, including the Karnataka Rent (Amendment) Bill that seeks to achieve the principle of "minimum government maximum governance" by decriminalisation of minor offences and rationalisation of monetary penalties as envisaged in the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act 2023 (Central Act 18 of 2023).
- The Karnataka Labour Welfare Fund (Amendment) Bill; the Drugs and Cosmetics (Karnataka Amendment) Bill; the Karnataka Cine and Cultural Activists (Welfare) (Amendment) Bill; and the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill were also tabled.

### What the Bill entails

■ It aims to curb and prevent dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and crimes that cause disharmony and hatred	■ It provides for one-year imprisonment which may extend to seven years with a fine of ₹ 50,000 for first time offence
	■ For subsequent offences, the punishment shall not be less than two years which may extend to 10 years with a fine of ₹ 1,00,000
	■ It provides for compensation to be paid to victims

- The other Bills that were tabled were: the Malnad Area Development Board (Amendment) Bill; the Bayaluseeme Development Board (Amendment) Bill; the Karnataka State Universities (Second Amendment) Bill; the Shree Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority and Certain Other Laws (Amendment) Bill; the Chandraguthi Shree Renukamba Kshetra Development Authority Bill, and the Sri Malai Mahadeshwaraswamy Kshetra Development Authority (Amendment) Bill.

### ❖ Cabinet may discuss and clear Bill on internal quota today

**Context: While a meeting with Dalit Ministers was held on Wednesday, the Bill will be discussed in the Cabinet.**

- The State government, which is under pressure from the Dalit left (Madigas) group to bring a legislation to implement internal reservation among Scheduled Castes (SCs), is expected to discuss and approve The Karnataka Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Bill, 2025, at the Cabinet meeting on Thursday before moving it in the legislature during this Winter session.
- While a meeting with Dalit Ministers was held on Wednesday evening, the Bill that is being fine-tuned will be discussed in the Cabinet on Thursday, a top government source said.
- “There has been no stay on the 17 % reservation. The court has said that the appointments hinges on its final orders,” said the source.

### **Consequential seniority**

- The Karnataka Extension of Consequential Seniority to Government Servants Promoted on the Basis of Reservation (To the Posts in the Civil Services of the State) Act, will be appropriately amended to provide internal reservation in promotions, the source said, adding that the process of recruitment for over 3,500 posts notified through over 40 notifications would continue subject to the final orders. The source also indicated that the government would appeal if there is any adverse order. “However, we are hopeful of a favourable order in court,” he added.
- After the one-man commission headed by H.N. Nagmohan Das submitted its report to the government recommending internal reservation matrix, the government notified 6% each to Dalit Left (Madigas) and Dalit Right (Holeyas) communities, and 5% to Lambani, Bhovi, Korama and Koracha along with nomadic castes. About 50 microscopic nomadic communities to whom the commission recommended 1% reservation lost out eventually. Following this, Dalit left groups are demanding a legislation to make the internal reservation stronger.

### **Cases in court**

- Currently, the appointments to the government posts are in a limbo as four petitions regarding reservation are pending before the Karnataka High Court.
- While two public interest litigation petitions have been filed against the Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and Appointments or Posts in the Services Under the State) Act, 2022, that enabled increasing reservation to 101 SCs from 15 % to 17% and from 3% to 7% to STs, in another case the government has gone on an appeal in the High Court after the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal stuck down the enhanced reservation. Box

## **Return to 15%?**

- With fresh notifications for appointments and those for which process has been started now stuck amid cases in the High Court, the government is mulling returning to 15% reservation for Scheduled Castes, and reduce the internal reservation quota accordingly. Sources said that it is one of the ways out of the current situation since the 2022 Act faces legal challenge.
- Following the Act, the reservation increased from 50% to 56%, since the quota from SCs increased from 15% to 17% and for Scheduled Tribes from 3% to 7%. The increase was based on recommendation by retired Judge H.N. Nagmohan Das. The total reservation for OBCs is 32%. Karnataka is yet to implement 10% EWS reservation.
- Another source said that Dalit Ministers are opposed to the idea of reducing the quota to start recruitment, and discussions are on. On the other hand, to convince the Alemari community to withdraw the case in High Court, the government is offering a special package, sources said.
- Land conversion will be simplified soon, says Krishna Byre GowdaThe rules that simplify land conversion and define the procedures to be followed by revenue courts will be notified soon, said Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda in the Legislative Council in Belagavi on Wednesday.

## **Why the delay**

- Answering a question on the delay in notifying the rules following the amendment to the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964, the Minister said that there was delay as it involved many issues. The government was framing the rules for the first time in an elaborate manner since the Act came into effect in 1964, he pointed out. The draft rules were notified on September 17, and probably within a month, the final notification would be issued.
- Elaborating on the rules, the Minister said that the purpose of the amendment was to simplify land conversion. With the amendment, there would be no requirement of land conversion if the plan of the construction was in tune with the master-plan.
- “If the activity proposed is in accordance with the green, yellow and red zones, there is no need of seeking land conversion, as per the new rules. The applicant can directly approach the planning authority to get the plan approved. Similarly, in case the proposed construction is outside the planned area, the DC will have 30 days time to dispose of the application. On the 30th day, the land conversion certificate will be generated automatically, unless the officer rejects the application,” he stated.
- The Minister said that the rules would stop the role of mediators, who had brought bad name to the officers and the government. The rules had been framed such that those setting up small-scale industries within two acres of land need not seek land conversion. Similarly, those taking up projects related to renewable energy would not require land conversion.

## **Court procedures**

- Further, the Minister explained that the rules would also define the procedures of the revenue courts. “All these years, the act allowed the revenue officials to hold courts. However, there were no rules to define the procedures. There were instances where officials issued orders exceeding their powers. Now, we have framed rules and defined the procedures, including a summary enquiry and a formal enquiry,” he said.

- The draft rules, which run into 29 pages, would be finalised soon and the final notification would be issued within a month, he added.

## ❖ India gives tepid response to Russian push for Su-57, long-range drones and submarines

**Context: Russia's latest pitch to expand defence cooperation — including offers of the Su-57 fifth-generation stealth fighter, long-range drones and submarines — has met with a lukewarm response from India, officials familiar with the matter said.**

- A senior official said that in the run-up to President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to India, Moscow made repeated outreach promoting platforms such as the Geran series of kamikaze drones, submarines and aircraft.
- "India didn't show much interest in the equipment offered by Russia. The Russians were expecting major movement on the sidelines of the visit and are still pursuing the proposals. We are very much focusing on development of indigenous products," the official said.
- Despite high expectations, the much-watched defence announcements during Mr. Putin's visit did not materialise. While 19 agreements aimed at boosting bilateral trade were signed, there was no breakthrough on collaboration involving the Su-57 or Russia's S-500 air defence system.
- The restrained response comes at a time when India is driving an aggressive push towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing.
- In Leh, while dedicating 125 newly completed Border Roads Organisation (BRO) projects to the nation, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh underscored the transformation in domestic capacity.

### **Paradigm shift**

- He highlighted that India, once heavily dependent on arms imports, now boasts a record defence production value of ₹1.51 lakh crore, up from ₹46,000 crore in 2014. Defence exports have surged from under ₹1,000 crore to nearly ₹24,000 crore in a decade. It reflects a paradigm shift.
- The Geran drones — Russia's indigenised variant of Iran's Shahed-136 kamikaze drone — have played a major role in Moscow's low-cost attrition strategy in Ukraine, enabling mass salvo attacks. But Indian manufacturers and services have not shown interest in acquiring them.
- On October 29, the 23rd Working Group Meeting of the India–Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation was held in Moscow. Co-chaired by Sanjeev Kumar, Secretary (Defence Production), and Andrey A. Boytsov, First Deputy Director of Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, the discussions spanned tri-service cooperation and defence R&D.
- The meeting concluded with the signing of a Protocol outlining fresh areas of collaboration and mutual growth — even as big-ticket defence deals remain elusive.

❖ **‘State is a continuum with commitments beyond pleasing the party or leader of the day’**

**Context: The Supreme Court said the commitment of the state and its agencies exist beyond subservience to the political party in power or the leader of the day.**

- Justice Sanjay Kumar, leading a Bench, observed that the state is a “continuum”.
- The court’s observations came while dismissing a petition filed by the State of Jharkhand against a State High Court-ordered Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into an illegal mining case in which the accused persons are linked to Chief Minister Hemant Soren. The Soren government had contended that the prior consent of the State government was not taken before the CBI probe. Justice Kumar repeatedly questioned the State’s interest in “trying to protect criminals”.
- “Why did the State come here [to the Supreme Court] to protect alleged illegal mining, be it by the friends or family of the Chief Minister?” Justice Kumar asked repeatedly during the hearing.
- The State counsel replied that the State was not trying to thwart the case, but was only questioning the transfer of the case to CBI, which ought to be done only in exceptional circumstances and not as a routine affair.
- But Justice Kumar pointed out how the State delayed registering a first information report (FIR) in the case for five months in 2022 despite a Magistrate’s order.
- “A state is a continuum. You have several responsibilities and certain commitments to the law and order. You do not just try to commit yourselves to the Chief Minister of the day; protect his family, his aides, his supporters at all costs, knowing that investigation is taking place against them. That is not the right way of going about,” Justice Kumar observed.
- The court order recorded its opinion that the “State of Jharkhand cannot seek to support the accused against the CBI FIR”.
- The Bench noted that the complainant in the case, Bijay Hansda, was “forced to withdraw” his allegations of illegal mining, but the High Court had eventually denied him permission to do so.

❖ **Opposition questions removal of CJI from panel to select CEC**

**Context: Congress MP K.C. Venugopal accuses the government of undermining the idea of an impartial electoral umpire by enacting a law that replaces top court’s intent to ensure fair elections; he also refers to data analysis of voter deletions**

- The Opposition and Treasury benches went head to head on the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, as the Lok Sabha discussed electoral reforms.
- In a no-holds-barred attack against the government, Congress MP K.C. Venugopal asked why the Chief Justice of India had been removed from the process to select the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the other Election Commissioners (ECs).
- Referring to a Supreme Court judgment by a Bench headed by now-retired judge K.M. Joseph, which said the selection committee should include the Prime Minister, the CJI, and the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha until a law is framed, Mr. Venugopal said the top court’s intention was to ensure free and fair elections.

- “You didn’t want the Chief Justice in that committee; that is why you enacted a law to remove him,” he said. “The idea of an impartial electoral umpire has been replaced now and it has now openly collapsed under political pressure and has become partisan. The right to vote is not a mercy from the government, it is a fundamental principle of democracy,” he added.

