



**DR. RAJKUMAR ACADEMY
BENGALURU**

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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

APRIL WEEK 4

20-04-2026 TO 25-04-2026

**INDIA'S FORESTS
COULD NEARLY
DOUBLE
CARBON
STORAGE BY
2100**

**DELIMITATION AND
PARLIAMENT SEATS**

**ALTERED
MOSQUITOES
COULD RESHAPE
MALARIA CONTROL**

SAF IS DIFFERENT

**GOVT. ADDS 14
SEAPORTS FOR E-
VISA ENTRY**

❖ **Export disruption hits 'Bangalore Rose' onion;MP seeks Centre's support**

Context: MP for Chickballapur K. Sudhakar has urged the Union government to intervene immediately, stating that farmers cultivating the geographically indicated (GI) 'Bangalore Rose' onion are facing severe market distress.

- The 'Bangalore Rose' onion is a distinctive, small, pungent, scarlet-red bulb variety primarily cultivated in Karnataka's Chickballapur, Kolar and Bengaluru Rural districts.
- According to Dr. Sudhakar, the crisis follows ongoing geopolitical disruption in West Asia, which has significantly constrained export supply chains for the 'Bangalore Rose' onion crop, which is traditionally export-oriented. This has led to a steep fall in prices as the rates have plummeted from ₹1,200 to ₹1,500 per bag to below ₹100, leaving farmers in acute financial distress, Dr. Sudhakar said.
- "The situation has caused acute financial distress to farmers. Large quantities of perishable produce remain unsold, further aggravating the situation," he said.
- In a letter to Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Dr. Sudhakar has urged the **Centre to step in with immediate market support measures. He has called for procurement interventions to prevent distress in sales and stabilise prices.** In a separate communication to Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, the MP has sought urgent steps to open up alternative export markets. He has also emphasised the need for logistical support and export incentives to revive the crop's viability.
- Highlighting long-term solutions, Dr. Sudhakar has proposed the **development of processing infrastructure in the region, including dehydration and pickling units under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY).** He noted that such measures would reduce dependence on raw exports and provide value addition opportunities for farmers.
- However, **farmers in Chickballapur noted that the crop was exported to Southeast Asia. "We do have a disrupted market,** as the price has fallen to ₹200 per bag of 50 kg as against ₹800 last year. Some of us have not harvested and have left it as it is. A few have harvested and threw them on roads as a sign of protest," said Venkata Reddy, a farmer from Chelur in Chickballapur.
- However, he acknowledged that there is a need for establishing dehydration and pickling units. "Even the hoarding infrastructure is very small and limited to a few farmers. We need a bigger storage facility for our district," he said.

❖ No respite from summer heat as 5 districts cross 40°C

Context: The India Meteorological Department predicts that no large change in maximum temperature is expected over north interior Karnataka during the next five days.

- In north interior Karnataka, Kalaburagi recorded a maximum of 41.7°C against the normal maximum temperature of 40.2°C with a departure of 1.5°C.
- Bidar recorded a maximum of 41.6°C against the normal maximum temperature of 38.6°C with a departure of 3.0°C.
- Raichur recorded a maximum of 41.4°C against the normal maximum temperature of 39.9°C with a departure of 1.5°C. Koppal recorded a maximum of 40.4°C against the normal maximum temperature of 38°C with a departure of 2.4°C.
- However, the Koppal All Weather Station (AWS) recorded a maximum of 43.2°C. In south interior Karnataka, Ballari (Hagari KVK) AWS recorded 40.9°C.
- The maximum temperature was above the 35°C mark in the remaining districts of the State, barring a few in the coastal region along with Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga and Haveri districts.

❖ Centre's procurement price for potato is half of input cost: farmers

Context: A day after the Union Agriculture Ministry announced the procurement of 20 lakh tonnes of potatoes at the rate of ₹6.5 per kg (₹6,500.9 per tonne) from Uttar Pradesh, where the prices have fallen due to various factors, including unseasonal rain, farmers on Sunday said the amount was less than half of their input cost.

- Welcoming the decision to procure approximately 10% of the total potato output in the State, the farmers, however, said the Centre should procure potatoes for at least ₹12 a kg.
- Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the first week of March, highlighting the plight of potato farmers. Mr. Tikait had said in the letter that the Centre should announce at least ₹1,500 per quintal (₹15 per kg) as support price for potatoes. He had also demanded that industries for value addition and processing be promoted in the potato belt of the State.
- Rajveer Lawaniya, BKU Agra district president and a potato farmer, told The Hindu that potato prices had fallen to ₹2-₹4 a kg. "Our input cost is ₹12 for a kg. For a farmer to make even a small profit, the procurement price should be ₹15 a kg.
- The amount announced is far below than what we have been demanding. The harvest is over and farmers have sent the crop to cold storages. To avoid suicides of farmers in this region, the government should immediately increase the procurement price," he said.
- He added that if 10% of the produce was procured by the government for at least ₹12 a kg, it would be a huge help for the farmers.
- The government also approved the procurement of chickpea in Andhra Pradesh and pigeon pea in Karnataka.

Context: As India opens its nuclear power sector to private participation under the newly enacted SHANTI Act, former regulators of the nuclear energy establishment and policy veterans said that nuclear power required “lifetime commitment,” and maintaining “financial security” to account for “waste management, settlement of claims (caused by radiation), and decommissioning (nuclear power plants).

- The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, as the government has articulated repeatedly, is to help India raise its installed nuclear power capacity from the existing 8.7 gigawatt (GW) to 100 GW by 2047.
- Unlike the previous half-century, it hopes to achieve this by allowing, in theory, private companies to run nuclear power plants and harness foreign funds for the purpose.
- Ravi Grover, member, Atomic Energy Commission and veteran nuclear engineer, at a talk in New Delhi on Saturday, said the SHANTI Act clearly prescribed duties and liabilities that power plant operators must adhere to, whether in the private or public sector.
- “The prime responsibility for safety, security and safeguards lies with the licensee...Section 10 of the Act clearly and transparently spells out what a newcomer to the sector should know...there is no place for indulging in regulatory tricks. No one can fudge the half life of a radioisotope. If it is 30 years, it remains 30 years,” he said.
- Rajan Raghavan, vice-president, Tata Consulting Engineers Ltd., who represented Indian private sector companies interested in expanding their presence in India’s nuclear power sector, said four priorities shaped investment decisions: site selection, affordable technology, government hand-holding, and tariff viability.
- The 700 MW indigenous pressurised heavy-water reactor, Mr. Raghavan said, which the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) — a public sector company which is the sole operator of nuclear plants — plans to deploy in fleet mode over the next 10 to 12 years, was the “natural choice”.
- The 220 MW design, though indigenous, was finalised 15 years ago and would need substantial rework to meet current regulatory and safety benchmarks.
- Foreign reactors, he cautioned, came with prohibitive costs and lengthy design-validation timelines for Indian conditions — “two to three years” before construction could even begin.

Legal framework

- Former Atomic Energy Regulatory Board Chairman. D.K. Shukla offered the regulator’s view, arguing that the SHANTI Act finally provided a “unified legal framework” that separated control regulation from safety regulation — a clarity that was implicit earlier only because every player sat within the Department of Atomic Energy.
- With private entities entering, he warned that issues previously considered minor would now become major. A central concern Mr. Shukla flagged was the lifetime commitment of nuclear operation demands. The Act, he noted, now required licensees to “maintain design support throughout the lifetime of the facility” — a requirement far weightier for nuclear than for other power plants, given the longer operating life. Every

10 years, operators must undertake a periodic safety review to demonstrate compliance with current safety standards.

- “How do you modify or incorporate the new safety upgrade if you do not have the full-fledged design information and capability?” he said, pointing out that changes to one system can cascade adversely through others.
- Design integrity must be preserved throughout the plant’s life, he stressed, “whether technology is developed within the country or it is imported” — a pointed caution for private players contemplating foreign reactor imports without securing long-term design support arrangements.

❖ V-P Radhakrishnan calls on Sri Lankan President

Context: Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan on Sunday called on Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and held wide-ranging discussions on bilateral cooperation across sectors.

- Energy sector cooperation was among the key aspects discussed, officials said, with India emphasising that there was “no time to lose” on projects, including the proposed ‘energy hub’ in the eastern Trincomalee district.
- “The Indian Vice-President stated that both countries expect to further strengthen cooperation in the fields of economy, education, health, tourism, investment and trade, with particular emphasis on enhancing collaboration in energy security and port development,” a statement from Mr. Dissanayake’s office said.
- “Comprehensive discussions” were held on India-funded housing projects and programmes under the \$450 million-package extended towards cyclone recovery. The two sides signed a set of Memoranda of Understanding to firm up projects as part of the assistance.
- Further, the two sides discussed addressing fishermen issues “in a humanitarian manner”, considering the livelihoods of fishing communities on both sides, a post on the Vice-President’s official account on X said.
- Mr. Radhakrishnan is in Sri Lanka on a two-day visit that officials said was the first bilateral by any Vice-President. He was accompanied by Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, S.P. Singh Baghel, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and two Members of Parliament.
- In a press briefing later, Mr. Misri told presspersons that the Indian side thanked Mr. Dissanayake for the release of 47 Indian fishermen, who had been in Sri Lankan custody, in recent weeks.
- Further, citing the impact of the West Asian war on the global energy sector, he underscored the “urgency of” the proposed energy hub in Trincomalee, that included a possible fuel pipeline from south India, and the developing of the Second World War era oil tank farms in the eastern district.
- Last month, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath called the Trincomalee project the “permanent solution” to the energy crisis.

'We grow together'

- In addition to calling on President Dissanayake, Mr. Radhakrishnan attended a luncheon meeting hosted by Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, before attending a reception with the Indian diaspora and members of the Malayaha Tamil community.
- Speaking at the well-attended event in Colombo's Wellawatta neighbourhood — where many Tamils in the capital reside — Mr. Radhakrishnan announced that the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card, a multiple entry life-long visa extended to foreign nationals of Indian origin, would now be extended to sixth generation Indian-origin Sri Lankans.
- He also assured that the process of obtaining the OCI card would be simplified to help applicants. "In my meeting with your President, I said we grow together," Mr. Radhakrishnan said, emphasising that India would always stand with Sri Lanka in the country's success and struggles, be an "affectionate elder brother".
- Earlier, Mr. Radhakrishnan met with Leader of Opposition Sajith Premadasa and leaders of Tamil political parties from the north, east and the hill country. "We held constructive discussions on expanding trade, deepening economic ties, and unlocking practical opportunities that can benefit both our nations," Mr. Premadasa said in a social media post.

❖ How altered mosquitoes could reshape malaria control

Context: New research has confirmed that genetically modified mosquitoes can suppress malaria parasites from real-world infections, not just laboratory cultures; it also reported that advanced mosquito genetic engineering can be carried out in malaria-endemic regions, helping build local scientific expertise and regulatory capacity.

