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Economics

Economic Survey 2024-25: Indian Economic Overview

Introduction

- The Economic Survey 2024-25 was tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament.
- It serves as a roadmap for reforms and growth, setting the stage for the Union Budget 2025.
- The survey is an annual report prepared by the Economic Division of the Ministry of Finance under the Chief Economic Adviser's supervision.
- It assesses India's economic performance, highlights sectoral developments, and provides an economic outlook for the coming year.

History of the Economic Survey

- The Economic Survey was first presented as part of the Union Budget in 1950-51.
- It became a separate document from the Union Budget in 1964, tabled a day before the budget.

Key Highlights of Economic Survey 2024-25

- **Global Economy:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected 3.2% global growth in 2024 due to manufacturing slowdowns and strong service sectors despite inflation and geopolitical uncertainties.
- **India's Economy:** India's GDP is estimated to grow between 6.3-6.8% in FY26, while the real Gross Value Added (GVA) is predicted to reach 6.4% in FY25.
- **Sector-Wise Performance:** Agriculture, industry and manufacturing, and services have experienced respective growth of 3.8%, 6.2%, and 7.2% in FY25.

- **External, Monetary and Financial Developments:** Persistent growth exhibited in exports, reduction in GNPA of scheduled commercial banks and increased financial inclusion.
- Capital markets mobilised Rs 11.1 lakh crore in primary markets, a 5% increase over FY24.

Economic & Sectoral Prospects

- India's services sector contributes 55% to GVA and is expected to continue to grow.
- Retail inflation eased, but food inflation rose due to supply chain issues and weather disruptions.
- The IMF projects India to become a USD 5 trillion economy by FY28 and USD 6.3 trillion by FY30.
- Capital expenditure (Capex) grew at 38.8% Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) (FY20-FY24).

Social Sector Progress

- Education spending rose 12% CAGR to Rs 9.2 lakh crore, decreasing dropout rates and increasing higher education enrolment.
- Welfare measures such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Phase II) have steeply made progress.
- India's social sector spending rose at 15% CAGR (FY21-FY25), reaching Rs 25.7 lakh crore in FY25.
- Healthcare spending surged 18% to Rs 6.1 lakh crore, improving health security.

Employment and Skill Development

- India's unemployment rate fell from 6% (2017-18) to 3.2% (2023-24), with labour force participation (LFPR) increasing to 60.1%.
- The formal sector witnessed a surge in jobs, with Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) net payroll additions doubling from 61 lakh (FY19) to 131 lakh (FY24).

Challenges In The Economy

- Geopolitical risks and global trade slowdown pose a threat to Indian exports and supply chains.
- Persistent food inflation and adverse climate impact face challenges in meeting food security needs and farm incomes.
- Both public and private investment face bottlenecks due to global uncertainties and regulatory concerns.

Suggested Way Forward

- The survey suggests managing geopolitical uncertainties, controlling inflation, bolstering private sector investment, and strengthening the financial sector to improve economic performance and stability.
- It emphasizes improving tax collection mechanisms, rationalising subsidies, and pushing for states to adopt fiscal responsibility measures.
- Bolstering diversification in international trade and expanding domestic energy production are also suggested to build financial resilience and secure long-term economic growth.

Union Budget 2025-26: A Comprehensive Overview and Analysis

Introduction and Budget Theme

- The Union Budget 2025-26 was presented by the Union Finance Minister in the Parliament.
- Recognising agriculture, MSMEs, investment, and exports as four crucial engines of development, this budget aims to boost nationwide economic growth.
- The theme of 'Sabka Vikas' (development for all) underpins the budget, reflecting a commitment to fostering balanced growth across all regions.
- A key framework outlined during the presentation was the principles of Viksit Bharat (Developed India).
- This budget paints a vision of an India where welfare initiatives target the most vulnerable

sections of society – the poor (Garib), Youth, farmers (Annadata), and women (Nari).

Four Engines of Development and their highlights

- Agriculture: Initiatives such as the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, Atma Nirbharta in Pulses, Enhanced Kisan Credit Card Limit, and National Mission on High Yielding Seeds, among others, aim to stimulate agricultural productivity and farmers' incomes.
- MSMEs: Revised MSME Classification, Micro Enterprise Credit Cards, Credit Cover for MSMEs, and the Fund of Funds for Startups are some of the prominent steps taken for the MSME sector.
- Investment: The government has allocated considerable budgets to urban development, water and sanitation, maritime development, education, healthcare, and more to invite and encourage public and private investments across key sectors.
- Export Promotion: With platforms like BharatTradeNet (BTN) and policies promoting Global Capability Centres, the budget promotes export growth.

Taxation, Financial, and Social Reforms

- The government seeks to boost income and financial inclusion among citizens with tax exemptions, increased TDS on rent, time extension for updated tax returns, and the PM SVANidhi Scheme for street vendors.
- Efforts to stimulate domestic manufacturing are evident in the Basic Customs Duty (BCD) Exemptions for specific sectors.

Financial Trends and Budgetary Estimates (2023-24 & 2024-25)

- The financial trends over the last two years indicate the government's focus on balancing revenue and capital expenditures, and steadily decreasing deficits.
- Total transfers to States and Union Territories have also been on the rise.
- The net tax collected by the Centre in 2024-2025 (RE) was ₹28.4 lakh crore. Simultaneously, non-tax revenue stood at ₹5.8

lakh crore, while non-debt capital receipts comprised ₹0.8 lakh crore in 2024-2025 (RE).

Conclusion

- The Union Budget 2025-26, with the fundamental theme of 'Sabka Vikas,' establishes a robust blueprint for Viksit Bharat.
- The budget's empathetic focus on the youth, women, farmers, and the middle class illustrates a comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable development.
- By promoting private sector investment alongside social equity, the budget aims to steer India into becoming a globally competitive and economically resilient country.

Retail Inflation - Key Trends, Challenges, and Measures

Introduction and About Retail Inflation

- Retail inflation, based on the consumer price index (CPI), is defined as the rate at which prices for goods and services purchased by consumers rise overtime.
- It notably reflects changes in the cost of living.
- In December 2024, retail inflation fell to 5.22% from 5.48% in the previous month, November 2024, spurred by easing food inflation.

Causes for Easing of Retail Inflation

- The easing of retail inflation was largely attributed to low food inflation amidst a strong kharif harvest, favourable conditions for rabi sowing, and adequate reservoir levels.
- Food inflation was measured by the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI), which dropped to 8.39% from 9.04% earlier in November 2024.
- A decline in fuel prices that resulted in a contraction of inflation at -1.39% and a stable

inflation in transport and education sectors, also largely contributed to the reduction in overall inflationary pressures.

- Core inflation, discarding volatile food and fuel items, decreased to 3.5%.

Inflation Concerns

- Concerns relating to inflation include rates that exceed RBI's 6% threshold, as evidenced in seven states.
- Factors such as a depreciating rupee, which raises domestic prices and boosts the cost of imported crude oil and global commodities, hinder efforts to control inflation.
- A weak rupee leads to pricier imports due to an increased number of rupees required to purchase the same quantity of foreign commodities.
- High global interest rates can deter foreign investments in India, potentially impacting financial stability and exacerbating currency depreciation.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- CPI is used to measure changes in consumer prices over a period of time, using 2012 as the base year.
- The statistical measure helps in adjusting dearness allowance, targeting price stability, and understanding cost of living among others.
- The CPI incorporates different areas like food, education, medical care, clothing, transport, electricity, and more.
- It is calculated by dividing the cost of a fixed basket in the current year by the cost in the base year, then multiplying by 100.
- There are four types of CPI measured; for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), for Agricultural Laborers (CPI-AL), for Rural Labourers (CPI-RL), and for Urban Non-Manual Employees (CPI-UNME).
- Food and Beverage (45.86%), Housing (10.07%), Fuel and Light (6.84%), Clothing and Footwear (6.53%), Pan, tobacco, and intoxicants (2.38%), and Miscellaneous (28.32%) are the main components of CPI along with their given weightage.

Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI)

- CFPI reflects the variation in retail prices of food items consumed by a defined population group with reference to the base year, currently 2012.
- NSO, MoSPI has been releasing CFPI for three categories (rural, urban and combined) since May 2014.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations releases a global food price index every month.
- Their basket of food commodities comprises five commodity group price indices.

Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24 (HCES)

Introduction and Purpose of HCES

- The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) provides critical data on household consumption patterns in India, thereby reflecting the economic well-being of the population.
- Conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), it's been a significant part of the National Sample Survey (NSS) since 1951.
- The HCES vital data is used to compute Consumer Price Indices (CPI) and to update the base year for macroeconomic indicators, including Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- Its results shed light on the levels of poverty, inequality, and social well-being in India.

Key Findings of HCES 2023-24

- The 2023-24 survey revealed an increase in rural consumption spending, with the average monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) rising to Rs 4,122 and the MPCE of urban areas rising to Rs 6,996.

- According to the survey, the difference between rural and urban consumption dwindled from 83.9% (2011-12) to 69.7% (2023-24).
- The gap narrowed due to rural consumption growing faster than urban consumption.
- When imputed values for free benefits under welfare schemes are included, the rural MPCE rose to Rs 4,247 and urban MPCE to Rs 7,078.
- Examination of regional disparities highlighted the highest MPCE in Sikkim, and the lowest in Chhattisgarh.
- The survey also revealed consumption inequality measured by the Gini coefficient decreased in both rural and urban settings.

Consumption Trends According to HCES 2023-24

- Food spending increased in both rural (47.04%) and urban (39.68%) areas, with the highest expenditure on beverages, refreshments, and processed food.
- Non-food expenditure remained high, at 52.96% in rural and 60.32% in urban areas.
- The most significant portions of non-food spending included conveyance and medical expenses in rural areas, while urban households spent more on conveyance and rent.
- The survey recorded a decrease in consumption spending for the top 5% in rural and urban demographics, while the bottom 5% of both settings observed a significant increase in spending.

Implications of HCES Findings on Policy Making

- The HCES findings can influence a range of policy-making decisions.
- The diminishing rural-urban gap suggests the rise of rural incomes, hinting at the potential benefit of government initiatives like the PM-KISAN and MGNREGA schemes.
- The relatively high spending on conveyance in rural areas indicates a pressing need for improved rural transport infrastructure.

- Emergence of expenditure trends towards services like conveyance and entertainment may suggest a shift towards a service-driven economy, highlighting the need for skilling and job creation in these sectors.
- High urban spending on rent and conveyance suggests the need for improved public transport infrastructure and affordable housing policies.
- States with lower-than-average consumption may need focused interventions in education, healthcare, and employment to boost economic activity.
- The trend towards processed food consumption underscores the need for regulation to ensure quality standards and consumer safety.

Decline in Gross Non-Performing Assets of Scheduled Commercial Banks

Introduction and Current Situation

- The gross non-performing asset (GNPA) ratio for Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) observed a sharp fall from 3.9% in March 2023 to 3.2% by the end of September 2023.
- These figures were recorded in a recent report by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Non-Performing Asset Explanation

- The RBI defines a non-performing asset (NPA) as a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment has remained overdue for a specific period.
- Such an asset becomes non-performing when it stops generating income for the bank.
- For most debts, non-performance is declared when loan payments are not made for at least 90 days.

- However, in agriculture, if the principal and interest are not paid for two cropping seasons, the loan is marked as an NPA.

Types of Non-Performing Assets

- NPAs are subdivided into three categories: Sub-standard assets, doubtful assets, and loss assets.
- A substandard asset is an NPA for less than or equal to 12 months.
- A doubtful asset has been non-performing for more than 12 months.
- Loss assets, on the other hand, are deemed uncollectible and have minimal to no hope of recovery.

Gross and Net Non-Performing Asset

Explanation

- Gross NPA (GNPA) refers to the total amount of NPAs before deducting the provisional amount.
- Net NPA is the gross NPA minus the provision.
- Provision is the fund reserved by banks to counter potential losses from bad loans or NPAs.

Measures to Deal with NPAs in India

- Multiple provisions exist in India to tackle NPAs, including the Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993, the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.
- These mechanisms have facilitated the fast and efficient resolution of debt instances.
- For instance, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has helped recapture Rs 3.16 lakh crore of debt in 808 cases since its inception.

Contributing Factors to NPA Decline

- The primary contributing factors to the decline in NPAs include write-offs, upgrades, and recoveries.
- Write-offs refer to non-performing loans or assets that are removed from the bank's

books, marking the improbability of debt recovery.

