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## INTERNATIONAL

### MEANINGLESS TRUCE

When the U.S.-brokered ceasefire took effect in Gaza on October 10, a big question that loomed over all parties was whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who accepted the truce under pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, would honour his commitments once the hostages were released. Barely three weeks later, Mr. Netanyahu, who had vowed to destroy Hamas, found a convenient pretext to resume strikes. He accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire, and claimed that the remains returned by the group were the body parts of a hostage already retrieved. Several hostages are believed to have been buried under the rubble, while Gaza's officials and Egyptian excavators continue struggling to locate and identify bodies of captives. On Tuesday, Israel said militants fired anti-tank missiles at soldiers in Rafah, southern Gaza, killing one soldier — Hamas has denied any involvement. Mr. Netanyahu ordered retaliatory strikes, killing 104 Palestinians overnight, including 46 children and 20 women. After the assault, Israel announced that the ceasefire was back in effect — but what kind of a ceasefire is Israel observing if it has the freedom to carry out devastating attacks on Palestinian civilians?

While the ceasefire offered a respite to the Palestinians from daily Israeli bombardments and allowed the release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners, the absence of any credible enforcement mechanism makes it extremely fragile. Israeli troops still control roughly 55% of Gaza's territory. It would be unrealistic to expect that the Palestinians, who were bombed and displaced repeatedly over 24 months, would quietly accept the Israeli military occupation. Hamas has enforced its control in the rest of Gaza. Within Israel, Mr. Netanyahu's far-right coalition allies want the war to continue and Gaza ethnically cleansed of Palestinians. Despite the deep mistrust, all sides agreed to the ceasefire largely under U.S. pressure — Hamas needed a reprieve and Israel wanted its hostages back. The next stage of Mr. Trump's peace plan is even more controversial as it calls for Hamas's disarmament, which it has not agreed to. If Mr. Trump is serious about the peace push, he must own his plan and build mechanisms that ensure both sides adhere to their commitments. His boastful talk about peace will mean little if he allows Israel to continue to kill Palestinian civilians with impunity, while claiming that the ceasefire remains in place. For any truce to endure, Israeli troops must withdraw from Gaza and a new Palestinian administration should be in charge of the enclave. What Palestinians in Gaza desperately need is assistance for recovery, resettlement and reconstruction — not more bombs.

### NEW CHAPTER

The Kurdistan Workers Party's (PKK) announcement that it would withdraw all its fighters from Türkiye to northern Iraq marks a significant step in the peace process between Kurdish militants and the Turkish state. When the group's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, called on the PKK to disarm and dissolve in February, many doubted whether the outfit would honour his appeal. It has been waging an insurgency for decades. But in March, its executive committee declared that "none of our forces will take armed action unless attacked". On May 12, the group announced its full dissolution, and that its demands could be met through "democratic politics". Its fighters even held a symbolic weapons destruction ceremony. The group's demands have changed over the years. An initial demand for an independent state for the Kurds was later moderated to greater rights and limited autonomy for the Kurdish region. But decades of violence, which claimed some 50,000 lives, seem to have blunted the PKK's appetite for insurgency. Mr. Öcalan has been in jail since his capture in February 1999, while most of the group's senior commanders operate from

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northern Iraq, which is periodically bombed by Türkiye. Political groups linked to the PKK have faced sustained crackdowns inside Türkiye.

Türkiye's President Erdoğan has called the PKK's decision to disarm "an irreversible turning point". He has also appointed a 51-member cross-party parliamentary commission to chart the path forward. But the rebels are pressing for faster and firmer legislative action that would allow them to join "democratic politics". Türkiye's southeastern Kurdish regions have endured decades of military operations, displacement and economic stagnation. They deserve peace. The PKK is still a banned, terrorist organisation in Türkiye and allied countries. For the peace process to hold, Türkiye needs a new legal framework, governing amnesty, political participation, and the protection of Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights as the militants transition into political life. Without clear laws, disarmed PKK fighters could remain stranded in the mountains of northern Iraq, while their supporters at home would feel betrayed. Peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question could offer a template for addressing Kurdish grievances across the region — Iraq, Syria and Iran. Conversely, failure could reignite Türkiye's conflict and embolden hardliners elsewhere who insist that states understand only force. Mr. Erdoğan should match the PKK's decision with irreversible measures, including releasing Mr. Öcalan, easing restrictions in the Kurdish region and enacting laws that end the conflict and open a new chapter for Türkiye.

#### BRITISH PRINCE ANDREW TO BE STRIPPED OF TITLES AND EVICTED FROM HIS WINDSOR RESIDENCE

Britain's Prince Andrew, late Queen Elizabeth II's second son and younger brother of King Charles III, will lose his titles and honours, Buckingham Palace announced on Thursday. The former prince had been accused of having had sex with a minor, and had links to sex offender and American financier, Jeffrey Epstein, who died in 2019. U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer "fully supports" the Palace's decision, Downing Street said.

Virginia Giuffre, an American woman who died by suicide in April 2025, had claimed that she was trafficked by Epstein and his associate Ghislaine Maxwell, and that she had sex, three times, with Prince Andrew, including, possibly, when she was 17 years old.

Ms. Giuffre's memoir was released posthumously last month, contributing to attention on Andrew's links with her and Epstein. Andrew has consistently denied Giuffre's allegations, including as recently as October 17, when he issued a statement that he and his brother, King Charles, had together decided that he would no longer use the titles and honours given to him. "This normal girl from a normal family has taken down a prince," Giuffre's brother, Sky Roberts, told the BBC.

Thursday's action by the Palace goes a step further and begins the formal process to strip Andrew of his titles (i.e., he no longer has the option to use these) and to evict him from Royal Lodge, his residence in Windsor since 2003. He will no longer be allowed to use any of his titles, i.e., 'Prince', 'the Duke of York', 'His Royal Highness', 'Earl of Inverness' and 'Baron Killyleagh'. Thursday's move is the latest in the scandalous fall from grace for the 65-year-old prince, who was considered to be the late British Queen Elizabeth II's favourite child.

#### Formal process

"His Majesty has today initiated a formal process to remove the Style, Titles and Honours of Prince Andrew," a statement from Buckingham Palace said, adding that the prince would henceforth be



known as Andrew Mountbatten Windsor. [‘Mountbatten’ refers to Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy and first Governor-General of India and a relative of the British royal family; Windsor refers to the House of Windsor, the royals’ family name].

The Palace also said that “formal notice has now been served to surrender the lease” on Royal Lodge.

The residence is owned by the Crown Estate, the profits of which are split by the monarch and the U.K. Treasury and questions had been raised by U.K. lawmakers on the lease arrangements.

The erstwhile prince is now expected to move to the royal estate in Sandringham, Norfolk, where his housing will be funded privately by King Charles.

The former wife of Andrew, Sarah Ferguson, who also lived in Royal Lodge, will have to find her own housing going forward. Ms. Ferguson was sacked by several charities last month after it was revealed that she had called Epstein “supreme friend” in a 2011 email.

“Their Majesties wish to make clear that their thoughts and utmost sympathies have been, and will remain with, the victims and survivors of any and all forms of abuse,” the statement from the Buckingham Palace said.

## THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF U.S.–PAKISTAN RELATIONS

In India, there has been extensive debate about China’s growing role in South Asia, particularly its strategic partnership with Pakistan, which continues to challenge India’s foreign policy outlook. Since the Partition, Pakistan’s military establishment has defined its security posture primarily around India. To counter its relative weaknesses, the Pakistani army sought to balance India by tightening its grip over domestic politics and cultivating foreign alliances, first with the U.S. during the Cold War and increasingly with China in recent years. As India deepens its partnership with Washington, the U.S.–Pakistan relationship has lost its appeal for Indian strategists; however, recent events have again made it a topic of interest.

### Trump’s shifting stance

On April 2025, Pakistan’s army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, delivered a provocative speech invoking the two-nation theory just days before the Pahalgam terrorist attack in India. His remarks drew immediate condemnation in New Delhi. Yet, in the months that followed, Mr. Munir emerged as a surprisingly frequent visitor to Washington. He first visited the U.S. in June 2025 for a White House lunch with President Donald Trump, then again in August for high-level military meetings, and went back again in September with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for a White House meeting. Three visits in three months underscored Washington’s willingness to engage directly with Pakistan’s army chief, unsettling many in India.

The shift was striking given Mr. Trump’s earlier posture. Back in 2018, Mr. Trump had tweeted that the U.S. had given Pakistan “more than \$33 billion” in aid and received “only lies and deceit” in return. Today, however, his rhetoric is notably warmer. The U.S. President has even suggested tapping “oil fields in Pakistan,” an idea met with scepticism given the absence of evidence of reserves. Recently, there have been reports of a U.S.–Pakistan deal on rare earth minerals, which is often cited as one of the reasons behind Mr. Trump’s renewed interest in Pakistan. Still, such overtures highlight how quickly Washington’s approach to Pakistan can change.



### The U.S.'s 'most allied ally'

The Pakistan–U.S. relationship has witnessed several ups and downs over the past seven decades. During the Cold War, this relationship unfolded in two distinct phases. The first began in 1954, when the two countries signed a Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement. Pakistan soon joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and in 1956 it allowed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to operate a U-2 spy base from Peshawar to monitor Soviet activity. In 1959, a Bilateral Agreement of Cooperation gave Washington access to military facilities in Pakistan. During the Ayub–Eisenhower era Pakistan was described as “America’s most allied ally in Asia.”

But the partnership had limits. In 1962, during the China-India war, the U.S. provided military aid to India while discouraging Pakistan not to exploit India’s vulnerability by opening a second front. In 1965, President Ayub Khan launched Operation Gibraltar in Kashmir, hoping to incite a local uprising against India, anticipating U.S. diplomatic and military backing. However, Washington withheld direct support and instead imposed an arms embargo on both Pakistan and India. The episode proved to be a turning point in Pakistan’s perception of the U.S., from that of a dependable strategic partner to an unreliable ally. Disillusioned by Washington’s neutrality and its reluctance to support Pakistan’s regional ambitions, Islamabad, whose military was heavily reliant on U.S. equipment, began cultivating closer defense ties with China. A similar disappointment followed in 1971, when, despite then U.S. President Nixon’s sympathy for Pakistan, U.S. help during the Bangladesh war was too little, too late. Though the USS Enterprise sailed to the Bay of Bengal, the war had already been decided.

The second phase emerged after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. With U.S. setbacks in Iran and Vietnam, Washington saw an opportunity to bleed Moscow by supporting the Afghan resistance. Pakistan, under General Zia-ul-Haq, became their indispensable partner. Between the 1980s and early 1990s, Islamabad received close to \$5 billion in U.S. military and financial aid, along with covert funding for the Mujahideen. Zia used this leverage to wage a proxy war against India and accelerate Pakistan’s nuclear programme, moves largely tolerated by Washington so long as Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan. When the Soviets withdrew, U.S. interest waned, aid was cut, and sanctions followed, and Washington began cultivating closer ties with India.

### Post 9/11

The 9/11 attacks triggered another sharp turn. As General Pervez Musharraf later acknowledged in his memoir, *In the Line of Fire*, Pakistan reluctantly joined the U.S.-led “War on Terror”, under intense diplomatic and military pressure from Washington. Nevertheless, the geopolitical relevance of Pakistan to start a war in Afghanistan was well realised by the U.S., and between 2002 and 2011, Congress approved some \$18 billion in aid, including military hardware like F-16s. Moreover, the U.S. sanctions imposed after the 1998 nuclear tests were subsequently lifted for both India and Pakistan. Despite these developments, Washington’s mistrust of Pakistan endured. The U.S. officials doubted Pakistan’s sincerity in fighting terror, especially as the Afghan Taliban found sanctuary in its territory. The discovery of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011 was the final blow to trust, cementing the view of Pakistan as a duplicitous partner.

### Sanctions and contradictions

The U.S. has imposed sanctions on Pakistan for nearly one-third of the duration of their bilateral relationship. Each phase of engagement and dependence has ended in disillusionment and punitive measures, exposing the fragility of a partnership built on short-term strategic convenience rather than enduring trust. During the 1965 India-Pakistan War, despite Pakistan’s



membership in SEATO, Washington withheld support and instead imposed an arms embargo. In 1977, the Symington Amendment was invoked against Pakistan for clandestinely pursuing its nuclear programme, resulting in both economic and military restrictions. Later, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Pressler Amendment in 1990 halted the delivery of F-16 aircraft. More recently, in 2018, during Donald Trump's first term, the U.S. withheld over \$300 million in military aid, citing Pakistan's alleged "double game" in counterterrorism. Each episode of sanctions reflects Washington's frustration with Islamabad's unpredictability, undependability, and strategic ambiguity, traits Pakistan has, ironically, internalised from the U.S. itself.

In response to these fluctuations, Pakistan has increasingly aligned with China, viewing this partnership as a counter to U.S. sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Since the 1960s, China has significantly supported Pakistan's nuclear ambitions and military cooperation.

Pakistan's army largely frames its U.S. partnership as a strategic necessity against India, yet anti-Western sentiment runs deep in society. In 1979, the U.S. embassy in Islamabad was burned by a mob inflamed by false rumours of U.S. involvement in the Mecca siege. Over the decades, numerous Pakistan-based terrorist organisations have targeted American interests, citing U.S.–Israel ties as justification. For example, Omar Saeed Sheikh, involved in financing the 9/11 plot and the brutal murder of the U.S. journalist Daniel Pearl, remains imprisoned in Pakistan. The persistence of such groups highlights Pakistan's double game — securing U.S. aid while tolerating militant networks that oppose the West.

These paradoxes were even acknowledged recently by Pakistan's Prime Minister in his UN General Assembly address in September 2025, where he admitted that militant groups operating from Pakistani soil posed a danger to global cities like New York and London. This candid statement reflects the dilemma at the heart of the U.S.–Pakistan relationship. While Islamabad presents itself as a partner against extremism, its territory continues to host actors fundamentally opposed to Western interests.

### **The way ahead**

The relationship remains fraught yet there are elements that keep the two together. The U.S. continues to see value in engaging with Pakistan, whether for counterterrorism efforts, Afghan stability, or its interests in West Asia. Pakistan, meanwhile, views Washington as both a source of financial support and an occasional hedge against over-dependence on China. But contradictions abound. American policymakers remain wary of Pakistan's internal dynamics, as a large and dominant section remained vehemently opposed to the U.S.

As Hussain Haqqani aptly put it, U.S.–Pakistan ties may be best understood as a "magnificent delusion", a partnership built on overlapping interests but undermined by mistrust and divergent goals.

The history of these relations shows both sides drawn together by necessity, yet perpetually disappointed by the other. Whether the future brings closer cooperation or renewed estrangement, one lesson is clear — the U.S.–Pakistan relations will remain complex, fragile, and unpredictable.



## NATIONAL

### INDIA, US SEAL 10-YR DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK, SIGNAL STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE

As they continue to negotiate a bilateral trade deal and the thorny issue of a tariff penalty by Washington over Delhi's purchase of Russian oil, India and the US Friday signed a 10-year Framework for the US-India Major Defence Partnership, signalling stable ties between the two countries in the defence sector.

- The pact was signed following a bilateral meeting between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his US counterpart Pete Hegseth on the sidelines of 12th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- In a statement, the Ministry of Defence said the 2025 framework is intended to provide a unified vision and policy direction to deepen defence cooperation. It said the framework will usher in a new era in the already strong defence partnership between the two countries and marks a new chapter in further transforming it over the next 10 years.
- Singh said the framework will provide policy direction to the entire spectrum of the India-US defence relationship. "It is a signal of our growing strategic convergence and will herald a new decade of partnership," he said in a post on X, adding that defence will remain a major pillar in bilateral relations between the two sides.
- In February this year, following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump, the two sides had announced plans for the new 10-year defence framework.
- Despite the strain in relations between Delhi and Washington over the issue of tariffs that came up in July and August, there has been no visible dip in military ties between the two countries.
- The vision for bilateral defence cooperation was encapsulated in the September 2013 Joint US-India Declaration on Defence Cooperation and the 2015 Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship, in which the two countries committed themselves to increasing cooperation in the sector.
- Between 2016 and 2020, the two sides signed four more agreements, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020.
- In August 2024, both countries signed a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) and Memorandum of Agreement regarding the Assignment of Liaison Officers, among other bilateral military agreements that have enhanced defence and security cooperation.
- In September this year, Indian and American troops participated in a two-week military exercise Yudh Abhyas at Fort Wainwright in Alaska.

**Do You Know:**

- **Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA):** Under SOSA, the US and India will provide reciprocal priority support to each other for goods and services that promote national defence. India is the 18th SOSA partner of the US. While SOSA is an important mechanism to strengthen interoperability with US defence trade partners, it is legally non-binding.
- **MoU on Liaison Officers:** The Memorandum of Agreement regarding the Assignment of Liaison Officers is a progression on a decision taken earlier to increase information-sharing between India and the US, and to post Indian armed forces officers in key strategic US Commands. India will deploy the first Liaison Officer to the US Special Operations Command headquarters in Florida.

**WHAT HAS THE U.S. CLARIFIED ON H-1B VISAS?****The story so far:**

In a softening of stricter immigration controls announced this September, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) clarified on October 20 that current holders seeking an extension or wanting to switch their visa category would not have to pay the \$1,00,000 fee to process H-1B applications. This fee would only be applicable to the new applications made after September 21 post-midnight hours in the U.S. (Eastern Time). Though the clarification does offer some reassurance, there is apprehension in various sectors, particularly the IT industry, about the Trump administration's inward-looking policies.

**What is the clarification?**

The immigration services department has clarified that those seeking an extension or wanting to switch their visa category, say, from a student's visa (categorised as F-1) to an H-1B visa, would not have to pay the processing fee. More importantly, the USCIS said the Secretary of Homeland Security could allow for an exception in certain "extraordinarily rare circumstances" wherein the applicant has been determined to serve a certain national interest, and no American is available to fill the particular role, or that making the employer pay the processing fee on the worker's behalf would undermine the country's interests. Homeland Security would also look to ensure the applicant does not pose a threat to the security or welfare of the U.S.

**What may have prompted the change?**

The revised fee announced in September had caused panic not only in India. Concerns centred about the fee making it "cost-prohibitive" for U.S. employers, especially start-ups and small and mid-sized businesses, to hire foreign workers. Several industry groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce argued this went against the objective of the programme which was to ensure "businesses of all sizes can access the global talent they need to grow their operations" in the U.S. In fact, the Chamber this month filed a legal challenge arguing that the revised fee was "unlawful" and must be structured around actual costs incurred by the government in processing visas, not otherwise. Moreover, the complainant argues that U.S. firms, particularly in manufacturing and certain STEM fields, face a shortage in finding domestic workers "qualified and available to fill the roles needed for the company to perform". In fact, Neil Bradley, Chief Policy Officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in a blogpost, mentioned the U.S. education system has "not kept pace with the needs of businesses in this global economy". Reflecting on an "entrenched opposition to change", among other things, he writes, "Our nation's failing report card in math and sciences forces business to create their own programmes to address these challenges," he stated.



The H-1B proclamation announced in September has already had an impact on arrivals to the country. Preliminary data of the U.S. International Trade Administration (ITA) points to a 44% decline on a year-over-year basis in student arrivals from India for August this year. Overall, the U.S. experienced a greater than 19% decline in overseas student arrivals.

#### **Does this open doors for Indian students?**

Ajay Srivastava, founder of the India-based Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), told The Hindu that the exemption for foreign students removes a “major financial hurdle at the start of their careers”. He elaborates this would allow for a smoother movement from education to employment without the risk of or cost of leaving the country. However, Mr. Srivastava apprehends the decision earlier this month to cap international student admissions [for undergrad] to 15% of total intake with 5% from an individual country would “drastically reduce opportunities for Indian students to even enter the U.S. education system”. “This measure effectively shuts the door for many before they can benefit from the revised H-1B rules,” observed Mr. Srivastava. The proposed cap forms part of a broader 10-point memo sent by the U.S. administration to universities seeking an agreement on a broad range of issues, ranging from foreign enrolment, faculty hiring to encouraging ideological diversity, and not just “woke, socialist and anti-American ideology”.

#### **Has confusion been resolved?**

Notwithstanding the clarifications, the H-1B proclamation struggles with certain structural concerns. Speaking to The Hindu over email, Kate Angustia, supervisory policy and practice counsel at the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), said the latest clarifications address some of the details on how the U.S. government is implementing their plan. “The USCIS update addresses when a petitioner must submit payment and what is required for petitioners. Prior to the update, these were unknown factors,” she said. Although, Ms. Angustia separately underlined there could be “confusion” with regards to determining the exceptions. “There is not a clear guidance on the standards, and this is a significant departure from the statute,” she states.

The proclamations, as was the case in September, fall amidst a larger backdrop advocating protectionism and strengthening inward-looking prospects, one of them being to tighten immigration. Ms. Angustia noted, “The broader environment is very concerning because U.S. businesses and immigration advocates know that the government could announce a new policy and create confusion again.” Back home, the Department of Economic Affairs in their monthly review for September had observed the fee could cause “disruptions” —particularly on the growth of future remittances and service trade surpluses.

#### **IN U-TURN, US GIVES 6-MONTH SANCTION RELIEF TO CHABAHAR**

The US has exempted the Chabahar port project in Iran, which is being co-developed by India, from its sanctions for a six-month period. This marks a turnaround from its withdrawal of its sanctions waiver over a month ago.

— On September 18, the US administration had announced the withdrawal of the sanctions waiver granted to the strategically located port, ending the exemption that was in place from 2018 — when the first Donald Trump administration was in power. Subsequently, the sanctions regime came into effect from September 29.



— While the move targeted Iran, it also affected India, which has been developing the port along with the Islamic republic and sees it as a key means to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. Chabahar is also close to the Chinese-developed Gwadar port in Pakistan.

— Chabahar is a deep water port located in the Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran. It is the closest Iranian port to India, and is located in the open sea, providing easy and secure access for large cargo ships.

— During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Iran in May 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement to establish the International Transport and Transit Corridor (Chabahar Agreement). India is participating in the development of the first phase of the Shahid Beheshti Terminal at the port along with the Iran government .

— The port has also facilitated the supply of humanitarian assistance, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Till date, a total of 2.5 million tons of wheat and 2000 tons of pulses have been transhipped from India to Afghanistan through the Chabahar port.

**Do You Know:**

— Chabahar, which sits at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, is Iran's first deepwater port that puts the country on the global oceanic trade route map. The port lies to the west of Iran's border with Pakistan, about as far as Gwadar, a competing port developed by China in Pakistan, lies to the east of the border.

— Chabahar is of strategic importance to both Iran and India. It can potentially help Tehran ward off the effect of Western sanctions, and offers New Delhi an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan, which does not allow India land access for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

— The port is also part of the proposed International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multi-modal transportation project linking the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, and onward to northern Europe via St Petersburg in Russia.

— India's involvement in the development of the port began in 2002, when Hassan Rouhani, then National Security Advisor to President Syed Mohammad Khatami, held discussions with his Indian counterpart, Brajesh Mishra.

— There are two distinct ports in the Chabahar project, Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari. India's investment is restricted to the Shahid Beheshti port, according to the paper, 'Geopolitics of Chabahar port for Iran, India and Afghanistan', by Ali Omid and Gauri Noolkar-Oak of the University of Isfahan (Iran).

— India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement in April 2016, after which the Indian Shipping Ministry worked at a rapid pace towards developing the port. In December 2017, the first phase of Shahid Beheshti port was inaugurated, and India sent its first consignment of wheat to Afghanistan through Chabahar that same year.

#### DELHI & KABUL: A BOND TESTED BY GEOPOLITICS

Ajay Darshan Behera writes- "India's connection with Afghanistan is one of the oldest in South Asia. It began long before modern borders were invented. Yet, this civilisational bond has been tested again and again – by empire, partition, the Cold War, and today's shifting geopolitics. The recent visit of Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to New Delhi in the second week

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of October was not just another diplomatic engagement. It reflected how old ties are being reworked in a new regional setting marked by uncertainty and change.”

- “Trade and culture linked the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan as far back as the Indus Valley Civilisation. Under Emperor Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire extended to Kandahar. His edicts, inscribed in Greek on Afghan rocks, show how these regions once formed part of a shared cultural world. The ancient land of Gandhara, covering parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, was once a great centre of Buddhist art and learning. The Bamiyan Buddhas, destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, stood for over 1,500 years as witnesses to that shared past.”
- “Islam arrived in the seventh century but did not break these ties. Afghan rulers continued to shape Indian history. The Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Lodis, and Mughals all crossed the passes to establish dynasties in Delhi. Babur ruled Kabul before founding the Mughal Empire in 1526.”
- “Afghanistan shared deep sympathy with India’s freedom movement. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the ‘Frontier Gandhi’, led the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, mobilised Pashtuns for non-violent resistance and worked closely with the Indian National Congress.”
- “After Partition, Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan’s entry into the United Nations. Kabul’s refusal to recognise the Durand Line reflected its sympathy for Pashtun autonomy and its disappointment that the North-West Frontier Province did not join Afghanistan.”
- “Independent India and Afghanistan signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1949, uniting them in suspicion of Pakistan’s Western alliances. During the Cold War, both leaned toward Moscow. India saw the Soviet presence as a barrier against Pakistan-sponsored militancy and an assurance that Afghan soil would not be used for anti-India activities. Pakistan, meanwhile, became the “frontline state” for the US-Saudi-backed jihad.”
- “When Soviet troops withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan slipped into chaos. India, which had invested in the old regime, found itself without influence. But with the Taliban capturing power in Kabul in 1996, New Delhi returned to the game. Alongside Iran and Russia, it supported the Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Massoud.”
- This support reflected India’s strategic calculation that a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan would essentially extend Pakistani influence to India’s northwestern approaches. India feared that a Taliban Afghanistan would provide sanctuary and support for anti-India militant groups. Those fears were realised in 1999 when an Indian Airlines flight was hijacked to Kandahar.”
- “Once the Taliban was removed from power in 2001, India emerged as one of Afghanistan’s biggest regional contributors. The \$275-million Afghan-India Friendship Dam, formerly known as the Salma Dam, and the Zaranj-Delaram highway connecting Afghanistan to Iran’s Chabahar Port were symbols of this partnership.”
- “The US departure in August 2021 restored the Taliban to power. India closed its embassy and flew out its diplomats. Two decades of investment appeared to be lost overnight. Pakistan leaders rejoiced, confident their influence was intact. But the Taliban quickly let them down. For India, this provided a small but significant diplomatic window.”
- “By 2025, both sides were experimenting with a new relationship. Afghanistan required partners to ease its economic difficulties. India wanted to regain its foothold through development, trade, and humanitarian activity.”