#### ❖ Protected marine areas not part of offshore blocks: govt.

**Context: Coastal and biodiversity areas have been notified, says Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State for Earth Sciences; environmental management plan will be made before mining operation.**

- Offshore blocks in the seas made available to private companies for mining were carved out after excluding regions known to be Marine Protected Areas, the Earth Sciences Ministry said in response to a query in the Lok Sabha by Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor.
- Earlier this year, protests had erupted in Kerala — cutting across party lines — over the Centre’s proposal in November 2024 to auction 13 blocks in the sea to private companies to mine for construction-grade sand off the coast of Kerala, three blocks of lime mud off the coast of Gujarat, and seven blocks of polymetallic nodules and crust off the Great Nicobar Island in the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The protests, however, were concentrated in Kerala where fishermen communities protested that such mining would destroy marine life and deplete fish stocks. The Kerala Assembly passed a resolution in March opposing the auctioning of the block.
- Rahul Gandhi, former MP for Wayanad and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to revoke the auction announcement. So far, no companies have been selected from the auction.
- The Environment Ministry had notified 130 Marine Protected Areas across the coastal States and islands, and 106 coastal and marine sites have been identified and prioritised as Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas (ICMBAs) to take care of marine species conservation, Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State for Earth Sciences, said in a statement.
- “The offshore blocks have been carved by excluding these areas. Furthermore, as per the provisions of the Offshore Areas Mineral Conservation and Development Rules, 2024, no production operations shall be undertaken except in accordance with a production plan. The production plan, inter alia, includes an environmental management plan indicating baseline information, impact assessment and mitigation measures,” he said.
- The Offshore Areas Mineral Trust has been established with coastal States as members of the Governing Body and Executive Committee of the Trust. The funds accruing to the Trust will be used for research, administration, studies and related expenditure with respect to offshore areas and mitigation of any adverse impact that may be caused to the ecology in the offshore area, due to operations undertaken, the statement underlined.

## ❖ Deepavali enters intangible heritage list

**Context: UNESCO says it strengthens social bonds, supports traditional crafts, reinforces values of generosity; PM says people are thrilled at the honour; Minister calls it a moment of national pride.**

- Deepavali, India's festival of lights, was on Wednesday inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- The inscription was adopted in the presence of Union Minister of Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, senior officials, and delegates from 194 member states, international experts, and representatives of UNESCO's global network, at an event held at the Red Fort here.
- The announcement came during the 20th session of the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee.
- UNESCO's inscription acknowledges Deepavali as a living heritage that strengthens social bonds, supports traditional craftsmanship, reinforces values of generosity and well-being, and contributes meaningfully to several Sustainable Development Goals.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said people in India and around the world were thrilled at the UNESCO honour. "For us, Deepavali is very closely linked to our culture and ethos. It is the soul of our civilisation. The addition of Deepavali to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List will contribute to the festival's global popularity even further," he said in a post on X.
- Addressing the international delegates at the event, the Union Minister said the inscription marks a moment of immense pride for India and for communities across the world who keep alive the timeless spirit of Deepavali.
- Highlighting the people-centric nature of the festival, he emphasised that Deepavali thrives through the contributions of millions, including potters crafting traditional 'diyas' (earthen lamps), artisans preparing festive decor, farmers, sweet-makers, priests, and households that uphold age-old customs.



**Living heritage:** Deepavali thrives through the contributions of potters crafting traditional earthen lamps. VIJAY SONEJI

## ❖ PM Modi, Goyal expected to travel to Oman next week to sign free trade pact

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal are expected to travel to Oman next week to sign a free trade agreement with that country, sources who are also part of the delegation confirmed. The exact dates and the composition of the delegation will be confirmed after the Union Cabinet gives its approval.**

- India and Oman began negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in November 2023. Following three rounds of negotiations, between November 2023 and March 2024, both sides reached an agreement on all aspects of the CEPA, including text and market access offers, the Department of Commerce said in a separate release.

- A Cabinet proposal regarding the deal, submitted in March 2024, was deferred at the time, prompting further renegotiations. The fourth round was held in September 2024 and the fifth in January 13-14, 2025, both of which focused on revised offers. According to the press note, both sides are now in the process of securing internal approvals for the final deal. However, according to sources, this is more of a formality, with the deal having been finalised and the signing set to happen soon. “The Prime Minister and Commerce Minister are set to visit Oman next week, maybe on December 17-18, to sign the deal,” a member of the likely delegation told The Hindu. “The exact dates of the trip and composition of delegation will be finalised after the Cabinet gives its approval, which is a formality at this point.”
- Speaking to reporters in Jaipur, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal confirmed that talks with Oman are in “their final stages” for a free trade agreement. He added that New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay is visiting New Delhi on Friday for negotiation on an FTA.
- “With them, too, our talks have reached the last stages,” Mr. Goyal said.
- On the FTA with the EU, he said following the visit of the delegation from the EU over the last eight days and of Maroš Šefčovič, EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security over the last two days, the broad outline of the deal has been finalised.

### ❖ House panel for speedy coal block clearances

**Context: Efforts must be made to reduce the average time it takes to accord forest and environmental clearances to coal blocks, the Parliament’s standing committee on coal, mines and steel stated in their latest report tabled.**

- The committee sought they be appraised of the probable reasons for the same. For context, the committee observed that it takes 15 to 18 months for a public-sector enterprise to receive an environment clearance to mine a coal block, compared with about 26 months for a commercial coal block of a private sector entity.
- The committee noted that this extends to forest approvals as well.
- It said that while public-sector companies have been observed to receive clearances between 24 to 30 months, that stretched to a wait of about 34 months for their private sector peers.

**Eco shield** | The Union government has said that marine protected sites will not be used for mining of minerals

- 23 offshore blocks have been proposed: 13 sand blocks (Kerala), 3 lime mud blocks (Gujarat), 7 polymetallic blocks (Andaman and Nicobar)
- Fisher families and green activities have expressed concerns over depleting marine life stock
- Offshore Areas Mineral Trust has been established with coastal States as members of the Governing Body and Executive Committee of the Trust

The production plan, *inter alia*, includes an environmental management plan indicating baseline information, impact assessment and mitigation measures

**JITENDRA SINGH**  
Minister of State for Earth Sciences

### ❖ Breeding project gives endangered western tragopan breathing space

**Context: Experts warn that, despite the success of the captive breeding project, the species' long-term survival remains uncertain without simultaneous habitat protection; fewer than 9,500 individuals remain in the wild and climate change and encroachment continue to pose a threat.**

- The western tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) is one of India's rarest pheasants and the state bird of Himachal Pradesh. It was once found across parts of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, but now survives in small, fragmented pockets.



A captive western tragopan at the Sarahan Pheasantry. P. JISAWANNA (CC BY-SA)

- Studies in the forests of Kazinag and Limber in Jammu & Kashmir have revealed that while habitats with suitable climates for the bird do exist, human disturbance and habitat fragmentation continue to endanger its future.
- Conservationists at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have estimated that only 3,000-9,500 mature tragopans remain and that all belong to a single subpopulation. Roughly a quarter lie across the western Himalayas and the northern parts of Pakistan.
- Yet deep inside Himachal Pradesh's Great Himalayan National Park, seasoned bird-watchers have said the tragopan still holds its ground.

### **The Sarahan Pheasantry**

- "Seeing one in the wild is rare and depends a lot on planning and luck, where sightings are about 60% on well planned trips," said Panki Sood, a seasonal birdwatcher and a host at a travel company.
- Wildlife Institute of India records say the first captive births took place in 1993. In 2005, the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department achieved a first when four western tragopan chicks hatched at the Sarahan Pheasantry, marking the world's first successful captive breeding programme in the world. From 2007 to 2015, 43 captive-born individuals were recorded, although their survival rates fluctuated due to skewed sex ratios and mortality among older birds. Genetic analysis further revealed that the entire captive population had originated from only eight wild founders, retaining about 87% of their genetic diversity.
- Sarahan Pheasantry staff recalled how inconsistent the early years were.
- "In 2007-2008, there were none at all," Ms. Keerthi (name changed on request), who has worked at the pheasantry for more than a decade, said. "There were no eggs, so no chicks. It was only after the biologists came that eggs and chicks finally began appearing."
- "When I joined as a research fellow in 2011, the Sarahan Pheasantry hosted about 15 birds," Wildlife Institute of India senior fellow Lakshminarasimha R. recalled.
- To stabilise the programme, the experts began to redesign core husbandry systems. "The primary approach was to develop protocols for managing species in captivity. We referred to how it behaved in the wild," Mr. Lakshminarasimha said.
- Captive tragopans were very sensitive to stress, diseases, and the conditions in the artificial enclosure. Researchers thus recreated elements of their natural habitat, such as dense cover with specific nesting materials and incorporated seasonal dietary changes.
- Everything from nesting material and vegetation to diet and feeding schedules were reworked to mimic the tragopan's natural habitat as closely as possible.

- “We have 46 tragopans now,” Ms. Keerthi added. “This year, seven or eight chicks hatched and five or six have survived.”

### **Climate variability, breeding**

- “Captive breeding emerged as a tool of insurance against major declines,” Rahul Kaul, chair of the Galliformes Specialist Group at the IUCN, said.
- “But it was always meant to complement, not replace, habitat protection. Unfortunately, much emphasis and resources were laid on protecting and breeding tragopans from outside the wild [ex-situ] while the conservation of species in their natural habitats [in-situ] was hugely undermined.”
- Mr. Kaul has been closely involved with pheasant conservation across the Himalayas and also said the initiative was well-intentioned.
- “The idea was to breed enough birds for release into identified habitats. Decades later and several crores of rupees spent, we are where we started in terms of conservation benefit. The forest department must be credited for their perseverance: they did produce birds, but without parallel habitat protection, the gains remain limited.”
- Ex-situ programmes have tried to build population security, but a greater threat today is the slow disruption of the tragopan’s timing system that synchronises breeding, insect availability, and seasonal changes in the wild.
- “Climate variability affects species like the tragopan through warming at lower altitudes and disruption of food resources,” Mr. Kaul said.
- “If breeding no longer synchronises with insect availability, the chicks may starve. The forests themselves hold the species together, allowing the pheasants to persist. In some areas of Pakistan, communities identify breeding zones and voluntarily leave them untouched until the chicks can fly. Maybe such adaptive models can be tried [in India] too.”

### **Stalled rewilding attempt**

- At the Sarahan Pheasantry, where captive breeding continues, staff members said efforts to take the next step have wanted for support.
- “The entire objective was to move towards reintroduction, specifically into forests surrounding Sarahan, and we were finally ready for it. In 2020-2021, we carried out experimental releases and results showed that the approach was viable,” Mr. Lakshminarasimha said.
- Sources from the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department also acknowledged the ex-situ programme had reached a stable phase. They added that the Pheasantry now consistently maintains over 40 western tragopans, with six to eight eggs hatching and four to five chicks surviving every year, figures made possible by years of refinement and expert inputs.
- Returning tragopans to the wild is also the most demanding phase of the programme. One forest guard said the Pheasantry had conducted reintroduction trials for two years, releasing birds deep into the forest and tracking them using radio collars. One individual survived in the wild for nearly a year — a highly encouraging sign for such an early-stage attempt — until its tag’s battery expired.