- For decades, malaria control has worked by reducing the number of mosquitoes and treating infected people. As a result bed nets, indoor insecticide spraying, and effective medicines have saved millions of lives.
- Yet malaria remains one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases, killing more than half a million people each year, most of them children in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Anti-malaria efforts have also slowed in many regions as mosquitoes become more resistant to insecticides and the malaria parasite evolves resistance to drugs.
- These setbacks have led scientists to reconsider a long-held assumption: that the only way to fight malaria is to kill mosquitoes.
- For more than 20 years, researchers have explored an alternative: modifying mosquitoes so they no longer carry malaria parasites.

'Transmission Zero'

- This idea is now moving closer to reality through a genetic technology called a gene drive. A series of studies over the past few years has shown that gene drives can spread through mosquito populations under increasingly realistic conditions.
- One recent study published in Nature, led by Tibebe Habtewold and Dickson Lwetoijera at the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania, working with collaborators at Imperial College London, demonstrated for the first time that genetically modified mosquitoes can block malaria parasites circulating in endemic African settings.

- The work forms part of 'Transmission Zero', a Tanzania-led and internationally supported project developing genetic mosquito control.

How gene drives work

- An organism normally has a 50% chance of passing a specific gene to its offspring. A gene drive alters this rule.
- Using the gene-editing tool CRISPR–Cas9, scientists design a genetic system that copies itself onto the partner chromosome during reproduction. As a result, far more than half of the offspring inherit the modified gene, often over 90%. Over multiple generations, this biased inheritance allows a gene to spread rapidly through a population.

Researchers are developing two main types of mosquito gene drives.

- The first is population suppression. These drives disrupt the genes essential for female mosquitoes to develop or become fertile. As the drive spreads, more females become sterile, causing mosquito populations to shrink or collapse.
- The second approach is population modification, also called replacement. Here, mosquitoes remain alive but carry genes that prevent the malaria parasites from developing inside their bodies. This strategy thus reduces the mosquitoes' ability to transmit malaria.
- Between 2015 and 2020, multiple research teams showed that CRISPR-based gene drives could spread through small laboratory cages of mosquitoes. Suppression drives targeting a gene called doublesex caused entire caged populations to collapse within a few generations. Other studies engineered mosquitoes to produce molecules such as antimicrobial peptides or antibodies to harm the malaria parasites.
- As small cages provide an overly simple environment, researchers built large indoor cages that allowed mosquitoes to swarm, mate, feed, and reproduce in more natural ways.
- In 2021, researchers at Imperial College London and partner institutions described experiments designed to mimic real mosquito populations. A small number of mosquitoes carrying a doublesex suppression gene drive were released into stable populations of *Anopheles gambiae*.
- Over eight to ten months, the drive steadily increased in frequency, egg production collapsed, and every experimental population eventually died out. Importantly, the researchers didn't detect any genetic changes that would both block CRISPR-Cas9 and allow mosquitoes to evade the gene drive while remaining viable.
- The experiments indicated that gene drives could work safely in messy real-world settings as well.

The Tanzania study

- While suppression drives aim to cut mosquito numbers, the Tanzania study focused on population modification.
- The team built a high-containment insectary in Bagamoyo in Tanzania that allowed advanced genetic work to be carried out in a malaria-endemic country rather than having to develop the technology elsewhere, then importing it to Tanzania.
- The researchers engineered local *Anopheles gambiae* mosquitoes to produce two antimicrobial peptides in their midgut after taking a blood meal.

- Instead of using laboratory parasite strains, the team collected blood samples from children with malaria in three nearby villages. Both modified and unmodified mosquitoes were fed on this blood, and the team tracked the development of parasites.
- In ordinary mosquitoes, parasites develop normally and reach the tissues linked to the salivary glands, starting transmission. In the modified mosquitoes, the parasites were severely impaired and often failed to reach the infectious stage. In some experiments, none of the modified mosquitoes carried potentially transmissible parasites.
- The researchers also demonstrated a split gene drive. One mosquito line carried the anti-malaria genes while another provided the Cas9 enzyme. When combined, about 94% of offspring inherited the protective trait, allowing the researchers to test the protective genes without immediately deploying a fully self-propagating drive.

Several directions

- The study showed that genetically modified mosquitoes can suppress malaria parasites from real-world infections, not just laboratory cultures. It also reported that advanced mosquito genetic engineering can be carried out in malaria-endemic regions, helping build local scientific expertise and regulatory capacity.
- The results support population modification as a realistic alternative to population suppression, with potentially fewer ecological risks because it doesn't aim to eliminate an entire species.
- At the same time, researchers acknowledge some major challenges. Developing effective anti-parasite genes is difficult. Different pathogens, and even different strains of the same parasite, may require different or combined molecular weapons to prevent resistance. This is why gene-drive research is moving in several directions.
- Researchers are also exploring self-limiting and reversible gene drives, as well as molecular 'off switches' that could slow or stop spread.
- Most scientists have emphasised that gene drives can't be a standalone solution. Eliminating malaria will still depend on bed nets, spraying, medicines, vaccines, surveillance, and strong health systems. Gene drives, if proven to be completely safe and acceptable, could be an additional tool.
- In the final analysis, no gene-drive mosquitoes have yet been released into the wild to control malaria; whether it will one day depends on extensive ecological risk assessment, regulatory review, and community engagement.

❖ On delimitation and Parliament seats

What is delimitation, and how does it work in India? What changes were proposed in the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill? Why was an increase in Lok Sabha seats proposed? What concerns did the Opposition raise against the Bills? What is the way forward?

- The Union government had introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from the existing 550 to 850. It had also introduced a Bill to set up the Delimitation Commission in 2026. However, the Constitution Amendment Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha, and thereafter, the Delimitation Bill was withdrawn by the government.

What are the existing provisions?

- Delimitation refers to the process of fixing the number of seats and the boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission set up through an Act of Parliament. Such exercises have previously been conducted based on the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Censuses. The number of Lok Sabha seats, based on the 1971 Census, was fixed at 543 when the population was 54.8 crore. The number has been frozen, based on the 1971 Census, to encourage population control measures. As per the current constitutional provisions, this number is to be readjusted based on the 2027 Census.
- In 2023, through the 106th Constitutional Amendment, Parliament provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This would be through delimitation based on the next Census.

What are the Bills?

- The 131st Constitution Amendment Bill proposed three key changes. First, to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from 550 to 850. Second, to empower Parliament to determine the Census based on which delimitation would be carried out. Third, to delink one-third reservation for women from the next Census in 2027 and to enable the same based on delimitation as per the last published Census of 2011.
- The Delimitation Bill, 2026, provided for the setting up of a Delimitation Commission from time to time by the Union government. This Commission would allocate Lok Sabha seats among the States and Union Territories based on the latest Census figures. Had the Bill been passed and a Commission immediately constituted, the allocation would have been based on the 2011 Census.

What are the issues?

- The government argued that increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats by around 50% (from 543 to 816) would enable the seamless implementation of one-third reservation for women in an expanded House. This would have resulted in approximately 272 seats being reserved for women.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah gave an oral assurance that the number of seats in each State and Union Territory would be increased by 50% on a pro-rata basis, thereby not altering the current proportion of their representation in the total strength of the Lok Sabha.
- However, the Opposition raised several objections. Firstly, there was no need to bundle women's reservations with delimitation. The 106th amendment in 2023 enables one-third reservation for women within the existing 543 seats. Second, the draft Bills did not contain an explicit provision for a pro-rata 50% increase in seats for each State or Union Territory. In fact, the Delimitation Bill provided that the allocation of seats would be as per the latest Census population. Third, the Opposition contended that such an important and sensitive subject requires detailed discussions and should not be rushed through in a brief session.

What can be the way forward?

- Democracy implies government by the people. It follows that the government is elected by the majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'. This principle has been diluted in the interest of population control since 1976, when the delimitation exercise was frozen based on the 1971 Census. Given the federal nature of India's polity, the next delimitation process has to take into consideration the variation in population growth across States.
- Mr. Shah offered to include an explicit provision to guarantee a 50% pro-rata increase in seats for each State and Union Territory. It was unclear whether this would have been provided in the Constitution Amendment or the Delimitation Bill. If it had been provided in the Constitutional Amendment, any future changes for the same could have been effected only by a two-thirds majority. However, if it had been provided in the Delimitation Bill, amendments could be made by a simple majority.
- Article 81(2) of the Constitution provides that the ratio between the number of seats and the population of each State should, as far as practicable, be the same across States. While a 50% pro-rata increase may offer a middle ground between democratic and federal principles, it would still be appropriate to discuss the same in more detail through parliamentary committees. The other urgent reform needed in our democracy is to empower the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities, which engage with the citizens on a daily basis.

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❖ IISc launches AI challenge for early detection of cognitive decline

Context: The Centre for Brain Research (CBR) at IISc has launched an AI challenge to advance early detection of cognitive decline.

- The CBR has invited researchers from institutions across the country to develop predictive models using large-scale brain aging datasets, including longitudinal cohort data from India.
- The six-month challenge is being held in partnership with the Alzheimer's Disease Data Initiative (AD Data Initiative) and Microsoft Research India (MSR India).
- **“Early detection of the onset of cognitive decline can lead to scalable and affordable intervention strategies that can benefit senior citizens in the country. The use of AI could be a potential game changer to unravel hidden connections in our understanding of cognitive decline. This challenge is about the future and the CBR’s commitment to transforming the lives of millions using discovery and innovation. We invite India’s sharpest minds to join the CBR’s mission to understand and improve aging brain health,”** said K.V.S. Hari, Director, Centre for Brain Research.
- The challenge is open for researchers and innovators based in India and affiliated with Indian institutions to develop AI models to predict the development of mild cognitive impairment or dementia and understand disease progression.
- “Our goal is to push the boundaries of our understanding of brain aging and building scalable solutions to address the issues of dementia and related brain aging challenges facing our society. The possibilities that are created with the AI revolution need to be applied in all aspects of research in this space, be it better predictions, better research and better treatments becoming available,” said Senapathy Kris Gopalakrishnan, co-founder of Infosys, chairman of Axilor Ventures and trustee of Pratiksha Trust.
- Submissions are open from April 20 to May 20 and will undergo a rigorous review by expert jury members. Winners will be awarded combinations of cash prize and research grants worth ₹2 crore to further develop their proposed solutions.

❖ India’s forests could nearly double carbon storage by 2100, study finds

Context: The findings, published in Environmental Research: Climate, involved researchers from Indian institutes; biggest increases in vegetation carbon are projected in desert and semi-arid zones across Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, study says

- India’s forests could store nearly twice as much carbon by the end of this century as they do now if current greenhouse gas emission trends continue, according to a new modelling study published this week in the journal Environmental Research: Climate.
- The findings, involving researchers from multiple Indian institutes, present a granular forecast of how climate change will reshape the country’s forest carbon stocks. Significantly, they diverge in important ways from official estimates compiled by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) – the official source of tree and forest cover data in India.
- For this study, the authors used modelling to peer into the future and found that vegetation carbon biomass rises by 35% under a low-emissions future, 62% under a medium-emissions pathway, and as much as 97% under a high-emissions, fossil-fuel-

intensive scenario by 2100. Till about 2030, all of the scenarios project roughly the same quantities of vegetation after which they diverge sharply — the steepest acceleration occurring after 2050.