- “Amir Khan Muttaqi’s visit to New Delhi marked the highest-level contact since 2021. India’s outreach to the Taliban is not a seal of approval but a pragmatic necessity. It is a response to unfolding realities. Afghanistan and India have been bound together for centuries by geography, commerce, religion, and culture. These ties have endured empire, ideology and invasion. But they have also been influenced – sometimes distorted – by the politics of the time.”
- “The road ahead remains uncertain. The track record of the Taliban when it comes to women’s rights and minorities is grim. Security risks persist. What, however, is certain is that the India-Afghanistan narrative is not yet finished. It has merely moved to a new chapter – one in which old bonds and new realities have to coexist.”

**Do You Know:**

- Afghanistan’s geopolitical significance goes beyond India and Pakistan. It is a multi-ethnic, landlocked country positioned at the crossroads of Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. This strategic location has historically drawn the interest of major global and regional powers, making Afghanistan a focal point in global politics. Acknowledging Afghanistan’s significance, India has carefully crafted its policy towards the country.

- India’s investments in Afghanistan:

India has constructed essential infrastructure, including roads, dams, electricity transmission lines, substations, schools, and hospitals in Afghanistan. The value of India’s development assistance is now estimated to exceed \$3 billion. Unlike in some other countries where India’s infrastructure projects have struggled to gain traction or have been hindered by local politics, these initiatives have successfully been implemented in Afghanistan.

**AFTER ASEAN SUMMIT: GROUP'S IMPORTANCE FOR INDIA, AMID US-CHINA TUSLE**

The 47th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits concluded in Kuala Lumpur on October 28. Ashok Sajjanhar, who has served as India's ambassador to several countries and negotiated for India in the Multilateral Trade Negotiations for India-EU India-ASEAN and the India-Thailand Free Trade Agreement, explains the significance of the recent summit, held in the shadow of US tariff turmoil and the Washington-Beijing trade dispute.

— When the foundation for ASEAN was laid in 1967 with five countries, it was basically a political organisation to combat the rise of communism. But after that, it has grown into a crucial economic entity and an important security player. Intra-trade in ASEAN, at between 25 and 30%, is second only to the European Union. In that respect, it is a very successful regional economic organisation.

— Secondly, it is geopolitically significant for India. The region it is located in frequently sees turbulence because of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

— Then there is the fact that the centre of gravity of the global economy is shifting from the transatlantic towards the Indo-Pacific, and this is right where ASEAN is situated. About 40-50% of India's trade is conducted through that region.

— Fourthly, all the countries in this grouping are rapidly growing economies, making it a very dynamic market.

— Fifth, ASEAN has emerged as a significant player on the global stage because all the countries tend to speak with one voice.



— Sixth, the region is important for us for connectivity. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway aims to connect Moreh in Manipur through Myanmar to Mae Sot in Thailand.

— India has deep historical and civilisational linkages with these countries. For decades, we could not build upon them because of the Cold War, but as part of the Look East policy of 1992, upgraded to Act East in 2014, this is now a crucial area of focus.

— PM Modi in his address pitched for an early review of the India-ASEAN free trade agreement. In the free trade deal with ASEAN, signed in 2009, India was facing distinct disadvantages.

— India has not joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is a free trade deal between ASEAN, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.

— The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) suffers from an existential issue. The government's firm policy is that terrorism and talks can't go hand in hand.

— But there are other groups, like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC, with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) and BBIN (with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) that can learn from ASEAN.

— In the trade and economy front, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a free trade agreement between 12 countries (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam) not including China. Its membership can benefit India more than a deal like RCEP.

— The most important lesson would be consistency of efforts. ASEAN did not take its present shape in a day, it was a halting, stuttering effort. While it was founded in 1967, it was only after 2002 that it gathered momentum and really took off.

— The lesson for India is to give greater energy and focus on groups that don't have Pakistan — and on the trade front, China — and keep up engagement consistently. From trade to manufacturing to services to technology to fintech, there are many areas in which India can come to the aid of smaller economies.

**Do You Know:**

— After feasibility studies were conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the KMMTTP framework was signed by India and Myanmar in 2008. This was set to be a major development in India's strategically vital Look East Policy. (Act East Policy under the Narendra Modi government).

— Upon completion, the KMMTTP would effectively shave off 1,000 km in distance between Kolkata and Mizoram, and save a journey time of three-to-four days.

— ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is a grouping of 11 countries — Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the recently added East Timor or Timor Leste.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITY**

Since 1995, when India became a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and 2002, when it was upgraded to Summit level, the annual ASEAN summit has been



an opportunity for India to reconnect with a region with historical linkages, and now increasing geopolitical importance. In addition to the ASEAN and ASEAN-India summits, the annual East Asia Summit (including the U.S., China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, India and the ASEAN countries) is a chance for the Indian leadership to interact with the most powerful countries on Indo-Pacific issues. The rebirth of the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. 'Quad', for example, took place in 2017, after a decade-long hiatus, on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit. Underlining this importance in his virtual speech at the ASEAN-India summit in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the 21st century "the century of India and ASEAN", and committed to India's support to "ASEAN Unity, ASEAN Centrality, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific". He also announced that 2026 would be the year of ASEAN-India maritime cooperation, with a focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster response, maritime security and the region's blue economy. The summit — External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar represented India — came at a time of increased geopolitical turbulence, including the economic turmoil unleashed by the U.S.'s tariff policy, China's constraints on crucial exports, and maritime tensions. At the East Asia Summit, Mr. Jaishankar called the times "complicated", taking aim at the U.S. for constraining energy trade with Russia and applying its principles "selectively", and China for supply chain reliability and market access issues. India and ASEAN also committed to finalising the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) soon.

The strong statements and commitment to cooperation did not, however, sufficiently cover for Mr. Modi's absence from the Summit — he was absent in 2022 also. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Mr. Modi had expressed his inability to attend due to festivities in India, but the explanation was unconvincing as the ASEAN engagement had been planned months in advance. While some pointed to Mr. Modi's campaign schedule for the Bihar Assembly polls, others cited U.S. President Donald Trump's presence and India-U.S. trade deal tensions as a possible reason for his staying away. A few even suggested a lingering strain in the India-Malaysia relationship over Malaysia's diplomatic support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, and a visit by the Pakistani Prime Minister to Kuala Lumpur earlier this month. Mr. Modi may have had international, domestic or bilateral reasons, but the no-show was a missed opportunity, especially when other global players including the U.S. and China demonstrated their commitment to regional stability, by simply being there.

#### 'STRONGER TIES VITAL': MODI SPEAKS TO NEW JAPAN COUNTERPART

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to new Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi on Wednesday, and agreed to focus on "economic security, defence cooperation and talent mobility".

— Sources told The Indian Express that the two leaders are also looking at the possibility of meeting in South Africa on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit in November.

— This was the first phone conversation between Modi and Takaichi since she assumed office as Japan's first woman PM, succeeding Shigeru Ishiba, last week.

— A Japanese Foreign ministry statement said, "At the outset, Prime Minister Takaichi stated that, as the two countries share fundamental values and strategic interests, Japan intends to continue to work together toward realising a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', including through Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad).

— Last week, Modi extended his wishes to Takaichi on her election... Takaichi, who is a protege of former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, is a hardline conservative and replaced former Prime



Minister Shigeru Ishiba after the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party suffered disastrous losses in July elections.

**Do You Know:**

— The partnership between India and Japan, two of Asia’s leading democracies and among the world’s top five economies, is rooted in civilizational ties that have been reinforced by convergence in their regional and global outlooks.

— India’s Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) align closely with Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy. Japan leads IPOI’s connectivity pillar, and is India’s largest Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) donor.

— Cooperation between the countries extends to plurilateral platforms such as the Quad, International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI).

— Key agreements on defence and security include the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (2008), Defence Cooperation and Exchanges MoU (2014), Information Protection Agreement (2015), Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Agreement (2020), and co-development of the UNICORN naval mast (2024).

— Bilateral trade reached \$22.8 billion in 2023-24. In Apr-Jan 2024-25, trade reached \$21 billion, demonstrating stability. Imports from Japan continue to outweigh exports. India’s main exports are chemicals, vehicles, aluminium, and seafood; imports include machinery, steel, copper, and reactors.

— Japan is India’s fifth-largest source of FDI, with \$43.2 billion cumulative investment up to December 2024. Annual inflows have been strong – \$3.1 billion in 2023-24 and \$1.36 billion in 2024-25 (Apr-Dec).

— The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, comprises India, Japan, Australia, and the US. It was formed as an informal alliance after the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004. It was formalised in 2007 by the efforts of the then-Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe.

**CJI RECOMMENDS JUSTICE SURYA KANT AS SUCCESSOR**

Chief Justice of India B R Gavai Monday wrote to the Union government recommending Justice Surya Kant as his successor.

- Once notified by the government, Justice Kant will take over as the 53rd Chief Justice when CJI Gavai demits office on November 23. Justice Kant will remain in office till February 9, 2027. Sources said CJI Gavai handed over a copy of the letter to Justice Surya Kant.
- On October 23, the government wrote to CJI Gavai, urging him to send the recommendation letter. It is an established convention that the outgoing Chief Justice of India writes to the government recommending his successor.
- Justice Kant was nominated as a member of the Governing Body of the National Legal Services Authority on February 23, 2007, for two consecutive terms, ending on February 22, 2011. He assumed office as Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court on October 5, 2018, and was elevated to the Supreme Court on May 24, 2019.



**Do You Know:**

- The Chief Justice of India and the other judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Indian Constitution. It is mentioned in Article 124 that appointment by the President is to be done “after consultation” with judges of the Supreme Court, as the President may “deem necessary”.
- Article 217, which deals with the appointment of High Court judges, says the President should consult the CJI, Governor, and Chief Justice of the High Court concerned. Further, the tenure of a CJI is until they attain the age of 65 years, while High Court judges retire at 62 years.
- Usually, the seniormost judge of the court after the chief justice (in terms of the years served) is recommended as the successor. This convention was memorably discarded by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who appointed Justice AN Ray as CJI in 1973 over his seniors for a CJI more favourable to her regime.
- According to the government’s Memorandum of procedure for the appointment of Supreme Court Judges, seniority is to be the norm. It says the Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs seeks the recommendation of the outgoing Chief Justice of India for the appointment of the next CJI.
- After the collegium’s recommendations are finalised and received from the CJI, the Law Minister will put up the recommendation to the Prime Minister who will advise the President on the matter of appointment.

**HOW SC REITERATED CENTURY-OLD PRINCIPLE REGARDING MINORS’ PROPERTY RIGHTS**

In a ruling with wide implications for property transactions involving minors, the Supreme Court has held that a person, on attaining majority, can reject a property sale executed by their guardian without court approval, either by filing a suit or by conduct, such as reselling the property, within the limitation period prescribed by law.

— A division bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and Prasanna B. Varale, on October 7, stated that “it is not always necessary for a minor to institute a suit for cancellation of a voidable sale transaction executed by his guardian... such a transaction can be avoided or repudiated by his conduct.”

— The court thus reaffirmed a century-old principle that a minor’s property rights can be protected through conduct demonstrating clear repudiation, not only through formal litigation.

— The laws on property acquired by minors through their guardians are determined through three pieces of legislation— the Indian Contract Act 1872, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956, and the Guardian and Wards Act, 1890.

— To enter into a valid contract, four conditions must be met. There must be consent between the parties, the transaction must have a lawful object, it must be supported by legal consideration, and the parties must be competent to contract. Of these, the competency becomes key when one of the parties is a minor represented by a guardian.

— Section 11 of the Indian Contract Act states that, “Every person is competent to contract who is of the age of majority according to the law to which he is subject, and who is of sound mind, and is not disqualified from contracting by any law to which he is subject.” This places minors outside the scope of those who are competent to enter into a valid contract.



— However, a contract that is entered into by a minor is considered “void ab initio” — unenforceable from the start. This is because minors’ lack of competency carves out their liability during a breach of contract. Such contracts can not be enforced by or against them in a court.

— There are limited exceptions. If a minor is provided with necessities suited to their condition in life, the supplier can recover the cost of those items from the minor’s property. Contracts that are clearly for the benefit of the minor may also be upheld. A guardian may enter into contracts on behalf of a minor if the arrangement serves the minor’s interest.

— The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, under Section 8, lays down the powers of a ‘natural guardian’ to act reasonably “for the benefit of the minor or for the realization, protection or benefit of the minor’s estate.”

— The common view has been that the now-major individual must file a suit to cancel the sale deed executed by the guardian. However, an earlier precedent from 1905, Abdul Rahman v. Sukhdayal Singh, held that, where a property was leased by a guardian not for the minor’s benefit, the court held that it was “not necessary that a suit should be instituted” and that “the act of the minor of selling the property on attaining majority is enough to repudiate the lease deed.”

— Once the minor, who turned major, repudiates the sale, the earlier sale is treated as void from the beginning, and no rights pass to the buyer from that sale.

— In this case, the Court found that the surviving sons had, after attaining majority, executed a new sale deed in favour of K.S. Shivappa. They did so within the three-year limitation period, while their names continued to appear in the revenue records, and the earlier buyers had never taken possession.

— This, the Court said, was enough to show that they had rejected their father’s sale, and filing a separate suit was not necessary.

— Since the plaintiff failed to appear before the court to provide evidence regarding her ownership of the plot, her case was presented through a power-of-attorney holder, who had no personal knowledge of the sale.

**Do You Know:**

— As per the Indian succession laws, a son is heir to his father’s and grandfather’s property by birth. In a case where the father dies intestate then the son, who is a Class I heir, will have succession rights along with his living brother, mother, sister and grandmother. However, if none of them are alive, then he becomes the sole successor.

— But here’s the hitch: In a situation related to a minor child, a case has to be filed in a court or a petition through a guardian under the law or a guardian appointed by the court. In essence, even though the minor child becomes the owner of his parent’s wealth, he cannot legally manage it.

— The inheritance is managed by a guardian, appointed from among his relatives, till he becomes an adult. Under Indian law, if no relative comes forward to become the guardian then due to the responsibility being of fiduciary nature, the court appoints a guardian.



## INDIA'S DIASPORA DIPLOMACY AND THE LIMITS OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM ABROAD

The Indian diaspora has been in the spotlight in various countries in recent weeks. A section of the diaspora has attracted attention for its display of faith and culture, crossing the limits of acceptable public behaviour in developed countries. The immersion of Ganapati statues in water bodies and the display of Deepavali fireworks in public places are examples.

After Deepavali revellers set two houses on fire in Edmonton, Canada, an official police statement said: "Light up your home, not your neighbour's roof." Three men have been charged with arson. Anti-immigrant and nativist protesters in Australia have singled out Indians, and in the U.S. and Canada, nationalist campaigners have a special focus on people of Indian origin these days.

The higher visibility of these incidents could also be because a section of Indians aggressively promotes cultural exhibitionism as a matter of community pride and right — for instance, in the use of firecrackers on Deepavali wherever they are. In the midst of all this, the Indian diaspora is being urged by some observers to advocate Indian positions in the United States.

The Indian national movement was spread around the world in British colonies, and in the U.S. and Canada, but the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, consciously decided to keep the new Republic aloof from PIO (person of Indian origin) politics in foreign countries. He did not want India to be seen as interfering in the domestic politics of another country through the diaspora, and he urged PIO to stay loyal to the countries that they had adopted.

### Rise of Hindutva

Issues of discrimination and racism were not narrow Indian concerns, and were raised as matters of universal human rights. This approach was consistent with the concept of territorial nationalism that guided Indian thinking then, as opposed to cultural nationalism.

The rise of Hindutva and a parallel fresh surge in the outflow of Indians expanded a global network of cultural nationalists from the 1990s. With the ascent of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in 2014, this approach gained further momentum. Mr. Modi addressed diaspora rallies in several countries, most notably the U.S.

Exactly around this time, the fear of foreign interference in domestic politics became a central concern in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and several European countries. At various points in U.S. history, immigrants from specific regions or countries have been subjects of special scrutiny. In recent years, allegations of Chinese and Russian interference have dominated public discourse. Even Israel, which had a free pass as an autonomous actor in U.S. domestic politics for decades, is facing increased scrutiny and resistance. Not only left-leaning figures such as Bernie Sanders, but also Christian conservatives such as Marjorie Taylor Greene and media figure Tucker Carlson now call out Israel's influence in U.S. domestic politics.

It may be noted that foreign influence operations per se are not illegal in the US, as long as they are openly registered as such.

Historically, Indian immigrants were considered a benign presence in the U.S. and diverse within, as followers of all religions and speakers of several languages. But state-sponsored attempts to turn the diaspora into active members of Indian strategy have clashed with a rising fear of foreign interference in the West. India has escaped the kind of hostility that Russia and China face, but there is enough to suggest that New Delhi is not going unnoticed on this count in the West.



## Nationalist hype

India does not allow dual citizenship, but the U.S. does. India gave partial citizenship rights to PIOs through the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, by adding Sections 7A–7D to the Citizenship Act, 1955. This amendment introduced the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI), offering lifetime visa-free entry, exemption from police registration, and rights similar to those of NRIs in economic, educational, and financial fields for the community. In 2015, the technical categories of PIO and OCI were merged as OCI. India presents this arrangement as “dual citizenship in spirit, but not in law”.

U.S. citizens can hold passports of more than one country, but some lawmakers, including Ms. Greene, are seeking more scrutiny on the issue. Fear of foreign interference in domestic politics is a universal concern of parties and state agencies in the West. Expectations from the diaspora to promote Indian interests in the U.S. or any other country must account for the reality that it is negotiating an era of heightened nationalism in host countries. Multi-alignment may not work for diaspora members always. After all, nationalist hype is not an exclusive preserve of India.

## MOST PEOPLE EXTRADITED TO INDIA ARE ECONOMIC OFFENDERS: DATA

A Belgian court’s ruling in the extradition proceedings concerning Mehul Choksi, a prime accused in the Punjab National Bank scam, is an important development in India’s efforts to bring him back to face trial. Mr. Choksi, who had fled India in 2018, has been the target of attempts by authorities to get him extradited since.

Mr. Choksi is detained in Belgium on India’s request. On Wednesday, a Belgium court concluded that the documents provided by him were insufficient to demonstrate a risk of ill-treatment upon extradition to India. It also rejected his plea of possible mistreatment in Indian prisons, observing that India has given multiple assurances to Belgium regarding his safety and prison arrangements.

If the extradition is successful, Mr. Choksi will join a long list of economic offenders who account for more than a third of all those extradited to India from all over the world over two decades.

The case involving Mr. Choksi is not the only instance where India seems to be gaining an edge this year. Last month, a delegation from the U.K.’s Crown Prosecution Service visited Tihar jail to assess prison conditions. This was aimed at facilitating the extradition of persons accused of economic crimes from the U.K. to India, such as Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi.

Extradition requests are initiated for cases under investigation, under trial, or for convicted criminals. India has signed extradition treaties with 48 countries/territories and has extradition arrangements with 12 countries.

Information obtained by The Hindu using the Right to Information shows that India has been stepping up efforts to secure the extradition of fugitives from foreign countries to face trial here. In the last five years, India has made 133 extradition requests. In 2024 alone, it made 39 requests — the highest in the 2020-2024 period.

RTI data also reveal that India received 79 requests from foreign countries seeking the extradition of fugitives, between 2020 and 2024.

An analysis of persons extradited or deported by foreign governments to India since 2002 shows that 35% of them were sent back for economic offences such as financial fraud, cheating, and



forgery. Christian Michel James was extradited from the UAE for economic offences in the AgustaWestland helicopter deal bribery case.

People accused of participating in terrorist activities, for offences such as terror financing, and for 'waging war against India' accounted for 27.5% of all cases. This year, Tahawwur Rana, accused of being a key conspirator in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, was extradited from the U.S to India.

Those accused of crimes such as murder or attempt to murder accounted for 21.3% of all extraditions. Other offences listed by the External Affairs Ministry include drugs and sexual offences.

A country-wise analysis shows that India has secured the extradition of people from at least 26 countries in the 2002-2018 and the 2024-25 periods. The UAE and the U.S. accounted for 46% of all such cases together, with at least 25 and 12 fugitives extradited from these countries in the periods, respectively.

These conclusions are based on data sourced through RTI requests for the 2020-2024 period and supplemented by data from Parliament Q&A for the 2002-2018 period. Data for particular offences and source countries could not be ascertained for the 2019-2023 period.

#### 'PROBE AGENCIES CANNOT FORCE LAWYERS TO REVEAL CLIENT INFO'

The Supreme Court in a judgment on Friday held that investigating agencies cannot summon lawyers and coerce them to disclose any professional communication made in confidence with their clients.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai said compelling a lawyer to prejudice his or her own client, without the latter's consent or knowledge, amounted to an "outrageous" infringement of the client's constitutional right against self-incrimination under Article 20(3) of the Constitution.

"The facts and circumstances of a crime committed, or an FIR registered, is not to be elicited from the advocate who represents the accused, which again is a reflection of the abject failure of the investigating agency. It is for the investigator to obtain independent evidence of the culpability of the accused. The position of trust the advocate occupies vis-à-vis his client cannot be put to test by an attempt to breach the professional confidence, conferred with a solemn privilege under Section 132; which has reflections of the constitutional protection against self-incrimination," Justice K. Vinod Chandran, who authored the judgment for the Bench also comprising Justice N.V. Anjaria, observed.

#### **Lawyer-client privilege**

The judgment recorded that lawyers were not at the beck-and-call of probe agencies. Their ability to protect their clients without fear was part of their fundamental rights under Article 19(1)(g) and Article 21 of the Constitution, coupled with the provisions of the Advocates Act, 1961.

The court said lawyer-client privilege was protected in Section 132 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) of 2023, which mandates that an advocate cannot be coerced into revealing any information with respect to the client he represents or the cause he is engaged to prosecute or defend. The exceptions to this rule are clear. The confidentiality of the lawyer-client



communication can be waived only with the consent of the client or if it was in furtherance of an illegal purpose or a if a crime or fraud is committed as a result.

The judgment was based on a suo motu case registered by the Supreme Court after two senior advocates were summoned by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for legal advice they gave their clients. The Bar had risen up in unison against the ED, which had quickly withdrawn the summons. In fact, even the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General had highlighted that the such summons by investigative agencies affect a large body of advocates in the country “whose voice is the voice of the victim, the accused, the marginalised and the downtrodden”.

The court held that investigating or prosecuting agencies or the police cannot directly summon a lawyer to elicit the details of the case, unless there was something the investigating officer had knowledge of, which fell under the exceptions [of Section 132]. In such cases, the exception had to be specifically mentioned in the summons.

The court made it clear that summons issued against a lawyer by a probe officer should be approved by a superior officer not below the rank of a Superintendent of Police, whose satisfaction has to be recorded in writing.

#### CREATING DISCORD BETWEEN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES WITH ‘UNSAID WORDS’? ALLAHABAD HC DECISION IS ANTI-FREE SPEECH

Can a person be charged for trying to create discord between religious communities with “unsaid words”? In a deeply troubling decision, the Allahabad High Court recently said that a WhatsApp text can indeed give a “subtle message” to stoke interfaith strife, even without explicitly mentioning religion. It refused to quash an FIR and directed the accused, Afaq Ahmad, to face trial. The decision could have a chilling effect on free speech.

Ahmad had moved the HC after the Uttar Pradesh police had registered a case against him under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita’s Section 352 — it criminalises intentional insults that provoke a breach of public peace. The police had sought to incriminate Ahmad on the basis of a WhatsApp text to two people. On October 23, this newspaper reported that in the message, Ahmad had alleged his brother had been “framed in a false case by putting political pressure on the police”. He had lamented that “a call has been made for a total boycott of my family’s livelihood”. The message contained repeated assertions of his faith in the judiciary. Ahmad’s lawyers also argued that their client only intended to convey resentment about his brother’s arrest. The HC, however, said that the Whatsapp text, “definitely conveys an underlying and subtle message that his brother has been targeted in a false case, because of his belonging to a particular religious community.” It went on to say, “even if one were to think that no religious feelings of a class of citizens or community have been outraged... it is certainly a message, which, by its unsaid words, is likely to create or promote feelings of enmity, hatred and ill-will between religious communities... members of a particular community, in the first instance, could think that they are being targeted by members of another religious community by abusing the process of law”.