- According to Forest Department sources (who wished to remain unnamed due to the sensitivity of commenting on reintroduction funding and programme status), reintroductions have been on hold since 2023 partly due to budgetary constraints linked to wider spending cuts by the State government. Some officials have also stressed that funding is only one part of the challenge.
- “The real bottleneck,” one official noted, “is the research and protocol development needed before each new release.”
- Before a tragopan can be returned to the wild, teams must check if release sites and food are available, monitor the birds’ predators, and make sure the captive-bred birds can adapt to natural conditions. Mr. Narasimha said he’s more hopeful. Reintroduction, he explained, “cannot happen overnight”.
- Like the decade-long effort that made captive breeding successful, reintroduction also demands patience, experimentation, and adaptive management: “You cannot draw conclusions from only a few attempts. This is a long-term commitment.”

### **Community support**

- Despite these challenges, those working closest to the species believe the western tragopan’s survival hinges on people as much as policy.
- Mr. Sood said local stewardship had already shifted the trajectory: “Community-based tourism is one of the best ways to protect this rare bird.”
- He added that tourism offered local families an alternative income source that didn’t depend on forest resources or grazing, giving them direct incentives to keep breeding areas undisturbed.
- Since villagers stopped disrupting the forest, more tragopans have been sighted, he said, citing examples from the Rakhundi and Shilt areas.

### **❖ EU scientists say 2025 set to be second or third warmest year**

**Context: This year is set to be the world’s second or third-warmest on record, potentially surpassed only by 2024’s record-breaking heat, the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on December 9.**

- The data is the latest from C3S following last month’s COP30 climate summit, where governments failed to agree on substantial new measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reflecting strained geopolitics as the U.S. rolls back its efforts, and some countries seek to weaken CO2-cutting measures.
- This year will also likely round out the first three-year period in which the average global temperature exceeded 1.5°C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period, when humans began burning fossil fuels on an industrial scale, C3S said in a monthly bulletin.
- “These milestones are not abstract – they reflect the accelerating pace of climate change,” said Samantha Burgess, strategic lead for climate at C3S.
- Extreme weather continued to hit regions around the globe this year. Typhoon Kalmaegi killed more than 200 people in the Philippines last month. Spain suffered its worst wildfires in three decades due to weather conditions that scientists confirmed were exacerbated by climate change.

## **Last year was the planet's hottest on record.**

- While natural weather patterns mean temperatures fluctuate year to year, scientists have documented a clear warming trend in global temperatures over time, and confirmed that the main cause of this warming is greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels.
- The last 10 years have been the 10 warmest years since records began, the World Meteorological Organisation said earlier this year.
- The global threshold of 1.5 Celsius is the warming limit that countries pledged to stay below under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement in order to avoid the worst consequences of warming.
- The world has not yet technically breached that target, which refers to an average global temperature of 1.5 Celsius over decades. But the U.N. said this year that the 1.5 Celsius goal can no longer realistically be met and urged governments to cut CO2 emissions faster, to limit overshooting the target.
- C3S's records go back to 1940, and are cross-checked with global temperature records going back to 1850.
- In a separate update ahead of COP30, the World Meteorological Organisation said the period from 2015 to 2025 is also set to rank as the 11 warmest years on instrumental record, with 2023-2025 the three warmest years and 2025 about 1.4°C above the pre-industrial average so far.
- Likewise, the UN Environment Programme's Emissions Gap Report 2025 had warned that even if countries implement their national climate plans in full, global temperatures this century would still be headed for around 2.3-2.5°C of warming, while current policies would deliver around 2.8°C.
- It also estimated that global emissions would have to drop by half by 2035 to keep the 1.5°C pathway open, at least briefly.
- Analysts have also noted an unprecedented 0.4°C rise in global temperature in just two years, suggesting the world may already be edging into the psychologically important post-1.5°C regime

## **❖ Is India's 8.2% growth rate sustainable?**

**Context: India's GDP surged 8.2% to ₹48.63 lakh crore, indicating strong economic momentum. However, the IMF's 'Grade C' rating warns of structural weaknesses that could threaten long-term growth amidst global volatility and internal challenges.**

- India's latest GDP figures position the Indian economy to be producing at a significantly higher level than last year, emphasised by the ₹48.63 lakh crore output projected to be realised in a single quarter.

## **The general state of the economy**

- An 8.2% increase of GDP indicates that this rise is part of a genuine momentum rather than just being a post-pandemic bounce. The 9.1% growth in manufacturing indicates that industrial demand has increased and factories are operating closer to capacity. Services, now 60% of India's GDP, is growing at 9.2%, with financial services at 10.2%, which reflects strong credit activity, higher transactions, and sustained urban demand.

- The increase in real Gross Value Added (GVA) numbers from ₹82.88 lakh crore to ₹89.41 lakh crore further indicates that agriculture, industry and services are experiencing genuine rise in added value and not just rise in prices.
- The real numbers held up because the nominal GDP increased by 8.8%, demonstrating that inflation remained under check. Moreover, Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) rising by 7.9% show that households are spending more. Further, the growth of agriculture by 3.5%, supported by fuller reservoirs and better horticulture output, points to a small but real improvement in rural incomes.
- Inflation, which had been high for much of the previous years, finally eased and even slipped below target toward the end of 2024-25. Banks experienced significant credit growth and were in a position to lend with a clean balance sheet, maintaining capital buffers which are far in excess of regulatory requirements.
- On the budget front, the Centre stuck to the path of consolidation with the help of strong GST and direct tax collections and successfully managed to keep the spending mix relatively high-quality. The external sector remained stable with a small current account deficit, healthy services exports and diversified foreign exchange reserves to weather global volatility.
- And so, if one were to just look at these figures, it would appear that the Indian economy is moving forward even as much of the world slows down and is eclipsed in greater economic uncertainty.

### **The IMF's rating**

- Notwithstanding this, every headline has its shadow. Here, the shadow arrived in the form of a shocker when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that India had been assigned 'Grade C' in its recent assessment on its national income accounting. There are four grades in total: A, B, C, and D.
- Some of the multiple shortcomings highlighted by the IMF team which require careful consideration and review include — a) the use of an outdated base year (2011/12); b) the use of wholesale price indices as data sources for deflators due to the lack of producer price indices; c) the excessive use of single deflation, which may introduce cyclical biases; d) sizeable discrepancies between production and expenditure approaches that may indicate the need to enhance the coverage of the expenditure approach data and the informal sector; e) lack of seasonally adjusted data and room for improvement in other statistical techniques used in the quarterly national accounts compilation; and f) a lack of consolidated data on States and local bodies after 2019.
- This raises a critical question: how can a nation possibly be underrated when it's racing at 8% while the world limps at 3%? But the truth lives in the footnotes of our own documents.
- The RBI's Annual Report (2024-25) recognises that the economy has performed well, but it also quietly lays out the structural issues that still drag down India's credibility. Countries with discretionary exercises in projecting the good alone in numbers have two narratives: the one they tell the world and the one they whisper under their own breath. India's 8.2% is the story its government wants tell the world.

### **The IMF's C is the whisper.**

- An economy appearing to grow fast is not the same thing as an economy growing well. What the IMF is really saying is that India's institutional bones are not yet as strong as its muscle.
- Mining output was hit by an unusually long monsoon, while electricity generation slowed because of a milder-than-usual winter that reduced heating and peak-load demand. Although these might seem like fleeting weather phenomena, they significantly undermined the industrial base of the year. The unevenness is evident even in this strong quarter. Electricity and utilities grew only 4.4%, and mining barely moved at 0.04%. These are backbone sectors and subsequently their sluggishness signals that recovery is not evenly spread across the real economy. According to nominal GVA, the primary sector accounted for 14%, the secondary sector for 26%, and the tertiary sector for 60% in Q2.
- These proportions look normal for a service-led economy, but India's case is different because its employment structure does not match its output structure: too many Indians still work in agriculture and low-wage services, sectors that contribute little to productivity gains.

### **Structural vulnerabilities**

- The RBI cautions that India's export trajectory will continue to be impacted by growing trade protectionism, tariff uncertainty, and geopolitical tensions in key markets.
- Services exports and remittances help cushion the current account, but they cannot substitute for a diversified and scaled-up goods export engine — one that India still lacks.
- Another contradiction shows up in the financial markets.
- The rupee looked stable from a distance, but underneath, it was constantly being pushed down by a strong U.S. dollar and the usual swings in foreign capital.
- When one realises that the IMF is grading the architecture that supports India's growth rather than the country's growth rate, its Grade C starts to make sense. A country can grow at 8% and still have structural vulnerabilities.
- It can post healthy GVA numbers and still have weak institutional capacity at the State level, low labour productivity, and an export profile mismatched with global demand. GDP captures the pace of economic activity; it does not capture the quality of governance that sustains it. The true conflict is that, despite India's robust short-term economic momentum, its long-term framework is still being developed.
- Even with the strong Q2 performance, broad-sector analysis shows agriculture growing only 3.5%, utilities at 4.4%, and mining barely above zero, sectors that collectively employ millions but contribute less and less to value creation.
- This does not diminish the achievement of 8.2% growth. However, it makes the narrative more difficult. The IMF's grade serves as a subtle reminder to see past the quarterly glow and recognise the unresolved issues in economic structure, finance, and governance. India is leading the way. What it needs now is the depth.

**Context: As the demand for satellite communication escalates, experts warn that without effective regulation and coordination, the rapid expansion of satellite constellations could lead to disruptions and congestion, and further the digital divide.**

- There's at least one space race already underway to get to the moon. There's also another one: to claim radio frequencies and orbital slots in the limited space around the earth. The main participants of this race are companies launching large fleets of satellites working together, called megaconstellations. These megaconstellations are already revolutionising Internet access around the world — but they're also sparking a fierce and fraught competition for the invisible highways across which they send and receive information.
- In physics, 'spectrum' refers to energy levels. Satellite communications uses the word with a similar meaning: the spectrum is the range of radio frequencies available for wireless data transmission. Radio frequencies are to outer space activities as oxygen is to life on the earth's surface: essential. Enabling data transmission between satellites and ground stations through electromagnetic spectrum bands allocated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) assigns the frequencies of electromagnetic radiation that different satellites and ground stations can use to talk to each other.
- The most sought after frequencies are Ku-band (12-18 GHz) and Ka-band (26-40 GHz) for high-speed satellite internet and L-band (1-2 GHz) for GPS. Each satellite must coordinate its spectrum use to avoid interfering with signals in another channel. But spectrum alone is insufficient: satellites also need to occupy certain physical orbital positions so that their broadcasts reach antennae on the ground.

### **Megaconstellation boom**

- This scramble for spectrum and orbital slots has led to unprecedented satellite deployment. SpaceX's Starlink, launched in 2019, now operates over 8,000 satellites with plans for up to 42,000. OneWeb has 648 satellites, Amazon's Project Kuiper plans 3,200, and China's GuoWang has aimed for 13,000.
- The value of the satellite megaconstellation market is thus projected to explode from \$4.27 billion in 2024 to \$27.31 billion by 2032, a 25.5% annual growth rate driven by demand for high-speed Internet in remote regions and dropping launch costs. The competition also transcends commercial markets; to countries outside the west, megaconstellations constitute a strategic push for technological sovereignty in space communications.

### **ITU governance**

- The ITU is a specialised agency of the United Nations with 194 member states. It serves as the sole global coordinator for satellite spectrum and orbital slots, operating under the principle that these are "limited natural resources that must be used rationally, efficiently and economically".

