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MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

AUGUST 2026



Gujarat's Unjha Cumin
and Fennel Get
GI Tags



Unjha Cumin (Jeera) Unjha Fennel (Variya)



$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

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India's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site: Sarnath

Context: Sarnath was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List during the 48th World Heritage Committee session in Busan, South Korea, in July 2026.

Key Points:

- Sarnath is India's 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site and Uttar Pradesh's 4th, after the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri.
- Located near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, Sarnath is one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage centres.
- Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon here after attaining enlightenment. This event is known as Dharmachakra Pravartana (Turning of the Wheel of the Law).
- The first sermon is recorded as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

Archaeological Discoveries:

- 1794: Jagat Singh, Dewan of Varanasi, dismantled the Dharmarajika Stupa, leading to the discovery of a relic casket.
- 1835–36: Alexander Cunningham carried out the first systematic excavation around the Dhamek Stupa.
- 1904–05: F.O. Oertel excavated the main shrine area and discovered the Ashokan Lion Capital, which later became India's National Emblem.
- Excavations also revealed the Ashoka Pillar, Buddhist sculptures and monastic remains.

Major Structures:

- Dhamek Stupa: Associated with Buddha's first sermon; known for its floral and geometric carvings.
- Chaukhandi Stupa: Traditionally associated with Buddha's meeting with his first disciples.
- Ashokan Pillar: Erected during Ashoka's reign; its Lion Capital is India's National Emblem
- Monastic Ruins: Reflect Sarnath's role as a centre of Buddhist learning and monastic life.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

- UNESCO World Heritage Sites are cultural, natural or mixed properties having Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).
- The World Heritage Convention, 1972 created an international framework for protecting and conserving such heritage.

India's Last 5 UNESCO World Heritage Site Inscribed:

1. Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh - 2026
2. Maratha Military Landscapes of India - 2025
3. Moidams of the Ahom Dynasty, Assam - 2024
4. Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas, Karnataka - 2023
5. Santiniketan, West Bengal - 2023



UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger List

Context: The 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee added six sites to the List of World Heritage in Danger. Three of these were simultaneously added to the World Heritage List through the emergency procedure.

New Sites Inscribed through Emergency Procedure

- **Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape** – South Sudan East African savanna supporting the world's largest known terrestrial mammal migration.
- Threats include infrastructure development, poaching, wildlife trafficking, insecurity and weak conservation capacity.
- **Mount Amel Castles** – Lebanon A group of five castles showing the evolution of defensive architecture from the Crusader and Islamic periods to the 19th century.
- Threatened by ongoing armed conflict.
- **Sebastia** – State of Palestine Archaeological site containing remains from several periods, including Israelite, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, Ayyubid/Mamluk and Ottoman periods.
- Faces threats from the proposed “Samaria” National Park, conflict, development and erosion.

Existing Sites Added to the Danger List

- **Ancient City of Tauric Chersonese and its Chora** – Ukraine: Threatened by occupation, new construction and archaeological activities.
- **Historic Inner City of Paramaribo** – Suriname: Modern construction is affecting its historic urban landscape.
- **Tyre** – Lebanon: Ongoing armed conflict threatens its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

World Heritage in Danger List

- **Legal Basis:** Article 11(4) of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention.
- Includes World Heritage Sites facing serious and specific threats to their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).
- Inclusion allows the World Heritage Committee to provide emergency assistance through the World Heritage Fund, where required.



Indus Valley Script

Context: The Indus script remains undeciphered despite efforts by historians, linguists, archaeologists and computer scientists. Interest has increased after the Tamil Nadu government announced a \$1 million prize in January 2025 for deciphering it.

Key Challenges in Decipherment

- **Unknown Language:** The language represented by the script is still unidentified.
- **Limited Evidence:** Around 300 signs appear only once, making patterns difficult to establish.
- **Archaeological Context:** Understanding the objects, sites and contexts where the signs were found is essential.
- **Need for Consensus:** Any proposed decipherment must gain acceptance among archaeologists, philologists and other specialists.
- **Modern Approaches:** Researchers are increasingly using AI, machine learning, data science and statistical analysis along with traditional methods.

About the Indus Script

- It is the undeciphered writing system of the Indus Valley Civilisation, found mainly on seals, tablets, pottery and metal objects.
- It was identified during archaeological work in the 1920s, particularly under Sir John Marshall.
- **Period:** Approximately 2500–1500 BCE.
- **Writing Direction:** Generally right to left; some longer inscriptions may use boustrophedon (alternating direction).
- **Short Inscriptions:** Most texts are very short, averaging around 5 symbols; the longest known inscription has about 26 symbols.
- **Nature:** It may be a logosyllabic script, combining symbols representing words/ideas and sounds. Some scholars have proposed the use of the rebus principle.

Veeragallu

Context: A Hoysala-era Veeragallu (hero stone) was discovered at Neeragunda, Arsikere taluk, Karnataka, during the restoration of the Lakshmi Narayana Swamy Temple.



About Veeragallu

- **Meaning:** In Kannada, Veeragallu means “hero stone”—a memorial stone erected in honour of a warrior who died heroically.
- It often depicts the warrior’s heroic act through sculptures and may carry inscriptions about his identity and sacrifice.
- **Historical Value:** Provides information about warfare, social practices, political history and memorial traditions of the period.

Key Findings

- Two sculpted stones were discovered; one was a Veeragallu installed by Maravve in memory of her husband Boppa, a soldier.
- Its Old Kannada inscription records that Boppa died shortly after the death of Hoysala ruler Vishnuvardhana at Bankapura.
- The inscription gives the date as 11 December 1141 CE.
- This discovery may help resolve the uncertainty regarding Vishnuvardhana’s death date, which was earlier dated to 1149 or 1152 CE.

About Vishnuvardhana

- One of the most prominent Hoysala rulers.
- Expanded Hoysala power across parts of present-day Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.



Vagdevi Idol

Context: India renewed efforts to repatriate the 11th-century Vagdevi idol from the British Museum, London, during the BRICS Culture Ministers’ meeting in Bhopal.

About the Vagdevi Idol

- **Period:** 11th century, Paramara period.
- **Origin:** Dhar, Madhya Pradesh.
- **Identity:** India identifies the sculpture as Goddess Saraswati (Vagdevi), while the British Museum catalogues it as Ambika, a Jain deity.
- The sculpture was discovered at Dhar in 1875 and acquired by the British Museum in 1909.



Key Features

- **Material:** White marble.
- **Size:** About 1.285 metres in height.
- **Weight:** Approximately 250 kg.
- **Iconography:** Depicts a four-armed deity; surviving attributes include an elephant goad and remains of a noose or plant stalk.
- **Inscription:** The sculpture carries an inscription attributing it to Vararuci, who some scholars identify with Dhanapala, a poet associated with the court of King Bhoja.

Food Safety in India

Context: Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has launched an intensive food-safety drive, conducting 1,100+ inspections across hotels, restaurants, dairies, bakeries, clubs and food-delivery dark stores. The action has resulted in licence suspensions, seizures, arrests and FIRs.

What is Food Safety?

- Under Section 3(1)(q) of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, food safety means ensuring that food is safe and acceptable for human consumption according to its intended use.

Why is Food Safety Important?

- **Public Health:** Contaminated and adulterated food can cause food poisoning, gastrointestinal diseases and contribute to chronic conditions. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.
- **Economic Losses:** Unsafe food can lead to recalls, business losses, legal costs and reduced consumer confidence.
- **Exports:** Failure to meet international standards can result in rejection or restrictions on Indian food exports. Concerns over pesticide residues in Indian spices in 2024 led to regulatory action/reviews in several international markets.
- **Environment:** Excessive pesticide use and unsafe agricultural practices can contaminate soil and water.
- **Consumer Trust:** Adulteration and misleading claims such as unsubstantiated "100% natural" or health claims can undermine consumer confidence.
- **Healthcare & Productivity:** Foodborne diseases increase healthcare costs and reduce productivity.

Legal & Institutional Framework

- **Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954:** India's first comprehensive central law to address food adulteration.
- **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** Main legal framework governing food safety in India.
- **FSSAI:** Statutory authority responsible for setting food standards and regulating food safety.

- **States & Local Authorities:** Mainly responsible for field-level enforcement. **Commissioner of Food Safety:** Oversees implementation at the State level.
 - **Designated Officers:** Work at the district level, issue licences and take action against violations.
 - **Food Safety Officers:** Conduct inspections, collect samples and monitor compliance.

Way Forward

- Expand modern food-testing laboratories, mobile testing units and rapid detection technologies.
- Provide financial incentives and easier credit to MSMEs with verified food-safety compliance.
- Simplify regulations for small food businesses and MSMEs.
- Use AI, DNA barcoding, rapid testing and satellite-based risk mapping to detect contamination and adulteration early.
- Develop real-time integrated food-safety surveillance systems connecting regulators, laboratories and businesses.
- Strengthen consumer awareness, helplines and grievance-redressal mechanisms.
- Promote safe agricultural practices, including judicious pesticide use, hygienic storage and proper waste management.
- Align Indian standards with Codex Alimentarius, while incorporating India-specific risk assessments.

Notifiable Disease

Context: The Maharashtra government has declared snakebite a notifiable disease, requiring cases to be reported to health authorities. The Supreme Court has also asked 19 States and UTs to consider declaring cancer a notifiable disease to support early detection and better patient care.

About Notifiable Diseases

- A notifiable disease is a disease that must be reported to government health authorities by law.
- **Purpose:** Helps in disease surveillance, early warning, outbreak detection and control.
- **Examples:** Cholera, tuberculosis, AIDS and dengue.

When is a Disease Made Notifiable?

Key considerations include:

- Public health importance at the national, State or district level.
- High severity and potential for rapid mortality.
- Communicability and outbreak potential.
- Risk of international spread.
- Importance for national or international disease-control programmes.

Legal & Institutional Framework

- Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897: Provides the legal basis for disease notification in India.
- State Governments: Decide which diseases must be notified within their respective jurisdictions.
- WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR): Provide a global framework for international disease notification and health surveillance.

Kerala's Vulnerability to Landslides

Context: Two years after the 2024 Wayanad tragedy, extremely heavy monsoon rainfall on August 1-2, 2026 triggered fresh landslides, mudslides and floods across Kerala.

What is a Landslide?

A landslide is the downward movement of rock, soil, earth or debris along a slope due to gravity.

Types of Landslides

- Falls: Sudden free fall of rock or debris from steep slopes or cliffs.
- Slides: Movement along a defined failure surface.
 - Rotational: Curved slip surface.
 - Translational: Planar slip surface.
- Flows: Water-saturated soil, mud and debris move like a fluid.
- Topples: Forward rotation and overturning of rock blocks around a pivot point.
- Creep: Very slow, continuous downslope movement of soil or weathered rock.