Criminal laws, especially those that deal with the fundamental Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, require a clinical interpretation. In looking for unsaid words and subtle messaging, the HC seems to have gone against the Supreme Court’s landmark 2015 ruling in *Shreya Singhal v Union of India*. The apex court had said that “a penal law is void for vagueness if it fails to define the criminal offence with sufficient definiteness”. It had underlined that “ordinary people should be able to understand what conduct is prohibited and what is permitted”. The Allahabad HC



verdict, in contrast, frames a vague unlawful zone that people must steer clear of. It goes against Shreya Singhal's strictures against the "arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement of the law". The HC must course correct.

#### EXPRESS VIEW ON INDORE HARASSMENT AND MINISTER KAILASH VIJAYVARGIYA: HER SPACE, HER RIGHT

When two Australian players in the ongoing ICC Women's World Cup stepped out of their hotel in Indore last week to walk to a nearby cafe, what should have been an enjoyable, if unremarkable, outing turned into an ordeal when a motorcyclist allegedly stalked and sexually harassed them. The accused was quickly identified and apprehended by the police. However, it's deeply troubling that the incident was then used by Madhya Pradesh cabinet minister Kailash Vijayvargiya to draw out a "sabak" (lesson) — the players should have informed the security or local administration before stepping out, he said. The minister's words are, indeed, yet another reminder of the tendency to normalise the lack of safety in public spaces, particularly when it comes to women. They show how beneath the glitz and sparkle of New India, the old tendency to burden women with the responsibility for their own security remains intact.

In its statement on the incident, the Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association lamented the reputational damage to Indore, describing it as one that "cast a shadow over the city's image." The implications, however, go far beyond how a city — or a country — is perceived. While it is commendable that there was quick action after the Indore incident, the larger issue is about how every woman in India, visitor or not, can be made to feel safe whenever she is out and about. Better access to education and employment has certainly raised the visibility of women and girls in public, but the dispiriting fact is that their claims on these spaces continue to be precarious because safety is seen as being conditional upon following certain gender-specific norms of conduct.

Across regions and political lines, this view persists — if Vijayvargiya had unnecessary words of caution for women, in West Bengal, CM Mamata Banerjee's question after the rape of a medical student in the state, about why the young woman was out late at night, also seemed to put the onus of safety on women. That such attitudes persist, while talk of "nari shakti" gains in volume and frequency, shows a sad disconnect between aspiration and reality. As India aspires to a more prominent position on the world stage, it cannot lose sight of the fundamentals, including the need to build a new normal where women, as they step out of their homes, don't have to keep looking over their shoulders.

#### RUSH TO PROMISE FREEBIES IN BIHAR ELECTION CAMPAIGN IGNORES ASPIRATIONS OF ELECTORATE

Governments traditionally were expected to provide public goods, whether roads, bridges, clean water, sewage systems, public health, education, or law enforcement and justice administration. These goods, with large positive externalities and prone to underproduction by private players, cannot be delivered overnight. Nor are the benefits from them visible in the immediate term. The problem arises when expectations get altered. As politicians don't look beyond the next elections and voters turn cynical about state capacity to discharge functions and supply public goods that private markets do not provide as effectively, the result is an all-pervading fiscally ruinous short-termism. Something of this sort is already apparent in the form of freebies being offered or



promised by parties and voters also demanding more of those, while not trusting governments to do what is really good for them in the long run.

Bihar — and previously Maharashtra and Karnataka, which also went to the polls in the last couple of years — is illustrative of this phenomenon. The Nitish Kumar-led NDA government has transferred Rs 10,000 each to over 1.2 crore women ostensibly as start-up money for self-employment, under a scheme unveiled just days before the current Assembly elections. Not to be left behind, the Opposition Mahagathbandhan under Tejashwi Yadav has promised to deposit Rs 2,500 per month in the bank accounts of “eligible women” in Bihar for five years. This is in addition to 200 units of free electricity and, worse, a government job for at least one member of every family in the state. From where will the money come? The tendency of political parties to rely on short-termism also does a disservice to the shift in Bihar’s economy in the past two decades. The share of the services and construction sector in the state’s economy is constantly increasing, while that of agriculture is coming down. The median age of the state’s population is under 25 years. The politics in Bihar must, therefore, recognise the aspirations of its young women and men. The state needs policies that are inviting to industry and are conducive to creating jobs; it requires skill-development centres and institutions to nurture its young population.

At the same time, the political parties should realise that when voters see dysfunctional schools and hospitals, and feel it is beyond the capacity of governments to provide clean air and water, they ask for the next best thing: Money. Politicians, too, are happy to oblige, as technology makes it possible today to undertake direct cash transfers at scale. That would not only prove fiscally ruinous but could also make Bihar’s aspirational class cynical and disrupt the economic shift underway in the state. Bihar is poised for a take-off. It needs a vision that aligns incentives in a way that makes both voters and politicians think and act long-term. The lead has to come from parties focusing on development and good governance rather than bankrupting the exchequer.

#### 12 STATES & UTS, 51 CR VOTERS: AFTER BIHAR, SIR NEXT ROUND FROM NOV 4

The Election Commission (EC) on Monday announced the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 12 states and Union Territories, where all of the registered 51 crore electors would have to submit enumeration forms by December 4 to remain on the draft roll.

- All those who cannot be traced back to the last intensive revision of rolls in 2002-2005 would be required to submit documents to establish their eligibility to remain on the final list.
- According to the EC, the exercise will be carried out in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Assembly elections are due in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and West Bengal early next year.
- In the second phase, the EC has expanded its indicative list of 11 documents that electors can submit to 13, adding Aadhaar and an extract of the Bihar SIR roll. All those born after July 1, 1987, would be required to submit eligibility documents for themselves as well as their parents. — The Bihar SIR roll can be submitted as a proof of electors’ parents. Aadhaar can be submitted as a proof of identity, and not citizenship, the EC said.
- Monday’s announcement follows the EC’s order on June 24 for an SIR of electoral rolls for the entire country, starting with Bihar as Assembly elections were due in the state.



- For the second phase of SIR, the enumeration period will start on November 4, with 5.33 lakh booth level officers (BLOs) conducting house-to-house visits to have enumeration forms filled. The draft roll, which will be published on December 9, will include all those whose forms have been received, the EC said.
- When asked why Assam, where Assembly elections are due in 2026, had been left out for now, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said the Citizenship Act had separate provisions for Assam and the Supreme Court-monitored National Register of Citizens process in the state was about to be completed. He said the electoral roll revision for Assam would be ordered separately.
- EC officials said the states were chosen based on the level of preparation, which was assessed during a two-day conference of Chief Electoral Officers last week — apart from the three states and Puducherry where polls are slated next year.
- Explaining the need for an SIR now, the CEC said: “For the past few decades, almost all political parties have continuously complained about the impurity of the electoral roll.”

He said an SIR had been conducted eight times from 1951 to 2004. In the time since the last intensive revision, he said, there had been many changes to the electoral roll due to frequent migration, voters being registered at more than one place, dead electors not being removed and wrongful inclusion of foreigners.

- The June 24 order of the EC has been challenged in the Supreme Court through a batch of petitions questioning the EC’s power to check citizenship of all registered electors as well as the process adopted in Bihar.

#### **Do You Know:**

- Article 324(1) of the Constitution gives the ECI the power of “superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of” elections to Parliament and state legislatures.
- Under Section 21(3) of The Representation of the People Act, 1950, the ECI “may at any time... direct a special revision of the electoral roll for any constituency or part of a constituency in such manner as it may think fit”.
- The Registration of Electors’ Rules, 1960, says the revision of rolls can be carried out “either intensively or summarily or partly intensively and partly summarily, as the [ECI] may direct”. In an intensive revision, the electoral roll is prepared afresh; in a summary revision, the roll is amended.

#### **DEVIL IN THE DETAILS**

After Bihar, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has now embarked on a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 12 States and Union Territories. Its stated goal is unambiguous — to update the rolls which have been affected by frequent migration, dead voters and other inaccuracies, which have been pointed out by political parties, the Congress in particular. Yet, the experience in Bihar suggests that the process, as envisaged, could risk the disenfranchisement of a significant number of people. It was conducted on a short timeline — roughly a month for enumeration and a month for claims and objections. The most significant change now is the formal provision of a “Notice period” for hearing and verification for about 54 days. The hurried approach



in Bihar produced glaring statistical anomalies in the final roll. The gender ratio fell to 892 women per 1,000 men from 907 in the pre-SIR roll — well below recent survey figures for Bihar. Women voters were disproportionately excluded in areas with higher female than male turnout in the general election 2024, particularly in the 18-29 age group under the “permanently shifted” category. High female turnout relative to low registration typically indicates male migration, yet more women were deleted despite the SIR’s stated aim to remove migrants not “ordinarily resident”.

These anomalies seem to be built into the ECI’s procedural framework, where the primary onus of verification is unduly borne by citizens and party representatives — Booth Level Agents — beyond Booth Level Officers. Expecting members from parties to ensure the inclusion of all eligible voters is problematic as they are more concerned about political competition. The ECI’s non-response to the anomalies — anyone left out can re-register with the help of BLAs — is inadequate. After the Supreme Court’s intervention, the ECI had to publish lists of all excluded voters with reasons, leading to some correction. An amended model is now being replicated across a larger canvas. While the ECI’s provision for BLOs to make three house visits is welcome, temporary migrants who might be absent during the enumeration window despite remaining “ordinarily resident” by law, could still lose out. The ECI’s stated mitigation, allowing electors to fill the Enumeration Form online, is insufficient. This provision overlooks the digital divide and literacy challenges, placing an undue burden on voters who are not physically present to be assisted by a BLO. As this exercise unfolds, it is incumbent upon civil society, the media and parties to assume a role of intense vigilance lest this affects the integrity of India’s electoral democracy.

#### CITING DISRUPTIONS TO LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, WHY ECI ASKED PARTIES TO LABEL AI CONTENT

Stating that the growing menace of deepfakes generated through artificial intelligence (AI) carries the risk of “contaminating the level-playing field in the electoral arena,” the Election Commission of India (ECI) in an advisory issued Friday, such synthetically generated information could disrupt fair and equal conditions for political participants.

- The Commission has directed political parties to add labels to videos, images, and audio clips they share that are altered or created through AI, and has prescribed specific prominence and placement standards of such markers. These prescriptions closely echo draft rules that the IT Ministry recently released.
- Ahead of last year’s Lok Sabha polls, the ECI had, for the first time, addressed the issue of deepfakes in election campaigning, and had directed parties that whenever a deepfake comes to their notice, they shall take down the post within three hours.
- In January this year, the Commission had directed parties to apply labels such as “AI-Generated,” “Digitally Enhanced”, or “ Synthetic Content” to images or videos that had been digitally altered.
- The Commission’s advisory on Friday takes its previous directions one step forward by specifically prescribing that the labels and watermarks on such images and videos should cover at least 10% of the visible display area, or the initial 10% duration for audio content. The label in the case of video content shall be carried as part of the top hand of the screen, the ECI said.



- Another new direction is that such digitally altered videos shall prominently disclose the name of the entity responsible for their generation in the metadata or accompanying caption. Parties would also have to maintain internal records “of all AI-generated campaign materials, including creator details and timestamps, for verification when sought by the ECI,” the Commission said.

**Do You Know:**

- The ECI’s advisory prescribing the specific visibility and placement of AI-labels closely follows amendments to Information Technology Rules, 2021, which the IT Ministry proposed earlier this week. Although it is worth noting that the amendments are currently in a draft stage and have yet to be implemented.
- As per the draft amendments, social media platforms would have to get users to declare whether the uploaded content is synthetically generated; deploy “reasonable and appropriate technical measures”, including automated tools or other suitable mechanisms, to verify the accuracy of such declaration; and, where such declaration or technical verification confirms that the content is synthetically generated, ensure that this information — that the content is synthetically generated — is clearly and prominently displayed with an appropriate label or notice.
- If they fail to comply, the platforms may lose the legal immunity they enjoy from third-party content, meaning that the responsibility of such platforms shall extend to taking reasonable and proportionate technical measures to verify the correctness of user declarations and to ensure that no synthetically generated information is published without such declaration or label.
- The draft amendments introduce a new clause defining synthetically generated information as “information that is artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified, or altered using a computer resource, in a manner that appears reasonably authentic or true”.

#### IN THE AGE OF AI-DOCTORED VIDEOS, FIND WONDER IN WHAT IS REAL

Once, there was fame. Then, the internet happened, and fame’s cousin, virality, entered the chat. Behind fame is a face, behind virality, a moment. Whether caught, captured or created on camera, a moment — free of the burden of a person and a personality — can drive views, profit, influence. If you can create it, you can mine it for all its worth — social media influencers, corporate sales teams and IT departments of political parties all have figured this out. This is why, as AI tools become handy, doctored and/or AI-created videos have been gaining ground. Recently, a video of a drunk man petting a tiger and offering it alcohol in Madhya Pradesh went viral. In comments sections and online articles, people expressed awe and suspicion: A moving scene caught on screen or a farce created by AI? Only long after its wide circulation did the fact that it was the latter come to light.

This series of events has now become par for the course. Today, on the internet, the fake sits right next to the authentic. Telling the two apart is near impossible — and nobody wants to be fooled. The result? Netizens who have turned into citizen detectives. Every viral video, every piece of music, art, or writing is met with suspicion. The joy of being able to relate to people across oceans, the excitement of discovering new talent, new art, and the awe at the universe revealing itself are all marred by a sense of distrust.



In discovering how to crack the algorithm, then, what is lost is more than just authenticity: It is also the sense of wonder which the promise of authenticity once offered. After all, who doesn't want a drunk man and a lonely tiger to be friends? Maybe then, what is needed is to look elsewhere. Step away from the internet and into the real world: Wonders still abound.

#### SHARP REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY LOKPAL

While the Lokpal's decision to float a tender for seven luxury BMW cars has triggered public outrage, the anti-graft body's performance record shows a sharp decline in public engagement. The number of complaints the body has received since it began functioning in 2019-20 has dropped sharply from a peak of 2,469 in 2022-23 to just 233 this year till September.

The Lokpal has the jurisdiction to inquire into allegations of corruption against individuals, including the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, and government officials.

Of a total 6,955 complaints received by the Lokpal to date, 90%, or 6,264, had been received in the first four years of its establishment till 2023. The remaining 691 were received in the past three years.

The data available on the Lokpal's website revealed that the body has ordered preliminary inquiries in only 289 cases against all the complaints it has received so far, and prosecution sanctions have been granted in just seven cases.

Right to Information activist Anjali Bhardwaj told The Hindu, "The Lokpal was created after a massive public campaign to ensure an independent authority could investigate big-ticket corruption involving top officials. Yet, in all these years, it has not sanctioned prosecution in any significant case. Most complaints are being dismissed on technicalities such as format errors, while serious corruption allegations go unaddressed."

Ms. Bhardwaj also questioned the Lokpal's transparency and the pace of institutional development. "It hasn't uploaded any annual report since 2021-22, and shockingly, its prosecution wing was notified only in June 2025 — 12 years after the Lokpal law was enacted. This reflects a lack of seriousness and accountability," she said.

The controversial tender floated on October 16 by the Lokpal reads, "The Lokpal of India invites open tenders from reputed agencies for supply of seven BMW 3 series 330Li cars to the Lokpal of India."

The luxury sedan were meant for its Chairperson and members. The Lokpal currently has seven members, including its Chairperson, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar (retd.), though its sanctioned strength is eight.

RTI activist Commodore Lokesh Batra (retd.) said the Lokpal, being anti-corruption body should "save public money".

The Lokpal should avoid unnecessary extravagance, he added.

#### REBEL'S HOMECOMING

Giuseppe Maria Garibaldi, the Italian General and nationalist who played a major role in the Risorgimento, or the Unification of Italy, in the 1860s, came to be known as the 'Hero of Two



Worlds' for his revolutionary military exploits in Europe and South America. He never pulled through the loss of his native Nice to France as the price for the French support for the Risorgimento.

To many Nagas, specifically in Manipur, the 91-year-old Thuingaleng Muivah is the hero of the Naga-inhabited world, divided between two countries — India and Myanmar. This world, covering more than 57,400 sq. km, includes the 13,329 sq. km Naga Self-Administered Zone of Myanmar's Sagaing Division. Mr. Muivah is based at Camp Hebron, the central headquarters of his armed organisation, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), in adjoining Nagaland, but Manipur's pre-bifurcation Ukhrul district is where his heart is, like most other members of his Tangkhul community, which dominates the district.

Ukhrul has, thus, been central to the goal of the unified Naga homeland of the NSCN, more familiar to the world beyond as the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland or the NSCN (I-M) that he has led since April 30, 1988. The Manipur government perceived this goal, though subdued since the NSCN (I-M) signed the Framework Agreement with the government of India on August 3, 2015, as a threat to the State's territorial integrity and banned his entry until recently.

#### **Changing scenario**

Two factors facilitated Mr. Muivah's visit to his village, Somdal, 25 km from Ukhrul town, on October 22, after six decades: his ill-health and the changed political scenario since the ethnic conflict that broke out in Manipur in May 2023, realigning the equations among the State's three major communities – the Kuki-Zo, Meitei, and Naga. These factors, however, were secondary for Manipur's Nagas, who regard Mr. Muivah as Avakharar, meaning 'eldest father' or godfather in the Tangkhul tongue. Emotions, understandably, ran high when he landed in a chopper at Somdal, with almost the entire village of some 4,500 people eager to catch a glimpse of their "greatest son" from up close, if not to touch him.

The fourth of five siblings, Mr. Muivah was born on March 3, 1934, five years after the Naga Club, the first Naga political organisation, submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission stating that the Nagas should be left "alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times". In 1946, the Naga Club evolved into the Naga National Council (NNC), which subsequently fought for the independence of the Naga-inhabited areas from India. Two years after he did his post-graduation in political science from Assam's Gauhati University, Mr. Muivah bid his village adieu to join the NNC in 1964.

The closest he came to visiting his village earlier was in 2010 when the Centre cleared the trip. Bowing to sentiments in the primarily non-Naga Imphal Valley, Manipur's Congress government put its foot down and barred his entry, with the resultant crackdown claiming two lives. Mr. Muivah's convoy could not proceed beyond Nagaland's Viswema, about 120 km northwest of Somdal.

His homecoming has ignited hopes for an honourable conclusion to the Naga peace process that began on August 1, 1997, when the NSCN (I-M) and the Centre agreed to the cessation of armed conflict. His followers pray that the Naga homeland with a "separate Naga Flag and a Naga Constitution or Yehzabo" becomes a reality for the man who walked out of the NNC when it signed the "compromising" Shillong Accord in 1975. He then went ahead to form the NSCN in 1980, and later the NSCN (I-M) with Isak Chishi Swu in 1988, after differences with his Myanmar-based comrade S.S. Khaplang. "Generation comes and goes, but the nation stays," Mr. Muivah said in



Somdal on October 22. “The issue we are fighting for is greater and older than most of us who are gathered here at this Tangkhul Naga Long ground today.”

#### ROW OVER PM-SHRI SCHOOLS SCHEME, WHICH KERALA HAS AGREED TO IMPLEMENT

The Centre’s PM-SHRI schools scheme is back in the limelight, this time, for political wrangling in Kerala. The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the state has agreed to implement the scheme, retreating from what was its vehement refusal so far to allow state schools to be labelled as ‘PM-SHRI’ schools.

- The Centre’s PM Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme was approved in 2022. It seeks to develop 14,500 schools to “showcase” aspects of the NEP 2020. These schools are to be “exemplars” for other schools in their region. The scheme is for existing elementary, secondary, and senior secondary schools run by the central government and state and local governments across the country.
- So far, 13,070 schools have been selected as PM-SHRI schools. Of them, 1,533 schools are Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas, which are managed by the Centre.
- A ‘PM-SHRI’ school needs to implement NEP recommendations. The Education Ministry has laid down a set of guidelines — teaching and learning will have to involve innovative methods, like art-based and toy-based learning; vocational education is to be imparted and skill labs to be set up; schools are to ensure that children in younger classes achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills; they are to provide adequate infrastructure and facilities, including labs and computers; testing and assessments will focus on measuring the student’s competencies and not rote learning. These schools are to ensure zero dropouts, and will have to ensure improvement in learning outcomes.
- For curriculum, PM-SHRI schools are to follow either the National Curriculum Framework or the State Curriculum Framework developed by the state on the basis of the NEP.
- The Ministry has developed a School Quality Assessment Framework, a checklist of sorts that can help schools track their “transformation” under the scheme. The funds that a school receives depends on its score on this assessment framework. The scheme is funded by the Centre and states in a 60:40 ratio.
- With Kerala agreeing to implement it, only Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are currently holding out.
- West Bengal has opposed the scheme on the grounds that ‘PM-SHRI’ will have to be pre-fixed to the name of the school, despite the state having to bear part of the cost.
- The Centre has linked the release of funds under the Samagra Shiksha scheme to the implementation of PM-SHRI. Samagra Shiksha is also funded by the Centre and States in a 60:40 ratio.
- Samagra Shiksha funds support implementation of the Right to Education Act, provides uniforms and textbooks to students in government schools, supports differently abled children, and covers reimbursement provided to private schools for admissions under the economically weaker section category. States that refused to implement PM-SHRI have not received funds under Samagra Shiksha.

**Do You Know:**

- A centrally sponsored scheme is one in which the cost of implementation is mostly split in a 60:40 ratio between the Union government and the states/UTs. The mid-day meal scheme (now PM Poshan) or the PM Awas Yojana are examples of centrally sponsored schemes.
- In the case of the Northeastern states, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, and UTs without legislatures, the Centre's contribution can go up to 90 per cent.

**FEDERALISM AND FUNDS**

Kerala sprang a surprise last week by signing up for the scheme, Prime Minister Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI), that dovetails the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020, to upgrade and brand 14,500 schools nationwide as model institutions. Kerala, one of the three States to oppose the NEP-2020 (the others being Tamil Nadu and West Bengal), on the contention that it sought to encroach on the subject of school education, which is in the Concurrent List, and infuse it with communal bias and anti-scientific content, was evidently looking to gain central funds. Earlier this year, Tamil Nadu had approached the Supreme Court of India after the Centre withheld funds under the Samagra Shiksha (SS) scheme over the State's refusal to adopt the NEP-PM SHRI framework. Kerala's agreement on adopting the scheme is now in freeze after strife within the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) soon after the government signed the PM SHRI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Centre, without Cabinet approval — an issue deferred twice in Cabinet meetings. The CPI, a key LDF partner, demanded an immediate withdrawal. The CPI(M), which holds the general education portfolio, initially defended the decision, arguing that enrolment in PM SHRI was necessary to avail of federal funds withheld under the SS, which had led to salary arrears for teachers and non-teaching staff. The CPI(M) clarified that Kerala remained opposed to the NEP-2020 and would retain control over its school curriculum. The allies reached a détente on Wednesday — a cabinet subcommittee will scrutinise the MoU. Implementation of PM SHRI will remain suspended until the subcommittee's recommendation. The Centre will be formally informed of this decision.

Kerala has long excelled in school education, achieving near-universal gross enrolment ratio, high retention rates, superior learning outcomes, and modern infrastructure — milestones that render many NEP-2020 targets redundant in the State. For Kerala, PM SHRI amounts to little more than cosmetic rebranding of already high-performing institutions, but the State would be forced to comply with provisions of the NEP-2020 for integration of 'Indian Knowledge Systems', which many reckon is a euphemism for pseudoscience. It is regrettable that the Centre withholds federal funds under the SS to arm-twist States into accepting NEP-2020 or PM SHRI. While Tamil Nadu has pursued legal redress, its case has not received the judicial urgency it warrants. In India's federal polity, the judiciary must robustly defend cooperative federalism whenever it is undermined. As Kerala pauses PM SHRI, it must consider litigation to secure its rightful share of central funds. Federalism and State autonomy cannot be bargaining points in the quest for funds.

**FOREIGN VARSITIES COMING TO INDIA: REASONS, POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

When UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived on his first official visit to India earlier this month, his 125-member delegation included 14 university vice chancellors and representatives.

- Both Starmer and Prime Minister Narendra Modi referred to the United Kingdom's interest in Indian higher education after they met in Mumbai. While Modi said that "it is a matter of great joy



that nine universities from the UK are going to open campuses in India”, Starmer pointed to “the demand for the best quality higher education” being “very high” in India.

- The idea finds mention in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which recommends that select universities — those among the top 100 globally — be allowed to operate in India, calling for the “internationalisation” of education.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) issued regulations in 2023 on the subject. Before them, foreign university campuses were permitted in Gujarat’s GIFT City under International Financial Services Centres Authority regulations, issued in 2022.
- Including the three already here, 17 foreign universities have been permitted to set up campuses in India — in Mumbai, the NCR (Gurgaon, Noida, Greater Noida), Chennai, and Bengaluru. Under the UGC regulations, the only eligibility criterion for a foreign university is ranking within the top 500 in global rankings. They can then apply for approval.
- Most universities are offering three-year undergraduate courses and one-year master’s programs, mostly in business management, computer science, accounting and finance, economics, data science, and artificial intelligence (AI).
- UGC regulations mandate that the university impart the same quality of education and offer the same qualifications, curriculum, and assessment in India as the main campus. They are also allowed to hire faculty from India and abroad.
- A press release during Starmer’s visit referred to “the explosion in demand for higher education in India... which has created a huge opportunity for UK universities seeking new funding streams.” While permissions granted under the UGC regulations gained momentum this year, conditions in the UK have also played a role.
- Universities in the UK have been grappling with a financial crisis for some time now. The government announced an increase in tuition fees from the 2025-26 academic session onwards, but its previous freeze for undergraduate students meant they relied on international students (who pay higher fees) to keep pace with inflation. International student numbers have, however, fallen in recent years. Cost-cutting measures have thus kicked in, leading to courses being closed and cutbacks on staff and research.
- The UGC regulations were introduced at a time when the number of Indian students going abroad, to the top destination countries of the US, UK, and Canada, saw a sharp spike post-Covid. However, with countries increasingly introducing measures to reduce immigration, these numbers have seen a slump.
- While some of these foreign universities have said that students from their India campuses might be able to spend a semester or a year at the campus abroad, studying at the India campus of these universities may not necessarily pave the way for students to land a job abroad.