- The ITU's first-come, first-served coordination system requires satellite operators to file frequency applications and coordinate with potentially affected administrations before receiving international recognition. This creates a competitive advantage for well-capitalised entities from spacefaring nations because they can file applications early and maintain the legal and technical expertise to navigate the lengthy coordination process. Late entrants risk finding the most valuable spectrum-orbital combinations already claimed.
- The World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 introduced some reforms. Its Resolution 8 in particular requires operators to notify deviations between planned and actual orbital deployments, preventing companies from claiming one orbit while deploying elsewhere. The Conference also formalised expectations that if a company proposes to launch a megaconstellation, it must deploy 10% of it within two years, 50% within five years, and complete deployment in seven years.
- The ITU's framework was designed for the 1960s-1990s satellite era and today faces mounting pressure. Its 2025-2029 operational plan identifies "spectrum and satellite orbits" as the top priority, acknowledging that traditional coordination mechanisms designed for hundreds of satellites are struggling to manage thousands of annual deployments. The body processes approximately 80% of satellite-related agenda items, a sign that satellite constellations dominate international spectrum management.

### **Digital divide**

- It's not possible to simply write off megaconstellations because they are one solution to bridging a connectivity disparity among the world's countries. For instance, on the Global Connectivity Index (a figure that combines the number of internet users, connected devices, natural-disaster vulnerability, and GDP), Switzerland leads with a score of 34.41 while India sits at 8.59, a nearly fourfold gap. Worldwide, 2.6 billion people remained offline at the start of 2025, with the most vulnerable populations in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- Satellite operators know that satellites in low-earth orbit (150-2,000 km above sea level) promise lower latency and higher bandwidth than traditional geostationary satellites (35,786 km above sea level). A latency of 20-40 ms, compared to 600+ ms for geostationary satellites, makes real-time applications like telemedicine and online education more feasible in remote regions, especially where ground-based infrastructure is out of the question.
- The thorn here is affordability. Starlink's user terminal, which receives the satellites' transmissions, costs around \$600 (₹53,168 on November 17) with monthly subscription fees, which is unaffordable for rural populations without subsidies or tiered pricing models. The ITU's 'Connecting Humanity Action Blueprint' has also estimated that closing the digital divide by 2030 will require \$2.6-2.8 trillion in investments, underscoring the scale of the challenge.
- For emerging spacefaring nations, this creates dual imperatives: securing spectrum access through the ITU's coordination system while ensuring connectivity translates to genuine affordability.

- India exemplifies this situation. The GSAT-N2 satellite of the Indian Space Research Organisation has a throughput of 48 Gbps and covers remote regions, including the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the Northeast, while Bharti Enterprises' 39% stake in OneWeb positions India within the global low-earth orbit ecosystem. However, the Telecom Regulatory Authority has recommended administrative spectrum allocation rather than auctions, recognising that spectrum for non-geostationary satellites can be shared when properly coordinated. This framework is designed to accelerate deployment while maintaining affordability.
- Yet the fundamental tension remains: without regulatory mandates for universal service obligations or government subsidies, satellite broadband risks becoming premium infrastructure serving urban enterprises and wealthy households rather than bridging urban-rural divides.

### **The path onward**

- Thus the urgency of reform is clear. Current trajectories indicate operators around the world will launch more than 50,000 satellites by 2030. The Earth orbit hosts around 40,000 tracked objects, including over 27,000 pieces of debris larger than 10 cm.
- The ITU adopted a resolution called ITU-R 74 in 2023 calling for the sustainable use of spectrum and orbital resources, including measures to mitigate space debris. Notably, it requires satellites to be removed from orbit within 25 years of completing their missions to prevent defunct spacecraft from accumulating in orbit. Current compliance rates remain low, however, with at best 70% of satellite operators actually deorbiting their machines in this timeframe. This compliance gap means debris continues to accumulate faster than it is removed, threatening the long-term sustainability of orbital space.
- As megaconstellations enter orbit, the overall success depends on governance frameworks that balance commercial innovation with scientific research, equitable access, and of course orbital sustainability. Without binding international standards and equitable allocation, the fight for spectrum could become a war, risking creating an orbital environment that is eventually too congested for anyone to use. For emerging space nations like India, shaping these frameworks now, rather than accepting rules written by other governments, will determine whether space becomes a shared resource or a domain of persistent inequality.

## ❖ State Cabinet clears Bill on internal quota

**Context: The Cabinet cleared The Karnataka Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Bill 2025, a proposed legislation for internal reservation among the 101 Scheduled Castes in the State.**

- 6% each has been provided for Dalit Left and Dalit Right communities, while 5% has been provided for Lambani, Korama and others.
- The Cabinet cleared The Karnataka Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Bill 2025, a proposed legislation for internal reservation among the 101 Scheduled Castes in the State.
- The Bill is likely to be tabled in the ongoing Winter Session of the legislature.
- The Cabinet also cleared a proposed amendment to the Karnataka State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act to provide for appointment of two additional members to the commission — one member from Scheduled Tribes community and another woman. The legislation for the internal reservation, slicing up the 17% reservation for Scheduled Castes communities is as follows: 6% each has been provided for Dalit Left and Dalit Right communities while 5% has been provided for Lambani, Korama, Koracha and Bhovi, besides about 50 Alemari (nomadic communities).
- The Cabinet is also learnt to have cleared a proposal to provide e-khata to unapproved properties up to 1,200 sq ft in rural areas.
- A senior Minister said that the Cabinet also discussed the procurement of maize not happening to the expected level by the distilleries and the Karnataka Milk Federation.

### **ORR makeover**

- The Cabinet also approved the global standards makeover project for the 17.01-km stretch of the Outer Ring Road (ORR) between the Silk Board junction and K.R. Puram in Bengaluru. The project is expected to cost ₹450 crore (including GST).
- The State government has entrusted B-SMILE, the Special Purpose Vehicle, with executing the project.
- In another decision, the Cabinet approved the Karnataka State Road Safety Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2025, one of whose components is the collection of an additional cess during vehicle registration.
- The amount collected will be used for road safety awareness initiatives.

## ❖ EC extends deadline for SIR in five States, one U.T.

**Context: T.N., Gujarat, M.P., Chhattisgarh, U.P., and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands given extension; Kerala got one already; no change in schedule for Bengal, Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, and Rajasthan.**

- The Election Commission has extended the schedule of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in five States and one Union Territory: Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The extension was announced, the earlier deadline to submit enumeration forms.

- The duration of the extension differs in these States and the U.T., ranging from three days to a fortnight, with all draft electoral rolls set to be published by the end of the year. Another set of States — West Bengal, Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, and Rajasthan — has not been granted any extension, while the schedule in Kerala was extended earlier.

### Revised schedule

The SIR schedule has been extended for T.N., Gujarat, M.P., Chhattisgarh, U.P., and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands



	New dates	Enumeration period (till)	Publication of draft rolls
■ Previous enumeration deadline: <b>Dec. 11</b>	T.N., Gujarat	Dec. 14	Dec. 19
■ Previous date for publication of draft rolls: <b>Dec. 16</b>	Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Dec. 18	Dec. 23
	Uttar Pradesh	Dec. 26	Dec. 31

- A senior EC official told that extensions have been given to all States whose Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) had sought it. Interestingly, EC data claims that 99% to 100% of enumeration forms have already been submitted and digitised in most of these States.

### Changing deadlines

- The initial EC order announcing the SIR in 12 States and U.T.s set December 4 as the deadline for voters to submit their enumeration forms. Last week, the EC extended the enumeration period by a week, to December 11, for all 12 States and U.T.s, with draft electoral rolls to be published on December 16.
- On the last day, however, the EC announced a further extension. The enumeration period for T.N. and Gujarat has now been extended till December 14 and the draft rolls will be published on December 19. For M.P., Chhattisgarh, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration deadline has been extended till December 18 and the draft electoral list will be published on December 23.
- U.P. has been given the longest extension, till December 26 for the enumeration period, with the draft rolls now set to be published on December 31.
- The enumeration period for West Bengal, Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, and Rajasthan, however, ended on Thursday as scheduled, and their draft electoral rolls will be published on December 16. The schedule for Kerala had been revised earlier, with the enumeration deadline pushed to December 18 and the draft voter list to be published on December 23.
- According to data shared by the EC, however, 100% of enumeration forms have been digitised in T.N., M.P., Chhattisgarh, Andaman and Nicobar, and Gujarat, while in West Bengal, Rajasthan, U.P. and Kerala, more than 99% have been completed.
- A senior EC official told that most CEOs wanted the booth-level agents appointed by political parties to go through the draft lists before they are published, so that any issues regarding addition or deletion of names can be resolved at this stage.
- Since CEOs had only begun sharing these lists with BLAs, they had sought some more time for this process.
- The poll body added: “New electors are being encouraged to fill Form 6 and submit it to the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) or fill the form online using the ECINet app or website.”

## ❖ Bill to include LS and Assembly members from GBA area in the Authority tabled

**Context: The Greater Bengaluru Governance (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025, and The Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Bill), 2025, were tabled in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly.**

- On behalf of Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa tabled The Greater Bengaluru Governance (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025, in which six amendments have been proposed to the Greater Bengaluru Governance Act, 2024.
- Among other amendments it has been proposed to include all elected members of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly, whose constituency or part of constituency lie within area of the Greater Bengaluru Authority, as members of the Authority.
- The others to be included are members of Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Council who are elected by members of Legislative Assembly who reside within the Greater Bengaluru Authority, all elected members of Legislative Council from local authorities constituencies or graduate or teachers constituencies and all Rajya Sabha members and MLCs who have their names in the electoral within the area of the authority.

### **On social boycott**

- Mr. Mahadevappa also tabled The Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Bill) 2025. Through the Bill, it has been proposed to prohibit any act of social boycott and any person who imposes or causes to impose any social boycott on any member of his community. The offence is punishable with imprisonment which may extend to three years or with fine which may extend to ₹1 lakh or with both.

### **Prohibition officer**

- The Bill also proposes to appoint social boycott prohibition officer, provide compensation to the victim.

## ❖ Panel on simultaneous polls gets more time

**Context: The tenure of the Joint Committee of Parliament examining the Bills that seek to introduce simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies was extended.**

- Committee chairman P.P. Chaudhary moved in the Lok Sabha a motion seeking extension of the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, up to the first day of the last week of the 2026 Budget session.
- The motion was adopted by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha.
- Mr. Chaudhary said that preparation of the report on the Bills would take time because the committee had to listen to many stakeholders. “The report will take time. We have to listen to many stakeholders. It should be done after listening to all stakeholders because it’s a very big election reform,” he had said after a meeting of the committee in the Parliament House complex.
- The committee has met constitutional experts, economists, Law Commission Chairman Dinesh Maheshwari, and others, since it was constituted last December.

- Senior Supreme Court lawyer Kapil Sibal, who is also an Independent Rajya Sabha member, appeared before the committee as an expert and answered queries on the Bills.