- Upgrades refer to the process of reallocating an NPA back to a stable asset category if the borrower clears the unpaid arrears of interest and principal.
- Finally, recoveries signify funds or assets recaptured by the bank after taking corrective actions for default loans or NPAs. These include repayments, liquidation of collateral, or settlements through recoveries.

Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment Scheme

Introduction and About

- Initiated in the financial year 2020-21, the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure was designed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It has been expanded and renamed the 'Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24', possessing a total allocation of Rs 1.3-lakh crore.

Structure of the Scheme

- Comprising eight different parts, Part-I is the most substantial section, allocated Rs. 1 lakh crore, distributed amongst states depending on their share of central taxes and duties concerning the 15th Finance Commission's award.
- Remaining sectors of the scheme focus on specific reforms or sector-specific projects including vehicle scrapping and automated testing facilities, improvements to urban planning and finance, raising the housing stock for urban-based police families, promoting cultural diversity and local products, and establishing digital libraries at the Panchayat and Ward level.

Aims and Objectives

- The objectives of the scheme include stimulating the economy, creating jobs, hastening projects in sectors such as Jal Jeevan Mission and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, and encouraging states to develop urban planning reforms and urban finance improvements to boost the cities' quality of life and governance.

Allocation and Recipients

- Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have been the leading recipients under this scheme over the last four years as they have fulfilled the associated capital expenditure criteria.
- Certain states, including Uttarakhand, Haryana, Kerala, and Punjab, have received approximately 1-2% of the total release amount.
- Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, and Punjab received no allocation in 2023-24 as they reportedly failed to meet the eligibility criteria.

Capital Expenditure in India

- Capital Expenditure (Capex) refers to the funds allocated for acquiring, constructing, or enhancing physical assets like infrastructure, buildings, machinery, and equipment.
- The Capex presented in the annual budget by the finance minister does not reflect the government's spending on creating capital assets through grants-in-aid to states and other agencies, as these are classified as revenue expenditure.
- As a result, 'effective capital expenditure' has been introduced to capture the true extent of public investment by the central government. This is defined as the sum of capital expenditure and grants for the creation of capital assets, budgeted at Rs 13.7 lakh crore or 4.5% of GDP (Union Budget 2023-24).

Revised 'Master Direction' for Asset Reconstruction Companies Issued by RBI

Introduction and Recent Developments

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently updated the 'Master Direction - Reserve Bank of India (Asset Reconstruction Companies-ARCs) Directions, 2024.
- The aim is to streamline operations, enhance transparency, safeguard creditor interests and underscore thorough due diligence in settlement processes.

Key Aspects of the Revised Regulations

- Every ARC needs to establish a Board-approved policy for settling borrower dues, entailing:
 - Establishment of a cut-off date for one-time settlement eligibility.
 - Determining permissible sacrifice for varying categories during settlement amount decision.
 - Methodologies for calculating the realisable value of the security.
- Settlement should only be considered post exploration of all recovery options, with the settlement amount preferably being disbursed in a lump sum.
- If non-lump sum payment plans are developed, they must align with business objectives, borrower's cash flows, and projected earnings.
- An Independent Advisory Committee, composed of experts in technical, financial, or legal fields, should review settlement proposals.

Brief about ARCs

- An ARC is a type of financial entity that acquires non-performing assets (NPAs) from banks and financial institutions and seeks to recover the debts or associated securities.

- ARCs were introduced based on the Narasimham Committee – II in 1998, and were established under the SARFAESI Act, 2002.
- ARCs must be registered under the Companies Act, 2013, and with the RBI under section 3 of the SARFAESI Act, 2002.

ARC Operations

- ARCs work by obtaining a bank's or financial institution's rights in loans, advances, bonds, guarantees, or other credit facilities for recovery, known as 'financial assistance'.
- ARCs acquire financial assets by issuing security receipts to Qualified Buyers, who include insurance companies, banks, state financial corporations, other ARCs, and SEBI-licensed asset management companies.
- ARCs issue security receipts to lenders that are redeemable upon loan recovery, hence, they charge a management fee and share recovery profits with the selling financial entities.

Basic Understanding of Non-Performing Asset (NPA)

- A loan is deemed an NPA when payments have not been met for at least 90 days.
- For agriculture, a loan falls into the NPA category if the principal or interest is overdue for two cropping seasons.
- Banks generally categorise NPAs into three categories based on non-performance duration and recovery probabilities: sub-standard assets (NPAs for 12 months or less), doubtful assets (NPAs for over 12 months), and loss assets, which are uncollectible and demand full write-off.

Geography And Environment

The Polar Vortex and Its Impact on Weather

Introduction and About

- The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure, named for the counterclockwise flow of harsh, cold air it encapsulates around the Earth's polar regions.
- It exists perennially, but its effects are more potent in winter due to strengthening and in summer due to weakening.
- It consists of two types: The Tropospheric Polar Vortex, that influences most weather events and exists until around 15 km above the surface, and the Stratospheric Polar Vortex, which resides between 15 and 50 km above the surface and strengthens during autumn.

Role in Extreme Weather Conditions

- Overlying the mechanism of cold storms, when this powerful vortex is in its prime, it contributes to a stable jet stream, barring cold air from shifting southward.
- On the contrary, when the vortex is weak, it causes the jet stream to disrupt, become wavy and finally enables the cold Arctic air to traverse towards the south.
- This disruption leads to exceedingly frosty temperatures, severe storms and extreme weather, such as heavy snowfall and freezing rain.

Polar Vortex in the Backdrop of US Winter Storm

- The occurrence of an intense winter storm that impacted over 60 million individuals across 30 states in the US is an effect of the southward expansion of the polar vortex.

- The event is characterised by intense cold, snow, sleet, or freezing rain, often combined with robust winds.

Connection with Global Warming

- As per scientific research, the Arctic is warming at a much faster pace than the rest of the Earth, a scenario termed as Arctic amplification.
- This swift warming curtails the temperature differences between the poles and mid-latitudes, thereby weakening the polar vortex.

Similar Geophysical Phenomena

- Arctic Oscillation (AO), like the polar vortex, is a climate pattern that influences winter weather in the Northern Hemisphere. Its positive phase fends off cold air outbreaks in the mid-latitudes while the negative phase prompts them.
- North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) is another such phenomenon that determines pressure variances between the Azores High and Subpolar Low that affects North America and Europe's weather significantly. A positive NAO phase brings about warmer, wetter conditions in the US and northern Europe, and conversely causes a cooler, drier phase.

A Study on Balancing Climate Goals and Biodiversity Protection

Introduction and Overview

- A recent study titled "Balancing climate goals and biodiversity protection: legal implications of the 30x30 target for land-based carbon removal" addressed the conflicts that occur between Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) strategies and the establishment of protected areas.

- The research offers an in-depth look into international environmental law in relation to the said conflicts.

Land Availability Issues

- According to the findings of the study, limited land availability is one of the key obstacles to achieving biodiversity targets and land-based climate mitigation initiatives.

- The commitment by various countries to allocate significant portions of land for CDR activities is a challenge for the creation of protected zones due to finite land availability.

The 30x30 Biodiversity Target

- Nations globally have committed to the 30x30 biodiversity target, which aspires to protect 30% of the world's terrestrial and marine areas by the year 2030.

- As of 2023, protected zones only cover about 16% of terrestrial locations and 8% of marine areas. These figures fall short of the targeted 30x30 goal.

Land Usage and Conflict

- Some land-based mitigation tactics conflict with the drive to establish more protected areas because of land usage limitations.

- The large-scale application of CDR might lead to further biodiversity loss and increased competition for land used in food crop production.

Insufficiency of Targets

- Despite the ambitious 30x30 target, researchers believe that at least 44% of the global land should be protected areas to effectively preserve biodiversity.

- Furthermore, CDR activities alone might not be sufficient to achieve the goals set out in the Paris Agreement, which is to limit global warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius.

Challenges in Implementation

- Questions arise over how nations will allocate more land for protected areas and restoration

while increasing food production and implementing CDR strategies.

- Striking a balance between these goals presents a significant challenge.

Legal Implications

- Although some land-based CDR strategies could foster biodiversity, current international environmental law does not prohibit the implementation of CDR techniques alongside protected areas on the same parcels of land.

Recommendations

- The researchers recommend the need to focus on CDR policies that can absorb greenhouse gases effectively whilst also preserving biodiversity.

- They stress the urgency of tackling climate change, arguing that the risk it presents to biodiversity far outweighs other issues.

Definition of Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)

- Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) refers to technologies, practices, and methods that extract and durably store carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere.

Artesian Well Discovery in Rajasthan and Its Connection to the Tethys Sea

Introduction of the Artesian Well in Rajasthan and Its History

- The Artesian well, a type of well where water rises naturally under pressure without need for pumping, recently sent large amounts of water gushing out from underground in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

- The source of this water is believed to have origins from the extinct Tethys sea, dating back millions of years to pre-Vedic times.

- The name Artesian comes from the town of Artois in France, where the best known flowing artesian wells were drilled during the Middle Ages.
- Contrary to the Tube Wells, which require external power to pump water, Artesian water can naturally rise to the surface on its own due to being found deeper beneath the earth's surface.
- Other prominent examples of Artesian Wells are present in the Great Artesian Basin in Australia, Dakota aquifer in the United States, and parts of Africa.

Characteristics of the Artesian Well Found in Rajasthan

- In the desert regions of Rajasthan, such as Jaisalmer, the water is confined within a geological layer of sandstone that once punctured, causes the water to flow upward due to heavy pressure.
- The water in the well displayed high salinity, similar to that of an ancient sea or saline groundwater sources, linking it to the Tethys Sea that existed about 250 million years ago.
- The well also brought up oozes, a type of marine clay rich in skeletal remains, and sand from around 6 million years ago, thereby supporting the claim that it is remnants of an ancient sea.
- The Jaisalmer region once bordered the Tethys Sea, with evidence of remains of dinosaurs and giant sharks found in this part of India.

Overview of the Tethys Sea and Its Historic Geographic Significance

- The Tethys Sea was a large body of water, positioned between the ancient landmasses of Gondwana and Laurasia formed during the early stages of the Mesozoic Era, around 250 to 201 million years ago.
- It stretched across present-day Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, extending from the Pacific Ocean in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

- The closure of the Tethys Sea played a significant role in shifting tectonic plates and the creation of new landmasses, such as the uplift of the Himalayan range and the Tibetan Plateau due to the Indian subcontinent's movement towards the Asian plate.
- Rich in marine life including early forms of sharks, ammonites, and marine reptiles like ichthyosaurs and mosasaurs, the sea's geological evolution also played a crucial role in the formation of petroleum basins in North Africa and the Middle East.

Similar Instances of Underwater Gushing on the Surface

- Underwater gushing has occurred before in natural geothermal features such as hydrothermal vents, hot springs like Manikaran in Himachal Pradesh and Gaurikund in Uttarakhand, geysers such as in Yellowstone National Park, and mudpots.
- Fumaroles, occurring when magma passes through the water table, causing volcanic gases to rise, are also examples of instances where magma deep underground solidifies and cools.

Brief History and Importance of the Saraswati River

- The Saraswati river, considered the mightiest and holiest river of the Vedic Period, was believed to originate in the Himalayas and flows through many Indian regions before draining into the Arabian Sea's Gulf of Kachchh.
- Despite its disappearance around 5000 BP, it is believed that the river still flows underneath the Thar Desert and maintains its Himalayan connection.
- The Saraswati River's importance has been highlighted in several ancient texts such as the Vedas, Manusmriti, Mahabharata, and the Puranas with various descriptions of its holiness, tributaries, and disappearance into desert sands.

International Year of Glaciers' Preservation 2025

Introduction

- The United Nations has designated 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation, with 21st March earmarked annually as World Day for Glaciers from 2025.

Glaciers - An Overview

- Glaciers are large, slow-moving masses of ice formed from compacted snow over centuries.
- Most of today's glaciers are remnants of the ice sheets from the Ice Age, roughly 10,000 years ago.
- Approximately 3% of the Earth's water is stored in glaciers, most located in polar regions due to low solar insolation.
- An exception being certain mountain ranges near the Equator, like the Andes, which have tropical glaciers due to their high altitudes.
- Greenhouse gas emissions have led to rising temperatures, thus causing glaciers to melt at an increasing rate.