**Do You Know:**

- Including the three already permitted, 17 foreign universities have been authorised to set up campuses in India as per UGC and GIFT City regulations.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends “internationalisation” of Indian higher education and allows select universities (top 100 globally) to operate in India.



## EXTENDING PM-POSHAN TO INCLUDE BREAKFAST WILL HELP ALIGN NATIONAL POLICY WITH NUTRITIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL REALITIES

The proposal by several states and Union Territories, including Rajasthan, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim, Lakshadweep, Gujarat and Delhi, to extend the Centre's midday-meal scheme — PM-Poshan — to add a breakfast provision in government and government-aided schools is both timely and commendable. While a similar proposal by the Education Ministry was turned down in 2021-22 by the Ministry of Finance, for the Centre to embrace this proposal pitched by state governments across party lines would signify a welcome alignment of national policy with nutritional and educational realities, and a recognition that learning begins not with the first lesson but with the first meal of the day.

The educational and health benefits of a breakfast scheme are well established. The National Education Policy 2020 notes that “the morning hours after a nutritious breakfast can be particularly productive for the study of cognitively more demanding subjects”. Studies show that a morning meal boosts continuity of nutrition while lifting attendance, attention and equity in classrooms. Tamil Nadu's example is instructive: Its breakfast programme, launched in 2022, expanded to reach about 24 lakh students, with commensurate improvements in attendance and health outcomes. The logic is simple: Nourished children learn better. In addition to the seven states/UTs, 11 others, including Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Meghalaya, have asked for the scheme to be extended to students up to Class XII. While the Centre estimates the additional cost of a nationwide breakfast rollout at around Rs 6,000 crore annually, such a cost is outweighed by the benefits, especially when compared with the downstream burdens of remedial education, healthcare and lost productivity.

Framing the breakfast initiative as more than a meal is crucial, if it is to succeed nationally. The initiative must be recognised as an investment in education, health, and inclusive growth. States advocating for the scheme under the PM POSHAN umbrella have stressed that this is not a mere add-on but central to fulfilling the promise of education for all. Effective implementation will require careful attention to logistics — kitchen infrastructure, supply chains, hygiene, adherence to nutritional guidelines, balanced meals, robust monitoring, and meaningful community engagement. Just as vital would be addressing the strain already felt by those who sustain the midday-meal network. Repeated strikes by Anganwadi and ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers have drawn attention to their low pay and excessive workloads. Adding a breakfast layer without scaling up staff, infrastructure, and funds would simply shift the burden. The Centre must ensure that frontline workers are supported if the programme expands. Welcoming the states' proposal, therefore, should go hand in hand with a commitment to fairness and feasibility.

## 'HEALTH HAZARD': HC SAYS CAN'T ALLOW ORS-LABELLED BEVERAGES IN MARKET

With the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) upholding its ban on beverages labelled ORS, this time in a reasoned order, the Delhi High Court Friday made it clear that it is not going to interfere with the regulator's order, noting that such products have been flagged as a “health hazard” by the regulator and the court reiterating that “public health considerations is of paramount.” The judge was hearing a plea by Dr Reddy's Laboratory (DRL), which has moved the high court seeking permission to exhaust its stock of ready-to-drink fruit flavoured beverages which it sells as an Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) branded as 'Rebalanz VITORS'.



- While DRL informed the court that it is rebranding its product now as 'Rebalanz Vitenergy', the court orally proposed that for its existing stock in circulation, it can approach the FSSAI, while refusing to grant permission to exhaust the stock.
- Justice Datta indicated that he shall pass orders on DRL's plea, while indicating that it will allow FSSAI's embargo to continue. "I'm not disturbing it, given the public health concerns," Justice Datta said orally.
- The FSSAI, in two orders dated October 14 and 15, had reasoned that the use of the term 'ORS' in the trademarked name or in the naming of any food product otherwise — whether fruit-based, non-carbonated, or ready-to-drink beverages — even when accompanied by a prefix or suffix, constitutes a violation of the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006, and the regulations made thereunder".
- It had held that "such practices are misleading to consumers by way of false, deceptive, ambiguous, and erroneous names/label declarations".
- On October 17, acting on a petition by the J&J subsidiary, the Delhi High Court had paused the operation of two orders of the FSSAI, which restrained the use of the term "ORS" in branding beverages. The move had drawn flak from paediatricians and health experts, given that such beverages have been flagged for their high sugar content.
- The FSSAI order dated October 30, as accessed by The Indian Express, is based on a representation made by pharma multinational Johnson and Johnson's subsidiary JNTL Consumer Health. The order notes that the reason for a blanket ban on ORS-branded products is because "complaints have been received that such products have been mistakenly consumed by patients, particularly children, in place of WHO recommended ORS, resulting in adverse health outcomes."
- The regulator, operating under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, also notes that "disclaimers are ineffective" when the brand name containing "ORS" visually dominates the label; the product labelling prominently displays the term "ORS" and uses colour schemes, fonts, and representations identical or similar to medically approved oral rehydration solutions; and consumers, particularly laypersons, do not read or comprehend such disclaimers at the time of purchase.

**Do You Know:**

- According to WHO- Food standards are a mechanism for promoting food safety and quality among the general public. Food standards ensure that established food safety practices are followed. They provide guidance on hygienic food handling for farmers and processors. They define the maximum levels of additives, contaminants, residues of pesticides, and veterinary drugs that can safely be consumed by all.
- In India, the Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006, provides the legal framework for monitoring the status of food safety, and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is the main authority for ensuring food safety.
- Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006:

It aims to establish a single reference point for all matters relating to food safety and standards, by moving from multi-level, multi-departmental control to a single line of command. The Act established FSSAI and the State Food Safety Authorities for each State.



- FSSAI:

It is an autonomous statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the administrative Ministry of FSSAI. Its headquarters is in Delhi.

### COMBAT SQUADRON STRENGTH DWINDLES, GOVT LOOKS AT PLAN TO UPGRADE SU-30MKIS

With the final exit of the MiG-21s last month bringing down the IAF fighter squadron strength to 29 as against the sanctioned 42, there's a push within the government to go ahead with the programme to upgrade the Sukhoi Su-30MKI fleet, the backbone of the IAF, officials aware of the latest discussions have told The Sunday Express.

- The Su-30MKI upgrade programme, also referred to as the Super Sukhoi programme, is a major midlife upgrade programme which can increase the service life of the multirole fighter by another 20 years.
- According to officials, the upgradation proposal is currently being examined by the Ministry of Defence and efforts are underway to fast-track its movement to the Cabinet Committee of Security (CCS) for its approval.
- The upgrade, the official said, will include a new cockpit, avionics, radars and IR sensors, a new electronic warfare suite including jammer pods.
- Officials said the upgrade programme is nearly finalised and once it gets the CCS sanction, state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has set a timeline to deliver the aircraft's initial operational clearance (IOC) version in five years and the final operational clearance (FOC) version in seven years of the CCS nod.
- The development also assumes significance in the context of the IAF's dwindling fighter squadron strength, which went down to 29 after the last of the MiG-21s retired in September. The IAF currently has a sanctioned fighter squadron strength of 42.
- The IAF is yet to receive delivery of any of the 83 Light Combat Aircraft Tejas Mk1A from the HAL.

In November 2023, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, had accorded an Acceptance of Necessity for upgradation of Su-30MKI aircraft indigenously from HAL.

#### **Do You Know:**

- With the Prime Minister helming it, the Cabinet Committee on Security has the ministers for Finance, Defence, Home Affairs and External Affairs as its members. It is responsible for debates, discussions and appointments of/ in the national security bodies.
- Major decisions with respect to the significant appointments, issues of national security, defence expenditure of India are taken by CCS.



- Besides dealing with defence related issues, the CCS also brainstorms on issues relating to law and order and internal security, and policy matters concerning foreign affairs on security-related issues. It also considers matters relating to atomic energy.

## INDIAN RAILWAYS TO PATRONISE 'AABHAR' ONLINE STORE IN A BID TO ENCOURAGE LOCAL ARTISANS

In a bid to promote local talent, the Indian Railways will patronise the newly launched 'Aabhar' online store that will showcase a range of exquisite gift items manufactured by indigenous tribes, handloom weavers and others coming under the ambit of One District One Product (ODOP) and Geographical Indication (GI) products.

The online store hosted by the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) sources gift items exclusively from the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), and various Central and State Handicraft and Handloom Emporiums.

Promoted with the 'Vocal for Local' campaign, the store would offer a variety of articles and hampers that could be used in official events, ceremonies, and functions. The objective is to promote social inclusion and encourage local artisans and traditional industries.

### Promote rich heritage

Sharing details of the website and liaison officers to facilitate the purchase, the Railway Board referred to a note issued by the Chief Executive Officer, GeM, which stated that the purpose of the initiative was also to promote India's rich heritage through handlooms, handicrafts, artisanal goods, etc., by providing market access to local artisans, rural entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises. The GeM is aimed at supporting a sustainable and inclusive economic development.

To provide a market for local/ indigenous products and create additional income opportunities for the marginalised sections of society, the railways launched 'One Station One Product' (OSOP) scheme over its network a few years ago where articles, like artefacts made by indigenous tribes, handlooms by local weavers, and handicrafts like chikankari were showcased.

## RELIEF, REHABILITATION

Historically, October and November mark the period when the Bay of Bengal throws up devastating cyclones. Of the 12 such cyclones during the 18th Century CE-20th Century CE, nine were recorded in these months. They include the severe cyclone which made landfall near Nizampatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on November 19, 1977, and the super cyclone, which crossed the Odisha coast near Paradip on October 29, 1999. The human toll in both disasters was about 10,000 each, according to an India Meteorological Department (IMD) publication in 2021. Memories of such events get rekindled whenever a cyclonic storm develops in the Bay, an example being Cyclone, which began to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm on October 27-28, 2025. Though not as strong as the ones in 1977 and 1999, this does not provide much comfort to the authorities in the three coastal States, including Odisha. Parts of north coastal Andhra Pradesh, especially Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli and Srikakulam districts, and also Ganjam and Gajapati of Odisha have received significant rainfall. In Andhra's Kakinada and Konaseema regions, nearly 10,000 people were evacuated. The Odisha government made arrangements for the evacuation of people from vulnerable places amid inclement weather in several southern districts where there was a "red alert". National Disaster Response Force teams were also deployed.



Over the years, the preparedness of the Union and State governments has improved to an extent where the prospect of thousands dying in cyclones has become a thing of the past, if the last 20-odd years are an indication. However, there is still damage to public and private properties, affecting the livelihood opportunities of the under-privileged sections in particular. Likewise, milch and draught animals and poultry are severely impacted. When Cyclone Gaja struck the Tamil Nadu coast near Vedaranyam in November 2018, Nagapattinam district and Thanjavur saw large-scale losses of cattle and poultry. Several coastal States have been taking measures, structural and non-structural, to mitigate the effect of cyclones. Notwithstanding improvements to their knowledge and skills, the authorities in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha will have to demonstrate in action all that they have learnt so far while undertaking relief and rehabilitation measures. The political leadership should not lag behind and must ensure that all affected people are safeguarded and treated in an impartial way.

**Note:**

Recently, UNDP India has published an in-depth story on how women in Odisha are using poetry, storytelling, and community leadership as tools for climate resilience and awareness. It entails the story of local “climate champions” like Kanchan Jena from Balasore district who used poetry in local form for climate storytelling. She is part of an initiative called Enhancing Climate Resilience of India’s Coastal Communities (ECRICC) which is helping communities turn hardship into strength.

**HOW DO CYCLONES FORM AND HOW ARE THEY MEASURED?****The story so far:**

If you think of a cyclone as a machine, it would be an incredibly powerful entity — an engine that draws heat from the earth’s tropical waters to drive destructive winds, heavy rainfall, and storm surges. Similar storms are known variously as hurricanes in the Atlantic and eastern Pacific Oceans, and typhoons in the western Pacific Ocean.

**How do cyclones form?**

A tropical cyclone begins as an area of low pressure, often associated with clusters of thunderstorms. For such a disturbance to develop into a cyclone, several atmospheric and oceanic conditions must come together. The most important is warm sea surface temperature, generally above 26.5°C and up to a depth of at least 50 m. When moist air near such a water surface rises, it releases its latent heat, cools, and condenses to form clouds. The released heat warms the surrounding air, causing it to rise even further and drawing in more moist air from below, setting up a self-reinforcing cycle of convection.

A second important condition is that the atmosphere must be unstable, that is, rising air must continue to rise rather than being forced back down, and there must be a sufficient Coriolis force (a deflection of circulating air due to the earth’s rotation, causing it to curve right in the Northern Hemisphere and left in the Southern Hemisphere) to induce rotation. As the Coriolis effect is weakest at the equator, cyclones rarely form within about five degrees of latitude from it. At the same time, the vertical wind shear, which is the difference in wind speed and direction between the lower and the upper levels of the atmosphere, must be low. High wind shear can disrupt a cyclone’s organised circulation and keep it from building in strength.



As the cyclone develops, a well-defined centre called the 'eye' may form. This is a calm, clear region surrounded by a ring of towering thunderstorms that produce the most intense winds and heaviest rainfall, called the eyewall.

Air spirals in towards the low-pressure centre at the surface and rises rapidly near the eyewall, while at higher altitudes it flows outwards, completing the circulation.

#### **How are cyclones classified?**

Since the storm draws energy from the ocean through evaporation, it can intensify as long as it remains over warm water. Cyclones are primarily classified by their maximum sustained wind speed and central pressure. Different ocean basins use slightly different classification schemes but the principle is the same. In the North Indian Ocean, the India Meteorological Department classification ranges from a 'depression' (31-49 km/hr) to 'super cyclonic storm' (>222 km/hr).

For measurements, meteorologists use ground-based observations, aircraft reconnaissance, satellite data, and ocean buoys. Satellites play a crucial role in monitoring cyclones over remote ocean areas: infrared images help estimate the temperature of cloud tops, indicating storm intensity, while visible and microwave sensors reveal structure, rainfall distribution, and eye formation.

In the North Atlantic, specialised aircraft called hurricane hunters fly directly into storms to measure wind speeds, pressure, humidity, and temperature. Instruments called dropsondes are released into the storm, transmitting data as they fall. In the Indian Ocean, satellites and automated buoys provide most of the data.

#### **How well are cyclones forecast?**

Forecasting the path and intensity of cyclones remains a complex challenge. Sophisticated numerical weather models simulate atmospheric and oceanic conditions, but even small errors in initial data can lead to large uncertainties. Advances in computing power, remote sensing, and data assimilation have improved forecasts significantly over the last few decades. Today, most meteorological agencies can predict a cyclone's track three to five days in advance with reasonable accuracy.

### **WHY HAS IUCN RED-FLAGGED THE WESTERN GHATS?**

#### **The story so far:**

The expansive Western Ghats and two national parks in India — Assam's Manas national park and West Bengal's Sundarbans national park — have been categorised as being of "significant concern" in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) list of natural World Heritage sites across Asia.

#### **Why did the IUCN state?**

The IUCN's World Heritage Outlook 4 report released earlier this month attributes four threats to the loss of habitats and species in South Asia: climate change, tourism activities, invasive alien species, and roads. The report categorises the natural sites as "good", "good with some concerns", "significant concern", and "critical". The report uses four cycles of conservation assessments undertaken since 2014.



“Each of these categories not only shows the potential for a site to preserve its values and underlying attributes but also indicates the urgency of measures that need to be taken to improve the conservation outlook and ensure the long-term conservation of all sites,” says the report. The IUCN assessment of over 200 natural and mixed World Heritage sites “offers the most in-depth analyses of threats facing natural World Heritage around the world and their protection and management status,” says Grethel Aguilar, IUCN director general, in the introduction to the report.

The report points out that the percentage of sites with “a positive conservation outlook has, for the first time, decreased significantly.”

#### **Do we have ‘good’ protected areas?**

Protected areas in South Asia are being usurped rapidly, obliterating natural habitats. Of the 228 sites assessed since 2014, some 63% of sites had a positive outlook in 2014, 2017 and 2020, however, ‘the IUCN World Heritage Outlook 4 shows that in 2025 only 57% of these sites have a positive conservation outlook.’”

The threats are also shapeshifting, “it is ...notable that roads and railroads are now among the top five greatest threats to natural World Heritage in Asia, while in 2020 this was not the case.” The other threats include: forest fires, hunting, roadkill, waste disposal, encroachment, illegal logging etc.

Of the 32 Asian sites categorised as “good with some concerns,” four happen to be in India — The Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area, Kaziranga National Park, Keoladeo National Park, and Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks. Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim has been rated “good” in its conservation outlook, valuing “attributes [that] are currently in good condition and likely to be maintained for the foreseeable future, provided that current conservation measures are maintained.”

The Western Ghats, a mosaic of forests and grasslands, are older than the Himalayas and have an exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism, habitat to some 325 globally threatened (listed in IUCN’s Red List) flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species, according to UNESCO. This includes the Nilgiri tahr, a stocky, agile goat found nowhere else in the world.

#### **What makes the Ghats vulnerable?**

The Western Ghats are highly endangered not least by hundreds of hydropower projects such as the proposed ₹5,843 crore Sillahalla Pumped Storage Hydroelectric project in the Nilgiris, which involves constructing dams across River Sillahalla and River Kundah, with an aim to generate 1,000 MW of power for Tamil Nadu’s plains.

Moreover, tourism is creating problems of garbage, often consumed by wild animals such as elephants and exacerbating conflict. Plantations are replacing natural ecosystems. And climate change has forced fauna to adapt by redistributing themselves from fast-warming lower altitudes to higher reaches, such as in the case of the Nilgiri flycatcher and the black and orange flycatcher. Exotic species are colonising natural forests, such as eucalyptus and acacia (both originally from Australia), which were introduced here during the colonial era. As for the Sundarbans mangroves where tigers swim, salinity, heavy metal contamination, and unsustainable resource extraction threatens the ecosystem. Sea level rise and frequent storm surges reduce mangrove biodiversity, says the report.



### Is there hope yet?

Outside India, seven sites in China have been proclaimed “best protected and managed protected areas,” including the Badain Jaran Desert-Towers of Sand and Lake, Chengjiang Fossil Site, and Mount Huangshan.

The Natural World Heritage sites make up less than 1% of the Earth’s surface, but nurture more than 20% of mapped global species richness. “This includes over 75,000 species of plants, and over 30,000 species of mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles and amphibians,” says the report.

This report is timely. “The world has agreed to halt biodiversity loss through the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is uniquely placed to meet these challenges by bridging the gap between nature and culture, and protecting places with extraordinary biodiversity, functional habitats and high ecosystem integrity,” says the report. “This report is more than a health check. It is a guide for action,” says Ms. Aguilar.

### FIREWORKS IN THE SKY, CLOUD OVER AIR DATA

Sparks fly: Families and friends gather to celebrate Deepavali in New Delhi. However, the festival also brought with it a big dip in air quality. Shashi Shekhar Kashyap

As Delhiites burst firecrackers well past the 10 p.m. deadline set by the Supreme Court for Deepavali night, air pollution shot up 70-100 times the World Health Organization limits in many parts of the city, but fell quickly afterward, according to government data.

The relatively faster decline in pollution was due to higher wind speeds and temperatures, according to experts. This is because Deepavali was in October this year, rather than in November, when the winter would be stronger, leading to slower wind speeds and lower temperatures.

However, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) data on air quality for the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday had several missing data points when pollution was at its peak. This led experts and activists to question the authenticity of the data, with many suggesting that actual pollution levels were likely higher than what was officially reported.

On Tuesday (October 21) morning, Delhi was the “most polluted” major city in the world, according to IQAir’s (a Swiss air quality technology company) live data for over 120 cities.

Meanwhile, Delhi’s 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) was 351 (very poor) at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, as per the Central Pollution Control Board’s daily official bulletin, which is considered a day’s official AQI. A higher AQI means an increase in air pollution. The air quality on Tuesday — the day following Deepavali — was better than in 2020, 2021, and 2023, but worse compared with 2022 and 2024. Unlike in many previous years, the city did not witness a prolonged smog episode after the festival.

Although the Supreme Court had allowed only the use of green firecrackers in Delhi, traditional firecrackers were also available in the city in the run-up to Deepavali.



## AIR MOST FOUL

### Is bursting firecrackers in rainy weather worse?

The air in a particular place is likely to become more polluted when firecrackers are burst on an overcast day with high humidity. This is due to a combination of the pollutants released by the fireworks and the prevailing weather conditions that trap these pollutants closer to the ground.

Firecrackers release a variety of harmful substances into the atmosphere. These include particulate matter, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and sulphur dioxide. These emissions can combine to create a toxic haze, which significantly reduces air quality and visibility.

Overcast skies typically lead to cooler days and a lower mixing height, which is a layer of the atmosphere where pollutants can disperse. When this height is lower, pollutants are trapped closer to the ground, leading to higher concentrations. Most smog episodes coincide with cloudy skies for this reason. Higher humidity exacerbates the problem. Water vapour in the air can interact with pollutants to form secondary pollutants.

## HAVE 'GREEN' CRACKERS BROUGHT DOWN POLLUTION?

### The story so far:

In the run-up to Deepavali, the Supreme Court legalised the sale of "green" crackers, in a bid to balance three competing interests: the "sentiments" of the people during the festive season; the pollution caused due to the burning of firecrackers; and livelihood concerns of those employed in the firecracker industry. The largely small-scale informal sector has been hit by the cracker ban in the National Capital Region since 2018.

### How are 'green' crackers made?

In 2018, the Nagpur-based CSIR-National Environmental and Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) initiated the development of "green" crackers that reportedly cut particulate emissions by a minimum of 30%, and sometimes up to 80%, while maintaining brightness, safety, and shelf-life. This was largely achieved by three major chemical-formulation changes: the use of additives such as 'zeolite'; water-releasing molecules such as boron-based reagents to act as dust suppressants; and the addition of metallic composites to enhance combustion temperature and improve combustion efficiency. Traditionally, firecrackers have been made with barium nitrate, antimony and a range of metals that, over the years, have been linked to respiratory diseases and even cancer.

The green avatar of the 'flower pot', one of the most popular fireworks, has a mixture of water and lime that is chemically stored in the cracker. When lit, the effulgence also triggers water, and the moisture, its makers contend, wets the dust-and-smoke particles making it settle rather than becoming airborne. NEERI claims that tests in its labs have seen a reduction of nearly 30% in particulate matter and also reduced the release of sulphur dioxide as well as nitrous oxide emissions when these flower pots are burnt. Green sparklers use 32% potassium nitrate, 40% aluminium powder, 11% aluminium chips, and 17% "proprietary additives" to reduce PM10 and PM2.5 to 30%.

Similarly, a new formulation of a 'bomb' named 'SWAS' uses 72% of a "proprietary additive," 16% potassium nitrate oxidiser, 9% aluminium powder, and 3% sulphur to reduce PM10 and PM2.5.



Since these crackers were developed, there have been demonstrations by NEERI at major fireworks manufacturing units such as Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu.

#### What has been the uptake?

NEERI, according to the Commission for Air Quality Management (Delhi-NCR), had also developed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to register green cracker manufacturers and to provide technology transfer of the formulations for manufacturing such crackers. The list of green crackers have been put on the website of NEERI for registration and grant for individual products. It would require the manufacturer to get multiple registrations from NEERI based on the number of products. Only manufacturers with an explosive licence from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) would be granted registration by NEERI. This year, there were nearly 1,500 applicants who procured a licence to manufacture these crackers with the vast majority of them from Tamil Nadu, followed by West Bengal. The term “green” cracker, strictly speaking, is a misnomer as green usually refers to zero-emission-or-smoke products. An electric vehicle, for instance is ‘green,’ as it is powered by a battery with no carbon emissions. In an academic article from 2023, scientists from NEERI when evaluating the results from such crackers referred to them as ‘Reduced Emission Fireworks,’ a more accurate term. However, the SC order refers to these products as “green”.

#### Are green crackers less polluting?

The stated claim of the makers is that they reduce particulate matter pollution by 30%. However, these are numbers computed by the lab themselves and have not been verified in real-world conditions. The Supreme Court in its order noted that relative to 2018 and 2024, there was “not much improvement” in the overall air quality. However, it used this to conclude that, therefore, permitting green crackers for Deepavali, though with restrictions on their use, could not make the deteriorating air quality much worse than it already was. On October 20 and 21, air quality deteriorated to ‘very poor’, according to readings from sensors through the NCR. In the days leading up to the festival, the air quality was already on a decline. This is not unusual in mid-October, given dipping temperatures and a drop in wind speed. Several sensors recorded particulate matter concentrations well over 1,000 microgram/cubic metre. A contributor to this was also stubble burning in Punjab but there is no official or independent scientific measurement available yet of their relative contribution.