- The projected increases are driven primarily by two interacting forces: rising precipitation and elevated atmospheric CO₂. Higher rainfall, projected across much of India under all emissions scenarios, translates to more moisture available for trees to grow.
- Simultaneously, more available carbon dioxide means enhancing photosynthesis and water-use efficiency. Rainfall effects appear with a lag of roughly two years under low and medium emissions, extending to about four years under the high-emissions scenario to account for the fact that forests do not respond instantly to a single wet year, and that woody biomass accumulates slowly over time.
- “Climate change is not just about rising temperatures — it is silently rewriting every sector, including our forests,” said lead author Fathima Fitha. “Even where gains appear, they may mask deeper stresses, raising concerns about the stability of today’s dense forests and the risk of releasing large stores of carbon. Human pressures, land-use change, and extreme events such as wildfires, droughts, and heatwaves are intensifying these risks. If we undermine our forests today, we risk amplifying emissions tomorrow.”

- **The largest relative increases are projected not in India’s established forest heartlands but in its driest margins. Desert and semi-arid zones across Rajasthan, Gujarat, western Madhya Pradesh, and adjoining dry interiors are expected to see vegetation carbon rise by more than 60% compared to historical levels under high emissions. The Trans-Himalayas, the Gangetic forest belt, and the Deccan Peninsula follow. The Western Ghats and the Himalayas — India’s most biodiverse and ecologically significant forest zones — are projected to see comparatively smaller relative increases, constrained by ecological saturation and specific climatic pressures those regions face, the study shows.**

- The increase in vegetation doesn’t mean that climate change is acting as a net good, the researchers warned, as the models do not capture disruptive forces such as deforestation, land conversion, fire, and pest outbreaks intensified by warming.

❖ **Doval’s Riyadh visit on PM’s instructions, part of govt. outreach to Gulf, says MEA**

Context: National Security Adviser Ajit Doval’s surprise one-day visit to Riyadh was part of an outreach by the government amid a tense phase in the West Asian conflict, and took place, according to the Ministry of External Affairs, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s instructions.

- The NSA’s visit was announced late night by the MEA, at the end of his meetings with a number of senior Ministers. In Riyadh, Mr. Doval held talks with his counterpart, National Security Adviser Musaed Al-Aiban. He also met Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud, both princes in the Saudi royal family.

- “On the directions of the Prime Minister, our outreach to countries in the Gulf continues,” said MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, describing the visit at a multi-ministerial briefing on Monday. “[Mr. Doval’s] meetings were helpful to exchange views and review bilateral ties, and also exchange views on the regional situation and other issues of mutual interest,” he added.
- Mr. Doval’s travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia came a week after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’s two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (April 11-12), and Energy Minister Hardeep Puri’s earlier visit to Qatar (April 9-10), and is understood to have been part of the government’s desire to shore up ties with India’s major oil and gas suppliers amidst a possible energy crisis, as well as emphasise a more balanced approach towards the region during the war.
- In a statement, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the talks between the Saudi Foreign Minister and Mr. Doval had reviewed areas of India-Saudi cooperation, “alongside a discussion of the latest developments in the regional situation and an exchange of viewpoints regarding it”.

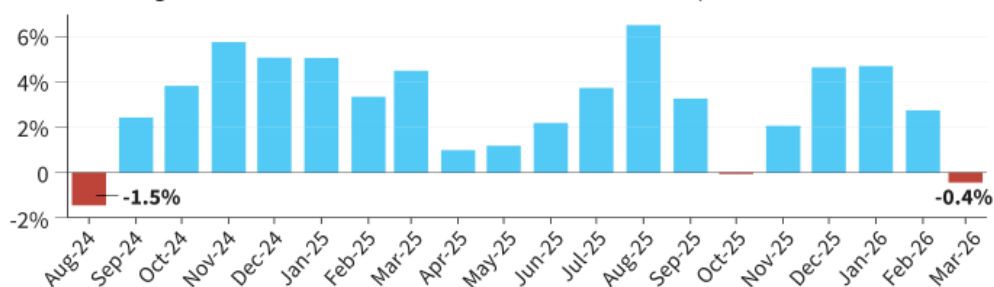
❖ Core sector activity contracts 0.4% in March on war impact

Context: Government data show that four out of the eight core sectors of the economy contracted in March 2026; growth in the full year of 2025-26 was the lowest since the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Activity in India’s eight core industrial sectors contracted by 0.4% in March 2026, the first month after the war in West Asia broke out, according to data released by the government. This

Core contraction

The Index of Eight Core Industries contracted in March 2026 on the impact of the West Asia crisis



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

was the poorest performance for the sectors in 19-months.

- The data on the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry also showed that growth in the index stood at 2.6% for the full year 2025-26, the lowest since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21.
- In March 2026, the data showed that four out of the eight sectors measured in the index contracted over their levels in March last year. “While an adverse base weighed on electricity generation, a shortage of inputs amidst the West Asia crisis curtailed the fertiliser output, which plunged by an unprecedented 24.6% year-on-year in the month,” Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ratings agency ICRA said.
- **The fertiliser sector ended the year 2025-26 with a contraction of 0.1% as compared with a growth of 2.9% in 2024-25, which itself was the lowest since 2021-22.**

- **The electricity sector contracted 0.5% in March 2026 on a relatively high base of 7.5% growth in March 2025. Over the course of 2025-26, the sector grew 0.9%, down from 5.2% in 2024-25.**
- **“Besides, the growth in steel and cement output also weakened in March 2026 relative to February 2026, suggesting that construction activity slowed in the month,”** Ms. Nayar added.

Steel growth slumps

- The steel sector saw growth slump to an 18-month low of 2.2% in March 2026, while the cement sector slowed to a 17-month low of 4%.
- **The only sector to see relatively robust growth in March 2026 was the natural gas sector, which grew 6.4% as the government pushed oil marketing companies to increase their output in reaction to the constraints brought on by the West Asia crisis.**
- The crude oil sector, on the other hand, contracted by 5.7% in March 2026, the seventh consecutive month of contraction.
- The coal sector contracted by 4% in March 2026, while the refinery products sector grew by 0.1% that month.

❖ Draft rules for roll-out of Ethanol 85 fuel to be notified soon

Context: The government will “very soon” issue draft rules on the roll-out of Ethanol 85 (E85) as vulnerabilities in oil exports exposed during the West Asia crisis sharpen the focus on alternative fuels, a senior government official said. While a final date is yet to be decided, the official said the roll-out is expected “in a couple of years”.

- **E85 is a fuel blend made of up to 85% ethanol and 15% petrol (gasoline).**
- “Draft regulations will be notified very soon. There is consensus within the government. There is also market consensus and preliminary testing too has been carried out,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.
- **The E85 blend will be introduced as a separate fuel grade, distinct from E20, in which ethanol blending could go up to 27%, which is permissible under a notification issued in 2023,** the official explained.
- High levels of ethanol blending offer several benefits, including “greater energy security for the country and a reduction in vehicular pollution,” the official said.
- Such a **high-ethanol fuel will require dedicated engine compatibility, as well as separate dispensing infrastructure at fuel pumps that will also dispense E20 petrol.**
- **An engine designed to run on E85 can also operate on lower ethanol blends, including E60 and E50.**
- On competing demands for ethanol-blended fuel, including from aviation, where India has a 1% blending target in aviation turbine fuel for international flights under the International Civil Aviation Organization’s plan to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, the official said there was “surplus” ethanol available in the country.
- **The government has mandated the sale of petrol with up to 20% ethanol across all States and Union Territories from April 1.**

❖ SEBI amends alternative investment fund rules

Context: SEBI has sharply reduced the minimum investment required from individual investor in social impact funds to ₹1,000 from ₹2 lakh, to widen retail participation on the Social Stock Exchange (SSE).

- This would align the minimum application size requirement for subscribing to **Zero Coupon Zero Principal Instruments under SEBI's Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements Regulations, 2018 with the minimum investment value requirement for individual investors in Social Impact Fund.**
- **Earlier**, AIF rules required individual investors to invest a minimum of ₹2 lakh in a social impact fund that invests in securities of NPOs listed or registered on the SSE.
- Now, in its notification dated April 16, SEBI reduced this threshold to ₹1,000. To give effect to this, it amended the Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) rules. Additionally, SEBI said AIFs, which do not retain any funds after the expiry of their fund life, may be permitted to seek an "inoperative" status, subject to compliance with prescribed norms.

❖ FY26 pharma exports up 2% even as March saw dip

Context: India's pharmaceutical exports rose more than 2% year-on-year to \$31.11 billion in FY26 despite a 23% slide in March amid the fallout of the West Asia war.

- A new record, the exports bettered the \$30.47 billion registered in 2024-25. March incidentally had played a crucial role in shaping the overall FY25 performance as shipments to the all-important U.S. market surged in the face of an impending higher tariff regime.
- In March 2026, pharma exports declined as much as 23.17% to \$2,828.60 million (\$3,681.66 million), official numbers showed. The downturn was largely concentrated in the final quarter, driven by logistics disruptions and tariff-related uncertainties, a highly placed source said.

U.S. market pressure

- Exports to the U.S, in particular, came under significant pressure, as the war disrupted shipping. U.S. tariff worries remained in 2025-26 too and there were concerns over potential tariffs on branded patented drugs manufactured outside the US. Generic medicines retain a cushion, for now, an official said.
- The impact of the evolving situation was not completely unexpected. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal had told a meeting here earlier this month while "we are likely to land up better than last year," but the \$32 billion target set for FY26 is unlikely to be achieved. The performance in rupee terms may still be better given the the currency depreciation."
- Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India chairman Namit Joshi, who earlier estimated the March exports to be lower at anywhere between \$250 million to \$500 million due to the war impact, had said FY26 exports will be "somewhere near to last year achievement".
- Up to February, the exports were nearly \$28.29 billion. "We have already achieved 5.6% growth up to February," Pharmexcil DG Raja Bhanu had said.

❖ 'Upgrading India-Korea trade pact for balanced partnership'

Context: The decision by India and South Korea to upgrade Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is aimed at moving towards a more balanced economic partnership and one not defined by huge trade deficits, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said.

- Earlier, PM Narendra Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung announced the signing of many MoUs and the pact to upgrade the CEPA.
- Addressing India-Korea Business Forum, Mr. Goyal said, “The fact we have a rapidly rising middle class with significant increase in their incomes, all of these make for a very good destination for Korean investment, Korean manufacturing,” Mr. Goyal said.
- “Our bilateral trade is about \$27 billion,” he said.
- “We have been tasked by our two leaders that we should double this by 2030. So, we’re looking at about 18% growth if we have to double it in the next four years,” he added.
- During his speech at the Business Forum, Mr. Lee said the bilateral trade between the two countries was not “large enough considering the size of India’s economy.”

❖ India violating its obligations, says UN Rapporteur

Context: India “is violating its obligations under international law”, said UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese, in an interview with.