Causes of Landslides

Conditioning Factors:

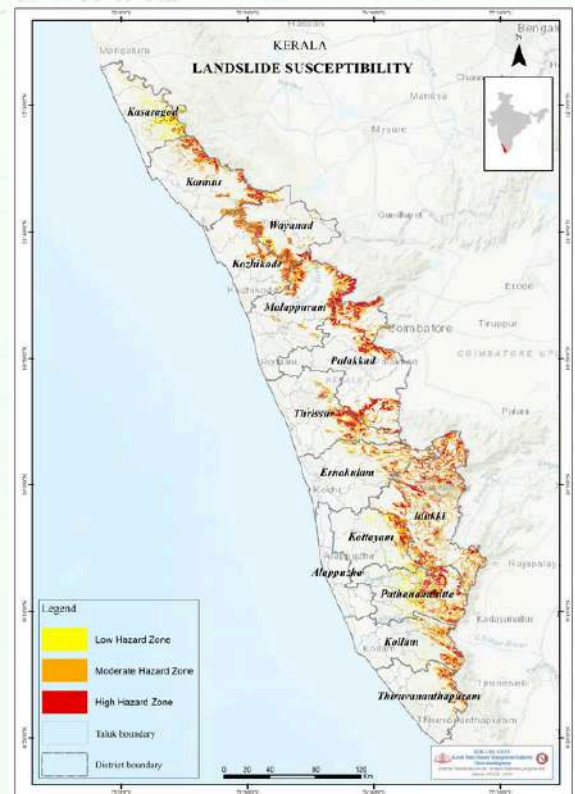
- Steep slopes, geology, geomorphology, soil characteristics and topography determine slope susceptibility.

Natural Triggers:

- Intense or prolonged rainfall is the major trigger for most landslides in India.
- Earthquakes, snowmelt and flood-induced erosion can also trigger landslides.

Human-induced Triggers:

- Hill cutting and excavation.
- Quarrying and unscientific construction.
- Deforestation and overgrazing.
- Haphazard land-use practices.



Why Did Landslides Occur in Kerala?

- **Offshore Trough:** Extended from the south Gujarat coast to Kerala, strengthening monsoon conditions.
- **Southwesterly Winds:** Increased moisture transport from the Arabian Sea.
- **Strong Pressure Gradient:** Enhanced rainfall along the west coast.
- **Heavy Rainfall:** Several Kerala stations recorded more than 20.4 cm of rainfall in 24 hours.
- **Saturated Slopes:** Previous rainfall had already saturated the soil, while intense rainfall acted as the immediate trigger.

Way Forward

- **Early Warning:** Strengthen rainfall-based landslide forecasting and warning systems.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Restore natural drainage and promote deep-rooted native vegetation to bind soil and reduce erosion.
- **Scientific Land-Use Planning:** Regulate development in vulnerable hill regions.
- **Ecological Conservation:** Control quarrying and hill cutting and restore native forests.
- **Disaster Preparedness:** Strengthen community-based and risk-informed disaster management.
- **Hazard Mapping:** Classify areas into very low, low, moderate, high and very high Landslide Hazard Zones (LHZ) using slope, geology, rainfall, drainage, land use and past landslide data.
- **Integrate hazard maps into infrastructure, road construction, land-use planning and disaster-risk reduction.**

Ganga Flood Plain

Context: The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) amended the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016, replacing the earlier blanket construction ban in parts of the Ganga flood plain with a risk-based zoning approach.

Background

- The Central Water Commission (CWC) issued guidelines in July 2025 proposing differentiated flood-plain zones based on flood frequency.
- The amendment incorporates this approach into the Ganga's regulatory framework.

New Flood-Plain Zoning

Zone	Flood Frequency	Construction
Active Flood Plain	Flooded at least once in 5 years	Largely prohibited; limited exceptions such as temporary religious activities
Regulatory Zone	Flooding once every 5–25 years	Permitted subject to regulatory clearances
Warning Zone	Severe flooding once every 25–100 years	Subject to approvals and safeguards

- The earlier provision declaring the Ganga riverbank and flood plain as a construction-free zone has been removed.
- Projects such as roads, bridges and riverfront infrastructure continue to require approval from the NMCG and relevant authorities.

Concerns

- **Flood Risk:** Construction beyond the five-year flood line may increase exposure to less frequent but severe floods.
- **Climate Change:** Historical flood patterns may not accurately predict future risks due to changing rainfall and extreme weather.
- **Encroachment:** Weak enforcement and rapid urbanisation could lead to gradual encroachment.
- **Ecological Impact:** Construction can damage wetlands, riparian ecosystems, groundwater recharge areas and natural drainage channels.
- **Governance:** Effective management requires coordination among the NMCG, CWC, State governments, urban local bodies and environmental authorities.

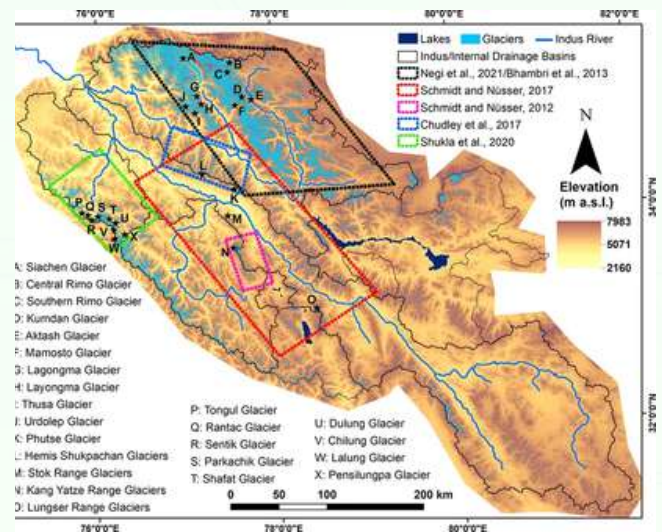
Way Forward

- Use climate-resilient flood maps incorporating future rainfall and extreme-flood scenarios.
- Establish legally enforceable flood-plain zoning based on scientific hydrological assessments.
- Promote nature-based solutions such as wetland restoration, floodplain forests, riparian buffers and natural drainage.
- Conduct cumulative impact assessments for major infrastructure projects.
- Use satellite monitoring, digital flood maps, public disclosure and strict penalties to prevent illegal construction and encroachment.



Ladakh's Glaciers Are Slowing Down

Context: A recent study published in *The Cryosphere* found that glaciers in Ladakh's Zaskar region have slowed significantly over the past three decades, along with an increasing rate of surface thinning.



Key Findings

- **Declining Glacier Velocity:** Zaskar glaciers slowed by an average of 2.4 metres per year per decade between 1992 and 2023.
- **Faster Thinning:** Surface thinning increased from about 0.22 m/year (2000–05) to 0.57 m/year (2015–20).

Climate Drivers

- **Western Disturbances:** Zaskar depends heavily on winter snowfall from Western Disturbances. Changes in their frequency, intensity and temperature can reduce snowfall and worsen glacier mass loss.
- **Rising Temperatures:** Higher temperatures accelerate snow and ice melting, leading to glacier thinning and retreat.
- **Black Carbon & Dust:** Deposits reduce snow albedo, causing greater absorption of solar radiation and accelerating melting.
 - **Albedo:** The fraction of incoming solar radiation reflected by a surface.

About Zaskar Glaciers

- The Zaskar-Suru region contains major glaciers such as Drang-Drung and Pensilungpa.
- It lies in the rain-shadow zone of the Himalayas, receiving limited summer monsoon rainfall.
- Therefore, glacier mass balance depends strongly on winter snowfall from Western Disturbances.

Implications for the Indus Basin

- **Peak Water:** Increased melting may initially raise river discharge. However, after substantial ice loss, glacier contributions can decline.
- **Water Security:** Long-term glacier thinning may reduce summer meltwater availability.
- **Agriculture & Hydropower:** Changes in glacier-fed rivers can affect irrigation, hydropower and downstream ecosystems across the Indus Basin.



Kosi-Mechi Intra-State Link Project

Context: The Centre has included the Kosi-Mechi Intra-State Link Project under PMKSY-Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) and approved ₹3,652.56 crore in central assistance. The project is targeted for completion by March 2029.

About the Project

- It is a river-linking project in Bihar aimed at improving irrigation by linking the Kosi and Mechi rivers.
- It is part of the National Perspective Plan for Interlinking of Rivers.
- Ministry: Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- Supervising Agency: National Water Development Agency (NWDA).

Kosi River

- Originates in Nepal and flows through northern Bihar.
- It is a tributary of the Mahananda River.

Mechi River

- Originates in Nepal's Mahabharat Range (Mahabharat Lekh).
- It is a perennial river.
- Flows through eastern Nepal and Darjeeling district of West Bengal before entering Bihar.



Earthquake Swarms

Context:

Maharashtra recorded 29 tremors within a fortnight, with the strongest measuring magnitude 4.3. Seismologists describe such a pattern as an earthquake swarm.

What is an Earthquake Swarm?

- A sequence of earthquakes occurring over several days or longer, without a clearly identifiable mainshock followed by aftershocks.
- No Clear Mainshock: Several earthquakes may have similar magnitudes, with their intensity fluctuating over time.
- Variable Duration: Swarms can continue for days, months or even longer.

Why Does Maharashtra Experience Earthquake Swarms?

- Intraplate Seismicity: Maharashtra lies mainly within the Indian Plate, away from major plate boundaries. However, ongoing plate movement and internal deformation can build up stress and trigger earthquakes.
- Deccan Traps: The Deccan Plateau is largely composed of basaltic rocks formed around 66 million years ago. Fractures, shear zones and other geological weaknesses can transmit accumulated tectonic stress.
- Water & Reservoirs: Rainwater infiltration can increase pore pressure and trigger seismic activity. The Koyna-Warna region is a notable example of reservoir-induced seismicity.

Hara Mangrove Forests

Context:

A major oil spill off Qeshm Island, Iran, is threatening the ecologically important Hara mangrove forests in the Persian Gulf.



About Hara Mangrove Forests

- The Hara mangroves are a vital coastal ecosystem of Iran and are designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- Location: Around Qeshm Island in the Persian Gulf, extending through the Strait of Khuran and the wider Strait of Hormuz region.

Key Features

- Grey Mangroves: Mainly composed of *Avicennia marina*, whose specialised roots allow them to survive in saline conditions.
- Marine Nursery: Mangrove roots provide breeding and sheltering grounds for fish, shrimp and crabs.
- Carbon Sink: Mangroves store significant amounts of carbon and help protect coastlines from erosion.
- Biodiversity: The forests support diverse wildlife and are an important migratory bird habitat, including for herons and the great stone-curlew.