### CHHATH PUJA: WHAT MAKES THIS FESTIVAL SO DEAR TO THE PURVANCHALI HEART

With Bihar going to polls soon, Chhath has attracted a lot of political attention this year, with leaders across party lines offering greetings. While Chhath has been celebrated in Bihar, parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Nepal for centuries, over the past decade or so, it has become a lot more visible across the country.

- Chhath Puja is a four-day elaborate celebration in honour of the Sun. It involves a long fast without water, and making offerings to **Usha** and **Pratyusha**, the light of the rising and the setting Sun, while standing in a water body. The prominent rituals begin from the **sixth day (shashthi) of the Kartik shukla paksha**, which means the waxing-moon fortnight of the month of Kartik.
- Some believe that it is a carryover from the time that man worshipped nature. The Rig Veda mentions elaborate rituals to worship the sun. Others trace its origins in the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.



- After Lord Ram and Goddess Sita returned victorious to Ayodhya from Lanka, they are said to have observed a fast and conducted a yagna for the Sun god.
- In the Mahabharata, when the Pandavas were in exile, some sages visited them. Draupadi, realising she had nothing to offer them, went to sage Dhaumya for help. He advised her to observe a fast and pray to the Sun, and eventually, all her prayers were answered. In the same epic, Karna also organised an elaborate ceremony in honour of Surya (the Sun), his father.
- Today, Chhath is a festival that epitomises religiosity in Bihar, and countless devotees join their hands as the Sun's rays spread over them.
- Chhathi maiya or **Mother Chhathi, Sun's sister**, is considered an exacting but generous deity. While the rules governing the **four-day festival** are exceedingly strict, immense spiritual gains are said to accrue to whoever observes them all successfully.
- The **first day of the festival is called naha kha**, where those observing it take a meal (khana) only after a ceremonial bath in a river or a pond (nahana). Water brought back from the waterbody is used to make a chulha or a stove, meals for those observing the fast are prepared on this for the rest of the festival. The meal partaken after the bath consists of a **pumpkin sabzi**.
- The **second day is called kharna**, on which the one observing the fast takes only one meal in the evening, of **roti and kheer (rice pudding)**. On the third day, devotees go to the banks of a water body. Those who can't, build a temporary pool in their homes.
- As the Sun sets, the person fasting **raises the soop to it as an offering (arghya)**. Friends and family members of the one fasting pour milk or water on the soop. This is called the **Sanjh ka Arghya**, or the evening offering. The next day, the same ritual is conducted at dawn, for the rising Sun, called the **Bhor ka Arghya**.
- This festival means the coming together of the community, the legendary Bihari migrants returning home to soak themselves in the homeland and its culture once more.
- For many Purvanchalis, 'religiosity' instantly invokes the lambent light at riverbanks, hundreds of twinkling diyas, Sharda Sinha songs, and a thousands-strong mass of humanity animated by a common purpose.
- People from any caste can observe the festival. There are no priests involved, it is the devotee directly fasting for and praying to a visible, apparent God, who shines on everyone equally. The offerings made to the deity are of seasonal, locally produced and thus easily accessible fruit.
- No matter how rich or poor you are, the rules are the same for everyone, and the success of the festival lies in how faithfully you observe the rules, not on what scale you observe them at.
- As the Purvanchali diaspora spreads, it has become an important votebank in many states. Thus, state governments far from Bihar now make arrangements for devotees to observe Chhath comfortably.

**Do You Know:**

- "The Government of India is engaged in a major endeavour connected with Chhath Puja, striving to include the Chhath Mahaparva in Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. When



Chhath Puja is included in the Unesco list, people in every corner of the world will be able to experience its grandeur and divinity,” PM Modi remarked during Mann ki baat.

- Unesco defines a World Heritage Site as a place of “outstanding universal value,” representing either cultural, natural, or a mix of both types of significance. These sites range widely, from centuries-old architectural wonders and sacred sites to lush rainforests, coral reefs, and dramatic mountain landscapes.
- They highlight not only artistic and historical brilliance, but also the Earth’s ecological and scientific richness. As of July 2025, India has 44 UNESCO world heritage sites.

## SHORT NEWS

### CLIMATE INEQUALITY REPORT 2025

— The Climate Inequality Report titled ‘Climate Change: A Capital Challenge, Why Climate Policy Must Tackle Ownership’ was released on 29th October, 2025.

— The report is co-authored by an economist and co-director of the World Inequality Lab, Lucas Chancel, and Cornelia Mohren, Environmental Director, World Inequality Lab.

— According to the report, wealthy individuals fuel the climate crisis through their investments, even more than their consumption and lifestyles.

— At the world level, the top 1% represent 15% of global consumption-based emissions, while they account for 41% of global emissions associated with private capital ownership.

— Climate change can deepen wealth inequality as the share of wealth held by the global top 1 per cent could increase to 46 per cent in 2050 from 38.5 per cent at present if those individuals were to make and own all necessary climate investments in the next decades.

— In order to address the dual challenges of climate crisis and wealth inequality, the report suggested three policies avenues:

- i. A global ban on new fossil fuel investments
- ii. A financial investment tax on the carbon content of assets
- iii. Major public investment in low-carbon infrastructure

### UNEP ADAPTATION GAP REPORT

— Recently, UNEP has released the ‘Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty’. The series provides regular updates on what is happening globally in planning, implementation, and finance for adaptation to climate change.

— According to the report, the developing countries will require at least USD 310 billion annually by 2035 to adapt to climate change — 12 times more than current international public finance flows.

— The report found that the new collective quantified goal for climate finance (NCQG) is insufficient to meet developing countries’ adaptation finance needs in 2035.

**4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



#### ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC) SUMMIT

- The APEC summit was held from October 31 to November 1, 2025, in Gyeongju, South Korea. The permanent secretariat of APEC is located in Singapore.
- At the APEC summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the establishment of a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization to govern the technology's development, set international rules, and foster collaboration among nations.
- APEC is a regional economic forum that was established in 1989. Its stated aim was to “leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific and create greater prosperity for the people of the region through regional economic integration”.
- The APEC economies are Australia, Brunei, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong (as part of China), the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Peru, and Chile – as located geographically around the Pacific Ocean.

#### XI VOWS TO PROTECT FREE TRADE AT APEC AS TRUMP SKIPS KEY REGIONAL SUMMIT

Chinese leader Xi Jinping told Asia-Pacific leaders on Friday that his country would help to defend global free trade at an annual economic regional forum snubbed by U.S. President Donald Trump. Xi took centre stage at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit that began Friday in the South Korean city of Gyeongju, as Trump left the country a day earlier after reaching deals with Xi meant to ease their escalating trade war. This year's two-day APEC summit has been heavily overshadowed by the Trump-Xi meeting that was arranged on the sidelines.

#### ASIA PACIFIC ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION GROUP (APAC- AIG) MEETING

- Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) on behalf of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, hosted a four-day Asia Pacific Accident Investigation Group (APAC- AIG) meeting along with a workshop from 28-31 October 2025.
- This is the first time that India has hosted the APAC-AIG meeting. This meeting is held annually which is generally hosted by one of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) member states in the APAC region.
- ICAO is a specialised organisation of the United Nations created through the Chicago Convention (formally known as the Convention on International Civil Aviation) of 1944 to promote safe and orderly growth of international civil aviation throughout the world.

#### INDO-PACIFIC REGIONAL DIALOGUE (IPRD) 2025

- The 7th Edition of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue was held at the Manekshaw Centre in Delhi from October 28 to 30, 2025, under the theme of ‘Promoting Holistic Maritime Security and Growth: Regional Capacity-Building and Capability-Enhancement’.
- The IPRD is the Indian Navy's annual, international, apex-level conference, and is the principal manifestation of the Navy's outreach at the strategic level.



- Each successive edition of the IPRD seeks to sequentially focus upon the pillars of the “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative” (IPOI).
- In 2019, the IPOI was launched at East Asia Summit and in 2020 the IPOI and SAGAR were linked at ASEAN-India summit.

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#### EIGHTH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE ASSEMBLY (ISA)

- The President of India, Droupadi Murmu, inaugurated the opening plenary of the Eighth Session of the International Solar Alliance Assembly (ISA) in New Delhi, on October 28, 2025.
- The Assembly witnessed the launch of five ISA knowledge products — Ease of Doing Solar 2025, Solar PV Skills and Jobs in Africa, Solar Compass: Special Issue on Integrated Photovoltaics, Global Floating Solar Framework, and Global Solar Trends & Outlook 2025.
- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a joint initiative of France and India, launched during COP21 in Paris in 2015 with the aim of making an unprecedented effort to promote solar energy.
- Headquartered in New Delhi, the ISA brings together over 120 member countries to improve energy access and security worldwide and promote solar power as a sustainable transition to a clean energy future.

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#### INDIA MARITIME WEEK – 2025

- The India Maritime Week 2025 was hosted by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) from October 27 to 31 at NESCO Grounds in Mumbai. The theme of IMW 2025 is ‘Uniting Oceans, One Maritime Vision’ – which reflects the timeless Indian ethos of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’.
- The government has decided to invest Rs 70,000 crore in the maritime sector to boost domestic capacity, build greenfield and brownfield shipyards.
- The logo of the proposed National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal in Gujarat was unveiled by Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on the second day of India Maritime Week 2025 in Mumbai.

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#### US, RUSSIA TO BE PART OF MEGA INDIAN NAVY DRILL IN FEBRUARY

The US and Russian navies are among over 55 countries set to take part in the Indian Navy’s mega biennial maritime exercise Milan in February. Simultaneously, the Navy will also host two other major international maritime events— the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs at Visakhapatnam, during which the Indian Navy would assume Chairmanship for the second time (2025-27). The three events are scheduled between 15 and 25 February.

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#### 2026 REPUBLIC DAY GUESTS

- In a first, India is inviting the European Union’s leadership — President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Council Antonio Costa — as chief guests for the Republic Day celebrations next year, The Indian Express has learnt.



— An invitation to be the Republic Day chief guest is highly symbolic from the Indian government's perspective. New Delhi has been weaving strategy with hospitality to decide its chief guest.

— This year, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto was the chief guest at the Republic Day.

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#### RASHTRIYA EKTA DIWAS

— October 31, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birth anniversary is celebrated as 'Rashtriya Ekta Diwas' or National Unity Day.

— India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, played a key role in bringing the country together after independence in 1947.

— National Unity Day was first observed in 2014 following the Government of India's decision to honour Sardar Patel's exceptional contributions to nation-building.

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a special ₹150 commemorative coin and stamp as a tribute on this occasion.

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#### KOYLA SHAKTI DASHBOARD AND CLAMP PORTAL

— The Union Minister of Coal and Mines, Shri G. Kishan Reddy, has launched two digital platforms, the Koyla Shakti Dashboard and the Coal Land Acquisition, Management, and Payment (CLAMP) Portal.

— Koyla Shakti enables real-time monitoring of coal movement through rail, road, and multimodal systems, facilitating data-driven decision-making and predictive analytics for better demand forecasting and logistics planning.

— The CLAMP Portal is a unified digital solution aimed at streamlining land acquisition, compensation, and rehabilitation & resettlement (R&R) processes in the coal sector.

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#### TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

— Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is set to launch Delhi's first transit-oriented development in the East Delhi Hub in Karkardooma.

— TOD is an urban development strategy that aims to create the maximum possible numbers of houses, shops, offices and recreational spaces near public transport facilities. It puts public transportation at the centre of the urban development plan.

— For land-owning agencies and governments, TOD appears as a mode of value-capture financing, which allows them to fund public projects through potential increases in land values resulting from these projects.

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#### RBI, SBI ECONOMISTS CLASH PUBLICLY OVER ALLEGATIONS OF 'PLAGIARISM'

In an unprecedented public exchange between India's monetary authority and the country's biggest bank, economists from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and State Bank of India (SBI) have locked horns over allegations of 'plagiarism' in economic research. The clash, playing out on

**4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



professional networking site LinkedIn, has sparked unease within policy circles given the stature of the two institutions involved. The controversy began when Sarthak Gulati, Assistant General Manager in the RBI's Monetary Policy Department, accused SBI's research team of "verbatim replication" of sections from the central bank's Monetary Policy Reports (MPRs) in recent editions of SBI's widely-circulated Ecowrap publication without proper attribution. The MPR is a six-monthly report published in accordance with the RBI Act. As per the law, the report must explain the sources of inflation and detail inflation forecasts for the next 6-18 months.

#### ELECTRONICS COMPONENTS MANUFACTURING SCHEME (ECMS)

- The government has approved the seven projects worth Rs 5,532 crore under the ECMS.
- The scheme was approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2025 with an outlay of Rs 22,919 crore over six years. It seeks to integrate India's electronic industry with global value chains by encouraging production of essential components, sub-assemblies, and raw materials within the country.
- It was expected to generate production of Rs 4.56 lakh crore and bring in incremental investment of Rs 59,350 crore.
- Under this scheme, incentives have been linked to three key parameters: annual employment generation, capital expenditure needs and annual production.
- The components that the government is looking to target through the scheme include display modules, sub assembly camera modules, printed circuit board assemblies, lithium cell enclosures, resistors, capacitors, and ferrites, among others.

#### ABOUT THE ELECTRONICS SECTOR

- ↪ Electronics have emerged as India's third largest and fastest growing export category in 2024-25, rising from the seventh position in 2021-22. Total export in 2024-25 was ₹3.27 lakh crore.
- ↪ The country's electronics production has grown from ₹1.9 lakh crore in 2014-15 to ₹11.3 lakh crore in 2024-25, marking a six-fold increase.
- ↪ Over the past decade, electronics manufacturing has created around 25 lakh jobs across the country.

#### ISRO LAUNCHES INDIA'S HEAVIEST SATELLITE CMS-03

- ISRO has successfully launched the CMS-03 communication satellite using its biggest launch rocket LVM-3.
- This is the first time that ISRO has put a satellite weighing over 4,000 kg in the distant geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO) from the Indian soil. It was launched from the second Launch Pad (SLP) from Sriharikota.
- LVM-3, earlier referred to as Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle Mark 3 or GSLV Mk 3, uses solid, liquid, as well as cryogenic-fuel based engines to put up to 8,000 kg in low earth orbit (up to an altitude of 2,000 km from Earth's surface) and up to 4,000 kg in geosynchronous orbit (about 36,000 km).



— The previous LVM3 mission was the successful launch of Chandrayaan-3, during which India became the first country to successfully land near the lunar South Pole in 2023, according to ISRO.

#### HAL JOINS HANDS WITH US-SANCTIONED RUSSIA FIRM TO MAKE REGIONAL JETS IN INDIA

Government-owned Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) has inked a memorandum of understanding with Russia's Public Joint Stock Company United Aircraft Corporation (PJSC-UAC) — a company sanctioned by the US — to manufacture the latter's SJ-100 regional jets in India.

If the MoU materialises, SJ-100 could become the first passenger jet to be fully manufactured in India, which harbours the ambition to become an aerospace manufacturing hub.

The SJ-100, earlier known as the Sukhoi Superjet 100 (SSJ-100) — is a regional jet with a flight range of 3,530 km, and can carry up to 103 passengers. Other aircraft in its segment include the likes of Embraer E190 and the Airbus A220.

#### RAFALE FIGHTER JET

— President Droupadi Murmu, the supreme commander of the Indian armed forces, made history by undertaking a sortie in a Rafale fighter jet at the Air Force Station in Ambala, Haryana.

— This marked the first time an Indian President has flown in the advanced French-origin multirole combat aircraft.

— Group Captain Amit Gehani, the commanding officer of the IAF's No. 17 Squadron, the 'Golden Arrows', was the pilot of the aircraft carrying the President.

— The President was assisted into the Rafale cockpit by Flight Lieutenant Shivangi Singh, the first woman pilot to fly the aircraft.

#### AI TO BE INTRODUCED IN CLASS 3 FROM 2026-27

Artificial intelligence is set to be introduced in the school curriculum from Class 3 onwards in the 2026-27 academic session, according to the Education Ministry.

This is in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which calls for the introduction of "contemporary" subjects like artificial intelligence, design thinking, holistic health, organic living, environmental education, and global citizenship education in the curriculum.

#### RASHTRIYA VIGYAN PURASKAR 2025

— The winners of the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar 2025, the country's highest recognition for exemplary and inspirational contributions in the fields of science, technology, and innovation, was announced on 25th October.

— It comprises four awards — Vigyan Ratna for lifetime achievement, Vigyan Shri for scientists of all ages, Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (VY-SSB) for scientists under 45 years, and Vigyan Team for collaborative research work.



— These awards were instituted in 2023 after disbanding all existing science awards, including the coveted Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize. VY-SSB is a replacement for the Bhatnagar Prize, which too used to be given to outstanding scientists below 45 years old.

Award Tier	Category	Criteria/Focus	2025 Winner(s)
<b>VR (Vigyan Ratna)</b>	Lifetime Achievement in Science	Individual, Lifetime Contribution	Prof. Jayant Vishnu Narlikar (Physics)
<b>VS (Vigyan Shri)</b>	Scientists of All Ages (Posthumously)	Individual (Posthumous), All Ages	Dr. Gyanendra Pratap Singh, Dr. Yusuf Mohammad Seikh, Dr. K Thangaraj, Prof. Pradeep Thalappil, and more
<b>VY (Vigyan Yuva-SSB)</b>	Scientists Under 45 Years (Replaces Bhatnagar Prize)	Individual, Below 45 Years	Dr. Jagdis Gupta Kapuganti, Dr. Satendra Kumar Mangrauthia, Shri Debarka Sengupta, Dr. Deepa Agashe, and more
<b>VT (Vigyan Team)</b>	Collaborative Research Excellence	Team/Group	Aroma Mission CSIR Team (Agricultural Science)

#### BHARAT INTERNATIONAL RICE CONFERENCE (BIRC) 2025

— The inaugural edition of the BIRC 2025 was held at the Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, on 30–31 October 2025.

— It was organised by the Indian Rice Exporters Federation (IREF) jointly with Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

— India has emerged as the largest producer of rice in the world surpassing China, with a total estimated production of over 149 million MT during 2024-25 season.

— With exports of over 20.19 million tons of rice in 2024-25, India continues to be the largest exporter of rice in the world, contributing over 40% of global rice trade.

#### CHAKHAO RICE

— A pact was signed by APEDA during the 1st BIRC conference which will allow Manipur to introduce another variety of Chakhao (white sticky rice) to the international market after successfully exporting its indigenous black sticky rice.

— Chakhao is a Black Rice variety grown in Manipur. It is glutinous rice with a pleasant aroma and nutty flavour. It is considered one of the healthiest superfoods due to several medicinal and nutritional values, rich in antioxidants, protein, iron, fibre and other essential nutrients.



— The Government of India awarded Chakchao (black variety) the Geographical Indication Tagging in 2020.

#### NUTRIENT-BASED FERTILIZERS: CABINET OKS RS. 38K-CR SUBSIDY

THE UNION Cabinet, chaired by PM Narendra Modi, Tuesday announced rates of nutrient based subsidy (NBS) on Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers for the ongoing Rabi season 2025-26 from October 1 this year until March 31 next year.

Union I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the NBS subsidy will promote balanced use of fertilisers. A statement said, “The tentative budgetary requirement for Rabi season 2025-26 would be approximately 37,952.29 crore. This is approximate 1736 crore more than the budgetary requirement for Kharif season 2025.

#### MODEL YOUTH GRAM SABHA

— The Model Youth Gram Sabha was launched nationwide on 30th October 2025 at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi.

— It was launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (Department of School Education and Literacy) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

— It is an initiative based on the Model UN – an educational simulation of the United Nations – in schools across the country.

— The initiative will be rolled out across more than 1,000 schools nationwide, including Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs), Eklayva Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), and State Government Schools.

— As part of the initiative, a mock Gram Sabha will be conducted in identified schools, where students from classes 9-12 will play the roles of sarpanch, ward members, and village-level officials, including village secretary, Anganwadi worker, auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), and junior engineers.

— They will hold mock meetings of the Gram Sabha, discuss various issues, and prepare the village budget and development plans.

#### PAINTING TARGETS ON CANCER CELLS

Google DeepMind recently announced that its AI model C2S-Scale had generated a “novel hypothesis” about how cancer cells behave, which was later confirmed through lab experiments. The research was conducted in collaboration with Yale University. The lab believes this marks a milestone for AI in science and opens up a promising new direction for developing cancer treatments.

#### TAAL VOLCANO

— Recently, the Taal Volcano, located south of Manila, experienced a spate of eruptions.



— Taal is classified as a “complex” volcano by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS).

— A complex volcano, also called a compound volcano, is defined as one that consists of a complex of two or more vents, or a volcano that has an associated volcanic dome, either in its crater or on its flanks.

— The Taal volcano does not rise from the ground as a distinct, singular dome but consists of multiple stratovolcanoes (volcanoes susceptible to explosive eruptions), conical hills and craters of all shapes and sizes.

#### NEW RAMSAR SITE- GOGABIL LAKE

— Gogabil Lake in Bihar becomes the latest addition to the list of Ramsar sites in India, taking the total tally to 94.

— It is an oxbow wetland situated between the Rivers Ganga (Ganges) and Mahananda.

— It was declared Bihar’s first ‘Community Reserve’.

#### LUCKNOW- CREATIVE CITY OF GASTRONOMY

— UNESCO has declared Lucknow a “Creative City of Gastronomy” at the 43rd session of its General Conference in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

— The designation places Lucknow among 70 gastronomy cities worldwide and makes it the second Indian city to win the title after Hyderabad.

— The state’s Directorate of Tourism submitted Lucknow’s nomination to the Ministry of Culture on January 31, 2025, and the Government of India selected the city as the country’s official entry on March 3, 2025.

#### PAUL BIYA

— Cameroon’s top court has confirmed President Paul Biya, the world’s oldest head of state, as the winner of the 12 October election.

— The 92-year-old leader has ruled the central African country since 1982. The Constitutional Council said Biya received 53.66 per cent of the vote.

#### QUEEN MOTHER SIRIKIT

— Thailand’s Queen Mother Sirikit, who supervised royal projects to help the rural poor, preserve traditional craft-making and protect the environment, died on 24th October. She was 93.

— Sirikit Kitiyakara was born into a rich, aristocratic family in Bangkok on Aug. 12, 1932, the year absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional system. Both of her parents were related to earlier kings of the current Chakri dynasty.

— Sometimes dubbed the “Green Queen,” she also set up wildlife breeding centres, “open zoos,” and hatcheries to save endangered sea turtles.



#### DR PATRICK HERMINIE

- Vice-President C P Radhakrishnan attended the swearing-in ceremony of the President of Seychelles, Dr Patrick Herminie, in Victoria, Seychelles, on 26th October on behalf of India.
- Herminie represents the United Seychelles party, which led the country for four decades before it lost power in 2020. It was the governing party from 1977 to 2020.

#### ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP FINAL

- India created history as they defeated South Africa by 52 runs in the Women's World Cup final at Navi Mumbai and clinched their maiden ICC Trophy.
- This is the 13th edition of the Women's World Cup, and so far Australia have won seven times, England four times, and New Zealand and India have lifted the trophy once.
- According to the official site of the Olympics, the Women's ODI Cricket World Cup was first played in 1973, two years before the inaugural men's World Cup, the oldest global event in the sport.
- The Women's Cricket World Cup 1973 was contested by seven teams with teams battling for 60 overs – not 50 – and a league table deciding the winners instead of a knock-out competition.
- India hosted and made their debut in the 1978 tournament, and they were joined by Australia, England and New Zealand.

#### WORLD KUNGFU CHAMPIONSHIPS

- The World Kungfu Championships, previously known as the World Traditional Wushu Championships, were held from October 14 to 20 in Emeishan, China.
- It is hosted by the International Wushu Federation (IWUF) for the Chinese martial art of wushu, or kung fu. This year's competition saw participants from 54 countries.
- Purnima Linda, from Jharkhand's Adivasi Oraon tribe in Ranchi's Kanke village, clinched two bronze medals at the competition held in China's Emeishan this year.

#### U23 WORLD WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

- Indian wrestler Sujeet Kalkal was crowned the U-23 World Champion in the 65 kg category, after he defeated Uzbekistan's Umidjon Jalolov.
- It's only the third time an Indian male wrestler has won a gold medal at this level – only Aman Sehrawat (2022) and Chirag Chikkara (2024) have done this before, both in the 57kg category.
- In the Championship, India finished with nine medals – one gold, two silvers and six bronze – that concluded in Novi Sad, Serbia on 27th October, 2025.
- In the women's 59kg category, Sarika won the Silver medal and Hansika Lamba also won the Silver in women's 53kg.



## BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

### CHINESE CHECK

While there may be much relief after the détente in the tariff war between China and the U.S., in Busan, South Korea, following the meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, the uneasy truce has laid bare a structural inversion of power between the two economies. What began in the 1980s as a reluctant embrace of World Bank/IMF-prescribed neoliberal reforms by an overwhelmingly agrarian China, has now evolved into an unimaginable assertion of industrial dominance. A nation that once bartered sovereignty for technology transfer and market access has, through patient accumulation of manufacturing depth, labour arbitrage, and global supply-chain integration, positioned itself as the indispensable node of world production. The irony is sharp. The U.S., whose export and technology corporations once defined global trade cycles, now finds its four-year political rhythms ill-suited to contest a rival that plans in decades. The concessions Mr. Trump has extended to Mr. Xi include some reductions in tariffs, a pause on additions to the “no-trade list” of Chinese firms, and a partial rollback on levies linked to the fentanyl supply-chain dispute. China has promised resumption of purchase of American farm products, particularly soybean, and an easing of export restrictions on critical minerals.