- Ms. Albanese’s comments were in response to questions about the findings in her latest report titled ‘Torture and Genocide’, which she presented at the 61st session of the UN Human Rights Council, on March 23.
- The report has examined Israel’s “systematic use of torture against Palestinians” from the occupied Palestinian territory, since October 7, 2023. It notes how various forms of torture — such as forced displacement, mass killings, deprivation, among others — have “become integral to the “domination of and punishment” inflicted on men, women and children”.
- Responding to how she views India’s legal and moral responsibility by associating with Israel and its war, Ms. Albanese said that while India is “violating its obligations” under International law, it might also be “facing responsibility”.
- “In an ideal world, if there was a court that was capable of dealing with all member states who have violated the law to support Israel causing harm to the Palestinians, probably the Indian government would face this court as well,” Ms. Albanese said.
- During Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to Israel in February, he spoke to the Knesset hailing India’s cultural, political and military relationship with Israel. He described Israel as the “fatherland” of Indian-origin Jews, while the visit also brought upgraded ties sealed with a ‘Special Strategic Partnership’. Within days, the U.S. and Israel initiated a war against Iran.
- According to the report, Israeli authorities have arrested more than 18,500 Palestinians since October 2023, which include at least 1,500 children. As of February 26, Israel still holds 9,245 Palestinians in various detention facilities, many of them held without trial.

- On March 30, the Knesset passed a death-penalty law, which according to critics, targets only Palestinians prisoners.
- Ms. Albanese stated that Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir — who pushed for the law — was the face of the policy which has institutionalised torture.
- “What Mr. Ben-Gvir has done is simply to institutionalise and to make legal what until some years or decades ago was believed to be exceptionally incidental. Torture is not incidental. It is central to a broader system of violence aiming to destroy the Palestinians as individuals and as a people, as body and mind, as capacity to exist in the future, and even to have a decent memory of their past,” Ms. Albanese said.



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Context: One Israel-linked vessel among the two that 'endangered maritime security', says IRGC; Trump says ceasefire extended until Iran comes up with peace proposal; Tehran yet to confirm extension.

- Iran has seized two vessels, one of them claimed to be affiliated with Israel, in the Strait of Hormuz, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said he was extending the ceasefire with Tehran indefinitely.
- The Islamic Republic said it would not lift its restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz as long as U.S. and Israeli "ceasefire violations" continue.
- "Two vessels, 'MSC-FRANCESCA' (affiliated with the Zionist regime) and 'EPAMINODES', which had endangered maritime security by operating without the necessary permits and tampering with navigation systems, were seized by the IRGC Navy and escorted to Iran's coast," the Guards Navy said in a statement. "Disruption of order and safety in the Strait of Hormuz is our red line," it added.
- Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump ended the hours-long uncertainty about the ceasefire, saying he was extending it until Iran, whose leadership he claimed was "fractured", comes up with their own peace proposal.
- But he added that the U.S. blockade of Iran's ports would stay in place. "Based on the fact that the government of Iran is seriously fractured... and, upon the request of Field Marshal Asim Munir, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, of Pakistan, we have been asked to hold our attack on Iran until such time as their leaders and representatives can come up with a unified proposal," he wrote in a social media post hours before a two-week ceasefire, announced on April 8, was set to expire.

'Zionist warmongering'

- Iran did not immediately say whether it would also extend the ceasefire, but the country's Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said the truce would make sense only if the U.S. blockade is lifted and Israel honoured its ceasefire commitments.
- "A complete ceasefire only makes sense if it is not violated by the maritime blockade and the hostage-taking of the world's economy, and if the Zionist warmongering across all fronts is halted; reopening the Strait of Hormuz is impossible with such a flagrant breach of the ceasefire," the Iranian Speaker said in a statement.
- "They did not achieve their goals through military aggression, nor will they through bullying. The only way forward is to recognize the rights of the Iranian nation," he added.
- The Tasnim News Agency reported on Wednesday that Tehran has not taken any decision yet on the matter. "Iran is currently examining various aspects of U.S. President Donald Trump's claim about extension of the ceasefire," it said.
- The U.K. Maritime Trade Operation Centre, a monitoring agency, reported that two ships came under attack in the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday.
- Mr. Trump said on Tuesday that his representatives (headed by Vice-President J.D. Vance) would hold talks with Iran in Islamabad and that Tehran would make a "great deal". If Iran failed to do so, he warned, the U.S. would start attacking the country. But Tehran told Islamabad on Tuesday that it would not be participating in the talks, citing the U.S.'s "excessive demands" and its blockade of Iranian ports. By late Tuesday in

Washington (early Wednesday morning in Tehran), Mr. Trump announced that he was extending the truce, while keeping the blockade in place.

- “I have therefore directed our military to continue the blockade and, in all other respects, remain ready and able, and will therefore extend the Ceasefire until such time as their proposal is submitted, and discussions are concluded, one way or the other,” Mr. Trump said in his social media post.

❖ Centre makes registration for e-sports mandatory

Context: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on notified rules allowing registration of e-sport games and the firms running them, which will take effect from May 1. The rules come as subordinate legislation for the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, which prohibited real money gaming in India. The rules come after a draft was last published last October.

- The Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI), which will run as an attached office within MeitY as a fully digital organisation, has been set up under the rules. Representatives from the Ministries of Home Affairs and Law have been added to the OGAI.
- Under the new rules, registration for “online social games” will only be required and triggered when the Centre notifies a specific category of games as requiring such registration. Registration for e-sports is mandatory.
- IT Secretary S. Krishnan told the media that the rules have enabling provisions to regulate and require age classifications of video games in the future, should the government deem it necessary to address issues like addiction.
- The rules provide for a “code of practice” the the IT Ministry could notify in the future covering video games, such as games with microtransactions.
- “Most games which are not money games should be able to operate with no obligation to necessarily either be determined or registered,” Mr. Krishnan said. “That entire process is optional.”
- On the issue of betting markets hosting wagers on Indian elections and cricket matches, he said that such sites were being blocked as and when they were brought to notice.
- “Access through VPNs is a slightly thorny issue,” he added. “We are trying to see how we can regulate VPNs more effectively... there are many legitimate uses of VPNs. So how do you distinguish between the legitimate and the illegitimate uses is the big question... it’s a bit like a whack-a-mole situation,” he said.
- The Act drops the draft’s language on promoting e-sports altogether. Mr. Krishnan said that this was because promotion of e-sports was a policy matter and may not have been appropriate to include in a rulemaking process.

❖ Tribunal gives last opportunity to Odisha, Chhattisgarh to settle Mahanadi dispute

Context: The Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT) may soon deliver its judgment on the water-sharing formula between Odisha and Chhattisgarh with both States failing to place a concrete proposal for mutual settlement. The tribunal has given a last opportunity to the two States to come up with a formula by May 2, the next date of hearing.

- An order passed by the MWDT, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Bela M. Trivedi, noted that though both States had jointly submitted on April 11 that the annual water availability would be finalised by the next date of hearing on April 20, Advocates General of Odisha and Chhattisgarh again sought more time to submit a concrete proposal.
- “They have also not been able to place on record the suggestions with regard to the recasting of issues already framed in both the reference proceedings to narrow down the disputes between the party States,” the tribunal observed.

Panel unhappy

- The three-member MWDT – comprising Justice Trivedi, Justice Ravi Ranjan, and Justice Indermeet Kaur – expressed unhappiness over the manner in which the proceedings are being conducted. “We make it clear that if they are not able to finalise the same or place on record any consensus on any of the issues by the next date, the tribunal will proceed with the proceedings on merits,” the tribunal said.
- The 851-km-long Mahanadi river, which originates from the Amarkantak hills in the Bastar plateau of Chhattisgarh, flows for 494 km in Odisha before meeting with the Bay of Bengal.
- Following its formation as a separate State, Chhattisgarh’s demand for water skyrocketed, which led it to create major, medium, and minor irrigation projects, including industrial barrages. When Odisha found out there was considerable reduction in Mahanadi water in its territory, it noticed Chhattisgarh’s extensive upstream construction and increased water usage.
- According to the Odisha government, Chhattisgarh has built more than 500 anicuts and 30 barrages, many primarily for industrial use.

No headway

- The then Naveen Patnaik-led government had moved the Supreme Court in 2018 for river-water sharing. With the case dragging on, the MWDT’s formation was subsequently announced.
- With BJP governments in both States after 2024, they submitted before the tribunal about settling the dispute amicably but haven’t made much headway.

❖ Will a change in entry rules amount to 'invasion', asks SC

Context: The Supreme Court asked if a hypothetical alteration of rules by the State of Kerala to allow menstruating women entry into Sabarimala temple in the name of social reform would amount to an 'invasion' of religious practice.

- A nine-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant is hearing a series of petitions in the Sabarimala review case. "Suppose the Kerala rules said the entry of women between the age of 10 to 50 is allowed to the temple in the name of social reform, would it be an invasion or can the court say it [bar on entry] is not an essential practice and uphold the rules?" Justice B.V. Nagarathna said.
- Senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam, for a review petitioner, submitted that the rules, in the name of reform, must not take away devotees' rights.
- Senior advocate Aryama Sundaram and advocate Rohini Musa said a temple was considered the abode of the deity. The traditions, beliefs and rituals of a temple would be peculiar to the manifestation of the deity in that shrine.
- Mr. Sundaram argued that the concept of gender equality did not extend to access to all places of worship. He said gender was not part of "all classes" mentioned in Article 25(2)(b), which said the state could make any law to usher in "social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes of Hindus".

❖ Govt. adds 14 seaports for e-visa entry, widens immigration access

Context: The Union Home Ministry has designated 14 more seaports — half of them in Gujarat — as immigration check posts for foreign nationals who hold e-visas.

- Electronic visa facilities have been operational since March 19 at Alang, Bedi Bandar, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Hazira, Pipavav, and Mandvi seaports in Gujarat; Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, and Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu; Kakinada and Krishnapatnam in Andhra Pradesh; and Paradip and Dhamra in Odisha, an official said.
- There are altogether 114 immigration check posts (ICPs) across air, sea, land, rail and river routes, catering to international traffic. At present, there are 37 ICPs at seaports.
- E-visa holders are allowed to enter India only through the 32 designated airports and 33 seaports.
- The e-visa — often confused with visa-on-arrival — is available to citizens of 207 countries, excluding China, Pakistan, Yemen and Iran. The e-visa categories are tourist, business, medical, medical attendant, student, family, transit, miscellaneous and production investment, with validity ranging from a month to five years.
- In a related development, the Ministry revised modalities for granting tourist visas to Chinese nationals. The Indian Embassy in Beijing had announced on July 23, 2025, that tourist visas would be issued to Chinese nationals after a gap of five years.
- After the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the Galwan Valley incident, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed in clashes with the Chinese army, both countries had suspended flights and most visa services between them.

- China restored visa applications for Indian students in 2022 and later for business and tourism.
- On March 30, the MHA amended the tourist visa guidelines for Chinese tourists by liberalising conditions for Buddhist pilgrims and family members of Chinese diplomats.
- The Centre, on October 2, 2025, also gave the green signal to resume direct flights between India and China after a gap of five years. On Tuesday, Air China resumed its non-stop Delhi-Beijing flight, reconnecting the flight services between the two capitals after five years.