Tamirabharani (Porunai) River

Context:

The Madras High Court recognised the Tamirabharani River as a deity and legal person to strengthen its protection against pollution and other harmful activities.

About Tamirabharani River

- Also known as Porunai or Tamraparni.
- It is a perennial river in southern Tamil Nadu with ecological, economic and cultural significance.
- Origin: Agastyarkoodam Peak in the Pothigai Hills of the Western Ghats.
- Course: Flows through Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts.

Impact of Legal-Person Status

- Legal Recognition: Gives the river a distinct legal identity, allowing its interests to be represented and protected through legal mechanisms.
- Pollution Control: Aims to strengthen action against waste dumping and pollution, including waste from funeral and religious practices along the riverbanks.

Other Natural Resources Given Legal-Person Status in India

- Ganga & Yamuna: Uttarakhand High Court recognised them as legal persons in 2017; the Supreme Court later stayed the order.
- Gangotri & Yamunotri Glaciers: Also granted legal-person status by the Uttarakhand High Court in 2017.
- Sukhna Lake: Punjab and Haryana High Court recognised it as a legal entity/person in 2020 for its conservation.



Income-Based Creamy Layer in SC/ST Quotas

Context:

The Union Government has opposed petitions seeking the introduction of an income-based creamy layer within the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) reservation system.

What is the Creamy Layer?

- Refers to the relatively advanced sections of a backward class who are excluded from reservation benefits so that benefits reach the genuinely disadvantaged.
- At present, the creamy layer principle applies to OBCs, but not generally to SCs and STs in reservation for education and public employment.
- OBC income ceiling: ₹8 lakh per annum, subject to specified exclusions and conditions.

Centre's Stand

- Different constitutional basis: SC/ST reservations aim to address historical discrimination, untouchability and social exclusion, while OBC reservations are based on social and educational backwardness.
- Need for evidence: Any income-based exclusion for SCs/STs should follow a comprehensive socio-economic study.
- Existing targeting: Many welfare and development schemes already use income/means-based eligibility criteria.
- The Centre has argued that the petitions do not establish a substantial constitutional issue or violation of fundamental rights.

Arguments in Favour

- Equitable distribution: Benefits could reach the most deprived sections within SC/ST communities.
- Prevents concentration: May reduce repeated access to reservation benefits by relatively advanced families over generations.
- Intra-category equity: Could address disparities among different SC/ST sub-groups.
- Better targeting: Socio-economic filters may help direct affirmative action towards the most vulnerable.

Arguments Against

- Historical discrimination: Caste-based discrimination and social exclusion cannot be measured solely through income.
- Continuing discrimination: Economically advanced SC/ST individuals may still face caste-based prejudice and exclusion.
- Distinct constitutional basis: SC/ST reservations have a different rationale from OBC reservations.
- Lack of evidence: There is no comprehensive socio-economic study establishing the need for an income-based creamy layer for SCs/STs.

Key Supreme Court Judgments

Case	Key Ruling
Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)	Introduced the creamy layer principle for OBCs; distinguished it from SC/ST reservations.
Jarnail Singh v. Lachhmi Narain Gupta (2018)	Applied the creamy layer principle in the context of SC/ST reservations in promotions to exclude advanced sections.
State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024)	Seven-Judge Bench upheld sub-classification within SC/ST categories to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits.

Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026

Context: Parliament has passed the Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026, which repeals the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 and seeks to align the tribunal framework with Supreme Court judgments.

Key Provisions

- National Tribunals Commission (NTC):
- Establishes the NTC as the central body for the administration and oversight of tribunals.
- Composition:
- Headed by a former Supreme Court Judge or Chief Justice of a High Court, appointed in consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI), along with judicial and technical members.
- Age & Tenure:
 - Chairpersons: up to 70 years
 - Members: up to 67 years
 - Tenure: up to 5 years
- Uniform Service Conditions:
- Provides common service conditions for tribunal members to ensure greater consistency.
- National Tribunals Data Grid:
- Aims to systematically track tribunal data, including cases, vacancies, pendency and disposal.
- Pending Appointments:
- Existing pending appointments will continue during the transition to the new framework.
- Search-cum-Selection Committee:
- Recommends one primary candidate and one wait-listed candidate for each vacancy. The Central Government must complete the appointment within 3 months.

Significance of Tribunals

- **Specialised Justice:** Provide expertise in areas such as taxation, environment, company law and administrative disputes.
- **Speedy Justice:** Can facilitate faster disposal of specialised cases and reduce the burden on constitutional courts.
- **Administrative Uniformity:** A common framework can improve consistency in administration and service conditions.
- **Better Governance:** The Data Grid can enable evidence-based monitoring of vacancies, pendency and disposal rates.
- **Institutional Independence:** An independent NTC could reduce dependence on Ministries whose decisions may come before tribunals for adjudication.

Key Challenges

- **Limited NTC Autonomy:** Executive control over appointments, finances and administration may affect its independence.
- **Excessive Executive Delegation:** Section 14 leaves important issues such as qualifications, selection, salaries and service conditions to executive rules. In *Rojer Mathew*, the Supreme Court stressed that determining who is qualified to exercise judicial power is an essential legislative function.
- **Ministry-Based Complaints:** Under Section 16, Ministries initially screen complaints against tribunal members, creating a potential conflict of interest.
- **Separation of Powers:** Excessive executive control over bodies performing judicial functions may affect judicial independence.
- **Vacancies & Pendency:** Shortages of members, staff and infrastructure can continue to weaken tribunal effectiveness.

Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026

Context: Parliament has passed the MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026, which amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 to provide greater regulatory certainty and stability in the major minerals sector.

Key Features

- **Regulation of Mineral-Bearing Lands:**
- Strengthens the Central Government's role in regulating mineral-bearing lands.
- **Restrictions on State Levies:**
- Seeks to regulate the power of States to impose taxes, cesses and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands.
- **New Section 9D – Capping State Levies:**
- Restricts States from using mineral quantity, mineral value or royalty as the basis for specified local levies, aiming to prevent multiple charges on the same mineral activity.
- **Extinguishing Past Dues:**
- Provides for the extinguishment of certain unpaid or unrecovered dues arising from specified State levies imposed before the new framework.



Significance

- **Fiscal Certainty:** Reduces overlapping State-level levies and improves investment predictability.
- **Lower Input Costs:** A predictable levy structure can reduce mineral costs for steel, cement, power and infrastructure industries.
- **Critical Mineral Security:** Can support the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) by encouraging exploration and extraction.
- **Global Competitiveness:** A more uniform fiscal framework may attract investment and reduce import dependence.
- **Greater Consistency:** Reduces fiscal fragmentation across States and promotes transparency.
- **Public-Industry Balance:** Seeks to maintain competitive mining costs while ensuring minerals generate public revenue.

Concerns Raised by States

- **Centre-State Fiscal Tensions:** Greater Union control may reduce the fiscal autonomy of mineral-rich States that depend on mining revenues.
- **Constitutional Concerns:** The amendment may raise questions regarding the division of powers under Entry 49, Entry 50 and Entry 54 of the Union/State legislative framework.
- **Revenue Loss for Mineral-Rich States:** States bear significant costs related to environmental damage, displacement, rehabilitation and infrastructure pressure.
- **Unequal Distribution of Benefits:** Mining regions may bear environmental and social costs while economic benefits are distributed more widely.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** States may view unilateral standardisation as reducing their participation, especially after the 2024 Supreme Court ruling recognising State taxation powers over mineral-bearing lands.

Way Forward

- **Mineral Governance Council:** Create a Centre-State forum, similar to the GST Council, for deliberation on mineral taxation, royalties and broader policy.
- **Transparent Fiscal Framework:** Develop clear limits on cumulative mineral levies with adequate State participation.
- **Revenue Sharing:** Provide suitable revenue-sharing or compensation where State taxation powers are curtailed.
- **Environmental Accountability:** Channel mineral revenues towards ecological restoration, rehabilitation, tribal welfare and mine-affected communities.
- **Strengthen the 3Fs:** Greater devolution of Functions, Funds and Functionaries to local governments in mining areas can improve accountability and ensure benefits reach affected communities.



FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026

Context:

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for examination.

Key Provisions

- **Designated Authority for Asset Management:**
- Proposes a Designated Authority to manage foreign contributions and assets created from such funds when an organisation's FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, expires or is not renewed.
- **Automatic Cessation & Asset Vesting:**
- FCRA registration will automatically cease upon expiry or non-renewal. Foreign-funded assets may vest with the Designated Authority until the organisation obtains fresh registration within the prescribed period.
- **Enhanced Transparency:**
- Organisations would be required to disclose:
 - Official websites and social media accounts
 - Project-wise activities
 - Donor details
 - Utilisation and reporting information
- **Time-Bound Utilisation:**
- Foreign contributions must be utilised within prescribed timelines.
- **Restrictions on Assets:**
- Organisations under suspension cannot transfer, sell or mortgage foreign-funded assets without prior government approval.
- **Revised Penalties:**
- The maximum punishment for violations is proposed to be reduced from 5 years to 1 year, or fine, or both.

Concerns

- **Excessive Executive Control:** Vesting foreign-funded assets with a government-designated authority could increase executive discretion and affect the autonomy of civil society organisations.
- **Property Rights:** Permanent vesting of assets may raise concerns under Article 300A, which protects the right to property, particularly if adequate judicial safeguards are absent.
- **Compliance Burden:** Stricter reporting, automatic cessation and time-bound utilisation requirements may disproportionately affect smaller NGOs with limited administrative capacity.
- **No Clear Appeal Mechanism:** Concerns have been raised regarding the absence of an effective appeal mechanism when the government denies renewal of an FCRA registration.

Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which seeks to make the process of delayed registration of births and deaths more stringent.

Key Provisions

- **Two-Tier Approval Mechanism:**

The Bill replaces the earlier single approval mechanism with different procedures based on the period of delay.

Period of Delay	Approval Required
More than 1 year but up to 2 years	District Magistrate (DM), Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) or authorised Executive Magistrate
More than 2 years	Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC), after verifying the correctness of the event

- **Judicial Scrutiny for Long Delays:**
- Registration delayed beyond 2 years will shift from executive approval to judicial approval, introducing greater scrutiny and verification.

Birth & Death Registration in India

- **Legal Basis:** Governed by the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, which provides for compulsory registration of births, deaths and stillbirths.
- **Civil Registration System (CRS):** Records births and deaths on a continuous and permanent basis and generates vital statistics for governance and policymaking.
- **Nodal Authority:** Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- **Constitutional Position:** The subject falls under Entry 30 of the Concurrent List, allowing both Parliament and State Legislatures to make laws.

Significance

- Ensures greater verification and reliability of late registrations.
- Reduces the possibility of fraudulent or incorrect registration of births and deaths.
- Introduces judicial oversight for registrations involving prolonged delays.
- Strengthens the reliability of the Civil Registration System and vital statistics.

Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, replacing an Ordinance that increased the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court from 34 to 38 judges, including the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Key Provisions

- Amendment to 1956 Act: The Bill amends the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956.
- Increase in Judges:
 - Puisne (ordinary) judges: 33 → 37
 - Total sanctioned strength, including CJI: 34 → 38
- Objective: To strengthen the Court's adjudicatory capacity and improve its ability to handle the growing volume of cases.

Why Was the Increase Needed?

- High Pendency: Over 92,100 cases were pending before the Supreme Court as of 1 January 2026.
- Institution-Disposal Gap: In 2025, the Court received over 75,400 fresh cases but disposed of only around 65,600, contributing to the backlog.
- Growing Litigation: The Court is dealing with increasing constitutional, commercial, civil, criminal and public interest litigation.

Significance

- Greater judicial strength can improve the Court's case disposal capacity.
- May help reduce pendency and delays in adjudication.
- Can strengthen access to timely justice and support the constitutional guarantee of speedy justice under Article 21.

Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026

Context:

The Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha to replace the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959 and provide a modern statutory governance framework for the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).



Key Provisions

- **Statutory Status:**
 - Converts ISI into a statutory body corporate, replacing its existing society-based governance model.
- **Board of Governors:**
 - Establishes an 11-member Board of Governors as the principal executive and policy-making body.
- **Academic Council:**
 - Responsible for curriculum, academic standards, examinations, research and interdisciplinary programmes.
- **Visitor:**
 - The President of India will be the Visitor of ISI.
- **Appointment of Chairperson:**
 - The Visitor will appoint the Chairperson on the recommendation of the Central Government.
- **Composition of Board:**
 - Includes government nominees, eminent experts and representatives of the Institute.
- **Continuity of Institution:**
 - Assets, liabilities, employees, academic programmes and service conditions of the existing society will transfer to the new statutory institution without disruption.
- **Appointment of Director:**
 - The Board of Governors will appoint the Director with the prior approval of the Visitor. The Director will continue to function as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ISI.

About Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)

- **Established:** 1931 by Prof. Prasanta Chandra (P.C.) Mahalanobis in Kolkata.
- **Registered as Society:** 1932.
- **Institution of National Importance:** Declared under the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959.
- **Headquarters:** Kolkata, with centres across India.
- **Major Areas:** Statistics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative economics, operations research, data science and statistical research.
- It also contributes significantly to official statistics and policy formulation.

Why Was a New Bill Proposed?

- **Outdated Governance:** ISI continued with a society-based model unlike institutions such as IITs, IIMs, AIIMS and IISERs, which operate under modern statutory frameworks.
- **Slow Decision-Making:** Amendments required approval by a three-fourths majority of the General Body, comprising more than 1,000 members.
- **Review Committee Recommendations:** Successive committees recommended a smaller governing body, stronger governance and merit-based appointments.
- **Modern Governance:** The Bill seeks greater efficiency, accountability and administrative flexibility through a statutory framework.

Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, seeking to replace the outdated legal framework governing the use of bank records as evidence in courts.

Why is the Bill Needed?

- **Outdated Legal Framework:** The existing Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891 was designed for a paper-based banking system and does not adequately reflect digital banking.
- **Digital Banking Growth:** Internet banking, mobile banking, electronic transactions and computerised accounting have transformed how banking records are created and stored.
- **Easier Judicial Proceedings:** Requiring original physical records can cause delays, logistical difficulties and administrative burdens.
- **Modernising Evidence:** The Bill seeks to align the evidentiary framework for bank records with the broader legal recognition of electronic records.
- **Faster Litigation:** Certified digital records can enable quicker presentation and verification of banking evidence before courts.

What are 'Bankers' Books'?

Bankers' books are records maintained by a bank in the ordinary course of its business. They serve as evidence of banking transactions, accounts and financial dealings and may be produced before courts.

Legal Definition & Scope

- **Traditional Records:** Includes ledgers, account books, cash books, day books and other records maintained in the ordinary course of banking business.
- **Digital Records:** The concept also covers electronic records and digitally stored banking information, reflecting the growing digitalisation of banking.

Significance

The Bill aims to make the use of banking records in judicial proceedings faster, simpler and compatible with modern digital banking, while reducing the need to physically produce original records.

Shakti Ki Saptadhara for Viksit Bharat

Context:

In his Independence Day address on 15 August 2026, the Prime Minister highlighted "Shakti Ki Saptadhara"—seven interconnected streams of national strength to accelerate India's journey towards Aatmanirbharta and Viksit Bharat@2047.



What is 'Shakti Ki Saptadhara'?

- It identifies seven strategic streams that can drive India's economic, technological, strategic and cultural development.
- It brings together manufacturing, agriculture, technology, connectivity, defence, green-blue economy and soft power as interconnected drivers of national strength.

What is 'Shakti Ki Saptadhara'?

- It identifies seven strategic streams that can drive India's economic, technological, strategic and cultural development.
- It brings together manufacturing, agriculture, technology, connectivity, defence, green-blue economy and soft power as interconnected drivers of national strength.

Seven Streams of Saptadhara

Stream	Key Focus	Strategic Outcome
1. Manufacturing Shakti	Global supply chains, components, finished products, cost, quality and scale	Industrial competitiveness, jobs and exports
2. Krishi & Food Processing Shakti	Farm-to-market integration, FTAs, millets, spices, fruits, vegetables and traditional foods	Higher farm incomes and agri-exports
3. Technology & Innovation Shakti	AI, robotics, data centres, quantum technology, space, next-generation communication and indigenous 6G	Technology leadership and innovation-driven economy
4. Gati Shakti & Connectivity	Roads, expressways, high-speed rail, multimodal networks and ports	Lower logistics costs and seamless connectivity
5. Raksha Shakti	Defence manufacturing, drones, counter-drone systems and advanced defence technologies	Strategic autonomy and defence exports
6. Green & Blue Shakti	Green hydrogen, renewables, energy storage, fisheries, coastal tourism and ocean technologies	Energy security and sustainable growth
7. Soft Power Shakti	Yoga, handicrafts, films, animation, gaming, digital content and tourism	Global cultural influence and creative economy

E-Samudra

Context:

The Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways launched E-Samudra, a comprehensive digital platform aimed at modernising maritime governance in India.

- **About E-Samudra**
 - Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
 - Digital Platform: Integrates maritime-related services for seafarers, shipping companies, ports and other stakeholders.
 - Single Digital Window: Brings multiple maritime services together on a common digital platform.
 - Digital-First Governance: Shifts maritime administration from traditional office-based services to an integrated digital system.
 - Faceless Governance: Enables more efficient, transparent and accessible delivery of maritime services without the need for physical interaction.
- **Significance**
 - E-Samudra seeks to improve ease of doing business, service delivery and administrative efficiency in the maritime sector while promoting Digital-First and Faceless Governance.

DAANVEER Initiative

Context:

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) launched DAANVEER to strengthen the digital infrastructure of Gram Panchayats through citizen participation and voluntary contributions.

- **About DAANVEER**
- **Nature:** A technology-enabled citizen participation platform that facilitates voluntary donation of digital equipment to eligible Gram Panchayats.
- **Objective:** To bridge digital infrastructure gaps and strengthen technology-enabled local governance and digital public-service delivery.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- **Tagline:** "Give Back to Your Village"

Significance

DAANVEER promotes participatory local governance by enabling citizens and organisations to contribute directly to the digital development of Gram Panchayats. It can help improve digital access, service delivery and technological capacity at the grassroots level.

Key Components

- Meri Panchayat Integration:
- Citizens and organisations can access DAANVEER through the Meri Panchayat mobile application and identify the digital equipment needs of eligible Gram Panchayats.
- DigiHaat Marketplace:
- Integrated with DigiHaat, allowing donors to choose pre-approved and quality-verified computer bundles based on State-specific technical specifications. This eliminates the need for donors to manage procurement and delivery.
- Digital Transparency:
- Enables digital tracking of equipment delivery and installation. Donors receive a verified digital appreciation certificate after successful installation.

India's Opposition to Plurilateral Agreements at the WTO

Context:

During India's Trade Policy Review at the WTO, several members urged India to reconsider its opposition to plurilateral agreements as part of WTO reforms. India maintained that such agreements could weaken the consensus-based multilateral trading system.



What are Plurilateral Agreements?

- Trade agreements negotiated and implemented by a subset of WTO members, rather than all members.
- Only countries that voluntarily sign and ratify the agreement are legally bound by it.
- Unlike multilateral agreements, they do not automatically apply to all WTO members.
- Legal Basis: Under the Marrakesh Agreement, plurilateral agreements are included in Annex 4, whose incorporation requires consensus of all WTO members.
- Objective: To advance negotiations on emerging or sector-specific issues where consensus among all WTO members is difficult.

Major Plurilateral Initiatives

Initiative	Focus
Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD)	Transparency, streamlined procedures and improved investment facilitation
Agreement on Electronic Commerce (ECA)	Rules for digital trade, including customs duties on electronic transmissions
Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform Initiative	Rationalisation of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies
Dialogue on Plastics Pollution & Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade	Reducing plastic pollution and promoting sustainable plastics trade

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Arguments in Favour of Plurilateral Agreements

- Facilitate WTO Reform: Allow negotiations to progress when consensus among all members is difficult.
- Address Emerging Issues: Can develop rules for digital trade, investment, e-commerce and environmental sustainability.
- Flexible Participation: Countries can voluntarily participate according to their development priorities.
- Promote Global Trade: Common rules can improve transparency, predictability and investor confidence.
- International Participation: Supporters include major economies such as the US, EU and China, while the IFD Agreement has received support from 129 WTO members.

India's Cultural Diplomacy

Context:

India has Cultural Exchange Programmes (CEPs) with 98 countries under the Global Engagement Scheme (GES), covering culture, museums, heritage and performing arts.



What is Cultural Diplomacy?

- **Meaning:** Exchange of ideas, traditions, arts, language, values and cultural expressions between countries to promote mutual understanding, trust and goodwill.
- **Soft Power:** It is an important tool of soft power, allowing countries to build influence through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion.
- **Strategic Role:** It strengthens political, economic and strategic relations by creating long-term people-to-people connections.

Major Instruments of India's Cultural Diplomacy

- **Cultural Exchanges:** CEPs promote cooperation in arts, museums, heritage and performing arts, including artist exchanges.
- **Festivals of India:** Showcase Indian dance, music, theatre, crafts and traditions abroad.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** Yoga, Ayurveda and wellness practices serve as platforms for global cultural outreach.
- **Diaspora & Academic Engagement:** Scholarships, Indian Studies Chairs, youth exchanges and the Indian diaspora promote Indian languages, festivals, cuisine and traditions.