America’s tariff offensives since Mr. Trump’s first term in 2017 did yield some numerical optics. U.S. goods trade deficit with China narrowed by roughly 30%. But economists across the spectrum agree that this was less a triumph of re-industrialisation than a diversion of trade flows. The deficit was largely re-routed through near-shoring and friend-shoring: Mexico, Vietnam and parts of ASEAN became new intermediaries for supply chains once centred in China. Meanwhile, China’s exporters diversified markets and adjusted prices, while the tariffs’ direct burden was borne mostly by U.S. importers and consumers. The human geography of the impact was asymmetric: in the U.S., retaliatory Chinese tariffs targeted farm-belt commodities, hurting those very rural constituencies that powered Mr. Trump’s rise. Federal subsidies softened the blow, but only temporarily. In China, the pain was concentrated in export-processing hubs such as Guangdong and Suzhou, where migrant and urban workers in electronics, semiconductor, and smartphone assembly absorbed the shock. Yet, the political fallout remained contained, cushioned by Beijing’s domestic-stimulus measures and its “dual-circulation” strategy of inward and outward rebalancing. This trade war has thus underscored a decisive shift: the U.S. remains the world’s largest consumer market, but China has entrenched itself as the world’s foremost factory with global leverage over intermediate goods, high-end technology and critical minerals.

### TRUMP, XI AGREE ON CEASEFIRE IN TRADE WAR: CHINA EASES CURBS ON RARE EARTH EXPORTS

THE MOST anticipated and consequential meeting for world trade this year between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in South Korea on Thursday ended in a truce — a seemingly fragile one as the leaders of the two largest economies decided that the agreement will be up for renegotiations each year unlike standard World Trade Organization-compliant trade deals which ring long-term certainty.

— While the US decided to pull back from the sharp tariff rhetoric, lowering duty on China to 47 per cent from 57 per cent in the backdrop of the 100 per cent tariff hike threats starting November 1, China agreed to resume purchases of US agricultural products.



— However, deeper distrust between the two countries was evident, as the deal will be up for renegotiation every year, and no resolution was announced on multiple areas, such as Section 301 and 232-related tariffs, or tit-for-tat port fees on American and Chinese ships

— Before the Trump-Xi meeting, the US had even launched a Section 301 investigation to look into China's compliance with the agreement struck between the two countries during the first Trump term in White House.

— The new tariff dynamics between the US and China now leave India facing the steepest tariffs (50 per cent) on any country globally, and a greater incentive for businesses to invest or reroute products via other countries.

— Trade experts said India needs to target a 15 per cent tariff concession in line with what the UK and Japan have received, as Indian products may not be competitive compared to Chinese goods, even with a 20 per cent difference in tariffs with the neighbour.

— The 15 per cent tariff rate would also be ideal for India because the US has kept tariffs at 20 per cent on Vietnam and 19 per cent on ASEAN countries such as Malaysia and Cambodia. ASEAN and India are the two regions seen as part of the "China plus one" strategy for global companies.

— China may have an upper hand in the trade tussle with the US, as its exports are now less reliant on the American market compared to earlier. While 20 per cent of India's total goods are shipped to the US, for China the comparable number is 12 per cent.

— Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) pointed out that China's exports to the US rose from \$28.8 billion in May 2025 to \$34.3 billion in September 2025. By contrast, India's exports to the US plunged 37 per cent during the same period — from \$8.8 billion to \$5.5 billion — as other Asian suppliers with lower tariff exposure captured market share.

— While the US-China agreement on Thursday hints at a pause in the trade war, US agreements with the ASEAN region indicate that Washington is taking concrete steps to move more and more countries away from Chinese influence. The US struck a trade deal with Malaysia and Cambodia during the ASEAN summit.

#### **Do You Know:**

— Rare earths, a group of 17 metallic elements, are used to produce magnets and other components that are a must for manufacturing everything from missiles to aircraft to cars and refrigerators.

— The '2025 Annual Threat Assessment (ATA)'—a coordinated evaluation of global threats to US interests- stated that fentanyl and other synthetic opioids remain the deadliest drugs trafficked into the US, responsible for over 52,000 deaths in the 12-month period ending October 2024.

— Fentanyl is a potent, fast-acting synthetic opioid, meaning it can be chemically manufactured in a laboratory. Unlike opioids, such as morphine and codeine, which are derived from the opium poppy plants, fentanyl is entirely synthetic.

### **WHAT ARE RARE EARTHS, WHY ARE THEY SO VITAL?**

U.S. President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart XiJinping have wrapped up a summit in South Korea with a deal to keep Chinese rare earth exports flowing.



Here are some basic facts about these obscure elements making headlines around the world:

**What are they?**

Rare earths are a group of 17 elements including 15 silvery-white metals called lanthanides, or lanthanoids, plus scandium and yttrium.

**Used for?**

Rare earths or the magnets which they are sometimes made into can be found in small but important quantities in everything from iPhones and washing machines to the F35 fighterjet.

They are also used in electric vehicles (EVs), medical equipment, oil refining, and other military applications such as missiles and radar systems. Without them, supply chains quickly grind to a halt. Automakers were forced to pause some production earlier this year after Chinese export controls caused shortages.

**Are they rare?**

They are not rare in the sense that they are uncommon; some are more common than lead, for example. But they tend to be spread thin around the Earth's crust in small quantities and mixed together or with other minerals, so larger deposits are difficult to find and costly to extract.

**Who produces the most?**

While U.S. scientists helped develop a process to separate and refine rare earths in the 1950s, China since the 1980s has come to dominate the industry thanks to lower costs, laxer environmental standards and decades of government support. China accounts for about 60% of global mine production and 90% or more of refined production and rare earth magnet output. Projects are under way across the U.S., Europe, and Australia to build an alternative supply chain but it will take years to produce meaningful quantities.

In the meantime, China is restricting exports of an increasing number of the elements and the equipment needed to mine and refine them.

**What are their names?**

In their periodic table order, they are: scandium, yttrium, lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, and lutetium.

**Environmental impact**

Processing rare earths often involves the use of solvents, which can produce toxic waste that pollutes the soil, water, and atmosphere. More environmentally-friendly technologies are being developed, but they are not yet widely used.

Certain types of rare earth ores also contain radioactive thorium or uranium, which is often removed using acid. For this reason, development of the sector faces health and environmental regulatory hurdles.



## FOR INDIA, THE MESSAGE OF THE US-CHINA DETENTE IS CLEAR

From a bipolar world between 1945 and 1989, divided between the United States and the Soviet Union, to a unipolar one after the latter's collapse, there is now enough evidence to suggest the return of bipolarity: Two superpowers competing to control and shape the world order. The US-China rivalry has increasingly been characterised as the Group of Two, now even by US President Donald Trump, who framed his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Busan, South Korea, on Thursday as the "G2". There are expectations and fears in some quarters that the G2 implies a system in which the US and China strike bargains and collude to manage the world on their own terms. However, the structural competition between the two — both seeking dominance in military, advanced technologies, trade networks, and supply chains — is too intense for them to enter a permanently cooperative relationship that marginalises other powers.

The Busan summit led to a deal under which China would defer export controls on rare earths and increase agricultural purchases from the US, while Trump reduced tariffs on Chinese imports. Yet, the truce is temporary, one that allows the US and China to undo the damage from the trade war they themselves escalated, and is due for renegotiation in a year. What can be expected of the G2, therefore, is a dynamic equilibrium swinging between confrontation and cooperation. Still, it is essential to recognise that China is, indeed, a great power. Its influence is everywhere: Manufactured products, smartphones, green energy, and trade. China's control over rare earths gives it significant leverage in international affairs, and the technology gap between Washington and Beijing is evidently shrinking. China's power is only going to grow. The 15th Five-Year Plan makes clear that its leadership intends to prioritise further increasing the country's industrial and technological strength.

For India, China remains its foremost strategic rival. Beijing's adventurism on the border has grown; India runs a trade deficit of over \$100 billion, and the China-Pakistan nexus persists. The challenge for India, then, is to manage this unstable US-China dynamic in a way that harnesses economic opportunities with Beijing while resolving differences and strengthening its relationship with the US, with which it has shared interests (India and the US have just inked a 10-year defence framework pact in Malaysia). New Delhi must also consolidate its partnerships across the world. Even within an emerging bipolarity, powers like Europe, Japan, and Brazil have an important role to play. Ultimately, however, a nation's influence in global affairs is determined by its assets and the leverage they bring. India is projected to become the world's third-largest economy, yet the gap between the countries in the third and second positions remains vast. India has its task cut out. Diplomatic dexterity must be matched by the acceleration of defence modernisation, economic and technological reform, investment in education and skill development, and the strengthening of domestic institutions. Unlike China, India has a long way to go to reap its demographic dividend. If India does not build up internally, its capacity to navigate externally in a rapidly changing world will prove difficult.

## WHAT IS CHINA'S COMPLAINT AGAINST INDIA AT WTO?

### The story so far:

China has filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against India. It alleges that India is providing subsidies, as part of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, for the development of advanced chemistry cell (ACC) batteries; for boosting the auto sector; and for facilitating the production of Electric Vehicles, in contravention of WTO law.



### **What is the PLI scheme?**

India launched the PLI scheme in 2020 to give a fillip to Indian manufacturing. This scheme provides financial incentives based on incremental sales to strategic industries; aims to bolster India's position in global value chains; and integrates medium and small-scale industries into the industrial production process through backward linkages. The three specific PLI schemes that China has challenged are — the PLI scheme which aims to incentivise the establishment of giga-scale manufacturing capabilities of ACC batteries in India; the scheme for the auto industry, which seeks to buttress the manufacturing of Advanced Automotive Technology (AAT) products in India, encompassing both vehicles and their components; and third, a scheme to promote EV manufacturing by attracting global EV manufacturers to the country.

### **What is China's complaint?**

China alleges that the three PLI schemes provide financial benefits or subsidies to companies operating in India contingent on Domestic Value Addition (DVA). For instance, under the PLI scheme for the auto sector, one of the conditions for eligibility to get financial benefits is that there must be a 50% DVA. Likewise, one of the salient features of the PLI scheme for ACC batteries is that the beneficiary must ensure a DVA of 25%. The Chinese argue that the DVA requirements under these PLI schemes incentivise companies to use domestic goods rather than imported goods, discriminating against Chinese goods in the Indian market.

### **What is the law on subsidies in WTO?**

While providing industrial subsidies to boost domestic industry is a sovereign right of states, WTO law ensures that these subsidies are not provided in a manner that jeopardises the international trade of other countries by ushering in unfair competition. Unfair competition may arise from subsidies that confer an artificial advantage on industries for exporting or competing with imported products. Consequently, the grant of industrial subsidies is regulated by the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) agreement of the WTO. Article 1 of the SCM agreement defines a subsidy as a financial contribution by a government or a public body that confers a benefit. The subsidy should also be specific.

The SCM agreement divides subsidies into three categories — prohibited subsidies, actionable subsidies, and non-actionable subsidies. Prohibited subsidies are forbidden by definition and are generally of two types: export subsidies and Import Substitution (IS) subsidies. Export subsidies are contingent on export performance, and IS subsidies, as defined in Article 3.1(b) of the SCM agreement, refer to subsidies contingent upon the use of domestic goods over imported goods. Thus, if a country promises a financial contribution to a specific industry on the condition that it use domestic goods or goods produced locally, rather than imported goods, it would constitute a prohibited subsidy.

### **Do IS subsidies violate other laws?**

An IS subsidy will also breach two other WTO legal provisions. First is the national treatment obligation, codified in Article III.4 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which obligates countries to ensure that their domestic laws do not treat imported products less favourably than their domestic products; and second, is Article 2.1 of the Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) Agreement which states that no country shall impose any TRIM that is inconsistent with its national treatment obligations enshrined in GATT's Article III. The TRIMs agreement contains a specific illustration of a prohibited trade-related investment



measure. This illustration pertains to local content requirements which incentivise the use of domestically produced goods. Since an IS subsidy gives preference to domestic over foreign goods, it constitutes as a proscribed TRIM under the WTO law.

China alleges that India's three PLI schemes are IS subsidies. However, it is critical to note that the DVA milestones in India's PLI scheme do not automatically translate to local content requirements. Value addition at the domestic level can occur in multiple ways, and not just through the use of domestic goods. The analysis of the DVA component in these three PLI schemes must thus consider a complex set of facts.

#### **What happens next?**

The first step in resolving a dispute at the WTO is through consultations. Thus, India and China will try to resolve this matter amicably. If this does not occur, the dispute will proceed to adjudication by a three-member ad hoc WTO panel. The WTO's appellate mechanism, the Appellate Body, has remained incapacitated since December 2019. Thus, if the WTO panel's decision is appealed, it would mean postponing the adjudication of the dispute till the time the Appellate Body is resurrected. The practical implication is that the status quo remains, and a country can continue with its impugned measures.

### **TRUMP DITCHES CANADA TRADE TALKS OVER AD: A WARNING FOR ANY AD HOC US DEAL**

The United States abruptly terminated trade talks with Canada citing an anti-tariff advertisement campaign being run by the province of Ontario in the US. The advert featured a 1987 speech by former US President Ronald Reagan in which he can be seen warning people about the perils of tariffs and protectionist policies on economic growth.

- Reagan's words, however, were seemingly taken out of context. The original speech was delivered against the backdrop of his decision to impose tariffs on Japanese semiconductors for unfair trade practices — similar to the argument that the US appears to be using against China today.
- The Trump administration's erratic moves on trade have begun to hurt Indian exports. While India's overall exports did not decline in September, shipments to the US dipped 12% due to the 50% duty on Indian items. Continued tariffs could impact India's labour-intensive sectors such as leather, textiles, and marine products. Moreover, American sanctions on Russian oil could also put pressure on India's oil import bills.
- Washington's outsized reaction to the Canadian ad campaign also signals growing unease in the Trump administration over the Supreme Court hearing next month, which could strip Trump of his powers to impose reciprocal tariffs and perhaps go as far as to compel the administration to repay the tariffs to US importers.
- An adverse court order could also dramatically alter the dynamics of the US-India trade negotiations, as India is largely engaging in reciprocal tariffs rather than Section 232 tariffs. Moreover, experts have raised doubts about the longevity of trade deals that do not comply with WTO norms.
- Put simply, Section 232 tariffs aim to protect US national security. Unlike reciprocal tariffs which vary from country to country, Section 232 tariffs, in theory, apply to all countries equally



but vary sectorally. The Trump administration has used this tool to raise levies on aluminum, cars and car parts, copper, furniture, lumber, steel, and timber.

- The increased use of Section 232 by the US could mean that any concessions offered by India to the US under the trade deal may apply only to the current 50% reciprocal tariffs on India, leaving sectoral tariffs that the US is imposing — and planning to impose — unaffected.
- A concession on Section 232 may be unlikely, as the US has only offered concessions to the UK by levying 25% tariffs on the UK's steel and aluminium — compared with 50% on other countries — under the US–UK Economic Prosperity Deal. Under the deal, the UK agreed to import American agricultural products, a priority for the Trump administration. London has also secured lower tariffs on limited quantities of car exports to the US.

**Do You Know:**

- Tariffs are taxes or duties imposed by a government on imported goods and services. Their objective is to make foreign products more expensive compared to domestically produced goods, thereby encouraging consumers to prefer local products.
- Tariffs also act as a protective measure for domestic industries against foreign competition. Additionally, they serve as a source of revenue for the government.

## INDIA, RUSSIAN OIL, AND THE LOOMING SECONDARY SANCTIONS THREAT

India has always maintained that it is opposed to unilateral economic sanctions on countries. Yet it has, although grudgingly, heeded to such sanctions in the past on other countries, particularly when imposed by the United States. The US imposed sanctions on Iranian oil, and Indian refiners stopped importing oil from Tehran. And now, something similar is on the cards for oil imports from Russia, following the imposition of US sanctions on Russian oil giants Rosneft and Lukoil earlier this week.

— The reason why countries like India, while opposing unilateral sanctions, still try to steer clear of countries and other entities sanctioned by the US is primarily rooted in the sword of secondary sanctions hanging over their heads.

— While primary sanctions — on Rosneft and Lukoil in this case — mainly curtail or prohibit their engagement with American citizens and entities, secondary sanctions seek to limit the engagement of other countries and their entities — over whom the US has no legal control — with the target country or entity.

— Secondary sanctions certainly have an extraterritorial aspect and are potentially suspect under international law.

— Put simply, any entity engaged in international business and trade, requiring access to the American financial system, or having exposure to the US, cannot afford to be cut off by Washington.

— Indian refiners (public sector players as well as private sector refiner Reliance Industries (RIL)) cannot really afford to be cut out of the US financial system and markets. They need that access for various reasons, including raising funds overseas and paying for their imports.



— RIL, which alone accounts for nearly half of India's Russian oil imports, has several US-based subsidiaries operating in various sectors, has raised debt through dollar-denominated bonds, and has strategic alliances with US companies, with major investments from American majors like Google, Meta, and Intel.

— Given such massive exposure to the US, it is unfathomable that the conglomerate would risk inviting secondary sanctions from the US. Public sector refiners, too, have substantial exposure to the US.

— A senior executive from India's refining sector explained that almost all of India's oil is purchased in dollars, which essentially means that Indian refiners must pay overseas suppliers in American currency, and that leads to a large degree of dependence on the American banking system for such payments.

— There is some speculation that the refiners could continue buying Russian-origin crude from third-party traders and not directly from Russian oil companies, as none of these third-party traders have been targeted by the sanctions yet. However, experts opine that even these trades are bound to see a significant hit in the near term, as there may be a general aversion to getting involved in the Russian oil trade for the time being.

— On its part, the Indian government has consistently maintained that the country will buy oil from wherever it gets the best deal, as long as the oil is not under sanctions. There are no sanctions on Russian oil; it is only subject to a price cap imposed by the US and its allies that applies if Western shipping and insurance services are used for transporting the oil.

**Do You Know:**

— Oil, Russia's biggest source of revenue, is a lever that the Trump administration believes it can use to force Moscow to end the war in Ukraine. New Delhi is the second-largest buyer of its oil after Beijing, and is in the midst of sensitive trade pact negotiations with Washington.

— It was clear that India did not want to compromise on its strategic autonomy and was unwilling to be dictated to by the US on whom it should be doing business with, particularly when it came to Russia, an old and key strategic partner.

— When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Moscow's share in New Delhi's oil imports was less than 2 per cent. With much of the West snubbing Russian crude following the invasion, Russia began offering discounts on its oil to willing buyers.

— Indian refiners were quick to avail the opportunity, leading to Russia—earlier a peripheral supplier of oil to India—emerging as India's biggest source of crude with a commanding market share, displacing the traditional West Asian suppliers.

**Note:**

Soumya Bhowmick writes- Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin have always had a unique relationship — a tango of praises and sanctions, as if each side were waiting for the next twist in the ongoing geopolitical rollercoaster. Just when it seemed they might make peace, the Trump administration pulled out the sanctions card again, this time slapping Russia's oil giants, Rosneft and Lukoil, with measures that would make even their notoriously unpredictable relationship seem unsurprising. While Washington wants to tighten the screws on Moscow's energy sector, for countries like India and China, the fallout is about to get more complicated.



Rosneft and Lukoil are central to Russia's energy strategy, with their combined output accounting for nearly half of the country's total oil production and a significant portion of global supply. These sanctions represent a sharp escalation of US policy towards Russia, which, over the past few years, has fluctuated between attempts at diplomacy and direct economic punishment. For India, however, the sanctions carry immediate and far-reaching consequences, not just for energy supply but also for how the country navigates its position between global powers.

## UNEVEN GROWTH

The industrial production data for September is especially useful as it provides insights into longer periods such as the second quarter and the first half of the financial year. The news is not all bad, but there are areas that warrant attention. When looked at on a half-yearly basis, the IIP data for April-September 2025 show that industrial growth was the slowest in at least five years. At just 3%, the half-yearly growth is well below what it should be. However, quarterly growth shows that things are improving — Q2 growth was a more robust 4.1%, compared to 2% in Q1. The bright spot in all of this, at least on the surface, has been the manufacturing sector. In September, it grew by 4.8%, the second highest in this financial year. On a quarterly basis, the July-September 2025 quarter saw the manufacturing sector grow by a relatively strong 4.9%, the fastest quarterly growth it has seen since the quarter-ended December 2023. On a half-yearly basis, too, the sector's growth bounced back to 4.1% in the April-September 2025 half, after having slowed to 3.8% in the first half of the previous year. Activity in the mining sector contracted in September 2025, the second quarter, as well as in the first half of the financial year. While some of this can be attributed to the monsoon this year, this performance is still unusually poor. Strengthening the sector should be a priority to shore up India's energy and strategic mineral security.

The manufacturing sector's apparent strong performance, too, is not something that should be taken at face value. The data show that the growth is not broad-based, and is instead concentrated in some sectors. Of the 23 main manufacturing sub-sectors measured in the IIP, more than half contracted in the July-September 2025 quarter. Of concern is that labour-intensive sectors such as apparels, leather products, rubber products and plastics, all contracted in the September 2025 quarter. The sectors that grew included wood products, mineral products, basic metals and fabricated metal products, many of which are more capital intensive. If this trend persists, it could have negative implications for job creation, and warrants attention. The other troubling aspect of the data is that the consumer non-durables sector has contracted for the last six consecutive quarters. While some of these are essential items such as salt and edible oils, others are items of discretionary spending. Much of this is because of the base effect, but slack demand has been a problem that policymakers have been grappling with for some time. The only real solution lies in increasing incomes and creating jobs.

## DECODING INDIA'S PROJECTED GDP

A comment that India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal made during the Berlin Global Dialogue last week has gone viral. In his comment, Goyal made it abundantly clear that India does not strike trade deals under duress.

- “We don't do deals in a hurry and we don't do deals with deadlines or with a gun on our head,” he had said, and this was the part that caught everyone's attention. However, what was equally noteworthy was the reason he gave for India's approach: “We'd like to really look at the long term.”



We recognise that 20-25 years from now we'll be a \$30 trillion economy. And accordingly we'll negotiate based on the future. A trade deal is in the long term and we have to recognise the future and get the best deal.”

- The central point here is that India's economy is going from strength to strength and, even though at the moment the US economy is almost 8 times the size of India's economy, in the coming 25 years that gap will get narrowed substantially. As such, there is no reason to consider India weak when in the long-term, India's economy will become \$30 trillion — roughly the same level when the US is at present.
- Given that economic growth rate and the size of the economy — even the projected one — is a big enough variable determining India's trading stance, it is worth examining how likely it is for India to become a \$30 trillion economy in the next “20-25 years”.
- Some basics first. The size of an economy refers to the annual gross domestic product or GDP. The GDP is nothing but the total market value of all goods and services produced within a country. The size of an economy gives a sense of the overall heft of an economy in global affairs; it is a way to keep score. That's because if an economy produces more (or spends more, depending on how you calculate the GDP), it informs about the relative prosperity and economic vitality of that country.
- In a global context, a country's GDP is stated in US dollar terms. That way all economies can be compared easily. That means calculating the GDP in dollar terms requires taking India's GDP in rupee terms — the way it is actually observed on the ground — and then dividing it with the dollar-rupee exchange rate to arrive at the value in US dollar terms. It is also noteworthy that the GDP in question in all such discussions is the nominal GDP — not the real GDP (the one in which we take away the effect of inflation).
- As such, any projection of GDP would require two things: The projection of India's nominal GDP in rupee terms as well as the projection of rupee-dollar exchange rate.
- Both matter because the same nominal GDP of Rs 330 trillion in 2024 could be converted to make India a \$5 trillion economy if the exchange rate in 2024 was the same as in 2014. But since the exchange rate had slipped from around 65 rupees to a dollar in 2014 to around 84 rupees a dollar in 2024, India's GDP in dollar terms was still \$3.9 trillion.
- How valid are Goyal's projections? Quite valid. Here's how. Let's assume the projection of \$30 trillion is for 25 years instead of 20 years — which is the easier goal to achieve. Since we are projecting 25 years into the future, it makes sense to look back at how India's economy has grown in the past 25 years. Data reveals that India's nominal GDP has registered a CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) of 11.9% since the financial year 2000. Further, the Indian rupee has depreciated against the dollar at a CAGR of 2.7% since 2000.
- So, if one presumes that India's growth will be exactly the same and the rupee will depreciate exactly in the same manner over the coming 25 years, then India's GDP will cross \$30 trillion in 2048. That's exactly 27 years from now — smack in the middle of the range that Goyal provided.

**Do You Know:**

- Only final goods and services are included in GDP. Intermediate goods — those goods which are used as inputs in the production of other goods — are excluded to avoid double counting.



- There are two main measures of GDP: Nominal GDP and Real GDP.
- Nominal GDP: It refers to the value of goods and services evaluated at current market prices without factoring in inflation or deflation.
- Real GDP: An inflation-adjusted measure that reflects both the value and quantity of goods and services produced by an economy in a given year.

#### NEW CPI TO MEASURE RURAL HOUSING INFLATION, EXCLUDE EMPLOYER-PROVIDED DWELLINGS

Monthly rent data collection in both rural and urban areas as opposed to the current practice of collecting it every six months only for urban areas are proposed to be one of the key changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that will form the basis of the new retail inflation series beginning February, a discussion paper by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Thursday stated.