❖ **Rajnath Singh holds bilateral talks with German counterpart in Berlin**

Context: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held bilateral talks with his German counterpart Boris Pistorius in Berlin, aimed at strengthening the strategic defence partnership between India and Germany.

- According to the Ministry of Defence, the two leaders discussed a wide range of security and defence issues, with a strong emphasis on co-development and co-production of defence equipment, particularly in niche and emerging technologies.
- Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing military-to-military cooperation as a cornerstone of the bilateral strategic partnership.
- During the meeting, the Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap and Implementing Arrangement for Cooperation in UN Peacekeeping Training were signed and exchanged, marking a significant step forward in defence collaboration.
- On global issues, the Defence Minister underlined the role of India and Germany in providing stability to the global economy amid uncertainties. He also stressed that terrorism in all its forms must be condemned unequivocally.
- The German Minister welcomed the institutionalisation of service-level staff talks and future bilateral military exercises. Mr. Singh expressed hope for the participation of the German Air Force in the upcoming Exercise Tarang Shakti scheduled to be held in India later this year.
- India and Germany are marking 25 years of their strategic partnership and celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2026.

❖ **INS Nireekshak arrives in Colombo for bilateral exercise**

- INS Nireekshak, the Indian Navy's Diving Support and Submarine Rescue Vessel, arrived in Colombo on Tuesday to participate in the fourth edition of the India-Sri Lanka Diving Exercise (DIVEX 2026), scheduled from April 21.
- According to the Indian Navy, the bilateral exercise will be conducted over a week and brings together diving teams from both navies to undertake specialised underwater operations.
- The engagement aims at enhancing interoperability, operational cohesion, and the exchange of best practices between the two maritime forces. The vessel was accorded a ceremonial welcome by the Sri Lankan Navy.

❖ **Women win many unreserved panchayat seats, says Centre**

Context: Data show that the number of women representatives exceeded the quota in just 10 States and U.T.s by up to 5 percentage points; four did not meet the quota, while five had just enough.

- Ahead of National Panchayati Raj Day, the Union government, in a statement on Wednesday, said that with reservation of seats, women made up over 49.7% of the elected representatives in panchayats in the country, and they were winning unreserved seats as well in “significant numbers”.
- While the Constitution mandates a 33% reservation for women in urban and rural local bodies, 19 States and Union Territories have extended 50% of the seats for them.
- However, government data submitted to Parliament in 2025 showed that the number of women representatives exceeded the prescribed quota in just 10 States and Union Territories and by up to 5 percentage points. Four States and Union Territories did not meet the quota, while five have just enough women to meet the reservation percentage.
- The Ministry did not maintain any specific data on the absolute number of women elected to panchayat positions from reserved and unreserved seats, and neither did it maintain panchayat-wise data centrally.
- The Centre’s Constitution Amendment Bill to advance the next delimitation exercise and introduce women’s reservation in Parliament and the Assemblies was defeated in the Lok Sabha recently.
- In the statement, the Panchayati Raj Ministry said the panchayats represented “one of the most remarkable examples of women’s political empowerment”, adding that provisions had been made to ensure their representation in local self-governments. It said there were 24.41 lakh elected panchayat representatives across the country, of whom 12.14 lakh were women (49.75%).
- “Crucially, women are not only occupying reserved seats but winning unreserved seats in significant numbers, reflecting a genuine and deepening shift in grassroots political culture,” the Ministry added.
- However, according to State-wise data on representation among elected panchayat officials tabled by the government in Parliament in April 2025, the quota for women is not met in Gujarat, Haryana, Tripura, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.
- While all these States and Union Territories are meant to provide 50% quota for women, Gujarat has 49.9%, Haryana 42.12%, Tripura 45.25%, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu 31.97%. Apart from this, States such as Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Sikkim are seen meeting the 50% quota for women exactly.
- The States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Rajasthan were among the ones where the women’s quota was seen as exceeding, but by about 0-5 percentage points.
- In Arunachal Pradesh, where 33% quota is provided, women make up over 38% of elected panchayat representatives.
- On the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, over 35.6% representatives are women as against a 33% quota. In States where 50% reservation is provided for, the highest proportion of women representatives was seen in Chhattisgarh, where 54.78% panchayat representatives are women.

❖ Centre plans new rail link to 'controversial' bauxite hills in Odisha

Context: Notwithstanding massive tribal resistance to the proposed bauxite mining in the Sijimali hills spanning Odisha's Rayagada and Kalahandi districts, the Ministry of Railways has proposed a new rail link connecting two bauxite-bearing hills, the mining rights for which have been secured by the Vedanta and Adani groups.

- As per notification by the Ministry of Railways on Tuesday, the Centre, in exercise of the powers conferred by Clause (37A) of Section-2 of Railways Act, 1989 notified a new broad-gauge line connecting Tikiri Station to Kutrumali and Sijimali Bauxite Mines on Waltair Division of East Coast Railway.
- Kalinga Alumina Limited, a subsidiary of Adani Group, has proposed opencast mining over 701.792 hectare in Kutrumali, with 127.7 million tonnes of bauxite. Vedanta Group has secured rights over 1,549.022 hectare in nearby Sijimali, which holds over 300 million tonnes of bauxite.
- Villagers have obstructed construction of the road connecting State Highway 44 and summit of Sijimali announcing that they would not let anyone construct road by felling trees.

❖ Societies embrace gene therapy but resist genetic change in crops

Context: If regulation is only about safety and curbing, and demanding compliance with an ever-changing process, it will curb enthusiasm for daring ideas and explanations about the complexities and meaning of life; modest and unambitious approaches in science are a self-defeating oxymoron.

- Our debates and discussions on technology are currently dominated by artificial intelligence (AI). Conversations around this subject are rarely about whether AI will envelop our lives or not, but about how and when it will do so.
- The chariot taking us to the future has another horse — biotechnology — galloping at the same breakneck speed as its twin, but puzzlingly not central enough to our discussions. This steed has also matured, and the question before us is whether we have the ability to generate new ideas in science that can steer the chariot in directions we value or if we are destined to go where it takes us.
- Our ability to engineer life is not recent. For more than 10,000 years we have bred and domesticated plants, animals, and microbes. In our migrations across the planet, we have often taken with us these organisms and diseases across continents. The passengers on our migration often wreaked ecological devastation in their new homes. At other times they adapted well and were of great value to our societies.
- Much of the food we eat in India today is from non-native plants and animals, and our ecosystem has adapted these organisms, 'engineered' by breeding them. Most of what goes into your delicious aloo paratha is imported food engineered by breeding. Like all life on the earth, we too are much engineered. Our own migrations, mixing, isolation, and endogamy have shuffled our genes and how they respond to our environment.
- However, very little of all this — immensely valuable in building civilisations — was driven by deliberate ideas or theory. Engineering organisms by this method of breeding and selecting for characters that are valued by us is slow, taking decades or even hundreds or thousands of years.

Canvas of genome engineering

- Since the late 19th century and through the 20th century to the present, successive revolutions in biology have demonstrated how humans can engineer nature in our laboratories.
- These were driven by ideas as were other revolutions in natural sciences, mathematics, and computer science. Human societies have long demonstrated the capacity to modify nature, a capability that we have crudely held for millennia.
- Today, we wield this with a power and intensity that no one ever could, and with a greater responsibility upon us even as we open new avenues.
- The broad canvas of genome engineering can be divided for convenience into three compartments: humans, plants, and microbial engineering. Public demand, acceptance, and apprehension vary considerably across these sectors. Understanding how we accept, raise concerns about or reject technologies involves science, society, culture, market, and politics.
- Engineering germ-line cells — sperm or egg — to alter genes in a way that allows changes to be transmitted to the next generation is not legally permitted in most countries. Engineering somatic cells — the cells of our body whose genes are not carried to our progeny — is regulated and allowed and is happening in many situations.
- Cells of patients with certain kinds of cancers can be engineered so that their immune system is modified to attack cancerous cells. Because these treatments are given to patients who are severely ill, the risks are outweighed by the potential benefits.

Acceptance of innovation

- The acceptability of such interventions is high; indeed, they are welcomed. The value of gene therapies for well-defined inherited diseases is weighed against safety concerns coming from the toxicity of the gene delivery system, which may need to be injected at high concentrations for the treatment to be effective.
- Patient groups that are keen on treatment and cures for a wide variety of diseases, such as sickle-cell disease, thalassemias, and, potentially, muscular dystrophies, Huntington's disease, and a variety of other familial diseases, drive demands for drugs and genetic treatments.
- The costs of research and therapy, safety and efficacy considerations, long timelines, the operation of market forces, etc. are limiting the use of these technologies. There is no groundswell of opposition to the idea of engineering somatic cells for therapy in humans.
- Contrast the relative acceptability of genetic engineering approaches in human health to the situation in agriculture and horticulture. In the U.S. and Canada, almost all the maize, soybean, and cotton is made from genetically engineered plants designed for pest resistance or herbicide resistance. Canada is a large producer of canola, almost all of it from genetically engineered plants. These products are exported all over the world, including to Europe and India, where they are not allowed to be grown. Yet a large proportion of Europe's animal feed is imported from the Americas and is from genetically modified plants.

- The arguments against genetically modified food come from a range of positions: about their safety and the consequences of environmental release, about how they result in monoculture and reduce diversity, and how they result in the domination of big seed and farm companies that hold the key patents and control the market.
- However, genetically modified crops have been grown and consumed safely for decades now. The dominance of seed companies is not a consequence of the use of genetically modified plants and is present independent of whether their products are genetically modified or not. Monoculture and the dominance of marketable varieties have happened independent of the use of genetically modified plants. The classical green revolutions — i.e. the breeding of high-yielding varieties of cereals — did not require laboratory genetic engineering. Some of the criticism may be justified but the fact remains that acceptance of innovation in some areas is slow or never, and remarkably fast in other related areas.
- Synthetic biology and biotechnology provide another context where genetic engineering is growing rapidly. Several drugs — insulin is a common example — are made by recombinant DNA technology and directly injected into us. The anti-malarial natural product artemisinin can now be made by microbes in the laboratory and does not have to be extracted from plants. Many natural products are now synthesised in large amounts in the laboratory using genetic engineering.
- The ‘weight-loss’ drug semaglutide, which is the active ingredient in Ozempic and Wegovy, is a relatively recent example of synthetic biology’s reach. Its natural equivalent in our bodies decays in minutes, but the synthetic version grown in baker’s yeast can stay on for weeks, ensuring its efficacy. Synthetic biology has transformed the diagnosis of animal and plant diseases, made vaccines that have prevented millions of deaths of humans and livestock, and developed what are called biologics: genetically engineered antibodies and proteins that are used to treat cancers and other diseases. Developed largely by energetic startups, followed usually by collaboration with big companies, these drugs are less-expensively made when they eventually go off patent. Here, there is little or no lament against their being used in humans, except to despair of their cost and accessibility.