Key Challenges

- **Global Competition:** Countries such as China, Japan and South Korea have invested significantly in cultural outreach.
- **Limited Resources:** Institutions such as ICCR and Indian Cultural Centres face constraints in funding, manpower and global presence.
- **Institutional Coordination:** Greater coordination is needed among the Ministry of Culture, MEA, ICCR, Ministry of Tourism and State Governments.
- **Underutilised Cultural Assets:** India's languages, literature, heritage, crafts and traditional knowledge are not always effectively projected globally.
- **Digital & Linguistic Barriers:** Limited translation, multilingual content and digital dissemination restrict global accessibility.

Major Government Initiatives

Global Engagement Scheme (GES): Umbrella framework of the Ministry of Culture for India's international cultural engagement.

Initiative	Key Focus
International Cultural Exchange Programme (ICEP)	Festivals of India, artist/cultural troupe exchanges, CEPs and bilateral cultural cooperation
Project Mausam	Reviving historical maritime, trade and cultural linkages across the Indian Ocean
Brihattar Bharat	Highlighting India's wider historical and civilisational connections
Intangible Cultural Heritage	Preservation of living traditions, practices and knowledge systems
Heritage Conservation Abroad	Conservation and restoration of India-linked heritage, including efforts at Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm in Cambodia
Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)	Strengthening cultural and developmental links with the Indian diaspora

Way Forward

- **National Cultural Diplomacy Framework:** Coordinate the Ministry of Culture, MEA, ICCR, Tourism Ministry and Indian Missions with clear objectives.
- **Strengthen Institutions:** Improve funding, manpower, infrastructure and global presence of ICCR and cultural centres.
- **Digital Cultural Diplomacy:** Use social media, OTT platforms, virtual museums, digital archives, VR and e-learning.
- **Multilingual Outreach:** Expand translation and multilingual cultural content.
- **Promote Contemporary Culture:** Combine classical heritage with cinema, gaming, literature, fashion, music, design and culinary diplomacy.
- **Diaspora Partnerships:** Involve the Indian diaspora as cultural ambassadors.

Conclusion:

India can transform its vast cultural heritage into sustained global influence by combining heritage, contemporary creativity, digital platforms, youth engagement and diaspora networks. This can strengthen people-to-people ties, tourism, international partnerships and creative industries.



UN Secretary-General (UNSG)

Context:

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has conducted its first straw poll to select the next UN Secretary-General for the 2027-2031 term. The new Secretary-General will assume office on 1 January 2027.

About the UN Secretary-General

- **Role:** Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations under Article 97 of the UN Charter.
- **Term:** Five years, with the possibility of reappointment. The UN Charter does not prescribe a formal term limit.
- **Current UNSG:** António Guterres, in office since 1 January 2017; his second term ends on 31 December 2026.

About the UN Security Council-

The UNSC is one of the six principal organs of the UN and has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

Feature	Details
Total Members	15
Permanent Members (P5)	China, France, Russia, UK and USA
Veto Power	Held only by the P5
Non-Permanent Members	10, elected by the UN General Assembly for 2-year terms
Headquarters	New York, USA
Presidency	Rotates monthly among all 15 members
Rotation	English alphabetical order of members' official names

Appointment Process of the UNSG

1. **UNSC Recommendation:** Under Article 97, the UNSC recommends a candidate.
2. **General Assembly Appointment:** The UN General Assembly formally appoints the Secretary-General based on the UNSC recommendation.
3. **Straw Polls:** The UNSC conducts informal, secret polls to assess support for candidates.



How Does a Straw Poll Work?

Each UNSC member indicates:

- Encourage: Supports the candidate.
- Discourage: Opposes the candidate.
- Blank: Neutral/no opinion.

Initially, the voting is anonymous. In later rounds, P5 ballots are colour-coded to identify potential vetoes.

Winning Requirement

A candidate generally needs:

- At least 9 “Encourage” votes out of 15 UNSC members; and
- No “Discourage” vote from any P5 member, as this can effectively block the recommendation through the veto.

India-Japan Maritime Security Pact

Context:

India and Japan have signed a Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) on Maritime Security Cooperation to strengthen naval cooperation, information sharing and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

Key Features of the MoA

- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA): Greater sharing of maritime information between the Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.
- Naval & Logistics Cooperation: Cooperation on reciprocal access to ports, ship-repair and maintenance facilities.
- Protection of SLOCs: Joint efforts to safeguard Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- Defence-Industrial Cooperation: Explore cooperation in mine countermeasures, naval shipbuilding and ship design, combining Japanese technology with Indian production capabilities.
- Defence Technology: DRDO and Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency (ATLA) will deepen cooperation in advanced defence technologies.
- Indo-Pacific: Supports a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific and opposes unilateral attempts to change the status quo through force or coercion.

India-Japan Relations

India and Japan share a Special Strategic and Global Partnership, based on democratic values and a shared vision of a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

- Diplomatic Relations: Established in 1952.
- Strategic Partnership: Relations were elevated to a Global and Strategic Partnership in 2014.
- Institutional Mechanisms: Include the 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue, Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue and NSA-level consultations.

Major Defence Exercises

Exercise	Participants/Domain
Dharma Guardian	Army
JIMEX	Navy
Veer Guardian	Air Force
Malabar	Multilateral naval exercise

Economic & Technology Cooperation

- **Infrastructure:** Japan is a major investor and development partner, including support for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project.
- **Emerging Technologies:** Cooperation is expanding in semiconductors, AI and clean energy.
- **Supply Chains:** Both countries are working towards resilient and diversified supply chains.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Context:

India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$230 million loan agreement to modernise and expand water supply and sanitation infrastructure in Chennai.

About Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- **Established:** 1966
- **Nature:** Regional development bank supporting inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.
- **Key Focus:** Poverty reduction and economic and social development.
- **UN Status:** ADB has observer status at the United Nations.
- **Headquarters:** Manila, Philippines

Largest Shareholders

Country	Shareholding
Japan	15.6%
USA	15.6%
China	6.4%
India	6.3%
Australia	5.8%



Functions of ADB

ADB provides:

- Loans and grants to member countries.
- Technical assistance for development projects.
- Equity investments to support economic and social development.
- Financing for private-sector projects, financial institutions and private equity funds.

Membership

- Total Members: 69
 - 50 from Asia-Pacific
 - 19 from outside the region

ADB & India

- India is a founding member of ADB.
- India is the 4th-largest shareholder of the institution.
- ADB supports India through financing and technical assistance for sectors such as urban infrastructure, water and sanitation, transport and other development projects.

Favara-UPI Cross-Border Payment Corridor

Context:

The Favara-UPI cross-border payment corridor has been operationalised, enabling real-time person-to-person (P2P) transfers from the Maldives to UPI-enabled bank accounts in India.

What is the Favara-UPI Corridor?

- **Meaning:** A real-time cross-border payment system integrating the Maldives' Favara Instant Payment System with India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
- **Instant Transfers:** Users in the Maldives can send Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR) through Favara.
- **Recipient:** The beneficiary receives Indian Rupees (INR) directly in their UPI-linked bank account.
- **Significance:** It enables faster and more convenient digital remittances and person-to-person cross-border payments between the two countries.

UPI's International Presence

UPI is currently accepted in:

Cambodia, Singapore, UAE, France, Mauritius, Nepal, Bhutan, Qatar and Sri Lanka.



Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007

Context:

The government has proposed amending Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 to permit a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) of 0.25–0.5% on UPI transactions above ₹2,000.



Key Provisions of the Proposal

- Introduced through: Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026.
- Section 10A: The amendment would give the government legal authority to notify charges on specified electronic payment modes.
- Impact: Transactions above ₹2,000 are expected to account for around 5% of UPI transactions by volume, but nearly 65% of transaction value.

About the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007

The Act provides the legal framework for regulating payment systems in India and aims to ensure their safety, security and efficiency.

- Regulator: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is empowered to authorise, regulate and supervise payment systems.
- Scope: Covers payment systems, clearing houses, payment instruments and settlement mechanisms.

Why is the MDR Proposal a Concern?

- Possible Consumer Cost: MDR is charged to merchants, who may pass part of the cost to consumers through higher prices or transaction charges.
- Digital Payment Adoption: Additional costs may influence merchants and consumers when choosing between UPI, cash and cards.
- Financial Inclusion: Higher costs could discourage small merchants and users from shifting towards digital payments.
- Formalisation: Lower UPI usage could slow the expansion of traceable digital transactions, affecting economic formalisation and tax compliance.
- Ecosystem Impact: Reduced transaction volumes could affect incentives for banks, fintech firms and payment service providers to invest in the ecosystem.

Way Forward

- Evidence-Based Pricing: Assess the impact on merchants, consumers, fintech investment and financial inclusion before introducing charges.
- Protect Small Merchants: Avoid disincentives for small businesses and low-value transactions.
- Maintain Ecosystem Incentives: Ensure continued investment in reliability, cybersecurity and innovation.
- Policy Stability: Maintain a predictable regulatory framework to support long-term investment.
- Alternative Revenue Sources: Explore other revenue mechanisms that do not weaken UPI adoption and its network effects.

National Investment Policy for Urea-2026 (NIPU-2026)

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Investment Policy for Urea-2026 (NIPU-2026) to promote investment in gas-based urea manufacturing and increase domestic fertiliser production.

About NIPU-2026

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, through the Department of Fertilizers.
- **Objective:** Promote new gas-based urea plants, increase domestic production and reduce dependence on imports.
- **Coverage:** Applies to new gas-based urea manufacturing units.
- **Successor:** Replaces the New Investment Policy (NIP), 2012, whose investment window ended in October 2019.
- **Overall Goal:** Support fertiliser self-sufficiency under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Key Features

Feature	NIPU-2026
Cost Structure	Separates fixed and variable costs in the pricing framework
Return on Equity (RoE)	Introduces a 12%–16% band
Forex Risk	Fixed costs converted into rupees after 4 years based on the prevailing exchange rate
Expected Savings	Over ₹250 crore per plant compared with NIP-2012 projects
Implementing Body	Department of Fertilizers

About Urea

- **Chemical Formula:** NH_2CONH_2
- **Type:** Nitrogenous chemical fertiliser.
- **Nitrogen Content:** Contains around 46% nitrogen, the highest among solid nitrogenous fertilisers.
- **Major Crops:** Widely used for wheat, paddy, sugarcane and other nutrient-intensive crops.
- **Importance:** Supports crop productivity, food security and farmers' incomes.
- **Pricing:** Urea's Maximum Retail Price (MRP) is statutorily fixed by the Government under the Urea Subsidy Scheme.
- **Non-Urea Fertilisers:** Covered under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme.