— Also, government accommodations and other employer-provided dwellings will be excluded from the housing index as these do not reflect transactions in the actual rental market, the Ministry said.

— In the existing CPI, housing has 21.67 per cent weight for urban areas and 10.07 per cent weight at all-India level.

— The revision, when implemented, will help gauge the impact of rentals and housing prices on inflation more accurately as inclusion of only urban areas and employer-provided dwellings may not be reflecting the complete ground reality, especially with rentals having surged after the pandemic.

— The Ministry released the third paper in the series — 'Discussion paper on the proposed changes in the housing index compilation methodology in the new CPI series' — as part of its base revision exercise of the CPI.

— The new housing index will also have an expanded sample coverage by collecting rent data from all selected dwellings each month instead of limiting rent collection to one-sixth of the sample at present.

— The MoSPI is undertaking the base revision exercise of the CPI and is revisiting methodologies, exploring new data sources and incorporating changes after consultations with experts, users, academicians and other stakeholders.

— Housing is seen as a crucial indicator for the overall well-being of the households not only in India but across the world as a significant amount of their income is spent either on house rent or maintaining an owned house.

#### **Do You Know:**

— For CPI, 2024 has been identified as the revised base year as the item basket and the weightage of the items would be decided based on the NSO's Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) conducted in 2023-24. The new CPI series is expected to be published from the first quarter of 2026.



— A base year is the first of a series of years in an economic or financial index. In this context, it is typically set to an arbitrary level of 100. New, up-to-date base years are periodically introduced to keep data current in a particular index. Base years are also used to measure the growth of a company. Any year can serve as a base year, but analysts typically choose recent years.

— A base year is used for comparison in the measure of business activity or economic or financial index. For example, to find the rate of inflation between 2016 and 2024, 2016 is the base year or the first year in the time set. The base year can also describe the starting point from a point of growth or a baseline for calculating same-store sales.

## FOREIGN CAPITAL & INDIAN BANKS

At a time when India's net foreign direct investment has seen a sharp moderation, the country's financial landscape is in the midst of a transformation. Over the last 24 months, some of the world's biggest financial institutions — from Dubai's Emirates NBD to Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC), Blackstone, Zurich Insurance and Abu Dhabi's International Holding Company (IHC) — have lined up to acquire significant stakes in Indian banks, insurers and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

— It was once a tightly protected sector, dominated by Indian promoters and conservative regulation. The sector is now witnessing a wave of global money flow. The latest in the series came on Friday, with Blackstone announcing the acquisition of a 9.99 per cent stake in Kerala-based Federal Bank.

— Blackstone Inc, the world's largest alternative asset manager, has acquired a minority stake of 9.99 per cent in Federal Bank Ltd for Rs 6,196 crore while Bain Capital will be investing Rs 4,385 crore to acquire an 18.0 per cent stake on a fully diluted basis via preferential allotment of equity & warrants in Manappuram Finance.

— The Reserve Bank of India gave Canada-based Fairfax special approval to hold a majority stake in CSB Bank for five years, deviating from the normal 40 per cent foreign ownership cap, considering it a strategic revival investment.

— While each of these deals is significant on its own, they signal something larger, like a global relook of India's financial sector and growth potential. The sector was once considered as over-regulated and fragmented, but now it's emerging as one of the world's fastest-growing and most interesting destinations for long-term investment in financial services.

— The regulator RBI has also taken a positive, but cautious, stance in allowing the entry of global entities.

— According to McKinsey & Company, the banking industry is the largest sector in India by net income, generating \$46 billion in 2024, with a 31 per cent YoY growth. Higher profitability is observed compared with the global average, with ample liquidity, strong capital levels and reduced credit risk.

— India's revenue growth is expected to be healthy in both retail and wholesale banking as financial penetration deepens. "Despite strong performance, the banking sector is valued lower among industries, indicating market scepticism about long-term value creation," McKinsey said in its latest report on global banking.



— India's financial services sector is expanding faster than major global economies with credit demand robust from small businesses, retail consumers and housing. On the other hand, the formal banking system is matching the country's economic growth.

— India presents a vast, untapped and rapidly expanding financial market with over 400 million underbanked population, a vast informal credit system and a robust digital infrastructure enabling growth. Consumption is now expected to pick up following the GST rationalisation and reduction while credit offtake continues to grow.

— What has helped is the fact that the Reserve Bank and the government have been gradually relaxing restrictions on foreign ownership in insurance and private banks. Insurance companies can now go up to 100 per cent foreign ownership, and private banks up to 74 per cent levels with approval from the respective regulators.

— Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) hold 48.39 per cent stake in HDFC Bank, the second largest bank in the country. On the other hand, there are no promoters in many private sector banks like Federal Bank and South Indian Bank.

— The message is unmistakable, say analysts: that the financial sector welcomes capital, provided control and compliance stay under Indian regulation and it remains largely insulated from global shocks. This measured liberalisation offers an ideal entry point for global banks and insurers facing stagnant growth in developed markets like Europe and the US.

— For global investors, this is an ideal scenario. While India's macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong, many entities are available at attractive valuation and acquiring them provides global players with immediate access to customers, licenses and branch networks.

— While this inflow of foreign ownership reflects confidence in India, there are also risks involving trade and border conflicts. When a foreign institution takes a majority stake in an Indian bank or insurer, control over strategic decisions gradually is likely to shift offshore. Even if regulation remains Indian, what the new owners bring in, especially in crisis situations, may not always align with domestic policy goals and regulations. This means Indian regulators like the RBI will have to put checks and balances to keep the system stable and liquid.

— No doubt, foreign ownership can also make India's financial system vulnerable to global shocks. If global interest rates rise or liquidity dries up or trade tensions increase, these foreign entities might take decisions which are not favourable to Indian entities and regulators, putting strain on domestic credit flows.

— The test for India will be to ensure that this inflow strengthens its financial independence and stability.

**Do You Know:**

— NBFC is a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956 or Companies Act, 2013, and engaged in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of shares/stocks/bonds/debentures/securities issued by Government or local authority or other marketable securities of a like nature, leasing, hire-purchase, etc., as their principal business, but does not include any institution whose principal business is that of agriculture activity, industrial activity, purchase or sale of any goods (other than securities) or providing any services and sale/purchase/construction of immovable property.



— A non-banking institution which is a company and has principal business of receiving deposits under any scheme or arrangement in one lump sum or in instalments by way of contributions or in any other manner, is also a non-banking financial company (Residuary non-banking company).

## THE UPI OF INSURANCE?

Expectations have grown around Bima Sugam, the unified insurance digital marketplace inaugurated mid-September this year as the platform promised to simplify how Indians buy, service and manage insurance policies.

With India's insurance penetration at about 4% of GDP, Bima Sugam carries the potential to widen access, boost transparency and build trust. The website shows the portal is live but not yet open for business. Banners on the home page say marketplace is 'coming soon.'

When fully functional, Bima Sugam aims to be a one-stop destination for all insurance needs — from product discovery and quote generation to purchase, renewal, claims and grievance tracking. It is designed to integrate product information across insurers and categories, allowing customers to make informed choices.

Private aggregator websites offer similar services but the difference is in what Bima Sugam represents — a regulator-backed, industry-supported digital public platform aimed at bringing credibility, interoperability and standardisation. It aligns with the national mission of 'Insurance for All by 2047' of the Centre and the IRDAI (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India).

If executed well, Bima Sugam could do for insurance what UPI did for digital payments and ONDC aims to do for e-commerce. Its structure as a not-for-profit entity jointly promoted by insurers and intermediaries signals a blend of regulatory oversight and industry participation — an encouraging governance model for digital public infrastructure.

We can revisit a few expectations we outlined in CoverNote in 2022 when the idea was announced.

**Universal participation:** Every insurer should be present and list all products. This will expand choice while highlighting and addressing a persistent issue — too much choice.

The proliferation of policy variants shows innovation of the industry. But too much choice can overwhelm and confuse. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) faced a similar challenge with mutual funds and resolved it via standardisation. IRDAI's introduction of standardised policies in key segments was a step in this direction; Bima Sugam can advance it by ensuring comparability of features.

**Comparability and clarity:** Insurance benefits often sound similar but vary widely in meaning. A transparent comparison framework can help customers choose wisely. Simplifying insurance language — coverage, exclusions, co-pay, top-up — would also make the process more accessible and lead to standardising underlying benefits of standard terms.

**Renewals and mobility:** Auto-renewal and secure auto-debit options can prevent unintentional policy lapses and benefit clients and insurers. Importantly, a dedicated mobile app is essential for the smartphone generation that prefers to transact entirely online. If Bima Sugam ensures clarity, comparability and confidence, it can redefine how India engages with insurance.



## GOLD ETF INFLOWS SURGE OVER 6X: WHAT IS DRIVING INVESTOR INTEREST?

Surging gold prices, escalating geopolitical tensions, increased purchases by global central banks and tariff-related uncertainties have drawn investors towards gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs), resulting in a record six-fold jump in inflows into the asset class during September.

- Rising preference for gold as an investment option amid a lacklustre domestic stock market performance is also driving higher flows into gold ETF.
- Inflows into gold ETFs rose 578.28 per cent, or six times to Rs 8,363.13 crore in September 2025, compared with Rs 1,232.99 crore in the same period last year, according to the latest data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI). In September, net inflows rose 281.96 per cent on a month-on-month basis from Rs 2,189.51 crore in August.
- Gold ETFs are the ETFs with gold as the underlying asset. It gives investors an option of holding gold electronically instead of physical gold. It is a safer option to hold the precious metal since there are no risks of theft or purity.
- The attractive rate of returns on a majority of these ETFs has been a big draw for investors. For investors seeking portfolio diversification, inflation protection, and tax-efficient exposure to gold, ETFs remain a compelling option.
- Global factors like central bank buying, geopolitical tensions, and expectations of US rate cuts have turned gold into a preferred safe-haven asset. This has led to a surge in gold prices to record high levels in the past few months, with prices crossing over Rs 1,25,000 per 10 gram (999 purity) recently.
- All these factors have turned gold ETFs into the flavour of the season as investors prefer parking their funds due to better liquidity, transparency and global price alignment.
- One of the important factors which has played out in favour of gold ETFs is the tax clarity provided in the Union Budget 2025-26. Earlier, gold ETFs were taxed as per individual's tax slabs. However, this year's budget clarified that long-term capital gains on gold ETF held for over 12 months will be taxed at 12.5 per cent.

### Do You Know:

- An ETF, or exchange traded fund, is a marketable security that tracks an index, a commodity, bonds, or a basket of assets like an index fund. Unlike regular mutual funds, an ETF trades like a common stock on a stock exchange.

## CABINET APPROVES TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE EIGHTH PAY PANEL

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the terms of reference (ToR) of the Eighth Central Pay Commission, which will be headed by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, a former Supreme Court judge and the chairperson of the Press Council of India. The Commission will submit its recommendations within 18 months.

- Apart from Justice Desai, the Commission will have IIM Bangalore Professor Pulak Ghosh as Member (Part-Time), and Petroleum Secretary Pankaj Jain as Member-Secretary.



- The government had announced the formation of the 8th Central Pay Commission in January this year to examine and recommend changes in the salaries and other benefits of central government employees. The terms of reference have been finalised after consultations with various ministries, state governments and staff side of the Joint Consultative Machinery.
- “The Central Pay Commissions are periodically constituted to go into various issues of emoluments structure, retirement benefits and other service conditions of Central Government employees and to make recommendations on the changes required thereon. Usually, the recommendations of the pay commissions are implemented after a gap of every 10 years. Going by this trend, the effect of the 8th Central Pay Commission recommendations would normally be expected from 01.01.2026,” the government said in a release.
- This essentially means that the pay and pension hikes are likely to be implemented retrospectively from January 1, 2026, with arrears being paid when the recommendations take effect. Allowances, however, are likely to be revised prospectively.
- The Central government’s outgo on pay, pension and allowances is estimated at over Rs 7 lakh crore in 2025-26, which is around 18% of the revenue expenditure.
- The previous Central Pay Commission recommendations were implemented with effect from January 1, 2016, with retrospective effect for pay and pension.
- According to the government, while making its recommendations, the Commission will keep in view the economic conditions in the country and the need for fiscal prudence, the need to ensure that adequate resources are available for developmental expenditure and welfare measures, and the unfunded cost of non-contributory pension schemes.
- It will also take into consideration the likely impact of the recommendations on state government finances as states usually adopt the recommendations with some modifications, and the prevailing emolument structure, benefits, and working conditions available to employees of Central public sector undertakings and the private sector.
- The Seventh Central Pay Commission had recommended a 23.55% increase in pay, allowances and pension, which led to an additional annual outgo of Rs 1.02 lakh crore for the Central government.

#### LEGAL BATTLE OVER MGNREGS IN BENGAL, WHAT HAPPENS AFTER SC’S ORDER

The Supreme Court on Monday (October 27) cleared the path for restarting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in West Bengal after a gap of three and a half years.

- Following the enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, a hundred days of wage employment are annually provided as a legal right to adults in rural areas who are willing to do unskilled manual work. Central and State Governments provide financial assistance in the ratio of 90:10, respectively, with the Centre fully funding the wages.
- Before the Centre suspended the MG-NREGS in 2022, West Bengal was among the top states — 51 to 80 lakh families in the state availed it annually between 2014-15 and 2021-22.
- In its decision, the apex court dismissed the Central government’s plea, which challenged the Calcutta High Court’s order to resume the scheme from August 1, 2025.



- The Centre had stopped the release of funds to West Bengal with effect from March 9, 2022, “due to non-compliance of directives of Central Government”, by invoking Section 27 of the MGNREGA, 2005. Since then, no work under the NREGS has happened in the state.
- Minister of State of Rural Development, Kamlesh Paswan, said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha this year, “In case of the State of West Bengal, based on central teams’ inspection reports highlighting the implementation issues such as financial misappropriation, execution of non-permissible activities, splitting of works, lack of transparency & accountability, the Ministry had sent several communications to the State for rectification of the same. However, no noticeable improvements were observed.”
- The TMC-led West Bengal government repeatedly urged the Union Ministry of Rural Development to resume the scheme. TMC MPs also raised the issue, with Abhishek Banerjee leading a delegation of MPs to Krishi Bhawan in New Delhi on more than one occasion.
- Eventually, the West Bengal government approached the Calcutta High Court, which, in its order on June 18, 2025, directed that the “scheme be implemented prospectively with effect from 1st August 2025.” However, the Centre filed a plea in the Supreme Court on July 31, a day before the HC’s deadline, challenging the HC order.
- On Monday, when the matter came up before the bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, it refused to entertain the plea filed by the Centre against the HC order, saying it did not warrant interference. With the SC dismissing the Centre’s plea, sources said the ministry has virtually no option but to resume the scheme.
- The states can generate their demands for funds using NREGASoft, the Management Information System (MIS) of the MG-NREGS, only after this committee clears their labour budget proposals. Under the NREGS, the MoRD releases funds to states “based on agreed labour budget.”

**Do You Know:**

- MGNREGS is the world’s largest social security programme aimed at enhancing livelihood security and reducing rural poverty. It is based on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA, 2005).
- The MGNREGA recognises employment as a statutory right. The Act signified a critical shift from this being a negative right under Article 21 of the Constitution (which mandated that the state must not interfere with your livelihood unreasonably) to a positive statutory obligation on the government to provide employment on demand.
- It guarantees 100 days of employment in a year to rural households whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- The act provides a legally-backed guarantee for any rural adult to get work within 15 days of demanding it; thereby serving as an effective social safety net during times of economic distress. Moreover, at least one third of MGNREGA beneficiaries have to be women.

**TAPPING THE SHINE**

Among the successes that India can take reasonable credit for is cultivating a domestic solar power industry. Somewhere in 2017, the per unit cost of solar power fell below that of coal power, spurring new interest among businesses investing in ground-mounted solar projects. In 2024-25,

4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



the International Renewable Energy Agency reported that India generated 1,08,494 Gwh (gigawatt-hour) of solar energy, surpassing Japan's 96,459 Gwh, and making it the third largest producer of solar power behind only China and the United States. India's capacity to manufacture solar module panels rose from 2 GW (gigawatt) in 2014 to 100 GW in 2025, according to the Ministry of Renewable Energy. This is significant considering that India's domestically installed solar capacity is about 117 GW as of September. However, the actual manufacturing capacity is an optimistic projection and the effective production capacity currently is about 85 GW.

India has stated that as part of its climate commitments, it will source half of its power requirements in 2030 from non-fossil fuel sources. That is about 500 GW of which 250 GW-280 GW is expected to come from solar power. This means that India needs to add about 30 GW annually until 2030. However, India has effectively been able to add only about 17 GW-23 GW annually in the recent past. While in theory, internal production should be sufficient internally, modules made in India are anywhere from 1.5 to 2 times more expensive than those from China, simply because of its much larger capacity, control of the necessary raw material and far superior production lines. India, in its best performance, managed about 4 GW of export of solar modules to the U.S. in 2024 and that too, due to America's temporary restrictions. Compare that with China's annual export of around 236 GW in 2024. Therefore, the large manufacturing capacity that will come online in India in the next few years will likely struggle without new markets. In this context, India's overtures to be a 'solar supplier' to Africa, leveraging the flagship of the International Solar Alliance, is a good move. While India's PM Kusum scheme (solar power to rural India) and PM Surya Ghar scheme (rooftop solar in urban India) are yet to make substantial gains in terms of domestic adoption, they can serve as models to be pitched in Africa which, due to the lack of sufficient rural power, is able to tap only 4% of its arable land through irrigation, creating an opportunity for solar-powered India pumpsets. Though China still remains the dominant solar supplier in Africa too, India must be able to step in as a credible second player for a shot at the sustainability of its own industry.

#### NHAI TO DEPLOY NSVS ON 20,000 KM OF HIGHWAYS: HOW IT WILL SCAN FOR DEFECTS

The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has announced that it will deploy Network Survey Vehicles (NSVs) in 23 states, covering 20,933 km of National Highways (NHs), for the collection, processing, and analysis of road inventory and pavement condition data.

- The agency has said that these specialised vehicles will enable it to collect necessary data related to road and pavement condition, including all relevant road defects such as surface cracking, potholes, and patches.
- The NHAI has faced criticism regarding the poor condition of NHs, which leads to accidents and fatalities if it is not maintained properly. There are existing policy guidelines on surveying with NSV, which have been in place since 2019, mandating that the authority's engineer and an independent engineer conduct surveys with NSV before issuing completion certificates for newly built highway stretches.
- Now, with this new assignment, NHAI aims to collect all necessary data by conducting various surveys and accessing available data from concerned agencies, processing and analysing the same and uploading it on the Road Asset Management System (RAMS) in the prescribed format.



- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has developed RAMS (also called Datalake) to create a single road database for planning, budgeting, managing and maintaining the entire NH network in India through a systematic and scientific life cycle analysis.
- An NSV is usually a specialised van or SUV equipped with multiple sensors and instruments, such as Laser, Global Positioning System (GPS), Video image processing tools, High-resolution cameras, Inertial Measurement Units (IMU), and DMI (Distance Measuring Indicator).
- These vehicles will collect data on the condition of NHs. The collected data will be further used to make decisions for pavement maintenance, asset management, and infrastructure planning.
- Officials said that the data will be collected for all projects involving 2/4/6 and 8 lanes with NSV before the start of work and thereafter at regular intervals of six months.
- The pavement condition surveys will be carried out using a 3D laser-based NSV system, which is capable of capturing and reporting road defects automatically without any human intervention, with the help of high-resolution 360-degree cameras and other tools.
- NHAI has invited bids this month from qualified companies to implement this initiative. According to the terms of reference (TOR), the survey will capture 13 types of defects, including crack measurement, ravelling, patch area, potholes, edge break, roughness, rutting, lane marking, etc.
- The total length of NHs in India is 1.46 lakh km. Out of this, over 50,000 km stretch is managed by NHAI. According to the bid document, a total of 20,933 km stretch, covering 91,280 km lane length, has been identified for this special survey. It has been divided into five packages: north (2,687km), west (3,915km), centre (4,616km), south (4,537km), and east (5,179km).

**Do You Know:**

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is an autonomous agency of the Indian Government tasked with the development, maintenance, and management of National Highways and expressways in the country, along with Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).
- The NHAI is responsible for ensuring that National Highways and expressways remain pothole-free. However, State Highways and District Roads are constructed and maintained by state governments, with their Public Works Departments (PWDs) tasked with the repair and upkeep of these roads.
- NHAI plays a crucial role beyond managing and developing the country's highway system. It is authorised to levy fees on National Highways and regulate vehicle movement, ensuring efficient management and development of the road network.

**CIPLA SEALS DEAL TO TAKE MOUNJARO, WEIGHT-LOSS DRUG, ACROSS COUNTRY**

Indian pharma giant Cipla on Thursday announced an agreement with US pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly, acquiring the rights to distribute its blockbuster weight-loss drug Mounjaro. The drug, which was launched in India in March, will be sold by Cipla under a different brand name, Yurpeak, across the country.



- The partnership is significant, as it allows Eli Lilly’s weight-loss drug to leverage Cipla’s extensive distribution footprint — reaching beyond the traditional large metros where Mounjaro is currently available.
- The company has described the agreement as “strategic,” coming just months before the primary patent for Novo Nordisk’s semaglutide (Wegovy) — a rival to tirzepatide (Mounjaro) — is set to expire in India in March next year. This expiry could pave the way for the launch of generic versions of semaglutide at significantly lower prices in the Indian market.
- Significantly, this is not Eli Lilly’s first strategic tie-up with Cipla, India’s third largest pharma company. The US pharmaceutical giant has previously collaborated with the Indian firm on two of its diabetic products: Humalog and Trulicity.
- Tirzepatide is approved for chronic weight management in adults. It is indicated for individuals who are either obese (body mass index [BMI] of 30 or more) or overweight (BMI of 27 or more) and have at least one weight-related health condition, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or type 2 diabetes.
- This class of drugs is composed of polypeptides, small proteins that enhance naturally occurring hormones in the body. Tirzepatide works by increasing glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) levels, which regulate weight through effects on the brain and digestive tract.
- Higher GLP-1 levels, released in the gut, stimulate neurons that slow gut function and create a sense of fullness. At the same time, GLP-1 activates neural pathways in the brain that trigger satiety—the feeling of being satisfied after eating. The drugs also help manage glucose levels, making them effective for diabetes treatment.
- Significantly, tirzepatide not only targets GLP-1 receptors but also enhances a second hormone: glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP). This regulates weight through receptors in the brain and fat cells, and its combined action with GLP-1 amplifies the effects of both hormones, according to the company.

**Do You Know:**

- Both semaglutide and tirzepatide belong to a new class of medicines called GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) receptor agonists. They are prescribed for the management of type-2 diabetes and obesity.
- These drugs mimic certain naturally-occurring gut hormones called incretins (GLP-1 is one such incretin) produced in the small intestine, and are hence also known as incretin mimicker.

- They work by:

(a) improving the secretion of insulin that allows more of the glucose in the bloodstream to enter cells where it can be used for energy;

(b) inhibiting the secretion of the hormone glucagon that stimulates the liver to release stored glucose into the bloodstream;

(c) slowing down the emptying of the stomach so that the glucose levels in the bloodstream doesn’t spike; and

(d) reducing appetite by signalling to the brain that one is satiated.



- Semaglutide and tirzepatide both mimic the action of GLP-1. Tirzepatide additionally also mimics the action of another hormone called glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP).

## HOW AMAZON'S CLOUD OUTAGE AFFECTED SERVICES AND APPS GLOBALLY

On 20 October 2025, a routine Monday morning turned into chaos for millions worldwide as Amazon Web Services (AWS) suffered a massive outage in its US-EAST-1 region, demonstrating how a single technical snag can cripple the global digital economy.

The trouble began with a "latent race condition" in DynamoDB's DNS management system at Amazon's North Virginia data centre. This hidden defect in the internet's "phone book" caused endpoint resolution failures that quickly snowballed into a 15-hour nightmare, affecting everything from social media to banking services.

The scale was unprecedented: Downtidetector recorded over 17 million user reports across 60+ countries, impacting more than 3,500 companies. While the United States (6.3 million reports) and United Kingdom (1.5 million) were hardest hit, the ripple effects reached Indian users too, disrupting services they rely on daily.

Social media platform Snapchat led the casualty list with nearly 3 million complaints. Gamers couldn't access Roblox, while shoppers faced issues on Amazon's own platform. The financial sector took a severe hit—Lloyds, Bank of Scotland, and Barclays customers were locked out of their accounts. Even government portals like UK's HMRC and smart home devices including Ring doorbells malfunctioned.

The economic toll is staggering, with experts estimating losses in the hundreds of billions of dollars. This is particularly concerning given AWS's dominant 37% share of the global cloud market, making it a systemic risk akin to "too big to fail" financial institutions.

Amazon has since disabled the problematic automation globally and is implementing velocity controls and improved recovery mechanisms. However, the incident underscores a critical lesson: concentration risk is the Achilles' heel of our digital infrastructure.

For India's rapidly digitising economy, where thousands of startups and enterprises depend on cloud services, this outage serves as a clarion call. Businesses must adopt multi-region architectures, build circuit breakers into their systems, and recognise that in today's interconnected world, resilience is not optional—it's survival.