Wheels of the chariot

- Ideas that move into application have emerged where they have been challenged, tested, discarded or accepted, and where societal debates on them have flourished. When the flexibility to put out ideas and test them diminishes, as in Europe in agriculture or the U.S. in infectious disease research, the global supply chain of ideas gets broken until these geographies reform or new geographies for ideas take root. How societies respond to ideas also affects how further potentially transformative new ones emerge. Trofim Lysenko and his acolytes managed to destroy Soviet agriculture by smashing the core ideas of genetics, and in doing so also managed to kill new ideas in biology. Mathematics and physics, lying outside his interest and remit, escaped his attention and thrived. One can selectively destroy the capacity for new ideas but this is never a stable route.

- We do not find societies where only ideas thrive without any innovation — nor others where true innovation thrives without original ideas. But we can find societies where there is imitation and incremental development, standing on the discoveries and innovation of others. For true innovation, as opposed to imitation and catching up, a reasonable regulatory system is also needed. A completely risk-averse regulatory system is by definition very safe, allowing only those innovations to grow that have been tested by others elsewhere over the years. This results in a society that may become good at high-volume low-value products whose technological and market effectiveness has been demonstrated elsewhere. Not to be sniffed at, but certainly not sufficient for a large country like ours, and not sufficient to stimulate new and daring ideas.
- With the acceleration of biotechnologies in all their diversity, rigorous but enabling regulatory oversight is essential. Today, information from genome sequences in the context of how the environment and genes affect outcomes, partners with the growth of how we analyse information. This partnership powers the generation of new ideas about how life works and new ideas about what life itself is. These, in turn, will rapidly feed into new findings and new innovations.
- If regulation is only about safety and curbing, and demanding compliance with an ever-changing process, it will curb enthusiasm for daring ideas and explanations about the complexities and meaning of life. Modest and unambitious approaches, thus encouraged, are a self-defeating oxymoron. In this highly regulated situation, both ideas and innovation alike will happen elsewhere. Reverse engineering of quality is what one will have to take pride in, at best.
- The life sciences, unlike many other technologies, are simpler to scale, moving from ideas and discovery to innovations and applications. In particular, theory and computational approaches in the life sciences must be strongly encouraged and can be very effective. Narrowly demanding application and results can be counterproductive, yet focus and quality along with daring are required.
- Fundamental and applied research are the wheels of the chariot. If we ruin one wheel, we will go in circles. If we over-regulate, the chariot will be stuck in regulatory quicksand and we will go nowhere. If we under-regulate, we cannot steer the direction the horses are to take us, and they may well take us to a precipice. Wise regulation that not only deals with the present but also with an unknown and uncertain future will release human ingenuity and result in our ability to tackle the most complex and unforeseen challenges.

❖ Extreme heat threatens food systems, warn UN agencies

Context: Extreme heat is pushing global agrifood systems to the brink, threatening the livelihoods and health of more than a billion people, according to a new report by the UN's food and weather agencies.

- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said heatwaves are becoming more frequent, intense and prolonged, damaging crops, livestock, fisheries, and forests.
- For livestock, the report details a thermal humidity index that, when breached, will trigger acute heat stress.

- In dairy cattle, this manifests as a 15% to 25% drop in milk production and significant drops in fertility rates. Scientists have noted similar stressors in poultry, where extreme temperature spikes can lead to mass mortality events in facilities without industrial-level climate control.
- “Extreme heat is rewriting the script on what farmers, fishers, and foresters can grow and when they can grow. In some cases it is even dictating if they can still work,” said Kaveh Zahedi, head of FAO’s climate change office. “At its core, this report is telling us that we face a very uncertain future,” he said.
- Recent climate datasets show global warming is accelerating, with 2025 ranking among the three hottest years on record, triggering more frequent and severe weather extremes.
- Acting as a risk multiplier, extreme heat intensifies droughts, wildfires, and pest outbreaks and sharply cuts crop yields once critical temperature thresholds are breached.
- The report said higher temperatures are shrinking the safety margin that plants, animals, and humans rely on to function.
- Beyond just dehydration, extreme heat disrupts the rest period of plants. High nighttime temperatures force crops to maintain high respiration rates after dark, consuming the energy stores they built through photosynthesis during the day.
- This exhaustion stunts growth and leads to pollen sterility in staple crops like maize and rice, where heat during the critical flowering window can altogether prevent fertilisation, resulting in empty husks.
- Marine heatwaves are also becoming more frequent, depleting oxygen levels in water and threatening fish stocks. In 2024, 91% of the world’s oceans experienced at least one marine heatwave, the report said.
- Risks rise sharply as warming accelerates. The intensity of extreme heat events is expected to roughly double at 2C of warming and quadruple at 3C, compared to 1.5C, the report said.
- Mr. Zahedi said every one-degree rise in average global temperatures cuts yields of maize, rice, soya, and wheat by around 6%.
- The FAO and WMO said piecemeal responses were inadequate and called for better risk governance and early-warning weather systems to help farmers and fishers take preventive action.

❖ Why quotas alone won’t increase women’s representation

Context: While reservation can address the issue of underrepresentation, its impact is likely to be shaped by existing inequalities related to class, caste etc.

- As debate around the Women's Reservation Bill resurfaces, the central question is no longer whether quotas will increase representation, but whether they can overcome the deeper structural barriers that limit women's participation in politics.
- Evidence from a Lokniti-CSDS study suggests that while reservation may expand opportunities, it does not by itself ensure that more women are able to sustain political careers. Over the past decades, Indian women have become a significant electoral force.
- However, this rise in participation has not translated into representation. Women remain underrepresented as candidates and elected representatives, highlighting a gap between voting and political presence.
- The Lokniti-CSDS study shows that while women vote in large numbers, their involvement in more active forms of political engagement remains low (Table 1). Across categories such as locality, education, caste, class, and age, a large majority of women (74%-84%) report being "not at all active" in electoral processes beyond voting.
- This pattern cuts across socio-economic groups, suggesting that limited political engagement is not confined to specific sections. While voting has become more inclusive, deeper forms of political participation remain restricted.
- The limited presence of women in politics is also shaped by party-level decisions. Candidate selection remains a critical barrier (Table 2). Around 44% of women respondents agree that even when a man and a woman are equally qualified, political parties prefer a man over a woman while giving tickets.
- These perceptions point to a structural bias in candidate selection processes, where "winnability" is often invoked to justify the preference for male candidates. When asked whether there is a lesser possibility for a woman to win against a man therefore women should not contest against men, 17% agreed.
- Table 3 indicates that women's political participation is shaped by a combination of structural, social, and individual constraints. About 22% of women identify patriarchal structures as the biggest obstacle, followed by household responsibilities and barriers such as lack of awareness or interest.

Existing setbacks

The data for the tables were sourced from Lokniti-CSDS study

TABLE 1: Women's electoral participation across socio-economic groups. All figures in %

Locality	Active electoral participation		
	Not at all active	Somewhat active	Highly active
Rural	76	16	8
Urban	80	15	5
Level of education			
Non-literate	84	12	4
Upto primary	75	19	6
Upto matriculation	75	17	8
12th pass/intermediate	75	17	8
College and above'	78	15	7
Age groups			
18 to 25 years	83	13	4
26 to 35 years	78	17	6
36 to 45 years	75	18	7
46 to 55 years	75	17	9
55 years and above	75	16	9
Caste/communities			
Upper castes	78	15	7
OBC	75	18	7
SC	81	14	5
ST	81	15	5
Muslims	70	22	8
Others	81	12	6
Economic class			
Poor	83	13	4
Lower	78	16	6
Middle	74	19	7
Upper class	78	14	9

TABLE 2: Public perceptions of gender bias in candidate selection and electoral success

Statement	Agree	Somewhat agree/ somewhat disagree	Disagree
Even when a man and a woman are equally good candidates, political parties always prefer a man over a woman while giving tickets	44	30	15
Lesser winning probability of women compared to men	17	31	41

Note: All figures are in percentage. Others did not know



TABLE 3: Perceived barriers to women's political participation

Type of barrier	(%)
Patriarchal structure	22
Household responsibility	13
Individual barriers	12
Cultural norms	7
Constrains related to finance or political structure	6
Negative image of politics	3
Other barriers	1

TABLE 4: Extent of patriarchal dominance within households

Level of dominance	(%)
Strong dominance	12
Some dominance	23
Low dominance	31
No dominance at all	28

TABLE 5: Women's autonomy in participating in political activities

Level of freedom	(%)
No freedom at all	66
Very little freedom	12
Some freedom	12
A lot of freedom	10

TABLE 6: The willingness of women to enter politics

Willingness	(%)
No	61
Yes	28
No opinion	12

Krishangi is a researcher with Lokniti-CSDS, Sanjay Kumar is a Professor, Psephologist and Election Analyst. Views expressed by the authors are their own independent views, it does not reflect the views of the institution

- Nearly two-thirds of women report some degree of patriarchal dominance within their households (Table 4). At the same time, about 66% report having no freedom at all to participate in political activities such as attending meetings or rallies (Table 5). The overlap between household dominance and limited political autonomy suggests that the private sphere remains a key site of political exclusion. Even before institutional barriers come into play, many women face restrictions within their own homes. These structural and social barriers also influence how women perceive politics as a career. Only about 28% of women expressed willingness to enter politics (Table 6).
- Low willingness reflects not simply a lack of interest, but the cumulative effect of restricted autonomy, limited access, and exclusionary political structures.
- Data suggests that women's political participation in India is marked by a paradox: high electoral participation alongside limited political engagement and representation. While reservation can address the issue of numerical underrepresentation, its impact is likely to be shaped by existing inequalities related to class, caste, education, and access to resources. Without parallel changes, including greater inclusion in party candidate selection and enhanced autonomy within households, quotas alone may not substantially broaden the pool of women entering politics.

❖ 'War poses challenges to Indian economy via number of channels'

Context: Supply chain disruptions that may take longer to subside pose downside risks to growth and upside risks to inflation, writes MPC chairman.

- The impact of the West Asia conflict on the Indian economy dominated discourses at the last Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting (April 6-8) with all members expressing serious concern, minutes of the MPC meeting released indicated.
- However, the ceasefire announced by U.S. President Donald Trump on April 7 perhaps brought temporary relief as all six members had unanimously voted for a status quo on April 8.
- "With the announcement of the temporary ceasefire, there is a possibility of an early resolution of the conflict and normalisation of supply chains. In such a situation, it is prudent to wait and watch, before making any decisive move," MPC chairman and RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra wrote in the minutes.
- "The West Asia conflict poses challenges to the Indian economy through a number of channels — exports, supply of critical commodities, elevated energy and other commodity prices, remittances, uncertainty, subdued global demand, etc.," he observed.
- "Overall, geopolitical uncertainties have intensified with the conflict widening its spread over last month. As a result, supply chain disruptions, that may take longer to subside fully and restore the logistics network, pose downside risks to growth and upside risks to inflation," he stated. Nevertheless, the Indian economy is on a much stronger footing at the current juncture, he pointed out.
- External member Nagesh Kumar stated that the West Asia conflict had affected the Indian economy through several channels.