Importance of Glaciers

- Glaciers serve several key functions including providing a water supply, contributing to nutrient cycling, and acting as climate regulators.
- Furthermore, glacial meltwater is used for hydroelectric power in countries such as Norway, Canada, and New Zealand.
- With increasing threats to the ecosystems, notable glacier-related tourism are growing in mountainous regions.

Current Status of Glaciers

- The World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) has observed a large-scale deglaciation in recent years.

- Particularly vulnerable to glacial disasters is the Hindu Kush Himalayan cryosphere, which is warming at twice the global average.
- Experts predict the disappearance of several significant glaciers by the year 2030, leading to them splitting into smaller ones.
- In response to these alarming developments, the UN adopted a resolution in December 2022 promoting global awareness of glacier loss.

Hindu Kush Himalayas

- Stretched over 3500 kilometres and across eight countries, Hindu Kush Himalayas is one of the largest volumes of ice and snow outside of the Arctic and Antarctica.
- The region is often called 'Water Tower of Asia' as it is a significant water source for 12 river basins, including 10 major transboundary rivers.
- It is home to 330 bird and biodiversity areas, including four global biodiversity hotspots.

Impacts of Melting Glaciers

- The melting of glaciers contributes significantly to the rise in sea level, disrupting weather patterns and affecting industries that depend on fisheries.
- At the same time, some benefits can be observed in the short term, such as revealing geothermal energy sources and opening up passages like the Northern Sea Route.

Proposed Activities for Glaciers'

Preservation

- A global outreach initiative aims to educate the public and stakeholders about the importance of glaciers and their potential loss.
- An international conference scheduled for 2025 plans to focus on innovative approaches for preserving glaciers.
- Additional strategies involve providing targeted capacity-building programs and securing funding from various sources to support glacier monitoring, research, and preservation.

Related Glacier Terminologies

- Ice Sheet: A land-based mass of glacial ice covering more than 50,000 square kilometres.
- Ice Caps: A dome-shaped glacier with an area less than 50,000 square kilometres.
- Icefield: A glacier ice mass, similar to an ice cap but smaller and without a dome-like shape.
- Icebergs: Floating chunks of ice detached from a glacier and carried to a lake or the ocean. Smaller icebergs are known as bergy, bits, and growlers.

Military Defence And Exercises

Indo-Nepal Joint Training Exercise - Surya Kiran

Introduction and About

- Surya Kiran is a military training exercise conducted annually between India and Nepal.
- The exercise aims to foster better cooperation and coordination between the armies of the two countries.
- It focuses on various military operations, including Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations, jungle warfare, and mountain operations.
- Among other aspects, operational preparedness, aviation aspects, medical training, and environment conservation are also part of the training drill.

Current Edition

- The 18th edition of the joint training exercise "Surya Kiran" is being held at Saljhandi, Nepal in January 2025.
- This follows the 17th edition which was conducted in Uttarakhand, India, in December 2023.

Geo-strategic Relevance

- Nepal shares an 1850 km border with five Indian states: Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.
- This makes Nepal strategically significant for India from a security point of view.

India-Nepal Relations

- The relationship between India and Nepal is founded on the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which was signed in 1950.
- Further, the Koshi Agreement (1954, revised in 1966), Mahakali Treaty (1996), and Gandak Agreement (1959, revised in 1964) are notable water-sharing agreements between both nations.
- The regular conduct of military exercises like Surya Kiran reflects the ongoing cooperation and enhanced interoperability between the two nations.

The Objective of the Exercise

- The primary objectives of the exercise are to enhance the interoperability between the two armies and improve coordination in various scenarios.
- One of the key focus areas is on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) under the United Nations (UN) Charter.
- The training exercise also seeks to enhance medical training and commitment to environmental conservation.

Exercise La Perouse: A Multilateral Naval Initiative

Introduction and About

- Exercise La Perouse is a multilateral naval mission implemented with the purpose of fortifying marine security, augmenting interoperability, and fostering situational cognizance among participating naval units.

- The facilitator of the exercise is France, comprising the Carrier Strike Group headed by the aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle.

Geographic Position and Membership

- The pivotal exercise is held in the straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, significant junctions linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

- The recent 2025 chapter of Exercise La Perouse incorporates various nations, namely India, France, the United States, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.

Aims and Objectives

- The strategic exercise seeks to address an array of maritime-related issues encompassing illegal activities, environmental hazards as well as various maritime crises.

- Another aim is heightened cooperation among participating nations, particularly in areas of maritime surveillance, air operations, and maritime interdiction.

- The exercise showcases an in-depth utilisation of advanced systems such as IORIS, which facilitates coordinated crisis management efforts.

- The exercise is also an emblematic commitment to promoting order based on rules, endorsing an Indo-Pacific region that is secure and stable, in alignment with India's SAGAR policy (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

Current Status and Importance

- Exercise La Perouse 2025 is presently active amid the strategic straits connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

- The multinational naval exercise hosted by France aims to intensify the process of trust-building, cooperative relations, and regional stability among the countries involved.

- It's strategic in countering common security threats and consolidating respect for international maritime rules in the region.

- Aims to also enhance joint efforts in the region to sustain free, open, and stable sea lanes of communication, which is vital for global commerce.

Operation Sard Hawa: Strengthening India-Pakistan Border Security

Introduction and Objective

- Operation 'Sard Hawa' is an initiative launched by the Border Security Force (BSF) to enhance security along the India-Pakistan border in Rajasthan.

- The operation has been implemented around the Republic Day period, but will continue until 29th of January.

- Its main objective is to curb any potential infiltration and prevent undesirable activities, particularly during the winter season.

- While the BSF remains vigilant throughout the year, Operation 'Sard Hawa' entails additional vigilance.

Increased Vigilance and Use of Modern Technology

- The protocol during Operation 'Sard Hawa' calls for increased vigilance by BSF soldiers and officers.

- This vigilance is not restricted to the daylight hours but is maintained 24/7 to allow for immediate action against any suspicious activity.

- Modern weapons and technical equipment are being employed to augment the security measures during this operation.

Patrol enhancements

- To ensure security and immediate action if required, patrolling measures have been amplified.

- This includes foot patrols, vehicle patrols, and notably, camel patrols — an effective method for swift patrolling in desert areas.
- The border area will be under continuous surveillance.

Additional Security Measures

- Additional soldiers have been deployed as part of Operation 'Sard Hawa' to fortify the border area.
- The surveillance of existing border fencing has been improved.
- A reporting mechanism is in place to relay information instantly to higher authorities for informed decision-making and fast response times.

General Knowledge Part:

- The BSF is responsible for the security of India's international borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is the world's largest border guard and plays a vital role in counter-insurgency and internal security.
- The India-Pakistan border in Rajasthan is a prominent desert border area, and camel patrolling is not uncommon. Utilising camels for patrolling in such terrains is a practical approach due to their adaptability to desert conditions.
- Operation 'Sard Hawa' reiterates India's consistent efforts to protect its borders and maintain peace and security.

Commissioning of Indian Navy Ships- Nilgiri, Surat and Vaghsheer

Introduction and Details about the Commissioning

- The Indian Navy, on 15th January 2025, unveiled three newly built combat ships named the Nilgiri, Surat and Vaghsheer.

- The ships were constructed at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), located in Mumbai.

Detailed Information on Nilgiri

- Nilgiri is the forerunner in Project 17A, signifying a substantial advancement from the Shivalik-class frigates.
- This ship is equipped with innovative stealth technology and state-of-the-art weapon systems to bolster the naval defence capabilities.

Insights on Surat

- Surat stands as the fourth and final destroyer under Project 15B, an enhanced version of the Kolkata-class destroyers.
- It is fortified with long-range missiles and indigenous weapons systems.
- The inception of Project 15B panders to the Indian Navy's initiative of designing and fabricating four advanced guided-missile destroyers.

Introduction to Vaghsheer

- Vaghsheer represents the sixth submarine in the Scorpene-class and is engineered under Project 75.
- This submarine is among the most silent diesel-electric submarines across the world, with capabilities of anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, surveillance, and performing special operations.
- Project-75 (India) is an ambitious project that strives to build 18 conventional submarines and six nuclear-powered submarines for the Indian Navy to fortify India's submarine fleet.

Conclusion and Importance of the Commissioning

- The commissioning of Nilgiri, Surat, and Vaghsheer has marked an important milestone in the Indian Naval history as it showcases the defence capabilities of the country.
- Their addition will significantly enhance the operational and combat capabilities of the Indian Navy, taking its maritime security levels a notch higher.

- The commissioning also underscores the Indian Navy's move towards 'self-reliance' by focusing on the indigenous design and production of these advanced vessels.

Nag Mark 2 Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)

Introduction and Recent Development

- The Nag Mark 2 Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) is a third-generation, all-weather anti-tank missile developed indigenously in India.

- India has successfully conducted field trials of the Nag Mk 2 ATGM at the Pokhran Field Firing Range in Rajasthan.

Functionality and Effectiveness

- This is a fire-and-forget missile with a lock-on-after-launch functionality that enables it to independently track and engage targets.

- The Nag Mk 2 ATGM is designed to neutralise modern armoured vehicles, inclusive of those equipped with Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA).

- The missile utilises a tandem high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, which increases its destructive power considerably.

Range and Attack Modes

- The range of the Nag Mark 2 ATGM is between 7 to 10 kilometres, an upgrade on its predecessor, the Nag Mark 1 which had a range of 4 kilometres.

- The missile has a top-attack capability which targets the vulnerable upper surfaces of armoured vehicles.

Launch Platform and Usage

- The Nag Mk-2 ATGM is launched from the NAMICA (Nag Missile Carrier) Version 2.

- The NAMICA is an anti-tank armoured vehicle or tank destroyer vehicle used by the

Indian Army primarily for launching anti-tank missiles.

Significance to Indian Defence

- The successful development and trial of the Nag Mark 2 ATGM showcases India's progress in the defence sector and reduces reliance on foreign armament technologies.

- The missile's advanced features like the fire-and-forget capability, top-attack mode, and its notable range make it a crucial addition to India's defence arsenal.

- The launch from the NAMICA version 2 carrier increases the flexibility and mobility of the Indian Army while dealing with armoured threats.

ISRO's Third Launch Pad

Introduction and Overview

- The Indian Union Cabinet has given their approval for the establishment of the Third Launch Pad (TLP) at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), which is India's foremost launchport. The SDSC is based in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

- This development is significant, as the previous two launchpads, the First Launch Pad (FLP) and the Second Launch Pad (SLP), are currently operational, with the FLP being implemented for the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and continues to support launches for PSLV and the Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLV).

- The SLP, on the other hand, was primarily established for the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), and the Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3), while also doubling as a backup for PSLV launches.

Architecture and Capacity

- The third launch pad will have the ability to manage spacecraft weighing up to 30,000 tonnes in low Earth orbit.

- The design of this launch pad has been created to support the Next Generation Launch

Vehicle (NGLV), LVM3 vehicles with semi cryogenic stages, and scaled-up NGLV configurations.

Success and Future Plans

- The SLP has successfully launched the Chandrayaan-3 mission and is currently preparing for the imminent Gaganyaan missions.
- Looking at the future vision, it includes ambitious plans such as a Crewed Lunar Landing by 2040 and the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2035. This project requires heavier launch vehicles that the current pads cannot accommodate, necessitating the need for a third launch pad.
- The foundation stone for ISRO's 2nd rocket launchport was laid in Kulasekarapattinam, Tamil Nadu in 2024. The focus here will be commercial, on-demand, and small satellite (SSLVs) launches and it is created to bypass the dogleg manoeuvre over Sri Lanka.

Significance

- This new third launch pad is significant for ISRO's ambitious plans of crewed lunar landings and a new space station, marking a new era for Indian space exploration.
- The move also helps ISRO diversify its offerings in terms of space launches, providing a firm platform for the future of Indian space research and development.

First Indian Astronaut to Pilot Axiom Mission

Introduction and About

- Indian Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla is going to make history by becoming the first Indian astronaut to participate in a private mission to the International Space Station (ISS) scheduled in 2025.

- He will serve as the mission pilot in an operation, led by NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson.
- Additionally, Shukla is also the astronaut-designate for India's ambitious human spaceflight programme, Gaganyaan.