As industry experts suggest, the way forward is "contained failure" rather than zero failure, through disciplined redundancy planning and regulatory frameworks that treat cloud infrastructure as critical national assets.



## LIFE AND SCIENCE

### BOTANICAL SEXISM: A MALE BIAS

Have you ever wondered why your allergies seem to get worse in the spring and fall? Part of the blame may lie with a concept called “botanical sexism.” This term, coined by horticulturist Tom Ogren, refers to a long-standing practice in urban planning of planting more male flora than female.

Male trees produce pollen, the fine, powdery substance that triggers allergies in many people. Female trees receive pollen to produce fruits and seeds. For decades, city planners have often chosen to plant male trees to avoid the ‘mess’ of fallen fruits and seeds on the streets. In fact, the 1949 US Department of Agriculture Yearbook even recommended planting male trees to avoid this “nuisance.”

One unintended consequence of this preference in history was a significant increase in the amount of pollen in our urban environments. With fewer female trees to capture the pollen, the air becomes saturated with the allergens, leading to a rise in seasonal allergies and asthma. While some scientists have argued that the impact of botanical sexism is overstated and that other factors like pollution contribute to allergy severity, the connection between a high concentration of male plants and increased pollen is a legitimate issue.

The discussion around botanical sexism highlights how particular choices in urban landscapes can directly affect public health. By understanding this concept, planners and policymakers can advocate for more balanced and diverse planting in communities, which could lead to cleaner air and fewer sneezes for everyone.

### CHINA’S GOLDEN MONKEYS DEBUT AT EUROPEAN ZOOS, POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO ‘PANDA DIPLOMACY’

With their distinctive shaggy orange manes, pale blue faces and dense fur covering their hands and feet, it’s hard to mistake China’s endangered golden snub-nosed monkeys for any other animal.

- These rare and charismatic monkeys, unique to the frigid mountains of central China, have recently joined the country’s famous pandas as furry envoys to zoos in Europe for the first time — on loan for 10 years from the same government-overseen group that coordinates official panda exchanges.
- As with “panda diplomacy,” some observers cheer new opportunities for scientific and conservation collaboration, while others raise concerns about the welfare of individual animal ambassadors transported around the world.
- Three golden monkeys arrived at France’s Beauval Zoo in the city of Saint-Aignan this April, following an agreement to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and France.
- The hope is to build longstanding scientific exchanges between the zoos and Chinese authorities, said Anaïs Maury, the communications director for the Beauval Zoo.



- Both giant pandas and golden snub-nosed monkeys are endangered animals that are unique to China and they can only be moved outside the country with approval from the central government, said Elena Songster, an environmental historian at St. Mary's College of California.
- While both species are considered national treasures, only monkeys have deep roots in Chinese art and culture, appearing in countless paintings and as characters in classic literature, including the wily Monkey King in the 16th century novel "Journey to the West."
- The original soft power couple from post-war China was a pair of giant pandas, Ping Ping and Qi Qi, sent to the Soviet Union in 1957 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, which led to the establishment of the world's first Communist state.
- In 1972, a pair of pandas was sent to the U.S. for the first time, following President Richard Nixon's historic visit to Beijing. In 1984, China switched from gifting pandas to loaning them.
- Following outcry from animal-rights activists, China ended the practice of short-term loans and began longer leases, usually around a decade. In this arrangement through the China Wildlife Conservation Association, part of the money that an overseas zoo pays annually to China must be earmarked for habitat conservation or scientific research to benefit the species.

**Do You Know:**

- China's "panda diplomacy" is the practice of transporting pandas from China to other countries as a means of diplomacy and animal protection.

#### STUDY REVEALS RARE DEFENCE TRAITS IN INDIAN FROGS

Scientists from the University of Delhi have, for the first time, documented rare and contrasting anti-predator behaviours in two frog species from India: one that shrieks and bites attackers, and another that suddenly elevates its body to intimidate threats.

The findings, published in *Herpetological Notes*, were made by a team from Delhi University's Systematics Lab, led by herpetologist S.D. Biju. The study reveals remarkable and previously unrecorded defence strategies among Indian amphibians.

The nocturnal apatani horned toad (*Xenophrys apatani*), endemic to Arunachal Pradesh, relies on its cryptic, leaf-litter-like colouration to remain undetected during the day. When threatened or approached, it inflates its body, emits a piercing distress call and may even bite the intruder. Such behaviour was first noticed during field photography and later confirmed experimentally.

In contrast, the bicoloured frog (*Clinotarsus curtipes*), a diurnal species from the Western Ghats in Kerala, typically found on the forest floor among leaf litter, was observed to arch its body upwards by vertically extending its limbs when disturbed. This posture, believed to make it appear larger and more intimidating, was documented in the wild and later tested using a threat stimulus.

The observations mark the first records of biting and body-raising as defensive strategies among India's 419 known frog species. Of the 7,876 known frog species globally, around 650 are reported to display such behaviours. However, such natural history observations are rarely documented among Indian species.



## CHIMPS IMBIBE TWO COCKTAILS' WORTH OF ETHANOL DAILY FROM RIPE FRUITS

While humans have been drinking alcohol for thousands of years, some scientists think this history could go back millions of years. According to the drunken monkey hypothesis, humans' taste and indeed preference for alcohol may have evolutionary roots, shaped by our primate ancestors consuming small doses of alcohol found inside ripe fruit. Our bodies may also have evolved to metabolise alcoholic compounds more effectively as a result.

In a new study in *Science Advances*, researchers at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, analysed ripe fruits eaten by wild chimpanzees, the closest living relatives of humans, to discover that chimpanzees could be ingesting as much alcohol as in one to two glasses of wine every day.

### Ripe fruits

Chimpanzees share about 98.8% of their DNA with humans, making them an excellent model for exploring questions about human evolution. Their fruit-heavy diet is also believed to resemble that of our last common ancestor. By estimating the chimpanzees' daily alcohol intake from these fruits, researchers can gain insights into the levels that may have been ingested by this ancestor as well.

Ripe fruits contained less than 1% alcohol. To compare, a pint of beer (473 ml) typically contains 4-6% alcohol by volume. However, unlike humans, a large portion of a chimpanzee's diet consists of fruits: nearly three-quarters of their intake, amounting to around 4.5 kg per day.

Researchers calculated that the total alcohol intake from consuming fruits amounted to roughly 14 grams — equivalent to a glass of wine, or two when adjusted for a chimpanzee's body weight.

"When you adjust for body mass, because chimps weigh almost 40 kg versus a typical human at 70 kg, it goes up to nearly two drinks."

### 'An evolved attraction'

Among the 21 fruit varieties the researchers identified in the chimpanzees' diet, the primates showed a strong preference for sticky figs (*Ficus mucoso*). Only 75 of these figs, which are abundant and sugary, can contain as much as 10 grams of alcohol — a significant amount when consumed in a single bout.

However, despite consuming as much as 14 g of alcohol in a day, the chimpanzees didn't display any obvious signs of intoxication. Researchers suggested this was because they didn't imbibe the alcohol in one go but spread it throughout the day. The researchers also said such low-level exposure to natural alcohol may have influenced key physiological adaptations.

"Our research shows that chimpanzees in Cantanchez National Park in Guinea-Bissau share fermented fruits with each other and use leaf tools to access fermented palm wine harvested by humans, indicating an evolved attraction and tolerance to ethanol," Kimberley Hockings, a primatologist at the University of Exeter who has been studying apes in West Africa, said. "These findings suggest that an attraction to ethanol is deeply embedded in animal and human evolutionary history."

This interpretation is aligned with research by Matthew Carrigan, an associate professor of biology at College of Central Florida, USA. His work has concluded that about 10 million years ago,



the last common ancestor of living African apes and modern humans experienced a genetic mutation that increased the rate of ethanol metabolism 40-fold.

#### **Cue for ripeness**

The UC Berkeley study also raises a few questions. Do chimpanzees actively prefer fruits with higher alcohol content, or are they simply attracted to the sweetness of ripe fruits?

Dr. Dudley, who first proposed the drunken monkey hypothesis in 2014, has theorised that alcohol in fruits could serve as a cue for ripeness — a signal of extra calories and perhaps enhanced taste that adds to the pleasure of eating.

While previous studies have documented alcohol use in chimpanzees, the UC Berkeley effort is the first to measure the alcohol content of the fruits they consume.

Tetsuro Matsuzawa, former director of the Primate Research Institute at Kyoto University, Japan, said, “These observations contribute to a growing body of evidence for the drunken monkey hypothesis. From tool-assisted palm wine drinking to the spontaneous consumption of fermented fruits, wild chimpanzees consistently show behaviours that suggest an evolved attraction to ethanol.”

### THE MOST ANCIENT INDIAN WOLF IS SET TO BE A NEW SPECIES

A discreet, charismatic denizen of scrubland and grasslands, the Indian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*), whose population has dwindled to just around 3,000 individuals in India and Pakistan, is likely to be classified as a new species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Indian wolf was first placed within the umbrella genus of the grey wolf that roamed swathes of Asia. However, it has the oldest living lineage of the world’s wolves.

The canine has also been listed as “vulnerable”, bringing it much-needed attention as well as incentives to protect it and conserve its rapidly shrinking habitat.

This animal faces many threats, Y.V. Jhala, former dean of the Wildlife Institute of India and now a senior scientist of the Indian National Science Academy, explained. They are poisoned for preying on livestock, their natural prey base is vastly depleted in its fragile habitat, and the semi-arid areas they inhabit are destroyed by highways and renewable energy projects, Dr. Jhala told The Hindu.

“A den site I studied in Kutch is now engulfed by the Adani Solar Farm.”

The wolf’s persecution is curious, as they aren’t known to attack humans. “There have been two recent spates of wolf-human conflict, one in 1996 and the other last year in Bahraich district [in Uttar Pradesh],” Dr. Jhala said.

According to reports, since September, six people, including four children, were killed and 30 others were injured in wolf attacks in Bahraich. Meanwhile, almost the entire pack was shot to death.

“There has been a call for over two decades to have it be declared a distinct species,” Abi Vanak, director of the Centre for Policy Design at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology, Bengaluru, told The Hindu.



### 'Best models'

"The Indian wolf is already under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act. The wolf, like the bustards and other denizens of the open natural ecosystems, do not need strict protected areas. Rather they serve as the best models for co-existence, and this is what needs to be incentivised. With the downgrading of the wolf to 'vulnerable' (I don't call it upgrading), hopefully more international attention and funds can flow towards its conservation, and the protection of its habitats."

Going forward, Dr. Jhala said, it's important to acknowledge the IUCN assessment by developing a national policy and management plan for the unique, ancient Indian wolf.

## MANY INSECTS ARE MOVING FROM TABOO TO THE TABLE

We depend on insects in many ways for producing food for the world's population. They pollinate our crop plants, break down decaying plant and animal matter, and are natural pest controllers. We also consume honey from honeybees.

Insects are all around us. However, many of us would be reluctant to indulge in entomophagy, to eat insects or their larvae. One reason for this is probably neophobia, the fear of trying out anything new.

At the same time, humans are currently worried about the overexploitation of the planet. There is a need for foods that provide high-quality calories without consuming large amounts of natural resources. Insects fit the bill. Their protein content is typically 40% by dry weight, the fat content 20-30%, and they also have minerals like potassium and iron.

Nearly a fourth of the world's population already eats edible insects. Some insects are regarded as delicacies. Mexican escamole, known as the "caviar of the desert", tastes like richly buttered baby corn but is the fried pupae and larvae of the velvety tree ant. The chef Sheril Kirshenbaum discussed tasteful insect menus in a 2023 episode of 'Serving Up Science' on PBS.

In India, edible insects are consumed among Indigenous communities in the Northeast States, Odisha, and in the Western Ghats. The practice is rooted in nutritional needs, cultural habits, and folk medicine. Tribal and rural populations in the Northeast reputedly consume more than 100 edible insect species for their protein, and they are also sold in local markets. Fried, roasted, or cooked, certain beetles, moths, hornets, and water bugs are preferred — although flies are not.

Collecting insects from nature may not be sustainable, as insect populations may be depleted. Some groups have thus taken up semi-domestication, where insects and their larvae are nurtured and harvested by humans.

Ethnobiologists at the Nagaland University in Lumami have been studying traditional methods of insect farming and how they can be adapted to cultivating new species.

The Chakhesang and Angami tribes of Nagaland and Manipur consider the Asian giant hornet a delicacy, including roasted adults and fried larvae. This hornet is now semi-domesticated. Its cultivation begins by locating a nest, which is transported to a 1-metre-deep rearing pit that is loosely filled with soil. The empty nest is anchored to a pole just above the pit and covered with loose soil. A queen soon arrives with worker hornets, which begin enlarging the nest below the



ground. The result is a large multilayered structure resembling an inverted pyramid. For the harvest, adult hornets are smoked out and the larvae are extracted.

Tribal groups around the Annamalai Hills in Tamil Nadu use weaver ants as a culinary and medicinal resource. Leaf nests containing eggs, larvae, and adults are roasted and then stone-ground to create a spiced soup. Similar preparations utilising the nests of other wasps, termites, and bees are also consumed as health supplements to alleviate respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments.

The World Health Organization has opined that insects in diets may be the key to achieving sustainable food production. Insect processing strategies may make them more acceptable. Grasshopper, locusts, and cricket powder (or flour) are now used as a protein supplement. As dietary trends evolve, as we get used to dryland millets and grow curious about lab-grown meats, we may well have insects on our plates soon.

### HURRICANE MELISSA A 'BEAST' AMONG A STRING OF MONSTER ATLANTIC STORMS

Hurricane Melissa, the strongest tropical cyclone worldwide in 2025, has left a trail of catastrophic damage across the Caribbean, claiming over 80 lives and causing an estimated \$6 billion in losses after making landfall as a Category 5 storm in Jamaica on 28 October.

The system, which formed from a West African tropical wave on 21 October, intensified rapidly over warm Caribbean waters, reaching peak winds of 295 km/h and a central pressure of 892 mbar—tied for the third-lowest in Atlantic basin history. When Melissa struck Jamaica near New Hope, it became the first Category 5 hurricane to directly hit the island, surpassing Hurricane Gilbert's 1988 record.

Jamaica bore the brunt of Melissa's fury. At least 75 per cent of the island lost electricity, while flooding and landslides displaced approximately 125,000 residents. Prime Minister Andrew Holness declared the country a disaster area as infrastructure was "severely compromised". Internet connectivity plummeted to 30 per cent of normal levels, hampering rescue efforts. At least three storm-related deaths were reported during preparations.

The devastation spread eastward as Melissa slammed Cuba's southeastern coast on 29 October as a Category 3 hurricane with 195 km/h winds. Over 735,000 people evacuated in Santiago de Cuba province alone. The storm dumped up to 38 cm of rain, forcing more than 700,000 evacuations nationwide. The rugged terrain weakened Melissa, but it re-strengthened to Category 2 with 165 km/h winds before reaching the Bahamas.

Across the archipelago, power outages affected multiple islands. Cat Island experienced hurricane-force winds, while Long Island's power station suffered severe damage. Bahamas Power and Light reported 18 downed poles on San Salvador Island.

Haiti and Dominican Republic contended with heavy rains and landslides. Over 16,000 Haitians fled to safer areas, while the Dominican Republic saw overflowing rivers trigger deadly landslides. At least six deaths were recorded across Hispaniola.

As Melissa raced northeast at 66 km/h, it grazed Bermuda as a Category 1 hurricane on 30 October, knocking out power to 19,000 customers—half the island. An elevated anemometer recorded gusts of 158 km/h. By 31 October, Melissa transitioned into an extratropical cyclone northeast of Bermuda.



The storm's final impacts were felt along the US Northeast coast, where heavy rainfall caused basement flooding that drowned two people in New York City. Central Park set a new daily rainfall record with 46.48 mm.

Though Melissa has now dissipated southeast of Iceland, its legacy endures as a stark reminder of climate-fuelled intensification. With 83-plus fatalities and infrastructure damage spanning six nations, recovery efforts face a race against time before the world's attention shifts.

#### AT IMO, 57 NATIONS VOTE FOR DELAYING FRAMEWORK FOR CARBON-FREE SHIPPING

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) postponed a decision on implementing a framework to transition the shipping industry to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, following pressure from the United States and opposition from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Russia. Although a sub-committee had previously approved measures including a new fuel standard and carbon pricing to start in 2027, the formal vote was delayed by a year after a contentious meeting in London. Ultimately, 57 countries voted for the delay, 49 against, and 21 abstained. The postponement was criticised by climate advocates for failing to address urgent climate change concerns. The IMO's broader greenhouse gas strategy targets a minimum 40% reduction in carbon intensity of international shipping by 2030.

#### RISING CO2 LEVELS

The atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), the primary driver of climate change, increased by a record amount between 2023 and 2024, according to latest data released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

- Globally averaged CO<sub>2</sub> concentration near the Earth's surface reached 423.9 parts per million in 2024, 3.5 ppm higher than in 2023. The year-on-year increase in this period was significantly higher than the annual average during the 2011-2020 decade.
- The year 2024 was also the warmest year ever recorded, with the global average temperature being 1.55 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial times.
- This was the first time that global annual temperatures had crossed the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold, a key limit which, when breached over a long-term period, can result in devastating irreversible impacts.
- The rapidly rising CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations underscore the failure of the international climate framework, as represented by the Paris Agreement, to achieve a meaningful slowdown in global emissions.
- CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have been rising consistently over the years. There has been no instance of a decline in the last 40 years, at least. However, the new data from the WMO show that the year-on-year increase between 2023 and 2024 was the highest since these kinds of measurements began in 1957.
- The rate of increase in CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations had already tripled from an average of 0.8 ppm per year during the 1960s to 2.4 ppm per year between 2011 and 2020. But a 3.5 ppm jump in a year is unprecedented.



- The current CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere, 423.9 ppm, is now 152% more than the pre-industrial levels of 278.3 ppm.
- CO<sub>2</sub> is the most widespread of the greenhouse gases (GHGs), and is produced in a variety of natural and man-made processes. The emissions from natural processes such as respiration, ocean releases, volcano eruptions, wildfires, or decomposition of organic matter are nearly all absorbed back in other natural processes like photosynthesis, ocean and land sinks, thus maintaining a balance.
- Although CO<sub>2</sub> accounts for more than 90% of all accumulated GHGs in the atmosphere, its ability to trap heat is significantly less than other GHGs such as methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). CH<sub>4</sub> is at least 25% more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> in its heat-trapping capability, while N<sub>2</sub>O is about 270 times more potent.
- CO<sub>2</sub> remains in the atmosphere for a far longer time, about hundreds to thousands of years. As a result, it has a cumulative impact on global warming.
- CO<sub>2</sub> is known to have contributed about 66% of the warming that has happened since pre-industrial times, and about 79% in the last decade. In comparison, CH<sub>4</sub> is relatively short-lived and remains in the atmosphere for only about 12 to 14 years. N<sub>2</sub>O disintegrates after about 100 to 120 years.
- The unusually high increase of 3.5 ppm between 2023 and 2024 could not be solely attributed to continued emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> from man-made activities, the WMO report said. Variabilities in the natural CO<sub>2</sub> loop also had a role to play.
- One of the causes of the reduced capability of natural sinks in oceans and land to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> is global warming itself. At higher temperatures, oceans absorb less CO<sub>2</sub> due to decreased solubility.
- The concentration of CH<sub>4</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O also increased in 2024, but the jump was lower than the annual average witnessed in the last decade. CH<sub>4</sub> — the second most widely emitted GHG — concentrations increased by 8 parts per billion to reach a level of 1,942 ppb in the atmosphere, while N<sub>2</sub>O concentrations increased by 1 ppb to reach 338 ppb.
- The new data from the WMO Greenhouse Gas Bulletin underline the enormity of the challenge being faced in restraining the rapid accumulation of GHGs in the atmosphere.

**Do You Know:**

- The Centre has notified the first legally binding Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity (GEI) Target Rules, 2025.
- 4 high-emission sectors for which it has been notified are — aluminium, cement, chlor-alkali, and pulp and paper.
- The emission targets were notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on October 8.
- India has committed to reducing the emissions intensity of its gross domestic product (the amount of energy used per unit of GDP) by 45 per cent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, as part of its domestic commitments under the global agreement.



- Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are those gases in the Earth's atmosphere that trap heat. They allow sunlight to pass through the atmosphere but prevent the heat that sunlight brings from returning into space.
- GHGs act like a blanket that envelopes our planet and insulates Earth from the cold of space. This process of maintaining a warmer temperature is called the greenhouse effect.
- The most notable GHGs are water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, and nitrous oxide. These gases occur naturally and are a boon for the planet — in their absence, there wouldn't be the greenhouse effect without which there wouldn't be liquid water and any form of life.

### 'WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS FUEL CLIMATE CRISIS THROUGH WEALTH MORE THAN CONSUMPTION'

Wealthy individuals fuel the climate crisis through their wealth even more than their consumption, with 41 per cent of global emissions associated with private capital ownership, while the top 1 per cent represent 15 per cent of global consumption-based emissions, as per the Climate Inequality Report 2025 released Wednesday.

- Climate change can deepen wealth inequality as the share of wealth held by the global top 1 per cent could increase to 46 per cent in 2050 from 38.5 per cent at present if those individuals were to make and own all necessary climate investments in the next decades, the report titled 'Climate Change: A Capital Challenge Why Climate Policy Must Tackle Ownership' stated.
- The report has proposed a financial investment tax on the carbon content of assets which may help redirect capital flows away from high-carbon assets, especially in the absence of an outright ban on high-carbon investments.
- The findings show that the world's wealthiest 1 per cent account for 41 per cent of emissions associated with private capital ownership versus 15 per cent of emissions associated with consumption. This implies that per-capita emissions for an individual in the global top 1 per cent are about 75 times higher than those of someone in the bottom 50 per cent under the consumption-based approach, and about 680 times higher under the ownership-based approach.
- As per the ownership-based approach, the carbon footprint of the wealthiest 10 per cent in France, Germany, and the US is three to five times higher than suggested by consumption-only estimates, it said.
- In the consumption-based approach, the share of total emissions of the top 1 per cent stands at 3 per cent in France, 2 per cent in Germany, and 6 per cent in the US. When seen for ownership emissions, these shares rise to 44 per cent, 45 per cent and 43 per cent for France, Germany, and the US, respectively, the report said.
- This concentration of emissions linked to wealth, could be partly addressed via a tax on the carbon content of wealth, the report said.
- Such a tax could be designed as an additional component of a wealth tax, adjusting each taxpayer's liability according to the carbon intensity of the assets they own, it said adding that implementing such a scheme would require systematic data collection from asset holders and financial institutions.



- A wealth tax on the carbon content is likely to be more progressive than standard carbon taxes, which are almost entirely passed on to final consumers, it said, adding that carbon taxes on wealth rather than consumption may prove more effective as consumers often lack immediate substitutes for fossil fuels, whereas asset owners — particularly those with financial portfolios — can more readily shift their investments to cleaner alternatives.
- As other policy options, the report suggested a ban on new domestic dirty investments, such as fossil fuel exploration, to halt further contributions to climate change along with public investments and shared public ownership (international, national, local, and cooperative), to accelerate the shift to a resilient, low-carbon energy infrastructure that has the potential to reduce wealth inequalities.
- The report said climate change is advancing faster than ever and projections suggest that the remaining global carbon budget for limiting warming to 1.5°C could be exhausted within three years.

**Do You Know:**

- Ahead of COP30, the State of Climate Action Report 2025 was published by Change Lab, as a joint effort of the Bezos Earth Fund, Climate Analytics, the Climate High-Level Champions, ClimateWorks Foundation and World Resources Institute.
- According to the report, not a single one of the 45 indicators assessed is on track to meet the 2030 targets needed to achieve the Paris Agreement of limiting global warming to 1.5°C by the end of this decade.
- The report highlighted the key areas where acceleration is needed. The world needs to phase out coal more than ten times faster — equivalent to retiring nearly 360 average-sized coal-fired power plants each year and halting all projects in the pipeline.
- There is a need to reduce deforestation nine times faster. The current levels are far too high — roughly equivalent to permanently losing nearly 22 football (soccer) fields of forest every minute in 2024.

## ANTAGONISTIC ANTIBIOTICS

**Q. If antibiotics are becoming less effective, why not combine them?**

A. It might seem logical to combine different antibiotics to create a more powerful weapon against resistant bacteria, but this approach can surprisingly backfire. Instead of becoming stronger, some antibiotic combinations can work against each other, a phenomenon known as antagonism. This means the mixture can be less effective than using a single, appropriate antibiotic.

One reason for this is that some antibiotics, called bacteriostatic agents, only stop bacteria from multiplying, while others, known as bactericidal antibiotics, actively kill them. If you mix the two, the bacteriostatic drug can prevent the bactericidal one from working properly as the latter often targets processes in actively dividing cells.

Further, every antibiotic use, including in combinations, puts pressure on bacteria to evolve and develop resistance. Using combinations without a clear benefit can inadvertently contribute to the creation of “superbugs” that are even harder to treat. This is why it’s crucial for doctors to carefully select the right antibiotic based on the specific infection, rather than simply mixing them.



A study published in Molecular Systems Biology on October 27 illustrated this problem in Escherichia coli bacteria. Researchers combined ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic that kills bacteria by damaging DNA, with tetracycline, which merely stops them from growing. They discovered that tetracycline actually slowed down the bacteria's metabolism, preventing ciprofloxacin from killing them. Ultimately the survival rate of the bacterial cells increased.



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