### ❖ **DPIIT signals Copyright Act changes to address AI issues**

**Context: DPIIT proposes 'blanket licensing', to let AI firms train LLMs by scraping the Internet, pay royalties once models are commercialised; firms say publishers should be able to opt out from data sharing.**

- The Union government is working to make changes to the copyright law, necessitated by the new demands of artificial intelligence, within the next three years, a senior official.
- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) released a working paper on AI and copyright issues last week. It suggested a “blanket licensing” framework, where websites whose data is crawled by large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT would receive royalty payouts through a copyright society which would split the money between them.
- The proposal aims to resolve the growing tensions worldwide between online content publishers and AI firms, who “train” their LLMs with a large amount of text data, usually scraped from the public Internet. Publishers have argued that they need to be compensated because of their contribution in developing and improving these models.
- The DPIIT proposal suggests generally allowing the scraping of content by AI developers while ensuring that they eventually pay content publishers.
- This will be followed by another working paper that will look into whether AI-generated works are copyrightable, and how authorship is decided for them, DPIIT Additional Secretary Himani Pande said in a news briefing. Following this, the government is likely to move an amendment to the Copyright Act, 1957 in Parliament to establish the new regime.
- Ms. Pande said that the copyright society, known as the Copyright Royalties Collective for AI Training (CRCAT), would only seek payments from AI firms once they commercialise their models, as opposed to when they are mining data from the Internet to develop or train them.
- The compensation of copyright holders has been a contentious issue, with news publishers in particular suing AI firms around the world. Newswire agency ANI, and The New York Times are among those who have sued ChatGPT developer OpenAI for allegedly regurgitating their content in chat conversations. OpenAI has denied their accusations.
- Tech industry body Nasscom, which had one seat in the committee that drafted this report, dissented from the model proposed by the DPIIT. The body, which represents Google, Meta, Amazon, and other large firms with significant AI investments, said that publishers should be able to opt out of including their data in training models, warning that a blanket licensing model could expose firms to further disputes.
- In a note shared with , a Big Tech firm that develops AI models raised concerns about the DPIIT proposal. “As per stated copyright jurisprudence, the burden of proof to establish infringement is on the copyright owner who is making the claim,” it says. “The Hybrid proposal reverses this. It is well established in copyright law that in a copyright

infringement suit, the plaintiff (content owner) must prove that the defendant (AI developer) infringed their copyright. If the burden of proof is on the AI Developer then they have to prove that they have not used the content owner's material even if the output is similar. This is extremely onerous and technically infeasible because Gen AI tools are probabilistic and not deterministic."

### ❖ Aadhaar app to enable offline sharing by exposing minimal data: UIDAI CEO

**Context: A new Aadhaar app under testing will minimise the amount of data from the 12-digit unique identity to be shared in public places such as hotels, and enable sharing of selective information as and when it is needed, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) CEO Bhuvnesh Kumar in an interview.**

- "This is what we want Aadhaar to be," Mr. Kumar said, displaying a dense QR code in the Aadhaar app, which is set to be formally launched and promoted after incorporating more features and undergoing a public test. The app is already available on mobile app marketplaces. The dense QR code represents all the data of an Aadhaar user, including their photo, completely offline.

#### **Impossible to forge**

- The QR code would be scanned by others using the Aadhaar app, and since it is digitally signed by the UIDAI using standard cryptographic techniques, it would be practically impossible to forge. The feature would also reduce the issue of images or PDF documents featuring forged Aadhaar details.
- This would make Aadhaar the only ID "which is verifiable offline", Mr. Kumar said. In recent rule amendments, UIDAI introduced the concept of "Offline Verification Seeking Entities", or OVSEs.
- OVSEs would be public places like hotel receptions, which would be "discouraged", Mr. Kumar said, from asking guests to share physical copies of Aadhaar, and would instead receive a digitally authenticated record of visitors' Aadhaar, with an assurance that the details are legitimate.
- Mr. Kumar ruled out an outright prohibition of storing physical ID details, as this may exclude those without a smartphone.

### ❖ Mexico's 2024 tariffs could still hurt India's auto exports

**Context: The tariffs of up to 50% approved by Mexico's Senate on Wednesday on imports from Asian countries, including India, have been in place since April 2024 and will not have a material impact on India's overall export picture, an analysis of trade data shows. However, they could continue to impact particular sectors, such as automobiles.**

- As per the Senate's decision, the tariffs are expected to apply from January 1, 2026, and will apply to countries with which Mexico does not have a free trade agreement, which includes India.

- However, documents on the Mexican government's website show that these tariffs are not new. In April 2024, the country imposed tariffs ranging from 5-50% on a range of items imported from non-FTA partners for a period of two years. The Senate's move this December is an extension of that original decision.

### Mexican munch

Mexico accounts for about 10% of India's total auto and auto part exports

Motor cars, parts make up \$1.4 bn or **25%** of India's exports to Mexico

Motorcycle exports make up an additional **7%** of India's exports to Mexico



- India exported \$5.7 billion worth of goods to Mexico in 2024-25, which works out to 1.3% of its total exports that year, showing that at an aggregate level, higher tariffs would not pose a significant threat to India's overall export scenario.
- However, not only are these exports dominated by a few sectors, Mexico is a major recipient of those sectors' exports, which means the tariffs could pose a risk to them.
- For example, motor cars and their parts made up \$1.4 billion or 25% of India's exports to Mexico. In addition, motorcycle exports make up an additional 7% of India's exports to Mexico. What places these sectors at more risk than others is that Mexico is one of the largest markets for several of these items. For example, Mexico accounts for about 10% of India's total auto and auto part exports. Mexico constitutes about 12% of India's motorcycle exports.

### 'Start FTA talks'

- In reaction to the April 2024 tariffs and the subsequent impact they were having on trade, the Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) wrote to Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal asking him to begin talks with Mexico on a potential FTA.

### ❖ 'Work closely to spur crude oil source diversification'

**Context: The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) should work closely with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and other concerned government agencies to boost diplomatic engagement with oil-producing countries, secure favourable investment terms and address tax and regulatory hurdles faced by public-sector enterprises (PSEs) abroad, the Parliamentary Committee on Public Undertakings (2025-26) stated in their latest report tabled.**

- Stressing on the need for diversification of crude oil sources, the committee observed notwithstanding proactive efforts being made in this regard, challenges persist due to sanctions, financial market volatility and regulatory changes in host countries where overseas projects are located.

### 'Impact energy bill'

- "These issues not only affect India's energy import bill but also impede the ability of CPSUs to secure overseas exploration and production assets, thereby limiting long-term energy security," it noted.
- According to the committee headed by Member of Parliament from Kendrapara (Odisha) Bajayant Panda, India imports almost 89% of its domestic crude oil requirements.

- In this context, it observed, “Recent global events, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and tensions in the Middle East, have underscored the vulnerability of India’s energy supply chain and its dependence on international trade flows.”
- To this effect, it recommended intensifying efforts towards diversification of sources both “geographically and contractually”, risk management practices as hedging and flexible term contracts and enhancing alternate import routes, among other suggestions.

### ❖ Invisible epidemic: why air pollution is India’s largest health threat?

**Context: India’s air quality crisis is both widespread and deeply entrenched; the scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the health impacts are undeniable; country must now recognise clean air as a fundamental right essential to equitable growth and a non-negotiable national priority.**

- Air pollution in India is no longer a winter irritant confined to the northern plains. It has become a persistent, nationwide public health emergency that affects every demographic group and nearly every organ system.
- Across the Indo-Gangetic plain, and increasingly in fast-growing urban centres elsewhere, dangerous concentrations of particulate matter are shaping disease patterns, slowing childhood development and silently reducing life expectancy.
- India’s air quality crisis is both widespread and deeply entrenched. Of the 256 cities monitored in 2025, 150 exceeded the national PM 2.5 standard as per a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. For most urban residents, breathing unhealthy or hazardous air is now a routine part of the year. The Indo-Gangetic plain remains the worst affected. In 2025, Delhi recorded seasonal PM 2.5 levels of 107 –130 g/m<sup>3</sup>— far above India’s 24-hour limit of 60 g/m<sup>3</sup> and the World Health Organization guideline of 15 g/m<sup>3</sup>.

### **Flawed index, outdated ceiling**

- India’s official Air Quality Index (AQI) continues to cap values at 500, although real-time pollution levels in Delhi and other cities often exceed this threshold. The cap — introduced over a decade ago — was intended to avoid public alarm and was based on the belief that health impacts beyond 500 would be uniformly severe.
- Consequently, government platforms collapse all extreme pollution into one “severe” category, even as international trackers such as IQAir routinely show values above 600 and occasionally beyond 1,000. Experts have repeatedly pointed out that India’s AQI relies on outdated thresholds and instruments, and that the scale requires recalibration, removal of the upper cap and modernised monitoring.
- The health burden of toxic air is stark. According to the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) of the University of Chicago’s Energy Policy Institute, nearly 46% of Indians live in regions where air pollution significantly reduces life expectancy. In Delhi, current PM 2.5 exposure translates into a loss of more than eight years of life when measured against WHO standards. Across northern India, the losses range between 3.5 and seven years.
- The mortality toll is equally worrying. In 2023, air pollution contributed to nearly two million deaths nationwide, as per the State of Global Air Report, 2025, primarily from cardiovascular disease, stroke, COPD and diabetes. Pollution-linked mortality has risen by 43% since 2000, underscoring the cumulative effects of long-term exposure.

## **What PM 2.5 does inside the body**

- **Cardiovascular harm:** PM 2.5 particles penetrate deep into the lungs, cross into the bloodstream and provoke systemic inflammation. Multi-city epidemiological studies in India show an 8% increase in annual mortality for every 10 g/m<sup>3</sup> rise in long-term PM 2.5 exposure. Elevated exposure is linked to hypertension, atherosclerosis, myocardial infarction, arrhythmias and ischemic stroke. In a country already struggling with high cardiovascular disease rates, polluted air acts as a potent, invisible accelerant.
- **Respiratory illness:** Respiratory illnesses remain the most visible consequence of toxic air. Nearly 6% of Indian children now suffer from asthma. Clinical data from AIIMS reveals that a modest 10 g/m<sup>3</sup> increase in PM 2.5 can cause a 20–40% spike in paediatric emergency visits for respiratory distress. Children exposed to high pollution levels show a 10–15% reduction in lung capacity — a deficit that may persist into adulthood. Among adults, COPD, chronic bronchitis and recurrent respiratory infections are increasingly common, especially for those living near roads, industries, landfills and construction sites.
- **Neurological impacts:** Emerging scientific evidence shows that air pollution affects the brain as seriously as it affects the lungs and heart. PM 2.5 particles can cross the blood–brain barrier, triggering neuroinflammation and oxidative stress. Studies from Indian cities link pollution exposure to poorer academic performance, impaired memory and slower cognitive development among children. International meta-analyses show a 35–49% higher risk of dementia for every 10 g/m<sup>3</sup> increase in PM 2.5. Reviews in *Environmental Health Perspectives* (2024) suggest that polluted air accelerates brain ageing through vascular injury and toxic metal deposition.
- **Maternal and neonatal health:** High PM 2.5 exposure is associated with preterm births, low birth weight, stillbirths, and heightened neonatal mortality. Women living near major roads, industrial sites or waste-burning hotspots are especially vulnerable. These early-life impacts have long-term consequences, deepening health inequities across generations.
- **Air pollution in India mirrors existing social and economic inequalities.** Lower-income communities often live closest to emission hotspots — major roads, industrial clusters, construction zones and landfills. Children in these neighbourhoods spend more time outdoors and are therefore more exposed. Poor housing, limited access to clean fuels and inadequate healthcare exacerbate vulnerabilities. During winter, States such as Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar frequently record “severe” or “hazardous” AQI levels (CREA, 2025), where the poorest bear the heaviest burden.
- **Public discussions often focus on stubble burning or Diwali fireworks.** While these events intensify pollution, they are not the root cause. Source-apportionment studies consistently show that year-round structural contributors — vehicular emissions, industrial processes, dust from construction and demolition, informal waste burning, and household biomass use — drive baseline PM 2.5 levels. Seasonal factors simply worsen an already dangerous situation.
- **The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) has initiated some improvements, but its targets remain modest and enforcement weak.** Therefore, a health-centred, multi-sectoral strategy is now essential, which should include the following aspects:

- Transport transformation: Large-scale electrification of buses, taxis, auto-rickshaws and two-wheelers; shifting freight from diesel trucks to rail and electric fleets; real-world emissions monitoring; and the introduction of low-emission zones and congestion pricing.
- Industrial control: Strict enforcement of pollution-control technologies and a phased transition from coal-based processes.
- Construction regulation: Mandatory dust-suppression protocols, enclosure norms and mechanised sweeping.
- Waste-management reform: Segregation at source, decentralised treatment, biomethanation and scientific landfill remediation to eliminate open burning.
- Health-system integration: A health-centred framework should integrate air quality into routine healthcare. District-level advisories based on real-time AQI, lung-function testing within school-health programmes, and screening for COPD and cognitive decline.

### **A fundamental right**

- India must recognise clean air as a fundamental right essential to equitable growth. The scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the health impacts are undeniable. Protecting clean air must now become a non-negotiable national priority — anchored in science, driven by public health, and executed with urgency.

### **❖ Savings shift reshapes India's markets**

**Context: Domestic savings are replacing foreign institutional money, boosting stability but exposing new investors to uneven participation and higher risks; booming markets mask access and performance problems, underscoring the need to fix asymmetry and strengthen investor protection.**

- A significant transformation is under way in India's capital markets. Domestic household savings are now replacing foreign institutional money. This is not just a change in numbers — it is a shift in market power.
- Indian equities are less exposed to the unpredictable swings of global capital, which is positive for stability. However, there is a challenge: millions of new retail investors are stepping in, and not all of them are prepared for the complexities ahead. As India aims for “Viksit Bharat 2047,” the question is whether stability built on unequal participation and limited returns supports inclusive growth.

### **The rise of domestic money**

- The latest NSE Market Pulse report shows Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) ownership of Indian equities at a 15-month low of 16.9% and 24.1% in the NIFTY 50. Meanwhile, domestic Mutual Funds (MFs) are hitting new highs quarter after quarter. Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) are bringing in record inflows, and individual investors, through direct holdings and MFs, now own nearly 19% of the market, the highest in over two decades.
- Domestic savers are now the market's anchor. They are helping reduce volatility and giving institutions a “flight-to-stability” option, as seen in the NIFTY 50's surge in October.

- This market ownership shift has a corresponding impact on the policy landscape. The Reserve Bank of India now enjoys greater flexibility, thanks to domestic inflows and record-low inflation — CPI inflation eased to 0.3% year-on-year in October. With less reliance on FPI flows, the central bank can prioritise stimulating bank credit growth and managing the growth-inflation trade-off, rather than defending the rupee from capital flight. Yet, this policy space is not guaranteed; it could quickly evaporate if household confidence falters or if market downturns disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. Without careful management, this shift risks becoming a source of future instability.

### **Boom in primary markets**

- Further reflecting the confidence in domestic capital, the primary market is booming. Seventy-one mainboard listings this fiscal year have raised over ₹1 lakh crore. This surge is supported by a strong appetite for capital formation: in the first nine months of FY25, Indian companies announced investments exceeding ₹32 lakh crore, a 39% increase over the same period last year. Notably, the share of private participation in these announcements has risen to around 70%.
- However, beneath this growth lies a more complex reality. The celebratory narrative around MFs and retail participation often skips a key point: the quality of financial advice and how wealth is distributed. A concerning trend can be observed in the IPO market. Companies like Lenskart are commanding sky-high price-to-earnings multiples. Mamaearth and Nykaa have seen similar trends. These examples raise questions about whether market exuberance is outpacing fundamentals and whether retail investors are being exposed to excessive risk.
- Financial literature provides some answers — investing doesn't guarantee better returns. This dynamic is highlighted in the so-called "performance problem" in finance, where most active fund managers struggle to consistently beat the market after accounting for risk and fees.

### **Unequal outcomes**

- The consequences of this structural inefficiency are direct, impacting how wealth is distributed across society. When new equity wealth is concentrated among upper-income groups — as seen in higher MF participation in areas with formal financial access — market stability may inadvertently accelerate wealth inequality.
- The recent decline in household equity wealth by ₹2.6 lakh crore in the last quarter is particularly concerning. If these losses are concentrated among new, vulnerable investors, the promise of inclusive growth rings hollow. Moreover, concentrated benefits dampen aggregate demand, as high wealth concentration often leads to a lower marginal propensity to consume.
- One can argue that increased retail participation is a sign of democratisation and will naturally lead to better outcomes as markets mature. But without appropriate safeguards and education, new investors may face higher risks and losses. Market corrections are a normal part of investing, but when losses are concentrated among inexperienced investors, long-term trust in markets can be damaged.

## Fixing asymmetry

- Addressing these challenges requires more than just increasing the volume of savings. The current financial system must confront the “access asymmetry problem.” This means shifting the focus from simply disclosing information to actively protecting everyday investors. Key steps include incentivising lower fees and promoting passive, low-cost investment vehicles.
- With active schemes holding 9% of the market and low-cost passive funds only 1%, lowering expense ratios and educating investors on indexing are crucial steps toward solving the “performance problem.”
- Deeper structural issues also demand attention. As promoter holdings in the NIFTY 50 reach a 23-year low of 40%, it is vital to ensure this reflects healthy capital raising, not opportunistic disinvestment. Strengthening corporate governance and transparency is necessary to safeguard long-term value for domestic savers.
- Equally important are data-driven interventions. Using gender- and location-specific data can help identify gaps in access and outcomes, enabling targeted policies that bring more women and underrepresented investors into the financial mainstream.
- The market’s new foundation is promising, but the imperative now is to shift from simply attracting funds to proactively deepening institutional integrity and broadening financial literacy. Navigating the asymmetries inherent in financial deepening is no longer a peripheral concern; it is a fiduciary imperative.

## ❖ Why human-rating matters as India prepares for Gaganyaan

**Context: Human-rating emerges as a crucial process ensuring that space systems like LVM-3 can safely carry humans by adding redundancy, robust abort capabilities, and rigorous testing; as Gaganyaan approaches, ISRO upgrades and certifies the LVM-3 for human-rating.**

- As India moves closer to flying astronauts as part of Gaganyaan, human-rating has emerged as a central but oft-unseen part of the story. Launch vehicles like LVM-3 already fly satellites safely but carrying people demands a lower tolerance for risk and a different way of thinking about failure.

### What’s the definition of human-rating?

- Human-rating is the rigorous engineering and certification process that makes sure a space system, like a launch vehicle or a crew module, can safely carry humans to space. As a result, human-rated systems have an acceptable level of risk.
- According to NASA standards, this is a 0.2% chance for a catastrophic event causing loss of crew during the ascent and descent phases of flight.
- As part of the human-rating process, engineers attach redundant critical systems, e.g., triple or quadruple redundant flight computers; robust abort capabilities throughout the time of ascent, like the crew escape system; fault tolerance to single failures; and a reliable environmental control and life support system for the crew cabin.
- They also exhaustively test, verify, and document far beyond what’s required for expendable cargo rockets, all to achieve the stated loss-of-crew probability.

### **Why is human-rating challenging?**

- The endeavour of escaping the earth's gravity is much harsher and less forgiving than flying through the atmosphere, like aeroplanes do. In fact, between flying through the atmosphere and entering the vacuum of space, rockets have to accelerate to 28,000kmph in just 8-10 minutes, experience intense vibrations, and withstand high structural loads at the point of maximum dynamic pressure.
- A passenger aircraft, on the other hand, can cruise gently for hours through the atmosphere at less than 1,000 kmph with (relatively) large safety margins, can tolerate engine failure without catastrophe, and can glide or divert to an airport during emergencies.
- As a result, the most reliable orbital launch vehicles have success rates of around 98-99.5%, whereas commercial airliners have safety records closer to one fatal accident per 10-20 million flights.

### **Which launch vehicles have been human-rated?**

- As of today, fully operational human-rated launch vehicles — i.e. those flying crew to earth orbit — are Russia's Soyuz-2, China's Long March 2F, and SpaceX's Falcon 9.
- In the U.S., United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket completed its crewed test flight in 2024 using the Boeing Starliner crew capsule, but it awaits certification for routine operational crew rotation missions following post-flight technical reviews. NASA's Space Launch System is also human-rated but it has only flown one uncrewed mission, Artemis I, and is currently preparing for its first crewed flight.

### **Which agency provides human-rating certificates?**

- In the U.S., NASA grants the final human rating certification, thus authorising the vehicle for crewed flight, particularly where NASA astronauts are involved. For commercial missions like SpaceX's Crew Dragon and Boeing's Starliner, NASA specifies stringent crew safety requirements.
- The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also licenses commercial launch operations to protect public safety on the ground but doesn't certify crew safety.
- The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) grants human-rating approval for systems like the Long March 2F and Shenzhou spacecraft. In Russia, Roscosmos is the certifying authority for the long-standing Soyuz rocket and spacecraft.

### **How often do human-rated launch vehicles succeed?**

- Russia's Soyuz spacecraft programme has undertaken more than 150 crewed missions since 1967. It has an exceptionally high success rate, about 98%. The programme did suffer two fatal missions early in its history: Soyuz 1 in 1967 and Soyuz 11 in 1971.
- However it has been nearly flawless in the current era vis-à-vis delivering crew to orbit. The Soyuz crew escape system successfully saved the lives of cosmonauts in at least three non-fatal launch failures: in 1975, 1983, and 2018. Since the 1971 incident, the crew safety success rate for the Soyuz program has been 100%.

- The U.S. Space Shuttle programme completed 135 human space missions from 1981 to 2011 with 133 successes at a rate of 98.5% (133 successful). Its two failures, the Challenger and Columbia disasters in 1986 and 2003 respectively, were the only losses of vehicle and crew. All other flights safely achieved their primary objectives.
- The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket paired with the Crew Dragon spacecraft has achieved a 100% success rate across 20 of its orbital human spaceflights. These NASA Commercial Crew rotations to the International Space Station and private missions, including the Axiom-4 mission that Indian astronaut Subhanshu Shukla piloted.
- China's Shenzhou human spaceflight programme, operated by CMSA and launched aboard the Long March 2F rocket, has completed 16 crewed orbital missions with a record of success since its inaugural crewed mission in 2003. However, its flawless run was compromised by the Shenzhou-20 mission in November, when the spacecraft was damaged by space debris. While the crew returned safely aboard the Shenzhou-21 capsule, the damaged Shenzhou-20 capsule was left docked to the Tiangong space station.