Shukla's Role and the Axiom Mission

- The Group Captain will board the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft for the Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4), taking flight from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.
- Ax-4 is a joint venture between two space agencies, NASA and ISRO.
- Moreover, Ax-4 will see astronauts from other countries including Poland and Hungary, marking this as the first such international collaboration in over 40 years.

Activities and Objectives of the Mission

- The astronauts, including Shukla, will spend two weeks aboard the ISS.
- They will be conducting various scientific experiments during this time.
- Other activities will involve educational outreach and commercial pursuits with NASA and ISRO, thus making a significant contribution to space research.

Quick Recap of India's History in Space Exploration

- The first Indian to travel to space was Rakesh Sharma, reaching orbit in 1984.
- He participated in the Soviet Soyuz T-11 mission under the Interkosmos programme.
- Sharma's journey marked India's debut in manned space missions, preceding Shukla's upcoming voyage.

Significance and Implications

- Shukla's upcoming mission highlights the advancements made in India's space exploration ventures.
- His participation in the Axiom Mission further accentuates India's growing contribution in the field of global space exploration.

- Furthermore, through making its presence known in both national and international space programmes, India is solidifying its position in the realm of space research and technology.

Polity

The Unveiling of Tripura's State Emblem and the Regulation of State Symbols in India

Introduction to Tripura's State Emblem

- Tripura recently unveiled its very first official state emblem, a significant development for this northeastern Indian state.
- The central Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) gave its approval allowing the state to take this step forward.
- According to Rule 4(2) of the State Emblem of India (Regulation of Use) Rules, 2007, the proposal for the Government of Tripura's emblem received full support.

Provisions Surrounding State Symbols

- State Flags: Indian states are permitted to have a state flag, providing it does not conflict or supersede the Indian national flag.
- Any potential state flag must adhere to guidelines established in various legislation and judgements including the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950, the Flag Code of India, 2002, and the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- The Supreme Court of India has ruled that state flags should not dishonor the national flag; it must always be flown below it, and cannot be used for official or statutory purposes.

- State Emblems: States can adopt an emblem but it must gain approval from the Union Home Ministry.
- The State Emblem of India is regulated under the State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act, 2005.
- Usage of a state emblem is strictly monitored; it can be used on official seals, stationery, vehicles, and key public buildings, but personal, organisational, or commercial usage is strictly off-limits.
- State Songs: There's no uniform legislation regarding state songs in India. However, these songs are as a rule approved by state legislatures or executives and are sung at official events. For instance, the West Bengal state has designated Poila Baisakh, the first day of the Bengali month of Baisakh, as State Day or Bangla Divas and also designated a state song.

The Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950 and Flag Code of India, 2002

- This Act restricts unauthorised use of national and state emblems, names, and symbols for commercial purposes.
- The Act applies to state symbols as well, ensuring they are protected from unauthorised use for commercial ends.
- The Flag Code of India, 2002 lays down rules for the use, display, and hoisting of the Indian National Flag; it is governed by the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- Amendments over the years have added provisions regarding the allowable materials for flag construction, and the right of individuals and organisations to hoist the flag with respect on any day to the Regulation.
- The same guidelines stipulate design restrictions including dimensions, and restrictions against its use on vehicles or in association with other flags.

Importance of State Symbols

- State symbols like flags, emblems, and songs are important representations of a state's history, culture, and identity.
- In India, respecting these symbols is considered a moral duty of every citizen under Article 51A of the Constitution.
- They play a critical role in promoting national unity and pride, and are revered at official events and national celebrations.
- It is therefore of paramount importance that the use of these symbols follows the stipulated guidelines to maintain their dignity and respect.

Dismissal of Review Petition on Same-Sex Marriage by Supreme Court of India

Introduction and Context

- The Supreme Court of India (SC) recently rejected review petitions against its October 2023 ruling refusing to legalize same-sex marriage across the country.
- The ruling, delivered by a 5-member bench led by the Chief Justice of India, responded to a review petition on its previous verdict.
- Same-sex marriage, referring to marriages between two individuals of the same gender, is not legally recognized in India.

Same-Sex Marriage Laws in India and Abroad

- The Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954 does not extend its provisions to same-sex couples as per the SC ruling.
- The SC maintains that it is the jurisdiction of Parliament and State Legislatures to legislate on this matter.
- Globally, over 30 countries have legalized same-sex marriages; the Netherlands was the first country to do so in 2001.

- On the contrary, few countries including Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Brunei impose rigorous penalties for same-sex marriages.

Insights into The Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954

- The SMA, 1954 is an essential legal framework that governs civil marriages in India, allowing for marriage between individuals of different religions or castes.
- The Act applies universally to individuals of all faiths across India, subject to certain requirements.

Debating the Decriminalisation of Same-Sex Marriage

- Several arguments are in favour of same-sex marriage, centering on equity and human rights, the fundamental right to cohabit, legal and economic benefits, and global human rights principles.
- Arguments against same-sex marriages cite religious and cultural beliefs, procreation as the primary purpose of marriage, legal challenges, and adoption issues within the Indian social construct.

Evolving LGBTQIA+ Rights in India

- LGBTQIA+ people in India have made significant legal gains over the years; this includes the recognition of transgender people as a 'third gender,' decriminalization of same-sex relationships, and laws prohibiting discrimination against transgender individuals.
- The Supreme Court's definition of family was expanded in 2022 to include same-sex and queer relationships.
- Despite these advances, the legalisation of same-sex marriage was rejected by the Supreme Court in October 2023.

Proposed Future Developments

- Legal reforms including amendments to the SMA, 1954 and the introduction of contract-based agreements may enable same-sex couples to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples.

- Engagement with religious and cultural leaders could help bridge the divide between traditional beliefs and evolving perspectives on same-sex relationships.
- The LGBTQIA+ community could challenge the existing laws prohibiting same-sex marriage in courts, which could result in a legal recognition of same-sex unions in the country.

Ad Hoc Judges in High Court: Key Points and Current Developments

Introduction and About

- Ad hoc judges are temporary officials who are appointed to a court to address a specific need, such as reducing a backlog of cases or filling a gap when permanent judges are unavailable.
- Article 224A of the Indian Constitution enables the Chief Justice of a High Court, with the approval of the President and consent of the retired judge, to temporarily assign retired High Court judges.

Important Procedures Related to Ad Hoc Judges

- The procedure for their appointment is outlined in the Memorandum of Procedure (MOP) 1998.
- The MOP notes that after the retired judge consents to an appointment, their name and appointment details have to be forwarded by the Chief Justice of a High Court to the Chief Minister.
- This recommendation is passed to the Union Law Minister, who consults with the Chief Justice of India (CJI) before forwarding the recommendation to the Prime Minister.
- In the Lok Prahari v. Union of India case, 2021, the Supreme Court stipulated that appointment of retired judges involves a decision by the Supreme Court's collegium.

Critical Rules and Conditions regarding Ad Hoc Judges

- The percentage of sanctioned judge vacancies and pending cases over five years old should be more than 20% and 10% respectively.
- Ad hoc judges generally serve for two to three years, which may range from two to five years depending on the specific needs and vacancies in the High Court.
- Ad hoc judges are prohibited from other legal work such as advisory, arbitration, or client representation.

Previous Appointments and History

- Only three ad hoc judges have been appointed under Article 224A.
- Notable appointments include Justice Suraj Bhan to Madhya Pradesh HC in 1972, Justice P. Venugopal to Madras HC in 1982, and Justice O.P. Srivastava to Allahabad HC in 2007.

Significance of Ad hoc Judges to the Supreme Court

- Ad hoc judges also find relevance when there's a lack of quorum in the Supreme Court.
- The Chief Justice of India can appoint a High Court judge as an ad hoc judge in the Supreme Court temporarily, following consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court and prior consent from the president.

Status of Pending Cases in India and Economic Impact

- As of 2024, there are over 51 million pending cases in Indian courts, including district and high courts.
- Judicial delays are estimated to cost India's economy between 1.5% to 2% of GDP annually.

Causes for Case Pendency

- The shortage of judges, lack of proper infrastructure, and lack of judicial accountability are major stumbling blocks.
- Access to justice barriers such as high costs, complex procedures, and language barriers

exacerbate the problem of case pendency, especially for people from disadvantaged communities.

Initiatives to Reduce Case Pendency

- Several initiatives, like the National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms, e-Courts Mission Mode Project, and Tele-Law Programme, have been introduced to reduce case pendency.
 - Fast Track Courts were set up to provide speedy trials for specific cases.
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The Right to Information Act, 2005 and Delays in Appointing Information Commissioners

Introduction and Why in News

- The Right to Information Act, 2005 is a law enacted by the Indian Parliament to empower citizens with the right to access information from public authorities.
- The Supreme Court has shown concern about the chronic delay by the Centre and States in appointing Information Commissioners under this act.
- This delay has resulted in hindrance in exercising the right to information for the citizens, with thousands of appeals pending.

Concerns Regarding the RTI Act, 2005

- The number of vacant posts for Information Commissioners is notably high, resulting in a large number of pending appeals.
- Due to the lack of Information Commissioners, several state Information Commissions have been defunct since 2020, complicating the process for citizens to file appeals.
- Several states have different rules regarding the RTI Act, leading to inconsistent implementation.

- There is a lack of transparency in appointing the Information Commissioners as many of them are former bureaucrats.
- The Supreme Court, in its 2019 case, expressed concern over this lack of diversity in appointees.
- Personal data disclosure by the government in public interest is allowed under the RTI Act, 2005. However, The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, has banned it, shielding public officials from accountability.
- The RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019 gave the Union Government exclusive power to determine the tenure and salaries of Information Commissioners, raising concerns over their autonomy.

Key Facts About the RTI Act, 2005

- The RTI Act, 2005 aims to promote transparency, accountability, and good governance in government bodies.
- The Act originated from a grassroots movement in Rajasthan during the 1980s.
- The Act applies to all levels of government and allows for the disclosure of information if public interest outweighs confidentiality.
- While there are laws like the Official Secrets Act, 1923, Indian Evidence Act, 1872, and All India Services Conduct Rules, 1968 that allow officials to restrict information under the RTI Act, 2005, section 22 of the act ensures that it takes precedence over any inconsistencies with other laws.

Amendments in the RTI Act, 2005

- After the Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019, the term, salaries, allowances, and terms of service for both the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and ICs are decided by the Central Government.

The Central Information Commission

- The Central Information Commission (CIC) is a statutory body established under the RTI Act, 2005.

- The Commission consists of the Chief Information Commissioner and up to 10 Central Information Commissioners.
- Members are appointed by the President of India and must not have any political affiliations or hold any office of profit. They are not eligible for reappointment.
- The CIC has the power to summon witnesses, inspect documents, requisition public records, and issue summons for examination.
- Its primary role is to ensure the effective implementation of the RTI Act, 2005 and uphold citizens' right to information.
- The CIC deals with cases involving offices, financial institutions, public sector undertakings, and entities under the Central Government and Union Territories.

Supreme Court Urges for Periodic Legislative Reviews

Introduction and Supreme Court's recent plea

- The Supreme Court (SC) recently urged the importance of regular legislative reviews while hearing a plea regarding Section 81 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA 1951).
- RPA 1951 is aimed at governing the electoral system at the both national and state levels.
- During the plea, the court proposed 20-year, 25-year or 50-year reviews to maintain the effectiveness of laws and to identify any deficiencies or bottlenecks.

Key Provisions of RPA Act

- The RPA 1951 outlines the allocation of seats for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and State Legislative Councils.
- The Act also presides over the delimitation of constituencies for the purpose of elections,

and signifies qualifications and disqualifications for voters.

- Section 81 of the Act lays down that an election petition challenging the result must be filed within 45 days from the declaration of results.

Need for Periodic Review of Laws by the Legislature

- Regular legislative reviews enable the identification of outdated laws and allow for necessary modifications or abolitions.
- These reviews help ensure that laws remain relevant, effective, and aligned with societal needs and public interest.
- Periodic reviews can uncover areas where the laws unintentionally obstruct justice or generate inefficiencies.

Periodic Legislative Reviews in Foreign Countries

- Democratic nations like the United Kingdom and Australia conduct routine legislative reviews.
- The Law Commission of England and Wales in the UK and the Australian Law Reform Commission both play significant roles in conducting such reviews and recommending amendment proposals.