- **Significance of NIPU-2026**
- **Fertiliser Security:** Expands domestic production and reduces vulnerability to global supply disruptions.
- **Lower Import Dependence:** Reduces reliance on imported urea and can improve the trade balance.
- **Farmer Support:** Promotes a stable and timely supply of urea.
- **Investment:** Provides greater policy certainty and encourages public and private investment.
- **Fiscal Efficiency:** Revised pricing and cost structures can improve the efficiency of government support.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Strengthens self-reliance in a critical agricultural input.

MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Context: Parliament has passed the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 to address payment delays, simplify compliance and streamline dispute resolution for MSMEs.

Key Provisions

- **Revised MSME Classification:** Removes fixed investment thresholds from the Act and empowers the Central Government to classify MSMEs based on investment in plant and machinery/equipment and annual turnover, with thresholds to be notified.
- **Voluntary Registration:** Registration through a digital platform will be voluntary for all MSMEs, replacing the existing requirement for certain enterprises to file a memorandum.
- **Mandatory TReDS for CPSEs:** Every Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) must settle MSME procurement invoices through the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS). Governments may extend this requirement to other public-sector entities.
- **Time-Bound Dispute Resolution:**
 - **Mediation:** To be completed within 90 days of the first appearance.
 - **Arbitration:** If mediation fails, arbitration must begin within 30 days.
 - **Award:** To be issued within 90 days after completion of pleadings.
- **Decriminalisation:** Certain offences may be replaced with graded monetary penalties, reducing the criminal burden for specified compliance violations.

Potential Impact on MSMEs

- **Faster Payments:** Mandatory TReDS settlement can improve cash flow and working-capital availability.
- **Quicker Dispute Resolution:** Fixed timelines can reduce prolonged payment-related disputes.
- **Greater Formalisation:** Digital registration and investment-turnover based classification can improve identification and delivery of government support.
- **Lower Regulatory Burden:** Decriminalisation and graded penalties can promote a more business-friendly compliance environment.

About MSMEs - MSMEs are enterprises engaged in economic activities across manufacturing and services, contributing significantly to employment, entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Category	Investment in Plant & Machinery / Equipment	Annual Turnover
Micro	Up to ₹2.5 crore	Up to ₹10 crore
Small	Up to ₹25 crore	Up to ₹100 crore
Medium	Up to ₹125 crore	Up to ₹500 crore

National Circular Bioenergy Scheme (GOBARdhan)

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Circular Bioenergy Scheme (GOBARdhan) with an outlay of ₹23,731 crore up to 2035-36 to promote bioenergy production, waste management and a circular economy.

What is Compressed Biogas (CBG)?

- CBG is purified biogas containing over 90% methane.
- It is produced from agricultural residue, cattle dung, municipal organic waste, sewage and other biodegradable biomass.
- Its properties are similar to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and it can be used as a clean fuel in transport, industries and cooking.

About GOBARdhan

GOBARdhan stands for Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan.

- Launch: 2018 under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen).
- Nature: Government's flagship programme for converting organic waste into CBG, bioslurry and other value-added products.
- Objective: Promote Circular Economy and Waste-to>Wealth by converting waste into useful resources.
- Focus: Increase CBG production, improve waste management, enhance farmers' income and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Feedstock Used

The scheme can utilise:

- Cattle dung
- Agricultural residue/stubble
- Municipal organic waste
- Sugar industry waste (press mud)
- Food waste
- Sewage sludge
- Other biodegradable biomass

Example: Paddy straw can be converted into CBG instead of being burnt, thereby reducing air pollution, producing clean fuel and generating organic fertiliser.



Key Features

Feature	Details
Financial Outlay	₹23,731 crore up to 2035–36
CBG Production	Target to increase production nearly ten-fold
Assured Offtake	Guaranteed procurement of CBG to reduce market uncertainty
Administered Price	₹2,110/MMBTU
Capital Assistance	Up to ₹2 crore per TPD of installed CBG capacity
Pipeline Infrastructure	Cluster-based and standalone pipelines connecting plants to CGD networks and national gas grid
Access to Finance	Support for private enterprises, MSMEs, cooperatives, FPOs and rural entrepreneurs
Integrated Value Chain	Support for feedstock aggregation, storage, logistics and organic manure processing

Significance

- **Clean Energy:** Expands CBG as a component of India's clean energy mix.
- **Waste-to-Wealth:** Converts agricultural, municipal and animal waste into energy and manure.
- **Lower Import Dependence:** Reduces reliance on imported fossil fuels.
- **Farmer Income:** Creates additional economic value from agricultural and livestock waste.
- **Pollution Reduction:** Provides an alternative to open burning of agricultural residue.
- **Rural Economy:** Creates opportunities for MSMEs, FPOs, cooperatives and rural entrepreneurs.
- **Circular Economy:** Integrates waste management, energy production and sustainable agriculture.



Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)

Context:

The Union Government informed Parliament that ONGC will reserve 50% of its proposed 1.75 MMT crude oil storage facility at Mangaluru as a Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR).

What is a Strategic Petroleum Reserve?

- An SPR is a government-owned stockpile of crude oil maintained as an emergency reserve.
- It is used to ensure energy security during supply disruptions, geopolitical crises or other emergencies.
- IEA Recommendation: The International Energy Agency recommends maintaining oil stocks equivalent to 90 days of net oil imports for supply security during a crisis.

India's SPR Management

India's strategic petroleum reserves are developed and managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL).

- ISPRL: A wholly owned subsidiary of the Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- Purpose: Maintain emergency crude oil stocks and strengthen India's resilience against global oil supply disruptions.

Existing SPR Locations

India currently has operational SPR facilities at:

Location	State
Visakhapatnam	Andhra Pradesh
Mangaluru	Karnataka
Padur	Karnataka

Proposed SPR Facilities

Additional facilities are proposed at:

- Chandikhol — Odisha
- Bina — Madhya Pradesh
- Bikaner — Rajasthan
- Mangaluru — Karnataka
- Padur — Karnataka

Significance

- Energy Security: Provides a buffer against sudden disruptions in crude oil supplies.
- Geopolitical Resilience: Helps India manage risks arising from geopolitical tensions and global supply shocks.
- Import Dependence: Provides temporary protection for a country heavily dependent on imported crude oil.
- Economic Stability: Helps reduce the impact of sudden supply shortages and price shocks.

‘Unjha Jeera’ and ‘Unjha Fennel’

Context:

Farmers in Rajasthan have objected to the GI recognition of ‘Unjha Jeera’ and ‘Unjha Fennel’, arguing that Unjha in Gujarat is mainly a trading and aggregation centre rather than a major production centre.



Key Objections

- **Production vs. Trading Hub:** Farmers argue that a GI tag should identify products whose unique qualities are linked to their geographical area of production. Unjha, however, is primarily known for aggregation, grading and trading.
- **Rajasthan's Production Role:** Rajasthan is a major producer of both cumin (jeera) and fennel (saunf), much of which is traded through the Unjha APMC.
- **Price Concerns:** Farmers fear that the GI tag could allow traders to market Unjha-labelled products as premium products, potentially affecting the bargaining power and prices received by Rajasthan producers.

About Fennel (Saunf)

- **Scientific Name:** *Foeniculum vulgare*
- **Family:** Apiaceae
- **Nature:** Aromatic seed spice with a sweet, licorice-like flavour.
- **Key Compound:** Anethole, an important component of its essential oil.

Important Varieties: Gujarat Fennel-1, GF-11, Rajasthan Fennel varieties, Ajmer Fennel-1 & 2, Pant Madhurika and Hisar Swarup.

Growing Conditions:

- **Climate:** Prefers cool and dry conditions; excessive heat, frost and moisture can affect flowering and seed development.
- **Soil:** Grows well in fertile, well-drained loamy, sandy-loam and black soils rich in organic matter.
- **Water:** Sensitive to waterlogging and salinity.
- **Production:** Gujarat and Rajasthan are the principal producers; smaller areas are cultivated in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

About Cumin (Jeera)

- Scientific Name: *Cuminum cyminum*
- Family: Apiaceae
- Crop: Annual Rabi seed spice.
- Importance: India is a leading global producer and exporter of cumin.

Important Varieties: Gujarat Cumin-1 to 4, Rajasthan Cumin varieties and Mewar Cumin.

Growing Conditions:

- Climate: Requires a mild and dry climate. Humidity and cloudy weather during flowering increase disease risk.
- Soil: Prefers fertile, well-drained sandy-loam or loamy soils.
- Water: Performs poorly in heavy, waterlogged and highly saline soils.
- Temperature & Rainfall: Requires moderate temperatures and limited water, with dry weather near maturity important for good seed quality.
- Production: Rajasthan and Gujarat dominate India's cumin production, with smaller pockets in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.

Reserve Bank of India (Interest Rates on Loans and Advances) Directions, 2026

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a new framework for determining interest rates on loans and advances, covering both fixed-rate and floating-rate loans.

Key Highlights

1. Fixed and Floating-Rate Loans

Lenders may offer loans at either fixed or floating interest rates.

- Interest Calculation: Interest will generally be calculated on a daily reducing balance using the actual/actual day-count convention.
- Fixed Interest Rate: Remains unchanged during the agreed loan period, providing borrowers with predictable interest payments.
- Floating Interest Rate: Changes periodically based on a specified benchmark, causing the borrower's interest burden to rise or fall with market conditions.

2. External Benchmark for Floating-Rate Loans

Commercial banks must link floating-rate personal loans and MSME loans to an external benchmark.

Permitted benchmarks include:

- RBI policy repo rate
- Government Treasury Bill yields
- Benchmarks published by Financial Benchmarks India Pvt Ltd (FBIL)

The loan agreement must clearly specify:

- Benchmark used
- Reset frequency
- Reset date

Fixed vs Floating Interest Rate

Feature	Fixed Rate	Floating Rate
Interest Rate	Remains unchanged	Changes periodically
Market Impact	Generally insulated from market movements	Changes with benchmark movements
Borrower's Burden	More predictable	May increase or decrease
Benchmark Linkage	Not applicable	Linked to a specified benchmark

COP17 of the UNCCD

Context:

The 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17-28 August 2026. UNCCD COPs have been held every two years since 2001.



Key Highlights of COP17

- **Community-Led Rangeland Restoration:** India highlighted the importance of rangelands for pastoralist livelihoods, biodiversity and water and carbon cycles. A US\$1.3 billion package was announced for restoring critical global rangelands.
- **From Drought Response to Resilience:** India advocated shifting from reactive relief to proactive, technology-enabled drought resilience, integrating early warnings, mitigation, relief and community participation.
- **Guide to Grasslands and ONEs:** India unveiled its first Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) of India.
- **International Finance:** India called for diversified, predictable and sustained international finance for land restoration, emphasising that restoration is an investment in food security, water, biodiversity and livelihoods.