### **Why aren't all launch vehicles human-rated?**

- Human-rating a launch vehicle is essential to ensure the astronauts' safety but it's technically challenging and more expensive.
- The certification process imposes enormous costs because it requires additional systems, rigorous testing, and extensive documentation. These provisions also increase complexity and rocket mass, potentially reducing payload performance and sometimes introducing new modes of failure.
- For a cargo mission, the priority is to maximise the mass of the payload (e.g. satellite or supplies) delivered to the desired orbit at the lowest possible cost per kilogram. Adding the mass and complexity of additional systems required for human-rating for a cargo mission would however drive up the price for customers.

### **Which vehicle is being human-rated for Gaganyaan?**

- India's maiden human spaceflight programme will use the LVM-3 rocket. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has upgraded it and it's currently being certified for human-rating. Once it's thus rated, it will be called the HLV-M3 and will be able to carry Indian astronauts into space.
- To this end, ISRO has added extra backup systems, made several systems and subsystems more reliable, strengthened the engines, extensively tested and built a fast crew escape system (which can pull the crew module away in case anything goes wrong during launch).
- ISRO selected the LVM-3 for Gaganyaan for multiple reasons. The rocket has already proven its merits in seven consecutive successful orbital flights (including the Chandrayaan-3 mission). It's also the most reliable rocket in ISRO's fleet.
- The rocket's fully indigenous propulsion stages — two Vikas liquid engines, the C25 cryogenic engine, and the S200 boosters — are also aligned with India's strategic goal to achieve self-reliance in human spaceflight, under its Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

## ❖ Retail inflation moves up marginally to 0.7% in Nov.

**Context: Inflation has slowed in seven of the first eight months of the financial year; decline in food prices offsets marginal acceleration in fuel inflation; prices in housing segment stay virtually unchanged.**

- Retail inflation in India quickened marginally to 0.7% in November 2025, up from the historic low of 0.25% in October 2025, with a continued contraction in food prices offsetting a marginal acceleration in fuel inflation. November's inflation rate is the second-lowest ever recorded in the current series of the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Inflation as measured by the CPI, for which the latest data were released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Friday, has slowed in seven of the first eight months of this financial year.
- The food and beverages category saw prices contract by 2.8% in November 2025, as compared to a high base of 8.2% in November of last year, and a contraction of 3.7% in October 2025.
- "The factors driving inflation downwards have been the same: base effect and decline in prices of vegetables and pulses," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda said. "In particular, potatoes, onions and tomatoes have witnessed a decline, leading to food inflation falling by 3.9%. In the food basket, edible oils witnessed sharp increases though the topline number was down to 7.9%. Mustard and coconut oil were the main drivers of inflation here."
- This contraction in food prices offset the impact of a quickening in fuel inflation to 2.3% in November 2025, compared to 2% in October, and a contraction of 1.8% in November of last year. Inflation in the pan, tobacco, and intoxicants category quickened marginally in November 2025 to 3% from 2.9% in October.
- The clothing and footwear category, on the other hand, saw inflation ease marginally to 1.5% from 1.7%.
- Inflation in the housing category remained virtually unchanged at 2.95% in November 2025 as compared to 2.96% in October.

### Marginal rise

Retail inflation in India inched up in November 2025, rising from October's **record low of 0.25%**



Source: CMI

## ❖ AI Centre of Excellence for Healthcare established at IISc

**Context: The Translational AI for Networked Universal Healthcare (TANUH) Foundation has been established at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru as a dedicated AI Centre of Excellence in Healthcare to advance AI-driven healthcare innovation at scale in the country.**

- This has been established in line with the government of India's vision of 'Make AI in India and Make AI Work for India', and the Ministry of Education has set up four Centres of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence (AI-CoEs), each hosted by a premier academic institution in India, including IISc.

- The institute stated that the TANUH AI-CoE is a Section 8 not-for-profit company that focuses on developing and deploying scalable AI solutions for the effective management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) at the point of care. The centre operates as a multidisciplinary hub, bringing together clinicians, data scientists, and AI researchers.
- Nine faculty members from IISc, spanning digital health, machine learning, and public health, anchor the centre's research programmes. TANUH's core team, comprising executives, engineers, programme managers, and research staff, with significant industry experience, enables the translation of health-AI technologies from the lab to the population scale.
- TANUH's goal is to design and deploy tools for early detection, risk prediction, monitoring and personalised solutions across high-burden conditions such as oral cancer, breast cancer, retinal diseases, diabetes, and mental health. The tools will help frontline health workers, improve primary and hospital care, and include human decision-making to make sure the care is safe and effective. The solutions are designed to be used directly where patients are treated, follow responsible AI standards, and are created and tested together with doctors and researchers.

❖ **About 31% of SCSP/TSP funds used for guarantee schemes since 2023**

**Context: Minister defends move stating Section 7(C) of the SCSP/TSP Act allows utilisation of the funds in tune with SC/ST population.**

- The State government has used a significant share of the amount earmarked for the Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) towards implementing the five guarantee schemes of the Congress government since 2023.

SCSP/ TSP funds spent towards guarantee schemes (in ₹ crores)

Year	Gruha Lakshmi	Anna Bhagya	Yuva Nidhi	Gruha Jyoti	Shakti
2023-24	5,075	1,635.09	3.7	1,561.92	928
2024-25	8,548.55	1,589.6	76.85	2,452.21	1,451.45
2025-26 (up to Nov.)	599.2	846.75	118.52	1,665.71	1,023.65
Total	14,222.75	4,071.44	199.07	5769.84	3,367.1



- According to statistics shared by Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa, in response to a question by Hemalatha Nayak in the Legislative Council in Belagavi on Friday, of the total amount spent towards SCSP and TSP, as much as 31%, has been utilised for the guarantee schemes.
- The total amount for SCSP and TSP for the year 2023-24 was ₹35,221.8 crore, and of that, ₹34,369.85 crore was released, and finally, ₹34,245.76 crore was spent. In the year 2024-24, the total amount spent for SCSP and TSP was ₹38,717.74 crore. In the current year, up to November 2025, the government had spent ₹14,938.19 crore towards the SCSP and TSP.
- Since the Congress party came to power in 2023, the government has spent a total of ₹87,901.69 crore for SCSP and TSP. This amount includes ₹27,630.2 crore spent towards the guarantee schemes.
- The Minister, in his reply, defended the utilisation of SCSP/TSP funds for the guarantee schemes, stating that Section 7(C) of the SCSP/TSP Act allows utilisation of the funds in tune with the population of SC and ST.

- He stated that the amount utilised for guarantee schemes reached the beneficiaries of the SC and ST communities.

### **Bus travellers**

- Interestingly, he stated that his department had sought information from the Transport Department about the number of SC and ST women who had benefited from the Shakti scheme, under which women passengers could travel free in KSRTC buses. Ms. Nayak, the MLC, wondered how the Transport Department could share the information of the SC/ST passengers, as they do not collect the caste details while issuing tickets.
- Leader of Opposition Chalavadi Narayanaswamy appealed to Chairman Basavaraj Horatti to allot suitable time for a detailed discussion on the issue.

### **❖ Civil society group flags concerns over Karnataka hate speech Bill**

**Context: A civil society organisation has urged the Karnataka government to subject the proposed Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025, to wider public consultation before it is tabled in the Legislative Council. It has already been tabled in the Assembly.**

- While welcoming the intent behind the legislation, Campaign Against Hate Speech, the organisation, said the Bill in its present form raises several concerns that warrant careful review.
- In a representation to the government, the group said the Bill marks an important acknowledgement of the harm hate speech and hate crimes inflict on constitutional values of fraternity and dignity. Stating that such acts disproportionately target women, minority and queer communities, they cautioned that the current version risks being ineffective and may leave scope for misuse.
- A key concern is the Bill's definition of "hate crime", which is limited to communication of hate speech. "This creates a false equivalence between speech and physical acts of violence, and fails to recognise offences such as mob lynching, punitive demolitions and social or economic boycotts. The Bill also provides no standalone punishment for hate speech, and relies on an emotion-based definition — an approach that has already led to weak enforcement under existing criminal laws," the memorandum stated.
- The range of punishment for hate crimes was questioned for its lack of clarity, especially since the offence is non-bailable and cognisable. Sections granting broad "preventive" powers to the Executive Magistrate and police were flagged as potentially enabling arbitrary action, as the law does not define the scope of such powers or the due process requirements.
- Another point of concern, the group said, is the provision allowing a designated officer to block or remove online content construed as hate crime material even before trial.
- Emphasising that the Bill has far-reaching implications, the organisation cited the Supreme Court's emphasis on meaningful public consultation and referred to the Centre's 2014 Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy.

## ❖ Census 2027 to cost ₹11,718 crore, no separate budget earmarked for NPR

**Context: The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the proposal for conducting Census of India 2027 at a cost of ₹11,718.24 crore, a government statement said.**

- Unlike 2019, the statement does not mention a separate budgetary allocation for updating the National Population Register (NPR), which is the first step for the creation of a countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- In 2019, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved ₹3,941.35 crore for updating the NPR and ₹8,754.23 crore for conducting the Census of India 2021, which could not be conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- NPR, which was first collected in 2010 and updated in 2015 and already has a database of 119 crore residents, was to be updated with the first phase of Census in 2020. On July 29, the government informed the Lok Sabha that no decision has been taken to update the NPR during the forthcoming Census exercise.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah posted on X, “The outcome of the Census 2027 will serve as the new compass for development, mirroring India's latest population data with more accuracy. The precision in data will accelerate Modi Ji's vision of delivering the benefits of good governance and development to citizens of every demographic denomination, making the slogan of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas’ a grand reality of New India in the Amrit Kaal.”
- The government’s statement on Friday said that the “largest administrative and statistical exercise in the world” will ensure that data are provided to Ministries in a “clean, machine-readable and actionable format” as part of the “Census-as-a-Service (CaaS)” initiative.
- This will be the first digital Census and the first to enumerate caste in independent India. “The current endeavour would be to make available the coming Census data at the shortest possible time across the country. Efforts will also be made to disseminate Census results with more customised visualisation tools,” the statement said.
- The government said that a nearly 18,600-strong technical workforce will be engaged for about 550 days at the local level.
- “The enumerators, generally government teachers and appointed by the State governments, will be doing the field work of Census in addition to their regular duties,” it said.
- Data will be collected using mobile applications and a dedicated portal, namely Census Management and Monitoring System, has been developed for monitoring the Census process in real time.

## ❖ Framework to fight fake news has been made strong: Minister

**Context: The government has strengthened the framework to combat fake news and deepfakes across media platforms, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw said in the Rajya Sabha.**

- In response to the questions asked by Mohammed Nadimul Haque (Trinamool Congress), the Union Minister said free speech is protected under Article 19(1) of the Constitution.