Challenges in Periodically Reviewing Laws

- Legislative reviews can sometimes be influenced by political agendas, resulting in biased amendments.
- Regular reviews might lead to instances of judicial overreach, complicating the review process.
- Written laws can often carry various interdependencies, isolated adjustments to these can have unintended consequences.
- Public understanding and participation in legislative reviews remain limited.

Institutions Related to Legal Reform in India

- Several institutions in India are associated with legal reforms, such as the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC).

- A few other instances are the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) and the Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws (2020).
 - In addition, The Law Commission of India also plays a significant role in reviewing laws and recommending necessary amendments.
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Decline and Revival of Private Members' Bills in Indian Parliament

Introduction and About

- Private Members' Bills in the Indian Parliament are crucial for independent expression by Members of Parliament (MPs).
- These bills are proposed by MPs who are not ministers, giving them a platform to introduce laws or propose amendments that are important to their constituencies.
- The process involves MPs drafting the bill with at least a month's notice, followed by its introduction in the Parliament, and possibly debates in limited Friday afternoon sessions.
- The final decision on the bill can either be a withdrawal or proceeding to a vote.
- Despite their significance, there has been a noticeable decline in Private Members' Bills in recent years, particularly in the 17th Lok Sabha (June 2019 to February 2024).

Historical Context

- An important historical example of a Private Members' Bill is one introduced by H.V. Kamath in 1966, seeking to amend the Constitution to restrict eligibility for the Prime Minister post to only Lok Sabha members.
- Only 14 such bills have been passed since India's independence, with none being passed since 1970.
- The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill in 2014 became the first such bill approved by

the Rajya Sabha in 45 years but eventually lapsed without reaching the Lok Sabha.

Reasons for Decline in Private Members' Bills

- There are various reasons for the decline of Private Members' Bills, primarily the lack of time allocation and attention.
- Data reveals that the 17th Lok Sabha only allocated 9.08 hours to these bills, while the Rajya Sabha spent only 27.01 hours on them, a fraction of the total session hours.
- In the 18th Lok Sabha's two sessions, only 0.15 hours were spent on such Bills in the Lower House and 0.62 hours in the Rajya Sabha.
- Friday scheduling of Private Members' business further limits the discussion, as many MPs leave for their constituencies.
- Another contributing factor is MPs' lack of seriousness, with many skipping these discussions.

Revival of Private Members' Bills

- To revive these bills and boost participation, they could be shifted to midweek sessions.
 - Protecting the constitutional space for individual parliamentary expression is essential, and MPs should be encouraged to actively participate in discussions and voting on their proposed bills.
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Rank Reports and Awards

UNCTAD Global Investment Trends Monitor Report 2024

Report Introduction and Background

- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has published the Global Investment Trends Monitor Report for 2024.
- The report indicates an 8% drop in worldwide Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- This decrease in funding can impact critical sectors such as infrastructure and renewable energy, which are vital to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- UNCTAD, established in 1964, ranks as the UN's top authority on trade and the development of developing nations.
- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, it provides expertise and policy advice on trade, investment, finance, and technology transfer issues.
- The institution issues flagship reports such as the Trade and Development Report, World Investment Report, Digital Economy Report, and Technology and Innovation Report.

Key Takeaways from the Global Investment Trends Monitor Report 2024

- Global FDI had grown by 11%, reaching approximately USD 1.4 trillion in 2024, but there was an 8% decrease after excluding European conduit economies.
- FDI surged by 43% in developed economies due to multinational transactions flowing through conduit economies. Without these transactions, FDI in developed economies fell by 15%.

- FDI flows to developing economies dropped by 2% in 2024, following a 6% decrease in 2023.
- Developed economies experienced a 45% FDI drop in Europe (excluding conduit economies) and a 13% rise in North America.
- Greenfield investment announcements in developing economies decreased by 6% in number, with the most significant declines seen in Africa and Asia.
- Greenfield projects declined in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- FDI in Africa rose significantly by 84%, mainly due to a large project in Egypt, while FDI in Central America increased.
- Investments in sectors related to the SDGs, including infrastructure, agrifood systems, and water and sanitation, decreased by 11% in 2024.
- Due to the above changes, sectors like affordable and clean energy, industry, infrastructure, and water and sanitation could take a hit.

Predictions for Global FDI in 2025 According to the UNCTAD Report

- The report predicts a moderate global FDI growth, with the US and EU witnessing substantial growth and China investing more overseas.
- ASEAN, Eastern Europe, West Asia, North Africa, and Central America may gain from global supply chain adjustments.
- For India, moderate FDI growth is predicted in 2025, due to better financing conditions, increased mergers and acquisitions, and ongoing reforms.

Overview of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) types include Greenfield Investment and Brownfield Investment.
- FDI regulation in India is governed by the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 1999 and is overseen by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

- Sectors where FDI is strictly prohibited in India include atomic energy generation, gambling, betting, chit funds, real estate, and tobacco.

Opportunities and Challenges for FDI in India

- India with its large market size, favourable demographics, forward-looking government initiatives, and strategic location, offers numerous opportunities for FDI.

- Challenges for attracting FDI in India include regulatory hurdles, infrastructure challenges, rigid labour laws, and investor expectations like transfer of technology, job creation, and sustainable investments.

Analysis of FDI Trends in India as per Latest Data

- As per the most recent data, India had received FDI inflows exceeding USD 1 trillion between April 2000 and September 2024.

- From 2014 to 2024, India received USD 667.4 billion in cumulative FDI, indicating a 119% increase from the 2004-2014 period.

World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2025 Report by the ILO

Introduction and About

- The World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO): Trends 2025 report has been published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

- The document provides an overview of global unemployment, which remained at 5% in 2024.

- It highlights several challenges affecting the labour market, such as slow economic recovery, geopolitical tensions, environmental change, and social uncertainties.

Key Highlights of the WESO 2025 Report

- The global unemployment rate remained stable at 5% in 2024, with a relatively high rate of 12.6% for youth unemployment.

- Youth unemployment is highest in upper-middle-income countries at 16%, and lower in low-income countries at 8%, often due to underemployment and informal work.

- There are challenges in creating decent employment in low-income countries, and informal jobs have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Discrepancies in Regional Employment

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, employment growth mainly occurs in the informal sector, lacking stability and social protection, with approximately 62.6% of households living on less than USD 3.65 per day.

- Similar patterns are seen in other developing countries, with rising employment rates, but the jobs are often vulnerable, low-paying, and informal.

Economic Growth Trends and Global Jobs Gap

- Economic growth for 2024 was lower at 3.2%, compared to 3.3% in 2023 and 3.6% in 2022, yet the report forecasts similar expansion in 2025.

- The global job gap, the number of people who want work but can't find it, was at 402 million in 2024, including 186 million unemployed, 137 million discouraged workers, and 79 million who can't seek employment due to caregiving responsibilities.

- Although the gap has reduced since the Covid-19 pandemic, it is expected to stabilise in the coming years.

Labour Force Participation and NEET Statistics

- Labour force participation has risen in advanced economies, especially amongst older workers and women, but declined in low-income nations.

- The global NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population reached 259.1 million in 2024, with 85.8 million young men (13.1%) and 173.3 million young women (28.2%).
- A sharp rise was observed in LICs, with worsening youth unemployment, and NEET rates among young men increasing by 4%.

High Debt, Wage Stagnation, and Green Transition

- High-interest rates and economic problems have caused unsustainable public debt, especially in developing countries, with about 70% at risk of debt distress.
- Real wage growth remains weak due to low employment growth and a shift in labour market power towards employers.
- The renewable sector saw global employment increase from 13.7 million in 2022 to 16.2 million in 2023, driven by investments in solar and hydrogen energy.

Recommendations by ILO

- ILO advises LICs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, to direct remittances into productive investments rather than consumption.
- Governments should create mechanisms to consolidate remittances into investment funds, enhancing private sector growth and long-term development.
- The report also recommends addressing structural barriers by focusing on modern services and manufacturing to create quality jobs and reduce regional differences through investment.
- Youth should receive quality education and training to equip them with necessary job-market skills.
- The ILO also calls for global cooperation and inclusive fiscal and monetary policies that benefit all.

National Panchayat Awards 2024

Brief Introduction and Overview

- The National Panchayat Awards 2024 were given to 45 Panchayats in India by the President for outstanding contributions to inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- The aim is to highlight the crucial role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in enhancing rural governance and environmental sustainability.
- The awards commemorate the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which gave constitutional status to Panchayats as local self-governance institutions.

Objective and Significance

- The objective of these awards is to promote best practices, nurture a spirit of competition, and inspire Panchayats to deliver quality governance and services to rural communities.
- The awards were revamped in 2022 to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evaluated across Block, District, State/UT, and National levels.
- These awards underline Panchayats' crucial role in socio-economic development, grassroots governance, and advancing the SDGs through LSDGs.

Categories of Awards

- Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (DDUPSVP): Awarded to the top 3 Gram Panchayats under each of the 9 LSDGs themes.
- Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar: Honours the top 3 GPs, Block Panchayats, and District Panchayats for excellence across all themes.
- Other categories include: Gram Urja Swaraj Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar, Carbon Neutral Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar, and Panchayat Kshamta Nirmaan Sarvottam Sansthan Puraskar.

Other Initiatives Related to PRIs

- SVAMITVA Scheme: Aimed at promoting the economic development of rural India by providing a "Record of Rights" for each rural household owner and facilitating access to property and financial services.
- e-Gram Swaraj e-Financial Management System: An application for PRIs to manage work-based accounting, enhancing financial transparency and accountability.
- Geo-Tagging of Assets: mActionSoft is a mobile-based solution to capture photographs with geo-tags (GPS coordinates) for assets generated by Panchayat work.
- Citizen Charter: MoPR has introduced a platform for Panchayats to upload Citizen Charters to ensure efficient and timely service delivery to citizens.

QS World Future Skills Index 2025 and India's Position

Introduction and About QS World Future Skills Index 2025

- The QS World Future Skills Index is a global ranking system developed by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).
- The Index ranks countries based on their readiness to meet the evolving demands of the global job market, with a focus on innovation, sustainability, and talent development.
- The Index evaluates each country using four indicators: Skills Fit, Academic Readiness, Economic Transformation, and Innovation Ecosystem.

India's Position in QS World Future Skills Index 2025

- India currently ranks 25th in the QS World Future Skills Index 2025.
- This placement positions India as a 'future skills contender', implying its potential to become a key player in meeting future global job market demands.

Indicator Rankings and Observations for India

- In the 'Skills Fit' indicator, India ranks 37th, the lowest among the top 30 countries.
- This lower ranking indicates a significant gap between the skills of India's workforce and the demands of employers.
- It suggests that India's higher education system is currently struggling to adapt to the evolving requirements of the job market.
- In the 'Economic Transformation' indicator, India is ranked 40th, indicating challenges in innovation and aligning economic strategies with workforce adaptability.

Initiatives for Future Skills Development in India

- Industrial Training Institutes: These institutions provide practical training for various trades, equipping students with industry-specific skills.
- Green Skill Development Programme: A government initiative focused on providing training in environmentally sustainable industries.
- Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs): These hubs are designed to foster innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among Indian youth.
- Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGJ): An organisation designed to promote skill development in the renewable energy sector.
- Skill India Mission: A government initiative aimed at equipping India's youth with employability and entrepreneurship skills.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana: A scheme to provide industry-relevant skill training to Indian youth.
- SANKALP Scheme: A World Bank-aided project aimed at institutionalising the skill development and vocational training landscape in India.
- Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE): A government initiative to improve the quality and market relevance of vocational training in ITIs.

Global Risks Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum

Introduction and About the Report

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) has unveiled its 20th edition of the Global Risks Report for the year 2025.
- An annual release by the WEF, the report evaluates and predicts the most critical global risks to be encountered over short-term (two years) and long-term (ten years) periods.

Defining Global Risk

- In essence, a global risk implies an event that can markedly impact worldwide GDP, population, or natural resources.

Findings of the Global Risks Report 2025

- The report underscores the top five risks India may face, namely water supply shortages, misinformation and disinformation, degradation of human rights and civic freedoms, pollution (air, water, and soil), and shortages of labour and talent.
- The global risks identified for the immediate future include misinformation and disinformation, extreme weather events, and state-sponsored armed conflict.
- For the next decade, the anticipated risks comprise extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and ecosystem decay, and substantial changes to earth systems.
- The report indicates India and Gulf countries as vital multilateral alternatives in lieu of the escalating US-China rivalry, functioning as a bridge between the West and East to ameliorate tensions and foster cooperation.