Why is Drought a Developmental Challenge?

Area	Impact of Drought
Water Security	Groundwater depletion, soil-moisture deficits and reduced river flows
Food Security	Crop failures, livestock losses and food-price volatility
Livelihoods	Income loss, indebtedness and distress migration
Ecology	Desertification, soil erosion, biodiversity loss and forest fires
Emerging Risks	Flash droughts can develop rapidly due to heatwaves and sudden soil-moisture loss

India's Drought-Resilience Approach

- **Early Warning:** Uses rainfall monitoring, weather forecasts and satellite-based assessment for early preparedness.
- **Technology-Based Assessment:** Remote sensing and geospatial technologies monitor vegetation, soil moisture and land degradation.
- **Drought Management Framework:** The Manual for Drought Management uses rainfall, crop and ground-level indicators along with satellite information.
- **Catchment Restoration:** The principle “Restore the forest, before the flow” emphasises catchment and riverscape restoration to improve water retention and groundwater recharge.
- **Community Resilience:** Combines government action with watershed management, local water conservation and community participation.
- **Ecosystem-Based Adaptation:** Forests, wetlands, agroforestry and healthy watersheds act as Nature-based Solutions for drought resilience.

Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems of India

The Guide recognises grasslands, savannas, deserts, scrublands and other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) as ecologically and socioeconomically important landscapes.

Launched by: Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in collaboration with IUCN, CoE-SLM, ICFRE and SAC-ISRO.

Key Features:

- **Ecosystem Diversity:** Covers Himalayan and Terai grasslands, Thar, Banni, Deccan savannas, ravines and coastal ecosystems.
- **Community Linkages:** Highlights their importance for pastoral, livestock-based and agricultural livelihoods.
- **Scientific Conservation:** Focuses on landscape-level planning, land-degradation assessment, restoration, fire ecology and carbon sequestration.

What are Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)?

ONEs are naturally open landscapes dominated by grasses, shrubs or sparse vegetation rather than dense tree cover.

Examples: Grasslands, savannas, deserts and scrublands.

India's Land Restoration Commitment

- **Land Degradation Neutrality:** India has committed to restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
- **Progress:** India has reported restoration of approximately 21.76 million hectares of degraded and deforested land.
- **Employment:** Restoration efforts during 2011-2020 generated around 1.2 billion person-days of employment, linking ecological restoration with rural livelihoods.

Global Status of Land Degradation & Drought

- **Drying Planet:** Increasing dryland expansion and global aridity are making drought resilience a major development challenge.
- **Land Degradation:** Around 40% of global land is affected by degradation.
- **Human Security:** Drought and land degradation can worsen poverty, migration, food insecurity and resource conflicts.
- **Climate Link:** Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme heat are increasing the risk of flash droughts and persistent aridity.

Way Forward

- **Relief → Resilience:** Institutionalise anticipatory action rather than relying mainly on post-disaster relief.
- **Water-Smart Agriculture:** Promote micro-irrigation, rainwater harvesting, drought-tolerant crops and agroforestry.
- **Landscape Restoration:** Scale up watershed restoration, rangeland management, afforestation and ecosystem-based adaptation.
- **Technology Integration:** Combine AI, satellite imagery, weather forecasting and local observations for granular drought prediction.
- **Climate Finance:** Mobilise adequate, predictable and sustained international finance.
- **Community-Centred Governance:** Place farmers, pastoralists, local communities and Indigenous Peoples at the centre of land and drought management.

Conclusion: Drought resilience requires a shift from managing crises to managing risks by integrating technology, ecosystem restoration, water security and community participation.



Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)

Context:

The Union Environment Ministry has reissued the draft notification proposing an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) across the Western Ghats. The earlier draft lapsed on 27 July 2026 without being finalised.

Key Provisions of the Proposed ESA

Once finalised, the notification would:

- **Prohibit:** Mining, quarrying, sand mining, new thermal power plants, certain industries and large construction projects.
- **Regulate:** Activities such as hydroelectric power generation to minimise ecological damage.

Core Dispute: Centre vs. States

- The Centre is yet to reach an agreement with the six Western Ghats States on the exact villages and areas to be included.
- States are concerned about the impact on agriculture, plantations, infrastructure and other development activities.
- An expert committee constituted in 2022 is examining State objections, particularly regarding the names and boundaries of villages proposed for inclusion.
- The present draft is the 7th draft notification issued since 2014.

About the Western Ghats

- **Length:** About 1,500 km, running parallel to India's western coast.
- **States:** Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- **Elevation:** Generally increases from north to south.
 - Northern Western Ghats: around 900–1,200 m.
 - Southern section: peaks exceed 2,000 m.
 - Highest peak: Anamudi, Kerala – 2,695 m.
- **Significance:**
 - UNESCO World Heritage Site.
 - One of the world's 8 biodiversity hotspots.
 - Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is located in the southern Western Ghats.
- **Major Rivers Originating:** Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery and Periyar.

Western Ghats ESA: Key Timeline

Year	Development
2011	Gadgil Committee recommended treating the entire 1,29,000 sq. km Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive with graded protection.
2012	Kasturirangan Committee was constituted to review the recommendations.
2013	Kasturirangan Committee recommended about 37% (59,940 sq. km) of the Western Ghats' natural landscape as ESA.
Since 2014	Successive draft notifications have attempted to balance environmental protection and State development concerns.
2026	The 7th draft notification has been reissued after the previous draft lapsed.

What is an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)?

An ESA is an area notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, where certain activities are restricted, regulated or prohibited to protect ecologically fragile regions.

Objectives:

- Conserve biodiversity and fragile ecosystems.
- Prevent environmental degradation.
- Promote sustainable development.
- Regulate polluting and high-impact activities.

Green India Mission (GIM)

Context:

A recent CAG performance audit has highlighted major gaps in the implementation of the Green India Mission (GIM), particularly in forest improvement, funding and coordination among schemes.

Key Findings of the CAG Audit

- **Forest Cover:** Against the target of improving forest cover over 1.4 million hectares, improvement was recorded in only 0.03409 million hectares — a 97.57% shortfall.
- **Forest Quality:** Against the target of improving forest quality over 1.4 million hectares, only 0.11384 million hectares showed improvement — a 91.87% shortfall.
- **Funding Gap:** Against the proposed funding support of ₹10,600 crore, only ₹1,149.14 crore was received through budgetary support during the audited period.
- **Weak Convergence:** Coordination with CAMPA, MGNREGS, Nagar Van Yojana and School Nursery Yojana remained inadequate, with many programmes operating separately.

About Green India Mission

The Green India Mission (GIM), officially known as the National Mission for a Green India, focuses on forest conservation, restoration and ecosystem resilience.

- **Part of:** National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) — one of its eight missions.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Launched:** 2014; implementation began in 2015-16.
- **Approach:** Uses a landscape-based approach to protect, restore and enhance forest and tree cover.

Major Targets

Target	Objective
Forest & Tree Cover	Increase forest and tree cover over 5 million hectares
Forest Quality	Improve the quality of another 5 million hectares
Livelihoods	Enhance livelihoods of around 3 million forest-dependent households

The Mission also supports India's Paris Agreement commitment to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5–3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2030.

Major Concerns

- **Plantation ≠ Restoration:** Increasing the number of plantations does not automatically create healthy, biodiverse and climate-resilient forests.
- **ISFR 2023:** India's green cover increased by 1,445 sq. km, but only 156 sq. km of this increase was within recorded forests, while 1,289 sq. km came from tree cover outside forests.
- **Fragmented Governance:** Multiple schemes with similar objectives may result in duplication and implementation silos.
- **Funding Constraints:** Inadequate or delayed funding can limit the scale and effectiveness of restoration.
- **Weak Outcome Monitoring:** Greater focus is often placed on area planted rather than survival, biodiversity, forest quality and carbon outcomes.
- **Climate Mismatch:** Restoration may not adequately prioritise climate-vulnerable and ecologically important landscapes.
- **Accountability Issues:** Weak accounting, auditing and public disclosure can reduce transparency.

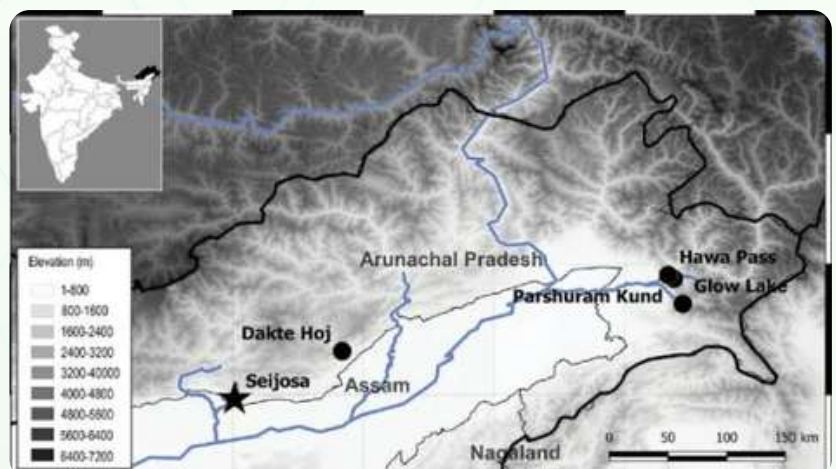
Way Forward

- **Landscape-Level Convergence:** Integrate GIM with CAMPA, MGNREGS, Nagar Van Yojana and other restoration programmes through common plans.
- **Outcome-Based Funding:** Link funding to indicators such as plant survival, canopy improvement, biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- **Climate-Smart Restoration:** Prioritise degraded, vulnerable and ecologically significant landscapes.
- **Technology-Based Monitoring:** Use GIS, remote sensing, field verification and public dashboards.
- **Ecological Restoration:** Promote native species and natural regeneration instead of focusing only on plantation targets.
- **Community Participation:** Involve Gram Panchayats, local communities and forest-dependent households in planning and implementation.

Glaw Lake: India's 101st Ramsar Site

Context:

Glaw Lake (also known as Glow Lake) has been designated as India's 101st Ramsar Site, making it the first Ramsar Site of Arunachal Pradesh. The Jai Prakash Narayan Bird Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh, was India's 100th Ramsar Site.



About Glaw Lake

- **Location:** Lohit district, Arunachal Pradesh, near Wakro.
- **Landscape:** Located within the Kamlang Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary, with Namdapha National Park to its south.
- **Type:** High-altitude natural freshwater lake in the Eastern Himalayas.
- **River Source:** An important source of the perennial Kamlang River.

Key Features

- **Rich Floral Diversity:** The lake and its catchment support over 150 tree species and 49 orchid species.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Located within the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot.
- **Wildlife Habitat:** The surrounding landscape supports species such as:
 - Hoolock Gibbon
 - Capped Langur
 - Red Panda
 - Mishmi Takin
- **Ecological Connectivity:** Acts as an important habitat and forest corridor for wildlife.