- “The government is cognisant of the increasing instances of fake, false, misleading information, and AI-generated deepfakes across media platforms, which can adversely impact democratic processes and public order,” said the reply.

### **Statutory framework**

- A broad statutory and institutional framework already exists to address fake news across various media platforms, the Minister said.
- TV channels follow the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, which prohibits content that is obscene, defamatory, deliberately false, or that contains suggestive innuendos and half-truths.
- The rules framed under the Act establish a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism to address violations.
- For the print media, Norms of Journalistic Conduct issued by the Press Council of India restrain the publication of fake, defamatory, or misleading news. It can inquire into alleged violations of the norms, examine complaints, and issue warnings.
- There is Code of Ethics under Information Technology Rules 2021 for publishers of news and current affairs on digital media.
- The Fact Check Unit (FCU) has been set up under the Press Information Bureau to check fake news related to the government.

### **❖ Govt. likely to rename MGNREGS to ‘Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana’**

**Context: The government is likely to introduce a Bill in the ongoing Winter session of Parliament amending the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), changing the name of the flagship rural employment scheme to “Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana”.**

- According to senior government functionaries, the amended Bill was cleared by the Union Cabinet in its meeting.
- There was no official announcement on the proposal at the Cabinet briefing addressed by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.
- The original Bill passed by Parliament on August 25, 2005, was called the “National Rural Employment Guarantee Act”. The suffix “Mahatma Gandhi” was added in 2009.
- The flagship scheme guarantees up to 100 days of wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The sources also indicated that the government plans to increase this to 125 days.
- As per a written answer by the Minister of State for Rural Development Kamlesh Paswan on Friday in the Rajya Sabha, the average number of days of employment per household during the past five years comes to 50.35 days. He also noted that the scheme was a “fallback option when no better employment opportunity is available”.
- In 2022, the government had appointed a panel headed by former Union Rural Development Secretary Amarjeet Sinha to review the scheme, especially the inter-State variations, and lower expenditure under the scheme in States with higher poverty rates.
- The amended Bill is likely to take into account the panel’s recommendation, introducing exclusionary clauses based on economic indices of a State.
- The government is also likely to tweak the scheme’s funding pattern.

### ❖ RS resolution seeks free, compulsory early childhood care

**Context:** The Rajya Sabha discussed a private member's resolution moved by nominated member Sudha Murty urging the Union government to consider steps to amend the Constitution to introduce a new Article 21B guaranteeing free and compulsory early childhood care and education (ECCE), including nutrition, health services, and pre-primary learning, for all children between three and six years of age.

- The resolution also sought universal access to quality ECCE through strengthened Anganwadi services and asked the government to focus on ECCE for its central role in securing strong foundations for lifelong learning and development.
- “Children are our future. They are the rising Sun. Their early education should benefit their life. Hence I request through you sir, to our government to consider amending our Constitution to give fundamental right to education from three to 14 years,” Ms. Murty said.

### ❖ UNEA adopts India's proposal on wildfire management

**Context:** India's push for a stronger global system to manage and prevent wildfires — centred on early-warning mechanisms and improved risk assessments — was formally adopted at the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi, the Environment Ministry said in a statement.

- India's resolution, titled “Strengthening the Global Management of Wildfires,” calls for a shift from reactive firefighting to proactive prevention. Officials said these measures are essential to address what India called the “cascading ecological, economic and social impacts” of today's fires.

### ❖ 'Cover doctors deputed for COVID-19 duty under PMGKY'

**Context:** The Supreme Court observed that the nation must not forget the unwavering sacrifice and heroism of doctors and health workers during the pandemic days while holding that the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY) insurance package benefits would apply to public and private medical professionals drafted into COVID-19 duties, only to lose their lives in service.

- The Indian Medical Association's COVID-19 registry records 748 doctors' deaths in the first wave and hundreds more in subsequent waves.
- The PMGKY package offered a comprehensive personal accident cover of ₹50 lakh for 90 days to a total of around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who were in direct contact and care of COVID-19 patients.
- The verdict came in a petition filed on the death of a doctor who ran a private clinic in Maharashtra. Dr. B.S. Surgade's wife claimed his services were requisitioned by the government to keep his clinic open during the pandemic. She said he had fatally contracted the virus from his patients.

### ❖ 'PF contributions on wages beyond ₹15,000 voluntary'

**Context: The Union Labour and Employment Ministry has clarified that contributions by employers and employees to the Provident Fund in excess of the statutory monthly wage ceiling of ₹15,000 are voluntary, after the Code on Social Security and three other codes came into force on November 21.**

- The Code on Social Security replaces the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and eight other laws. Similarly, 20 separate laws are subsumed into the other three codes — Code on Wages; Industrial Relations Code, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code.
- In a post on social media platform X on Wednesday, the Ministry made it clear that “there is no legal requirement” for the contributions made over and above the wage ceiling. “In case the employer and the employee agree, they can voluntarily contribute on wages more than the statutory limit of ₹15,000.”
- It emphasised that there would be no reduction in take-home pay in the light of enforcement of the four codes. The Ministry gave an illustration to substantiate its position.
- Since September 2014, the present limit has been in force. It was against this backdrop that early this month, Kerala MPs Benny Behanan and Dean Kuriakose raised a question in the Lok Sabha whether the ceiling would be increased to ₹30,000.
- Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya replied that “raising the wage ceiling for coverage under EPFO [Employees' Provident Fund Organisation] is done based on extensive stakeholders' consultations, including trade unions and industry associations, as the same will have impact on the take-home salary of employees and on the hiring cost for employers.”

### ❖ Centre increases minimum support price for copra

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), here on Friday, decided to increase the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for copra for the 2026 market season.
- The MSP for fair average quality of milling copra has been fixed at ₹12,027 per quintal and for ball copra at ₹12,500 per quintal.
- The new rate is an increase of ₹445 per quintal for milling copra and ₹400 per quintal for ball copra over the previous season.

### ❖ India offers 'final' deal to U.S., but tariff removal is focus

**Context: Offers 'immediate' removal of tariffs on import of items like walnuts and apples, but prioritises removal of 25% tariffs linked to Russian oil.**

- India has offered the U.S. a revised “final” deal, but its priority now is the removal of the additional 25% tariffs linked to Russian oil, two different sources have confirmed .
- As per the latest submission, India has offered to “immediately” remove tariffs on the import of items like walnuts, almonds, apples, and industrial goods. However, these would be part of a larger Bilateral Trade Agreement, while India right now is focussing on the removal of the 25% tariffs. A U.S. team led by Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Rick Switzer was in New Delhi for two days until December 12.

- The U.S. currently imposes a 50% tariff on imports from India, including a 25% reciprocal tariff and a 25% 'penalty' for India's import of Russian oil.
- "India has offered the U.S. team a revised deal," an official in the Government of India aware of the latest developments in the trade deal told The Hindu on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the issue. "This is the final offer that India can make."

## Penalty 'kick'

The U.S. currently imposes a 50% tariff on imports from India, which includes a 25% 'penalty' for India's import of Russian oil

■ Indian exporters say they can deal with 25% tariffs since the lowest global tariff is 19%, but 50% tariffs are hurting

■ They are retaining customers by absorbing the higher tariffs, but it is eating into their profits



■ The exporters have appealed to the government that at least the additional 25% tariff be handled

- "The focus now is on removing the 25% Russian oil tariffs," the official explained. "Indian exporters have told the government that they can deal with 25% tariffs since the lowest global tariff is 19%, but 50% tariffs are hurting." Two days ago, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, while testifying before the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, said that India was a "tough nut to crack", but that the offers it has made to the U.S. were the "best we've ever received as a country".
- According to a second official, Indian exporters are currently retaining customers by absorbing the higher tariffs as they feel that this is cheaper and easier than losing customers and then trying to reacquire them later. But this is eating into their profits.
- "They have appealed very sincerely to the government that at least the additional 25% tariff be handled and so the government is pushing for that," the second official said.
- The latest version of India's offer to the U.S. includes an offer to "immediately" remove tariffs on the import of tree nuts such as almonds and walnuts, apples, industrial goods, and items such as luxury motorcycles in return for the U.S. removing the additional 25% tariff.
- "The two teams of negotiators have broadly done what they can, the ball is in Trump's court to accept the deal or not," the second official said.
- This is confirmed by the fact that Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday told reporters in Mumbai that Mr. Switzer's visit was not "centred around negotiations".
- A previous analysis of government trade data by The Hindu found that India has been cutting back on its Russian oil imports well before the U.S. imposed its penalty tariffs in August.

## ❖ 'Nuclear, insurance opened up'

- India's Cabinet approved sweeping changes to atomic energy laws and fully opened insurance sector to foreign investors, two government sources said, in a bid to attract billions of dollars in these two critical sectors.
- India, which plans to expand nuclear power capacity 12-fold by 2047, is relaxing rules to end a decades-old State monopoly and overcome a stringent liability provision to allow private participation and attract foreign technology. In insurance, the government proposed removing the 74% cap on foreign ownership of Indian insurers.

## ❖ Union Cabinet allows export of coal

**Context: Paving the way for further coal exports, the Union Cabinet approved a policy allowing coal acquired through auctioning to be utilised for any industrial use and export.**

- The current policy allows coal to be used only for cement, steel, sponge, iron and aluminium, etc. via auctions.
- Effectively, the Policy for Auction of Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient and Transparent Utilisation of coal (CoalSETU) would now allow guaranteed supply deals (coal linkages) obtained via auctions to be used for captive consumption, export, or any other purpose (including coal washing), except for resale in India. Those securing coal linkages would be allowed to use it via the window among subsidiaries or group firms.
- **In FY25, India produced 1.05 billion tonne of coal.**

## ❖ Technical textile mission likely to be extended

**Context: The National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM) introduced by the Ministry of Textiles in 2020 with ₹1,480 crore in total funding, ending in March 2026 will likely be extended by two years.**

- An official said with almost 50% of the funds used so far, the Mission is expected to be extended by two years. The Mission has four components — research, innovation and development; market development, export promotion and education and training.

## ❖ India frees up business visas for Chinese professionals in major step to boost ties

**Context: India has cut red tape to speed business visas for Chinese professionals, two officials said, a major step to boost ties between the Asian giants and end chronic delays that cost output worth billions of dollars because of scarce technicians.**

- As Prime Minister Narendra Modi cautiously rekindles ties with Beijing in the face of punishing U.S. tariffs, the officials said New Delhi dropped a layer of bureaucratic scrutiny and shortened visa approval times to less than a month.
- India had blocked virtually all Chinese visits after the nuclear-armed neighbours clashed on their Himalayan frontier in mid-2020, widening its vetting of business visas beyond the home and foreign ministries.
- Following the news, China's Foreign Ministry said it had noticed "positive action" from India to facilitate people-to-people exchanges in the common interest. "China is willing to maintain communication and consultation with India to continuously enhance the level of facilitation of exchanges," Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun added.
- The removal of red tape comes after Mr. Modi visited China this year for the first time in seven years.

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