Trade Protectionism and Multilateral Solutions

- Initiatives like the Inflation Reduction Act, 2022 in the US and "Make in India," denote an increasing trend towards geoeconomic confrontation and trade protectionism.

- Non-tariff barriers, such as grants and industrial policies, are surfacing as primary drivers of protectionism.
- The report advocates for multilateral solutions to global challenges, including escalating geopolitical tensions, the fracture of global trust, and the climate crisis.

About the World Economic Forum

- Founded by Klaus Schwab in 1971 as the European Management Forum, the WEF is a platform providing public-private cooperation based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The organization engages global leaders to shape worldwide, industry, and regional agendas.
- In 1987, its nomenclature was changed to the World Economic Forum, and in 2015, it received recognition as an international organization.
- Along with the Global Risks Report, the WEF also publishes key reports such as the Global Competitiveness Index, Global Gender Gap Index, Energy Transition Index, and Global Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index.

India's Progress in Contending with Malaria as per World Malaria Report 2024

An Overview of the World Malaria Report 2024

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has acknowledged India's significant strides in reducing malaria cases and related deaths in its World Malaria Report 2024.
- Globally, there were an estimated 263 million malaria cases in 2023, an increase of 11 million cases from 2022.
- However, malaria mortality decreased to 597,000 deaths in 2023, from 622,000 deaths in 2020.

- The African Region bore the brunt of the global malaria burden, with 94% of global malaria cases and 95% of malaria deaths in 2023.
- Since 2015, nine countries, including Egypt in 2024, have been certified malaria-free.

About Malaria

- Malaria is a severe disease caused by Plasmodium parasites, spread by the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
- The parasites invade the bloodstream, travel to the liver, mature, and then infect red blood cells.
- Predominantly, it's found in tropical and subtropical regions in Africa, South America, and Asia.
- Preventable and curable, symptoms of malaria include fever and flu-like illness, shaking chills, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness.

India Specific Findings in the Report

- India has made tremendous strides from the time of independence when it faced 75 million malaria cases annually with 800,000 deaths.
- By 2023, cases decreased by over 97% to 2 million annually, deaths dropped to 83, representing an 80% reduction from 2015.
- States with a high burden of the illness decreased from ten to two, and three territories achieved Zero status, signifying subnational malaria elimination verification.

How India has tackled Malaria

- Several government initiatives have helped India in this effort, including the National Framework for Malaria Elimination 2016-2030.
- The National Vector-Borne Disease Control Programme covers various vector-borne diseases, likewise the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP), focusing on insecticidal residual spraying (IRS) with DDT, case monitoring and surveillance, and patient treatment.
- The High Burden to High Impact (HBHI) Initiative was established in four states and

aimed to reduce malaria via an increased distribution of insecticidal nets.

- The Malaria Elimination Research Alliance-India (MERA-India), under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), also collaborates with partners on malaria control research.

Recent Growth of Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)

Introduction and Overview

- The combined Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) registered a growth of 4.3% in November 2024 compared to November 2023.
- The ICI is an index that measures the aggregated and individual performance of eight of India's most significant industries: Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilisers, Steel, Cement and Electricity.
- These eight industries make up 40.27% of the weight of items incorporated in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

Industry-wise Growth (November 2024)

- Refinery Products, comprising 28.04% of the ICI, saw a growth of 2.90%.
- Electricity, with a weightage of 19.85% on the ICI, experienced a rise of 3.80%.
- Steel, accounting for 17.92% of the ICI, recorded a growth surge of 4.80%.
- Coal, making up 10.33% of the ICI, witnessed a growth of 7.50%.
- A decline was seen in the industry of Crude Oil (8.98% of ICI) with -2.10%.
- Similarly, Natural Gas (6.88% weight on ICI) also saw a reduction in growth by -1.90%.
- Cement, contributing 5.37% to the ICI, showed a significant growth of 13.00%.
- Lastly, Fertilisers with a relatively small contribution of 2.63% saw a growth of 2.00%.

About Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index tracking short-term changes in the

volume of production across key economic sectors in India such as mining, electricity, and manufacturing.

- It is published on a monthly basis by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) where the information is released six weeks after the stated month.
- The IIP reveals changes in production compared to a base year (2011-2012).

UDISE+ Report 2023-24 and its Implications

Introduction to UDISE+

- The Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) is one of the largest Management Information Systems implemented by the Ministry of Education in India.
- It covers an extensive range of data from 14.72 lakh schools, 98.08 lakh teachers, and 24.8 crore children across the country.

Findings from the UDISE+ Report 2023-24

- The report has indicated a significant decline in school enrolment in India over the period of 2023-24.
- This change is associated with the revision in the data collection methods to enhance the accuracy of the data.

Decline in Enrolment

- The report highlighted that the enrollment fell from an average of 26.36 crores for the period 2018-22 to 25.17 crores in 2022-23 and further dropped to 24.8 crores in 2023-24.
- This drop accounts for a decrease of 1.55 crore students.
- The enrolment in government schools decreased by 5.59%, whilst private school enrolment declined by 3.67%.

Trends in Gender-wise and State-wise Decline

- Boys' enrolment saw a decline of 6.04% and girls saw a drop of 5.76% in comparison to the average of 2018-22.
- State-wise, Bihar recorded the largest decline with 35.65 lakh followed by Uttar Pradesh with a decrease of 28.26 lakh, and Maharashtra with a decline of 18.55 lakh.

Decline in Level-wise Enrolment

- There was a noted decline in enrolment across all levels including primary, upper primary, and secondary.
- However, a rise was observed in the enrolment in pre-primary and higher secondary levels in 2023-24 as compared to the previous average.

Improved Data Accuracy

- The UDISE+ report also pointed out how the inclusion of Aadhaar-linked student records helped in improving data accuracy.
- This system removed duplicates which included students that were enrolled in both government and private schools, thus contributing to a more precise enrolment count.

Future of Jobs Report 2025

Introduction and About

- The 'Future of Jobs Report 2025' by the World Economic Forum (WEF) offers insights into the expected changes in the global job market by 2030.
- Learning from 55 economies, the report predicts a net increase of 78 million new jobs by 2030 and explores the influence of technology, economic trends, and the green transition on jobs and skills.

Key findings from the WEF Report

- Emerging job roles: A rise is anticipated in frontline jobs, roles in the care economy, tech positions, and jobs related to the green transition.
- Declining job roles: Clerical positions such as cashiers, data entry clerks, and bank tellers are projected to diminish significantly.
- Displacement and creation of jobs: As technology advances, and as changes related to renewable energy investment and aging populations occur, jobs will be displaced, concurrently creating new tech and machine management roles.
- Technological developments: 60% of employers anticipate that expanding digital access will reshape businesses by 2030. Skills in demand are AI and information processing, robotics and automation, and energy technologies.
- Green Transition: Climate change mitigation and adaptation trends are spurring demand for roles like renewable energy engineers, environmental engineers, and specialists in electric and autonomous vehicles.
- Demographic Shift: Aging populations and declining workforces will affect labor supply. High-income economies will require more healthcare workers, while growing workforces in low-income economies will need educators and talent managers.
- Goeconomic Fragmentation: 34% of organisations are undergoing transformations in their business model due to geopolitical tensions and trade restrictions, causing operations to move both offshore and onshore.

WEF and its Evolution

- WEF is an international organisation that ensures cooperation between public and private sectors. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, it engages global leaders to shape agendas across industries, regions, and worldwide.
- The WEF, founded by Klaus Schwab in 1971, introduced 'stakeholder capitalism', emphasising long-term benefits for

stakeholders as opposed to short-term profits for shareholders.

- In 1973, the Forum's scope broadened to include economic and social issues, accepting membership from leading global companies in 1975. By 1987, it rebranded as the World Economic Forum, solidifying its role as a dialogue platform. It gained recognition as an International organisation in 2015.

Emerging Issues for Employment in India

- Job displacement due to technology: Automation within sectors such as manufacturing and services can displace jobs focused on repetitive tasks.
- Skill mismatch: There's an increased need for skills in AI, data science, and cybersecurity, but a significant section of the workforce lacks these abilities, creating a skill-talent mismatch.
- Uneven technology adoption: New technology uptake is rapid in urban areas, contrasted with rural regions, leading to unequal employment opportunities and economic growth.
- Informal sector challenges: A significant proportion of India's workforce in the informal sector may struggle to transition to tech-driven job roles due to insufficient access to education and training.

Suggested Approaches

- Upskilling: Collaboration among governments, businesses, and educational institutions to create specific upskilling programs in emerging sectors is required.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Companies should seek diversity by recruiting from underrepresented areas and communities, thus enriching the talent pool.
- AI adoption for the workforce: The integration of human creativity and AI efficiency can lead to enhanced productivity without impacting employment negatively.
- Retaining talent: Regular pay reviews, compensation transparency, and incentives like stock options can improve retention and skill development.

- Public policy support: Government funding for upskilling, specifically in tech-impacted sectors, and retraining, financial help, and job placement aid for displaced workers is crucial.

Henley Passport Index 2025 - A Study

Introduction and About

- The Henley Passport Index, a tool for international travel liberty, ranks 199 global passports.
- It is based on the number of destinations their holders can travel without requiring a visa.
- The data for this ranking is sourced from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- The ranking is published and compiled by Henley & Partners, a firm specialising in global citizenship and residency advisory.

India's Position in Henley Passport Index 2025

- In 2025, India's rank dropped to 85, a significant decrease from 80th in 2024.
- India's holders of passports get visa-free access to 57 countries.
- The ranking has experienced fluctuations over the years, peaking at 71st in 2006 and hitting a low at 90th in 2021, largely due to Covid-19-imposed travel restrictions.

Global Highlights from Henley Passport Index 2025

- Singapore's passport ranks at the top with access to 195 destinations, followed by Japan with 193.
- Several European Union countries and South Korea share the 3rd place, granting access to 192 travel destinations.
- The United States and the United Kingdom saw a drop in rankings from 2nd to 9th and from 1st to 5th respectively.
- The countries with the lowest rankings include Pakistan and Yemen, sharing the

103rd position, followed by war-torn countries like Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Pricing Factors in the Global Passport Index 2025

- According to data from the UK-based online platform "Compare the Market," based on 2024 stats, the most expensive passports belong to Mexico, Australia, and the United States, whereas the cheapest are from UAE, India, and Hungary.
- India's passport is highlighted for its excellent "cost per year" value, which makes it highly economical in comparison to other countries.

Importance and Influence of Henley Passport Index

- The Henley Passport Index serves as a reflection of the relation between global mobility and visa-free travel.
- It assists individuals and governments in understanding their global reach and access, especially in today's world where international connectivity has profound economic implications.
- This index may even influence diplomatic relationships between countries as they negotiate bilateral travel agreements.

SC Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025 Awarded to INCOIS

Introduction and About the Prize

- The Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025 has been awarded to the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) in the Institutional Category.
- This award recognises outstanding work in the field of disaster management.
- The award is given out annually on 23rd January, on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

- It carries a cash prize of Rs 51 lakh for institutions and Rs 5 lakh for individuals.

About Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)

- INCOIS was established in 1999 in Hyderabad, Telangana.
- The agency specialises in ocean-related disaster management, with a particular emphasis on tsunami early warnings.
- INCOIS operates the Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC), which provides alerts to India and 28 other Indian Ocean nations within 10 minutes of detection.
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognises INCOIS as a Top Tsunami Service Provider.

Organization and Operations

- INCOIS is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO) and operates under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), New Delhi.
- The agency has developed a Search and Rescue Aided Tool (SARAT) to assist in locating individuals or objects lost at sea.
- INCOIS has also created the SynOPS visualisation platform, which allows for the real-time integration of various forms of data.
- Furthermore, INCOIS is a permanent member of the Indian delegation to UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

Importance and Recognition

- The award to INCOIS emphasises the critical role of technological innovation and foresight in effective disaster management.
- INCOIS' recognition by UNESCO underscores its global standing and the significance of its contributions to safety and disaster prevention in the Indian Ocean region.
- By developing early warning systems and real-time data visualization, INCOIS plays an essential role in mitigating disaster risks, thus safeguarding lives and maintaining stability in the region.

Overview of the 82nd Annual Golden Globe Awards (2025)

Introduction and About

- The 82nd Golden Globe Awards was an event held in 2025, honouring achievements in the arts and culture industry, especially films and television.
- The Golden Globe Awards serves as a platform to recognise and award individuals and productions for their exceptional performance, innovation, and contribution to the industry.