- “India’s high dependence on crude oil, natural gas and fertilizer imports from the Middle East is the most important channel for transmission of spillovers. The blockage of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted the supplies and has sent the crude prices through the roof. The crude oil prices are [an] important factor affecting India’s economic growth and inflation outlook,” he observed.
- “Despite tentative indications of a cessation of hostilities in the West Asia conflict and a consequent easing of tight global financial conditions, uncertainty regarding persisting dislocations of global supply chains remains heightened,” external member Saugata Bhattacharya wrote.
- “The level of uncertainty on the external front in general and the West Asia conflict in particular is high at this point. There seem to be many unknown unknowns whose direct and indirect economic impacts are unquantifiable,” said external member Ram Singh.
- Deputy Governor and internal member Poonam Gupta stated that the West Asia conflict had “afflicted” the global and Indian economies with significant intensity.

❖ Textile, apparel exports decline in FY26

Context: Export of textiles and apparel saw a 2.21% decline in FY 2025-26 in dollar terms and 2.1% increase in rupee terms.

- In dollar terms, the total textile and garment exports were \$35.7 billion in the financial year that ended on March 31, 2026 compared with \$36.6 billion in the previous year.
- Of this, export of cotton yarn, fabrics, and made-ups decreased 3.89% and total garment exports declined 1.36 %.
- In rupee terms, according to an official press statement, India’s textile sector continued to demonstrate resilience in global markets with total textile exports, including handicrafts, increasing from ₹3,09,859.3 crore in 2024–2025 to ₹3,16,334.9 crore in 2025–2026.
- Among the major segments, ready-made garments of all textiles remained the largest contributor to textile exports, rising from ₹1,35,427.6 crore to ₹1,39,349.6 crore (2.9% hike).
- Export growth was registered in more than 120 destinations during the April 2025 – February 2026 period over the corresponding period of the previous year, with notable growth in key markets such as the UAE (22.3%), U.K. (7.8%), Germany (9.9%), Spain (15.5%), and Japan (20.6%).

❖ Norms tweaked to blend non-petroleum sources with ATF

Context: In a boost for India’s sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) ambitions and to alleviate some pressure amid the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, the Petroleum Ministry expanded the definition of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) to include blending of the fuel with synthesised hydrocarbons viz. fuel created from non-petroleum sources.

- The gazette notification reads: “The following sub-clause shall be substituted, namely: ‘aviation turbine fuel’ is a complex mixture of hydrocarbons conforming to IS 1571 specification or its blend with synthesised hydrocarbons as specified in IS 17081.”

- For clarity, the gazette proposes to mandate standards for ATF, which adhere to those set for blended fuels labelled IS 1571. These standards would also include those defined as synthesised hydrocarbons, which are presently labelled IS 17081, and were formulated in 2019.
- Input feedstock for hydrocarbons can range from biomass and natural gas, among others and not necessarily ethanol.

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Context: The Supreme Court asked whether the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) was making a case of “breakdown of constitutional machinery” in West Bengal, momentarily pausing the Central agency’s rejoinder against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, senior State police officers, and bureaucrats for allegedly violating the rule of law to “barge” into I-PAC premises in Kolkata during a raid and leaving with material said to be incriminating in coal smuggling case.

- “We hope you are not arguing ‘breakdown of constitutional machinery’ in the context of the controversy you are raising,” Justice N.V. Anjaria, a member of the Division Bench headed by Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra, asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED.
- The query from the Bench followed submissions from the ED about a “well-established pattern” of violations by the Chief Minister, the State police, and the ruling Trinamool Congress, and a “non-existent” rule of law over the years in West Bengal.

Incidents recalled

- Mr. Mehta referred to the police “siege” of the Central Bureau of Investigation Joint Director’s residence in Kolkata and the arrest of CBI officials in 2019, a “mob” of lawyers and party workers crowding into a Calcutta High Court courtroom on January 9 and the Director-General of Police “acting as the PSO (personal security officer) of the Chief Minister”.
- Mr. Mehta responded that there was “nothing up the sleeve” of the ED in the case. He said the “rule of law” was a “part and parcel”, an essential part of Article 14, of the Constitution. The ED officials, against whom the State police registered criminal cases for conducting what was described as a lawful investigation, have a fundamental right to equality before the law or equal protection of the laws.
- “The ED cannot argue ‘breakdown of constitutional machinery’ [Article 356],” Mr. Mehta said.
- He submitted that the rule of law was raised to establish the locus standi of the ED, acting in a “representative capacity”, to approach the top court in an Article 32 writ petition to enforce the fundamental rights of its officials whose personal liberty and dignity as citizens were threatened by “engineered or orchestrated” police FIRs.
- The ED and its Deputy Director Robin Bansal have filed a plea seeking a CBI probe into the incident.
- Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the State, argued that the Centre, and not the ED, ought to have approached the Supreme Court against the State by filing an original suit under Article 131. Mr. Mehta said a Centre versus State dispute did not arise here, adding that an Article 131 suit was filed only if the dispute was of a federal nature.
- “This is a law and order issue. The president of the ruling party, who is also the highest executive of the State, along with officials who happen to draw their salaries from the Centre are on one side here... Besides, State governments, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu [in the Governor case], have repeatedly approached the Supreme Court under Article 32, and been entertained by this court,” Mr. Mehta said.

- The top law officer submitted that the argument of rule of law was raised to establish the locus standi of the ED, acting in a “representative capacity”, to approach the top court in an Article 32 writ petition to enforce the fundamental rights of its officials whose personal liberty and dignity as citizens were threatened by “engineered or orchestrated” police FIRs.
- The ED and its Deputy Director Robin Bansal have filed a plea seeking a CBI probe into the incident.
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- Mr. Mehta said a Centre versus State dispute did not arise here, adding that an Article 131 suit was filed only if the dispute was of a federal nature. “This is a law and order issue.
- The president of the ruling party, who is also the highest executive of the State, along with officials who happen to draw their salaries from the Centre are on one side here...Besides, State governments, including the States of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu [in the Governor case], have repeatedly approached the Supreme Court under Article 32, and been entertained by this court,” Mr. Mehta said. He said the filing of writ petitions by States should be “discouraged”. “Then should we dismiss this petition?” Justice Mishra asked.
- Mr. Mehta replied in the negative, saying ED officials too had approached the Supreme Court in their personal capacity in this case.

❖ State’s new excise regime calibrates taxes to social cost of alcohol

Context: The new regime that seeks to nudge people to lower strength beverages, will align alcoholic beverages to social cost that has been calculated to be ₹1,270 per litre of alcohol in beverage in 2024–2025 and is estimated to be ₹2,000 by 2028–2029.

- The social cost of alcohol consumption — ranging from health burden and domestic violence to accidents — is the fundamental reason behind Karnataka government’s decision to move to Alcohol in Beverage (AIB) regime from the complicated slab-based excise duty structure based on price, notes the draft report on Karnataka Excise Reforms submitted by the K.P. Krishnan-headed Resource Mobilisation Committee.

How economy works

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alcohol taxation contributes to 1.4% of State’s Gross State Domestic Product; 11.1% of total tax revenue; 20.3% of own tax revenue (2024–2025) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Contributes 0.4% of employment in the State, employing about one lakh directly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Karnataka recorded approximately 6.88 crore cases of IMFL sales, accounting for about 17% of the total IMFL sales in India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Karnataka is one of five Southern States that together account for roughly 45% of all alcohol sold in the country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Around 11% of the Karnataka’s population consumes alcohol – below the national average at 14.6% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Karnataka is one of five Southern States that together account for roughly 45% of all alcohol sold in the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Approximately 98% to 99% of excise revenue arises from sales within Karnataka 	

Social cost

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alcohol consumption in Karnataka imposes social costs estimated at 2.0% of GDP (central estimate) — approximately ₹51,000 crore annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Estimated social cost of alcohol consumption in Karnataka is ₹1,270 per litre of alcohol in beverage in 2024–2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The excise on pure alcohol in the Indian Made Liquor – the highest strength, highest volume and highest harm segment market – is approximately ₹600 to ₹800 a litre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Per capita alcohol consumption in Karnataka is approximately 14 litres of alcoholic beverages per year, corresponding to about 4.19 litres of pure alcohol annually
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- Under the new regime, higher alcohol content liquor which was so far cheaper, would increase marginally this year, and become costlier over the next three to five years.
- The new regime that seeks to nudge the consumers to lower strength beverages, will align alcoholic beverages to social cost that has been calculated to be around ₹1,270 per litre of alcohol in beverage in 2024–2025 and is estimated to be around ₹2,000 by 2028-2029. In 2026-2027, it has been estimated to be around ₹1,542.
- A multi-State analysis has found that a 1% increase in tax reduces alcohol consumption by 0.14%, and actively nudges consumption toward lower-strength beverages — a behavioural shift that directly reduces harm, the report said.
- It also noted with the raised excise duty, demand will contract as prices rise, while income growth will partially offset this through increased purchasing power. The government has proposed an increase that is in the range of 11% to 20%.

How costs work

- After the proposed revision, the IMFL cost remains below neighbouring States in some segments. In entry-level segment, the revised MRP remains substantially lower while in the mid-level, price is broadly aligned or lower.
- Currently, the economy Indian Made Liquor — the highest strength, highest-volume and highest harm segment of the market — bears an effective excise of approximately ₹600 to ₹800 per litre of pure alcohol, while the estimated social cost of that alcohol is approximately ₹1,542 per litre in 2026-27.
- In contrast, the lower strength premium alcohol is being taxed at higher than the estimated social cost. The premium and imported spirits face excise burdens of ₹1,200 to ₹ 2,000 or more at or above the benchmark social cost.
- “Karnataka’s current excise framework taxes alcohol based on price and product category rather than on alcohol content. The system under taxes the products causing the most harm and over taxes those causing the least. Taxation should be calibrated to the social cost of alcohol consumption not to revenue targets, product categories or administrative convenience,” recommended the draft report.
- For Karnataka, where the market is dominated by spirits at 42.8%, ABV and strong beer at 6–8%, the potential for the shift to lower strength is substantial, the report said.

Drunk driving

- Drunk driving causing harm to overwhelmingly innocent third parties — pedestrians, cyclists, passengers, and occupants of other vehicles, who had no part in the decision to drink; relationship of alcohol and domestic violence/ sexual violence in India; alcohol linked to more than 200 diseases and injury conditions — liver cirrhosis, several cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and neuropsychiatric disorders among — are among the cited social costs.
- It also pointed at the National Mental Health Survey (2016) that found an alcohol use disorder prevalence of 4.6% nationally and Karnataka falls within the 2.5%-4.9 % prevalence band. It has referred to particularly concerning dimension of adolescent initiation and alcohol expenditure as a share of total household spending.

❖ e-Swathu services now available at Grama One, Karnataka One, and Bengaluru One Centres

Context: Now, services related to e-Swathu will be available at Bapooji Seva Kendra (Grama One), Karnataka One, and Bengaluru One integrated service centres across the State as the RDPR Department has entered into an agreement with authorities concerned to expand the access to e-Swathu services as part of measures to bring government services closer to citizens.