About Ramsar Sites

- **Ramsar Convention:** An international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- **Adopted:** 1971, at Ramsar, Iran.
- **India joined:** 1 February 1982.
- **India's Ramsar Sites:** 101, making India the 3rd country globally after the UK and Mexico and 1st in Asia in terms of the number of Ramsar Sites.

Important Ramsar Sites in India

Category	Ramsar Site
Largest Ramsar Site	Sundarban Wetland, West Bengal
Smallest Ramsar Sites	Renuka Wetland, Himachal Pradesh & Vembannur Wetland Complex, Tamil Nadu
State with most Ramsar Sites	Tamil Nadu – 20
Montreux Record	Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan & Loktak Lake, Manipur

What is the Montreux Record?

The Montreux Record is a register of Ramsar Sites where the ecological character has changed, is changing, or is likely to change due to factors such as pollution, technological developments or other human interference.



Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) Scheme

Context:

Andhra Pradesh ranked second among Indian States under the MISHTI Scheme, developing mangrove plantations over 2,047.70 hectares during 2025-26, with an expenditure of ₹18.04 crore.

About MISHTI

MISHTI stands for Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes.

- Announced: Union Budget 2023-24.
- Launched: 5 June 2023.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Objective: Promote mangrove afforestation and restoration along India's coastline and on suitable salt-pan lands.
- Implementation: Seeks convergence with existing programmes, including the compensatory-afforestation framework and MGNREGS.

Fish Bone Technique

The Fish Bone Technique is a mangrove restoration method that creates a network of tidal channels resembling a fish skeleton.

How it works:

- Reconnects degraded mangrove areas with natural tidal flows.
- Improves the movement of sediments and nutrients.
- Creates favourable conditions for natural mangrove regeneration.
- Andhra Pradesh has used the technique to improve mangrove plantation survival and long-term ecosystem resilience.

Andhra Pradesh's Mangrove Initiative

Mangrove restoration activities in Andhra Pradesh are part of the Great Green Wall of Andhra Pradesh initiative.

- Inspired by Africa's Great Green Wall and the Aravalli Green Wall Project.
- Uses innovative restoration approaches such as the Fish Bone Technique.
- Focuses on improving tidal circulation, mangrove survival and ecological resilience.

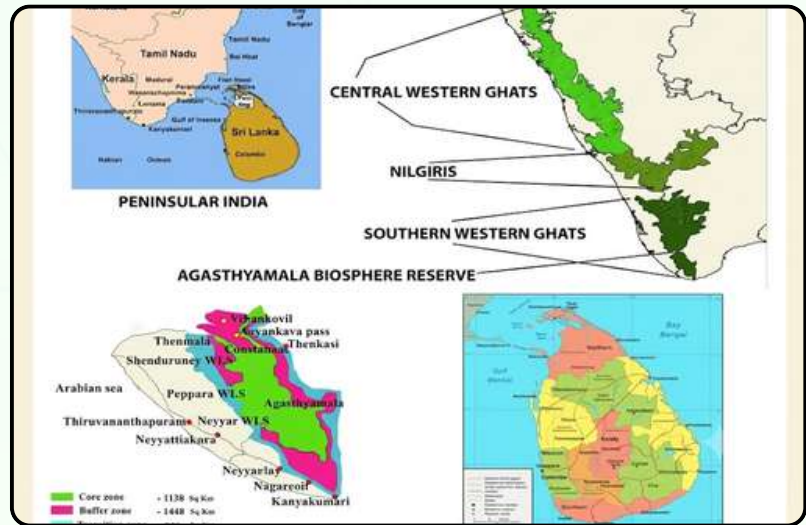
Why are Mangroves Important?

- Protect coastlines from cyclones, storm surges and coastal erosion.
- Provide breeding and nursery grounds for fish and other marine species.
- Store significant amounts of blue carbon.
- Support fisheries and coastal livelihoods.
- Help maintain coastal biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve (ABR)

Context:

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department issued eviction notices to thousands of households in the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve. However, eviction of forest-dwelling communities must follow proper verification of their rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.



Forest Rights Act, 2006

Officially known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, the FRA aims to:

- Recognise the historical rights of forest-dwelling communities over forest land and resources.
- Provide legal recognition to their traditional forest rights.
- Balance forest conservation with the rights and livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

About Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve

- Location: Transboundary biosphere reserve covering parts of the Western Ghats in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- Named after: Agasthyamalai Peak (1,868 m).
- Established: 2001 under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme.
- Ecosystems: Evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, grasslands and montane ecosystems.
- Biodiversity: Rich in endemic and threatened species, including several medicinal plants.
- Protected Areas:
 - Kerala: Neyyar, Peppara and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuaries.
 - Tamil Nadu: Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve.
- Tribal Communities: Home to indigenous communities such as the Kani, who have traditionally depended on forest resources.

UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

- Launched: 1971.
- Objective: Promote biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and harmony between people and nature.
- Biosphere reserves under the programme seek to balance conservation with sustainable use of natural resources.

Vulture Conservation

Context: Five captive-bred slender-billed vultures were released into the wild from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) conservation facility in Assam, marking the first such release of this species in the world. Five captive-bred white-rumped vultures were also released.

Slender-Billed Vulture

Scientific Name: *Gyps tenuirostris*

- **Type:** Old World vulture native to the sub-Himalayan region and Southeast Asia.
- **Distribution:** Mainly found in northern and northeastern India, as well as Bangladesh, southern Nepal, Myanmar and Cambodia.
- **Habitat:** Open landscapes, grasslands, agricultural areas and areas around human settlements.
- **Diet:** Mainly feeds on animal carcasses, helping in nutrient recycling and disease control.

Major Threat – Diclofenac:

The veterinary drug diclofenac can cause fatal kidney failure in vultures when they consume carcasses of livestock treated with the drug.

Other Threats: Habitat loss, food scarcity, poisoning, electrocution and collisions with infrastructure.

White-Rumped Vulture

Scientific Name: *Gyps bengalensis*

- **Distribution:** Northern and central India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and parts of Southeast Asia.
- **Habitat:** Plains, wooded areas, plantations, orchards and areas around villages, towns and cities.
- **Diet:** Mainly feeds on livestock and other animal carcasses, contributing to natural waste disposal and disease control.

Why are Vultures Important?

- **Natural Scavengers:** Quickly remove animal carcasses from the environment.
- **Disease Control:** Reduce the spread of pathogens by consuming decomposing carcasses.
- **Ecosystem Services:** Support nutrient recycling and maintain ecological cleanliness.
- **Indicator Species:** Their population trends can indicate the health of ecosystems and the impact of pollutants.



Conservation Status:

Protection Status
IUCN Red List - Critically Endangered
CITES - Appendix II
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 - Schedule I



Conservation Status:

IUCN Red List - Critically Endangered
CITES - Appendix II
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 - Schedule I

Dolphins

Context:
A viral video showing a dolphin carrying its dead calf has renewed interest in dolphins' intelligence, social behaviour and conservation.

About Dolphins
Dolphins are highly intelligent aquatic mammals belonging to the order Cetacea and suborder Odontoceti (toothed whales). There are more than 40 species, found in both marine and freshwater ecosystems.

- Key Features**
- **Distribution:**
 - **Marine:** Most species inhabit tropical, subtropical and temperate oceans, while some occur in colder waters.
 - **Freshwater:** Specialised river dolphins occur in major river systems such as the Ganga, Indus, Amazon, Orinoco, Mekong and Ayeyarwady.
 - **Body:** Streamlined body, horizontal tail flukes, pectoral flippers, dorsal fin and a blowhole for breathing.
 - **Echolocation:** The melon helps focus echolocation signals, which are used to navigate, locate prey and identify objects.
 - **Diet:** Carnivorous; mainly feed on fish and squid. Some coastal and riverine species also consume crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic organisms.
 - **Communication:** Use whistles, clicks and body movements.
 - **Social Behaviour:** Live in cooperative groups called pods and display coordinated hunting, calf care, predator defence and complex social behaviours.

Types of Dolphins

1. Marine Dolphins

Type	Habitat	Examples
Coastal/Inshore	Coastal waters, estuaries and bays	Common Bottlenose Dolphin, Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin
Pelagic	Open ocean	Spinner Dolphin, Striped Dolphin, Pantropical Spotted Dolphin
Blackfish / Large Delphinids	Marine ecosystems	Orca/Killer Whale, Pilot Whales, False Killer Whale

2. River Dolphins

Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*)

- Found mainly in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system and the Chambal River.
- National Aquatic Animal of India.
- IUCN: Endangered.
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I.
- CITES: Appendix I.

Indus River Dolphin

- Found in the Indus River basin of Pakistan and the Beas River in India.
- IUCN: Endangered.

Amazon River Dolphin / Boto

- Found in the Amazon and Orinoco river basins of South America.
- IUCN: Endangered.

Irrawaddy Dolphin

- Found in the Ayeyarwady, Mekong and Mahakam river systems and nearby estuarine waters.
- IUCN: Endangered.

Conservation Status

Dolphin species have different conservation statuses, ranging from Least Concern to Critically Endangered, depending on the species.

Major Threats: Habitat degradation, water pollution, fishing-net entanglement, prey depletion, river modification, vessel traffic and other human activities.

Indian Peacock at UNOG

Context: India recently donated five young Indian peafowl to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), including a rare white-feathered male.

About the Peacock Donation

- Composition: Four blue peafowl and one white-feathered male.
- Symbolism: The birds represent the blue-and-white colours associated with the United Nations.
- Previous Donation: This was India's second donation to UNOG. India had earlier sent a breeding pair in 1981.

Key Features

- Habitat: Dry deciduous forests, grasslands, orchards, cultivated areas and landscapes near human settlements.
- Diet: Omnivorous — feeds on seeds, fruits, insects, small reptiles and amphibians.
- Distribution: Indian subcontinent and neighbouring regions of South Asia.
- Male: Has an elaborate train of elongated upper tail-coverts with characteristic eyespots.
- Female: Comparatively duller in colour and lacks the long train.



About Indian Peacock

Scientific Name: *Pavo cristatus*

Also Known As: Common Peafowl

Status: National Bird of India

The Indian Peacock is native to the Indian subcontinent and is widely distributed across India and neighbouring parts of South Asia.

Protection Status

Category	Status
IUCN Red List	Least Concern
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Schedule I
National Bird	Declared in 1963

Cultural Significance

The peacock has a strong place in Indian art, mythology, literature and cultural traditions. Its designation as the National Bird of India in 1963 reflects its ecological and cultural importance.

SHAPING TALENT SINCE 2009