Noteworthy Award Winners

- The film, "The Brutalist", starring Adrien Brody received multiple awards such as Best Motion Picture — Drama, Best Actor and Best Director.
- Fernanda Torres was awarded Best Actress for her performance in "I'm Still Here".
- Zoe Saldana and Kieran Culkin bagged awards for Best Supporting Actress and Actor in a Motion Picture for "Emilia Pérez" and "A Real Pain" respectively.
- The television series "Shōgun" took home multiple wins, including Best Television Series — Drama and Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series — Drama (Hiroyuki Sanada).

Other notable recognitions

- "Hacks" was awarded both Best Television Series — Comedy or Musical and Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series — Musical or Comedy (Jean Smart).
- "Baby Reindeer" was recognised as the Best Television Limited Series, Anthology Series, or Motion Picture Made for Television.
- "Flow" earned the title of Best Motion Picture — Animated.
- "Wicked" was noted for its Best Cinematic and Box Office Achievement.

- In terms of music, Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross took away the award for Best Original Score — Motion Picture for “Challengers”.

Golden Globes and Cultural Influence

- The Golden Globe Awards hold immense importance as they set the tone for award ceremonies worldwide and help in influencing public and critical opinion about movies and television series.

- These highly coveted awards not only boost the winners' professional careers, but also influence viewership and box-office collections.

- They play a significant role in widening the global audience and appreciation for films and TV productions, enhancing the cultural value of these art forms.

The Importance of the British Film and Television Industry

- The success of British actors and directors at prestigious international events like the Golden Globe Awards underscores the importance and influence of British cinema and TV worldwide.

- Their recognitions also demonstrate the potential of British productions to compete at the highest level and bring their unique storytelling approach to global audiences.

Schemes And Initiative

PM Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (PM-YASASVI)

Overview

- Launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the PM-YASASVI scheme provides financial aid for quality education to socially and economically marginalized students.

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment addressed student beneficiaries of the scheme on Republic Day 2025.

Eligibility Criteria

- PM-YASASVI scheme is accessible for OBC, Economically Backward Classes (EBC), and DNT students, with an annual family income not exceeding Rs 2.5 lakh.

Structure and Benefits

- This scheme is multifaceted, encompassing sub-schemes that target specific needs and stages of education.

- Pre-Matric Scholarship offers an annual academic allowance of Rs. 4,000 to families earning less than Rs. 2.5 lakh per annum.

- Post-Matric Scholarship disburses an amount ranging from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 20,000 depending on the category of the course.

- The scheme also extends full financial support, including tuition, living costs, and educational materials, to top college students.

- Notably, the PM-YASASVI equation also includes hostel accommodations near government schools and institutions.

Relation to Other Schemes

- The PM-YASASVI is one among several government initiatives focusing on educational support. It correlates with other schemes like National Scholarships for Disabled Students, INSPIRE Scholarship, Maulana Azad National Fellowship, etc.

Significance

- The PM-YASASVI programme heralds a significant step towards assuring equitable education opportunities in India. By facilitating quality education for the marginalized section of the society, the scheme empowers these

students to transform their futures and contribute positively to the nation's growth.

Aroma Mission in India

Overview

- The Ministry of Science & Technology has prioritised the Northeast region and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in the Aroma Mission.
- The mission was initiated in J&K, aiming to boost India's aroma industry through the increased cultivation of aromatic crops and production of essential oils.
- The Aroma Mission is commonly referred to as the Lavender Revolution due to its focus on lavender among other aromatic crops.

About Aromatic Crops

- Aromatic crops like rose, peppermint, lemongrass, lavender, vetiver, and palmarosa are grown for their aromatic oils. These oils are essential in various industries such as cosmetics, aromatherapy, and food flavouring.
- The Aroma Mission targets the cultivation of high-value aromatic crops primarily.

Related Initiatives and Achievements

- The Incubation & Innovation Complex (IICON) at CSIR-North-East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST), Jorhat was introduced to provide farmers with advanced technologies and facilities.
- Through the mission, CSIR-NEIST has introduced aromatic crops across more than 5,000 hectares in the Northeast and set up 39 essential oil distillation units.

Potential Impact

- The mission aims for the production of over 2000 tonnes of high-quality essential oils annually, generating a revenue worth more than Rs. 300 crores.
- It is also expected to create 60 lakh man-days of rural employment and increase farmers' annual income by Rs. 60,000 to 70,000 per hectare.

Nodal Agency

- The nodal agency for the Aroma Mission is the CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CSIR-CIMAP) in Lucknow.
-

Watershed Development Component 2.0 of Prime Minister Krishi Sinchayee Yojna (PMKSY-WDC 2.0)

Introduction and Background

- PMKSY-WDC 2.0 is a sub-component of the broader PMKSY initiative, which focuses on conserving water and soil resources.
- Previously starting as the Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) in 2009-10, it was merged into the Watershed Development Component of PMKSY (PMKSY-WDC) in 2015-16.
- The upgraded PMKSY-WDC 2.0 was launched for the period 2021-2026 with revised guidelines and more expansive targets.

Current News and Implementation

- Recently, the Ministry of Rural Development sanctioned 56 additional Watershed Development Projects under the PMKSY-WDC 2.0 across 10 best-performing states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim.
- These projects will cover around 2.8 lakh hectares of degraded land.
- Notably, in 2021-22 alone, 1150 projects were sanctioned under this scheme, covering an area of approximately 50 Lakh hectares.

Objectives, Targets and Revised Approach

- The key objectives of PMKSY-WDC 2.0 are to improve rainfed and degraded land productivity through integrated watershed management and to strengthen community

institutions for livelihoods and watershed sustainability.

- It also strives to increase the efficiency of watershed projects through cross-learning and provision of incentives.

- This scheme aims to cover 49.50 lakh hectares of degraded land between 2021-2026, and includes springsheds rejuvenation as a new activity.

- With a next-generation focus, the scheme encourages water productivity over quantity, transition from mechanical treatments to biological methods, crop diversification, and integrated farming systems like horticulture, fisheries, apiculture, and animal husbandry.

Prime Minister Krishi Sinchayee Yojna (PMKSY)

- Launched in 2015-16 by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, PMKSY aims to augment water access for farming, widen irrigated areas, enhance water use efficiency, and promote sustainable water conservation.

- This scheme, which is sponsored by the Central government, shares costs on a 75:25 basis with state governments, and 90:10 for the north-eastern and hilly states.

- PMKSY has two primary components implemented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti – the Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) aiming for quicker completion of ongoing Major and Medium Irrigation, and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP) comprising four sub-components.

- In addition to these, PMKSY has two other components implemented by different ministries – 'Per Drop More Crop' (PDMC) by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and the Watershed Development Component (WDC) of PMKSY by the Ministry of Rural Development.

Overview of Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0 Programme

Introduction and Historic Significance

- Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0 is a notable programme inaugurated by the Lok Sabha Speaker on 6th January 2025.

- The launch was tailored to coincide with the 150th birth anniversary of renowned tribal leader Birsa Munda.

Involvement and Initiative Details

- The gathering featured an impressive turnout of 502 elected women representatives originating from Scheduled Tribes (STs) across India.

- The initiative is a women's awareness and empowerment effort, specifically designed to enhance understanding of constitutional and democratic values.

- It is presented through a joint organisation by the National Commission for Women (NCW) and Lok Sabha Secretariat, in partnership with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Objectives of the Programme

- The ultimate aim of the Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0 is to empower elected women representatives from various backgrounds in Panchayats (PRIs) and urban local bodies (ULBs).

- The programme seeks to provide these women with key insights into constitutional provisions, parliamentary procedures, and governance.

Key Features of the Programme

- The programme includes interactive workshops given by experts and Members of Parliaments (MPs), as well as guided tours of the New Parliament House, Samvidhan Sadan, Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya, and Rashtrapati Bhavan.

- Looking back, its precursor, Panchayat Se Parliament Tak 1.0, was successfully

conducted in January 2024 with participation from more than 500 individuals.

Background on Women Reservation Acts

- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 and 1993, respectively, as well as the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2023 have emphasised women's reservation.

Commemoration of Tribal Leader Birsa

Munda

- Birsa Munda, celebrated for leading the Munda Rebellion (Ulgulan), is fondly remembered on his birth anniversary known as 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas'. His life and works continue to inspire many initiatives, including the Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0 programme.

BHARATPOL Portal: A Push for Efficient International Crime Investigations

Introduction and About

- The BHARATPOL portal is a core initiative brought forward by the Indian Union Home Minister for boosting the efficacy of investigative agencies in India.

- This innovative platform has been developed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India, aiming at seamless interconnection of domestic and international agencies against crime.

Role in Crime Investigation and Current Importance

- By leveraging BHARATPOL, central and state agencies can connect with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) for real-time information

exchange, replacing the earlier system that granted only the CBI with this access.

- This signifies a marked shift from earlier practices and ushers in a new era of quick and efficient information sharing on international crime.

Potential Impact on Transnational Crimes

- BHARATPOL plays a pivotal role in refining international assistance to fight against increasing cross-border crimes, notably cybercrime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

- Further, the portal facilitates the processing of Red Notices and other INTERPOL notices, smoothing the way for field-level police officers to address these types of crimes more effectively.

Capacity Building

- In addition to being a tool for international information exchange, BHARATPOL is also central to the CBI's capacity-building efforts.

- The CBI holds the responsibility of training states on using the portal and applying three new criminal laws for efficient trials.

- Through this, it will increase the awareness and preparedness of local enforcement agencies in dealing with transnational crimes, fortifying the overall law and order machinery.

Further Developments and Potential Advancements

- With the incorporation of BHARATPOL, Indian investigative agencies are more equipped to handle the complexities of international crime.

- As the system evolves, it paves the way for faster inter-agency responses, marking a positive shift in India's commitment to tackle crime, defend its citizens, and uphold international justice.

An Overview of Mission SCOT

Introduction and About Mission SCOT

- Mission SCOT, an initiative by the Indian space startup Digantara, has been applauded by the Prime Minister of India for its success, signifying the expansion of India's commercial space sector.
- It is a groundbreaking project, marking the world's first commercial Space Situational Awareness (SSA) satellite.
- This satellite was launched under SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission.
- The mission of SCOT involves the tracking and characterization of space objects and their orbits, specifically Resident Space Objects (RSOs) as small as 5 cm in Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
- Its development is supported by Aditya Birla Ventures and the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).

Significance of the Transporter-12 Mission

- The Transporter-12 Mission is a component of SpaceX's rideshare programme.
- It aims to provide cost-effective access to space for multiple customers in a single launch.
- This mission not only signifies the advanced nature of SpaceX's operations, but also represents a milestone for achieving more cost-effective space exploration methods internationally.

India's Efforts in SSA

- The efforts of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) involve conducting proximity analyses and Collision Avoidance Manoeuvres (CAM) to prevent satellite collisions, which are crucial for safe space operations.
- ISRO utilises a Multi Object Tracking Radar for this purpose at Sriharikota range, however, its range is limited.

- Additionally, the ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Operations Management (IS4OM) provides the annual Indian Space Situational Assessment Report (ISSAR), giving important insights into the space environment.

The NETRA Project

- The Network for Space Objects Tracking and Analysis (NETRA) is another major project undertaken by ISRO.
- Under NETRA, a Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) network is being established with advanced radars and optical telescopes.
- This network aims at enhancing threat analysis and protecting space assets, further bolstering India's capabilities in space situational awareness.

Science And Tech

Twigstats: A New Age Genetic Analysis Tool

Introduction and About Twigstats

- Twigstats is an advanced and innovative tool designed specifically for genetic studies with a specific concentration on ancestry analysis.
- It has brought a revolutionary change in the precision of tracing individual-level ancestry using ancient DNA samples, particularly from northern and Central Europe dating from around 500 BC and 1000 AD.
- Not only does it improve genetic analysis, but it also enhances our understanding of population dynamics by integrating genetic data, archaeological findings, and historical context.
- Working primarily by the reconstruction of genetic family trees, it analyses shared genetic mutations between individuals to trace ancestry and connections between people from different time periods.