- The RDPR Department, in collaboration with the e-Governance Department's Directorate of Electronic Delivery of Citizen Services (EDCS), has signed an agreement to expand access to e-Swathu services.



The RDPR Department has signed an agreement to expand access to e-Swathu services.

For three years

- According to an official release, the agreement will be valid for a period of three years.
- Under this initiative, key services related to the e-Swathu system developed by the RDPR Department — mainly application submission, will now be available at these centres State-wide.
- To ensure smooth implementation of the initiative, operators at these centres will receive necessary training on the e-Swathu system from the RDPR Department. Dedicated login credentials will also be created for operators. Additionally, nodal officers will be appointed by the RDPR Department to coordinate and oversee the delivery of these services, the release states.
- A fee of ₹45 will have to be paid for availing new khata services, which will be borne by the citizens. For scanning and uploading documents required for e-Swathu applications, ₹5 per page will be charged, the release notes.
- **All Grama One, Karnataka One, and Bengaluru One centres will operate from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. throughout the year. The centres will remain closed on all national holidays.**

❖ 'Indian ties with Africa signal stability in a turbulent world'

Context: Jaishankar highlights that India-Africa partnership is rooted in shared anti-colonial history and strengthened through capacity building, development cooperation, and strategic engagement.

- India's relationship with Africa delivers a message of "stability in a turbulent world", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.

- Speaking at the launch of the theme, website and logo of the upcoming fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), Mr. Jaishankar said India's ties with Africa were rooted in the common struggle for freedom from colonial rule. He highlighted development partnership and capacity building as key areas of collaboration between the two sides.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with African Ambassadors and delegates at the India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi. ANI

- “As the world navigates through complex geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges, our partnership assumes particular significance. It will be a message of stability in a turbulent world, of reliability in an uncertain one and of solidarity in difficult times,” Mr. Jaishankar said, presenting the India-Africa partnership as a process that will strengthen institutions and empower people.
- The Minister made the remarks while launching the theme, logo and website of IAFS-IV, to be held from May 28 to 31. The event was attended by New Delhi-based heads of missions and Ambassadors of African countries. The third edition of the India-Africa Forum Summit was held in October 2015. The theme of the upcoming summit is “Enduring partnership — shared vision”.
- Mr. Jaishankar's remarks obliquely referred to the situation in the Gulf region, which has come into focus over the past two months due to the U.S.-Israel war on Iran that has triggered a global energy crisis.
- In view of disruptions in the supply of essential items such as petroleum, natural gas, and fertilizers, India is looking for stable alternative suppliers, with several African countries seen as potential partners. With disruptions in fertilizer supplies from Gulf countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, India is expected to focus on Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco to meet demand ahead of the next monsoon season.
- Mr. Jaishankar highlighted India's long-term commitment, noting that the opening of 17 new diplomatic missions in Africa has taken the total to 46. With this, India's diplomatic footprint is now visible in “every region of the continent”, he said.

‘Living bridge’

- He also referred to the three million-strong Indian diaspora in Africa as a “living bridge” connecting the two regions. He cited institutions such as the IIT, Zanzibar, the National Forensic Science University in Uganda, the Entrepreneurship Development Centre in Rwanda, and Centres of Information Technology in several African countries as examples of “people-centric cooperation”.
- Mr. Jaishankar said that outside the South Asian neighbourhood, Africa is the largest recipient of Indian overseas development support. “India has placed development cooperation and capacity-building programmes at the core of its partnership with Africa,” he said.

❖ India, Egypt advance their defence cooperation

Context: India and Egypt advanced their defence cooperation at the 11th Joint Defence Committee meeting held in Cairo from April 20 to 22, outlining a road map to deepen bilateral engagement.

- According to the Ministry of Defence, the Indian delegation, led by Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Amitabh Prasad, engaged with senior Egyptian defence officials to review progress since the previous meeting and identify new avenues of collaboration.
- Both sides agreed on a bilateral defence cooperation plan for 2026–27, focusing on expanding military engagements, intensifying joint training exchanges, boosting maritime security cooperation, and increasing the scope of military exercises.
- The two nations agreed to work towards a defence industry cooperation plan, exploring opportunities for co-development and co-production, it added. The inaugural Navy-to-Navy staff talks were held, underlining the importance of maritime cooperation.

❖ Cong. attacks govt. over nod for ethanol in aircraft fuel

Context: Party raises safety concern, says ethanol is less energy dense than ATF and cannot produce enough thrust unless more fuel is used, impacting number of passengers that can be carried.

- The Congress criticised the government over allegedly permitting use of ethanol in aviation turbine fuel (ATF), calling the move a potential risk to aviation safety though the method in question is different from the blending method used in automobiles, is internationally approved and has already been used on a commercial flight.
- The Petroleum Ministry issued a notification expanding the definition of ATF used in flights to include fuel blended with “synthesised hydrocarbons”, effectively opening the door to alternative fuels such as sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).
- The notification does not grant any specific approval for ethanol use, though ethanol is one of several recognised pathways for producing SAF. Other feedstocks and routes include used cooking oil, animal fats, municipal solid waste, agricultural residues and bio-waste.
- This comes after India’s plans to have 1% SAF for international flights from 2027 under the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)’s net zero goal for aviation by 2050.
- “If they are serious about testing this, let them first use it on [PM] Modi’s ₹8,400 crore aircraft or [Nitin] Gadkari’s private jet for a couple of years, prove it is safe, and only then consider introducing it to the public,” the Congress’s Kerala unit posted on X.

Chances of freezing

- The Congress claimed that ethanol is less energy dense than ATF and cannot produce enough thrust unless a much higher volume of fuel is used, impacting the number of passengers that can be carried onboard and aircraft efficiency.
- It also claimed that since ethanol absorbs moisture, it can freeze at cruising altitudes, where temperatures can fall below -50°C resulting in clogging fuel lines and filters “and potentially cause engine failure mid-air”.

- The move comes amid growing concerns over the mandated blending of ethanol into gasoline to produce E20 fuel across fuel stations, with users reporting reduced fuel efficiency and a noticeable decline in vehicle performance.

❖ **SAF is different: But the process used for gasoline and SAF is fundamentally different.**

Context: “The SAF notification employs the term ‘synthesised hydrocarbons’ instead of ethanol, recognising that aviation fuel compatibility requires chemically processed, drop-in hydrocarbon fuels rather than direct ethanol blending,” Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association’s Director General Deepak Ballani explained.

- The use of ethanol in automobiles involves simple blending with petrol (such as E20), where it is burned directly as a fuel.
- In contrast, for aviation, ethanol serves only as a feedstock and must undergo complex chemical conversion into jet fuel before it can be used. This also involves dehydration, or removal of water, which also strips out oxygen in the form of H₂O before the fuel can be safely used in aircraft.

❖ **State support key for tribal welfare, says Social Justice Ministry report**

Context: Support from State governments has been lacking in efforts to extend welfare measures to denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs), the Union government has said, adding that even now only seven States are issuing DNT community certificates. In its annual report for 2025-26, the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry said support from States was awaited despite letters and advisories issued for close to a decade.

- In the report, the Ministry said that State and Union Territory governments were yet to share lists of eligible DNT beneficiaries awaiting housing allotments under the Centre’s PMAY-G. Further, the Ministry said it had requested the States to share other details such as population estimates of DNTs and lists of these communities residing in each State, and had urged them to issue DNT certificates and set up grievance redress mechanisms in letters written since as far back as 2015.
- Over the past few years, DNT communities across various parts of the country had repeatedly raised the issue of community certificates not being provided, which, in turn, affected their ability to claim benefits targeted at them.
- Nearly 1,200 such communities, which were tagged as “criminal” by the colonial administration, were denotified in 1952 when the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed. Since then, a majority have been classified under the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled



DNT communities have raised the issue of not getting community certificates, which affects their ability to claim benefits. FILE PHOTO

Tribes or the Other Backward Classes lists, though nearly 300 communities are yet to be classified.

- Community leaders have argued that the lack of community certificates and their “misclassification” into SC, ST and OBC lists has further marginalised them within these respective groupings. Sections of DNT communities have taken this argument further to mobilise for a separate classification for DNTs on a par with SC, ST, and OBC classifications.
- However, even as the Ministry has maintained that there are no proposals under consideration for creating a new classification for DNTs, government officials have said that the ongoing Census 2027 exercise will count the population of these communities during the enumeration phase.

❖ Rice exports decline 7.5% to \$11.53 bn in 2025-26

Context: The country’s rice exports dipped 7.5% to \$11.53 billion in 2025-26 due to a contraction in shipments to major destinations including West Asian countries, according to Commerce Ministry’s data.

- The exports in March declined 15.36% to \$997.53 million. Shipments to West Asian nations, including Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman have been impacted due to the war between US.-Israel and Iran.
- Iran is India’s top basmati rice export destination, but the shipments are witnessing growing stress on order flows, payment cycles, and ship schedules due to the prevailing instability.
- Importers had conveyed their inability to honour existing commitments and remit payments to India, creating uncertainty for exporters. In 2024-25, India exported 20.1 MT of rice valued at \$12.5 billion, reaching more than 172 countries.

❖ Rupee falls 23 paise to cross 94 despite RBI intervention

Context: Central bank action fails to arrest slide as simultaneous rally in crude oil and the U.S. dollar exerts additional downward pressure; stocks fall 1% on profit booking, war-related concerns.

- Driven by high hedging dollar demand and a broader shift toward safe-haven assets, the Indian rupee on Thursday weakened past the 94 level against the U.S. dollar.
- As crude oil prices rose over \$100 a barrel owing to uncertainties around the West Asia conflict, the rupee came under pressure and fell 23 paise to 94.01 against the dollar from its previous close of 93.78 in the spot market as reflected in the Clearing Corporation of India platform.
- This is the rupee’s fall for the fourth consecutive session, its longest losing streak, analysts said.
- Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC Securities said, “Central bank interventions failed to arrest the slide as a simultaneous rally in crude oil and the U.S. dollar exerted additional downward pressure.”
- “With excessive speculation in the currency markets curbed by RBI’s actions, rupee is likely to move in tandem with fundamentals. The fundamental factor behind rupee’s weakness is the rising current account deficit caused by high crude prices and the

sustained FPI outflows from India,” said V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Ltd.

- “So long as these factors remain the same, rupee will remain weak and if crude price rises again due to escalation of the conflict, rupee will depreciate further,” he added.
- “The low of ₹93.50 to the dollar reached on March 30 is unlikely to be reached in the near-term since currency speculation is under check. Rupee will move inversely in tune with crude prices. Currently depreciation stands the risk of getting aggravated if FPIs turn big sellers,” he further said.
- Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities said, “Uncertainty around U.S.–Iran talks and tensions in the Strait of Hormuz are further supporting crude, adding to inflation concerns and limiting rupee recovery. The dollar remains steady, which is also capping any upside in the rupee.”
- The equity benchmark indices on Thursday fell about 1% owing to war related worries.
- The BSE Sensex fell 852 points, or 1.09%, to 77,664.
- The NSE Nifty-50 index, too, fell 205 points or 0.84% to 24,173 points.

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