Key Features of Twigstats

- Time-Stratified Ancestry Analysis: Through a time-stratified approach to analyze genetic data, Twigstats drastically enhances accuracy by studying evolution of ancestry and populations across different historical periods.
- Integration of Various Genetic Techniques: The tool comprises haplotypes, rare variants, and Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms to offer a comprehensive understanding of ancestry and population structure.
- This paves the way for deeper insights into demographic transitions across time and improves the accuracy of genetic analysis.
- Compatibility with programming languages R and C++ is another key feature of Twigstats which aids researchers in a more precise analysis of genetic data.

Explanation of Techniques Used for Genetic Analysis

- Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs): This laboratory method is used to identify differences in a DNA sequence where one nucleotide varies between individuals at certain points. SNP analysis is vital for reconstructing genetic histories and ancestry models.
- Haplotypes Method: This approach involves analysing combinations of genetic markers that are jointly inherited on the same chromosome. It offers essential insights which might not be noticeable with individual markers analysis alone.
- Genealogical Tree Inference: This method traces the ancestry and genetic relationships by constructing family trees. It analyses both modern and ancient genomes to understand population structure and demographic changes.

India's Emergence as a Global Hub for Data Centres

Understanding Data Centres

- Data centres are specialized facilities for data storage, processing, and managing large volumes of electronic information.
- They comprise of key infrastructural components like servers, storage systems, networking equipment, power supply systems, cooling systems, and dedicated security infrastructure.

Current Status and Projections of Data Centres in India

- India's data centre market is projected to grow significantly from USD 4.5 billion in 2023 to USD 11.6 billion by 2032.
- Notwithstanding the potential for growth, India currently holds only 3% of global capacity despite generating 20% of global data.
- The geographical distribution is concentrated with over 50% of the capacity located in Mumbai while smaller cities are emerging as viable alternatives.

Key Drivers for Growth of Data Centres

- The demand for data centres is being driven by digitalization with the increasing adoption of technologies like AI, cloud storage and computing, and the rollout of 5G.
- Regulatory mandates like RBI's directive for data localization and the increasing number of internet users are also contributing to the growth.

Importance of Data Centres in India's Economic Growth

- Data centres are critical to the digital economy, by providing computational capacity for data processing through AI and machine learning.
- They support the functioning of essential online services across various sectors like

e-commerce, social media, banking, entertainment, healthcare, and government.

- The data centre sector contributes to job creation, infrastructure development, and attracts investment in technology, power infrastructure, real estate, and other sectors thereby promoting economic growth.

Challenges and Constraints in Data Centre Growth

- Infrastructure deficits such as unreliable power supply, lack of connectivity especially in non-metro areas, high capital investment and regional disparities present challenges for growth.

- The energy-intensive nature of data centres presents sustainability issues and the industry faces pressure to adopt renewable energy sources to minimize its environmental impact.

- Skill shortages, competition from other countries like China, cybersecurity threats, and scalability as demand grows are other challenges that need to be addressed.

Initiatives for Promoting the Data Centre Ecosystem

- The Digital India initiative aims to enhance online infrastructure and internet connectivity, thus fostering growth of digital services.

- The Infrastructure Status granted to data centres with IT load greater than 5 MW has facilitated easier access to financing and incentives.

- State-Level policies like Maharashtra's IT and ITES Policy 2023 provide targeted benefits and incentives.

- The establishment of India's first hyperscale data centre, Yotta D1, signifies a major milestone for the country's data centre capacity.

Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025

Introduction and Overview

- The Ministry of Electronics & IT has formulated the draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025.

- The purpose of the draft is to protect the personal data of citizens while focusing on the growth of India's digital economy and innovation.

- The draft is based on the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act), 2023.

Key Features of Draft DPDP Rules, 2025

- The rules allow for the transfer of personal data outside of India with government approval.

- Citizens have the right to demand data erasure, appoint digital nominees, and have user-friendly mechanisms for managing their data.

- Data Fiduciaries, such as social media platforms, e-commerce companies, and online gaming platforms, have the responsibility to collect and process individuals' personal data.

- Data retention is limited to a maximum of three years from the last interaction with the Data Principal or the time these rules become effective, whichever is later.

- A Data Fiduciary must notify the Data Principal a minimum of 48 hours before erasure of data.

- The draft emphasises a 'digital-first' approach with the formation of a 'digital by design' Data Protection Board of India (DPBI).

- DPBI will oversee consent mechanisms and redress grievances, facilitating swifter online resolution of complaints.

- The rules propose a tiered system for responsibilities, easing compliance burden for startups and MSMEs, whereas significant Data Fiduciaries have greater obligations.

Role of Consent Managers and DPBI

- Digital platforms can collect consent through consent managers.
- A Consent Manager, who must be an Indian company with sound financial and operational capacity, is responsible for the collection, storage, and use of user consent, focusing on data privacy and digital interactions.
- For a Consent Manager role, a minimal net worth of two crore rupees is required.
- The DPBI is outlined in the new rules as an institution with civil court powers dealing with personal data breach complaints.

Background

- Privacy legislation was recommended by the Justice AP Shah Committee in 2011.
- The Supreme Court of India recognized privacy as a fundamental right in the case of Justice KS Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union of India in 2017.

Salient Points of the DPDP Act, 2023

- The act empowers individuals to exercise control over their personal data, including rights to access, correction, and erasure.
- For data processing, explicit consent is required, which must be clearly indicated in consent forms.
- Sensitive data is required to be stored and processed within India itself.
- DPBI is established as the regulatory authority for compliance checks and handling grievances.
- In case of a data breach, organisations are mandated to notify both the individuals and DPBI.
- The act inflicts heavy penalties for non-compliance, reinforcing data protection standards.

Launch of India's Genomic Data Set

Introduction and Overview

- India launched the Indian Genomic Data Set (IGD) under the GenomeIndia Project (GIP) at the Genome India Data Conclave in New Delhi.
- This launch also marked the initiation of the Framework for Exchange of Data Protocols (FeED) and the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) Portals.
- These efforts place India at the forefront of genomics, allowing international researchers to sample genome sets, thus fostering self-sufficiency in genomic information.

Key Highlights of the Genome India Data Conclave

- IGD is a comprehensive genomic data set featuring 10,000 whole genome sequencing samples archived at the IBDC.
- This data set can now be accessed globally, aiding in advancing genomics research and personalised medicine.
- The FeED enables efficient, ethical, transparent, and secure exchange of high-quality genomic data under the Biotech-PRIDE guidelines.
- The GenomeIndia Project, championed by the Department of Biotechnology, aims to create a detailed database of India's genetic diversity.

Biotech-PRIDE Guidelines and Indian Biological Data Centre

- The Biotech-PRIDE Guidelines were initiated in 2021 and provide the groundwork for sharing knowledge among Indian research institutes.
- They facilitate better integration, equitable access, and smart decision-making while maximising benefits from public investments in research.

- These guidelines are enforced via the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC), a national repository for biological data based at the Regional Centre for Biotechnology (RCB), Haryana.

The GenomeIndia Project (GIP)

- Initiated in 2020 to map out the genetic diversity of India.
- Aims at sequencing and analysing genomes across India's diverse population to gain insights into the nation's unique genetic makeup.
- Sets out to establish a foundational genetic map for studying health, disease predisposition, and population-specific traits.
- The project will also focus on understanding genes associated with certain diseases like cancer, diabetes, and rare illnesses.
- It aims to discover genetic factors unique to Indian populations, such as rare diseases and mutations not found in global databases.

Overview of Genome Sequencing and Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS)

- Genome sequencing involves deciphering the order of nucleotide bases in the DNA, thereby understanding an individual's genetic makeup.
- This process reveals insights into traits, health risks, and potential diseases.
- Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) sequences the entire genome of an organism, providing a comprehensive map of the individual's genetic material.

Benefits and Impact of Indigenous Genomic Data

- Indigenous Genomic Data enables personalised medicine adapting to India's demographic, thereby improving treatment effectiveness.
- Fuels India's surging bioeconomy, which has increased from USD 10 billion in 2014 to over USD 130 billion in 2024.
- Positions India as a global leader in biotech, especially as the country ranks 12th globally in biotech and 3rd in Asia-Pacific.

- Promotes the creation of genomic tools and diagnostic tests tailored to regional genetic variations.
- Supports agricultural and environmental research, offering useful insights into genetic diversity for improved crop breeding and disease resistance.

India's Other Initiatives for Biotechnology Development

- Numerous policies and projects such as BioE3 Policy, National Biotechnology Development Strategy 2020-25, National Biopharma Mission, Biotech-KISAN Scheme, and the Atal Jai Anusandhan Biotech Mission have been initiated.
- The IndiGen Project launched in 2019 is designed to map the genetic makeup of Indians, to comprehend disease susceptibility and drug responses better.

Genomic Projects Globally

- The first full human genome sequence was completed in 2003 under The Human Genome Project.
- The EU's '1+ Million Genomes' initiative aims to provide secure and widespread access to genomic and medical data across Europe.
- The Earth BioGenome Project is a worldwide effort to sequence and catalog the genomes of all known species on Earth.

Advanced Robotics in Healthcare and Its Role in India

Overview and Current Updates

- India has carried out two complex cardiac procedures using the country's first locally-built tele-robotic system called SSI Mantra, overcoming a physical distance of more than 280 km.

- This advancement represents a significant breakthrough in tele-robotic surgeries, facilitating premium healthcare by surpassing geographical limitations.

About SSI Mantra

- SSI Mantra is the first indigenous surgical robotic system in India, developed by SS Innovations.
- It has received regulatory approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).
- The system operates with ultra-low latency, ensuring smooth remote operations and is primarily designed for high-precision surgeries.
- It also uses a Master-Slave Console Model where the master controls the surgery from a distance, whilst the slave near the patient performs commands through robotic instruments.
- One of the most significant aspects of the system is the enhancement of surgical care in underserved or remote regions by overcoming geographical hurdles.

Introduction to Robots

- Robots are autonomous machines capable of performing tasks independently.
- They can be categorised based on their mobility, capability, and design, thus finding usage in diverse fields.
- The ethical implications of robotic usage are governed by Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, which outline how the robots should interact with humans.

Application of Robotics

- Robots are extensively utilized in various sectors like the health sector (prosthetics, surgery), industries, military, agriculture, disaster management, and space exploration.
- In healthcare, they offer advantages such as facilitating minimally invasive procedures, faster recovery, and higher precision in surgeries.
- They also act as a critical part of space exploration missions.

Current State of Robotics in India

- Between 2016 and 2021, India has made significant strides in the field of robotics, doubling its operational stock of industrial robots.
- Despite a slower growth rate compared to developed nations, India has also been developing its robots like DAKSHA, Vyom Mitra, and MANAV.
- Several government initiatives are in place to foster the country's robotics ecosystem, particularly in healthcare.

Challenges and Future Outlook

- Significant challenges in adopting robotics in healthcare include high initial costs, need for specialized training, ethical concerns, patient trust, job loss, and cybersecurity risks.
- The way forward should involve strategies to make robotic solutions more affordable, such as government subsidies and private sector collaborations, along with integrating specialized training into the curricula of medical schools.
- The adoption of online platforms and virtual training can ensure global access to specialized education.

Sports News

National Sports Awards 2024

Introduction and About

- The National Sports Awards are a set of prestigious awards given annually by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports for significant achievements and contributions to Indian sports.
- These awards are bestowed to recognise and reward the remarkable performances of Indian sportspeople and also honour coaches and

those involved in the development of sports in India.

Announcement and Details of the National Sports Awards 2024

- Recently, the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports made an announcement regarding the National Sports Awards 2024.
- The awardee names for the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna, Arjuna, Dronacharya, Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) trophy were unveiled.

2024 Award Recipients

- Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna: The recipients of this dedicated award include Gukesh D (Chess), Harmanpreet Singh (Hockey), Praveen Kumar (Para-Athletics), and Manu Bhaker (Shooting).
- Arjuna Awards for outstanding performance: The 2024 awardees include Jyothi Yarraji (Athletics), Annu Rani (Athletics), Nitu (Boxing), Rakesh Kumar (Para-Archery), and Navdeep (Para-Athletics).
- Arjuna Awards (Lifetime) for outstanding performance: The award has been conferred upon Sucha Singh (Athletics) and Murlikant Rajaram Petkar (Para-Swimming).
- Dronacharya Award: Some of the recipients include Subhash Rana (Para-Shooting) and S Muralidharan (Badminton).
- MAKA Trophy: Chandigarh University has been named the overall winner.

Various Sports Awards in India and Their Importance

- Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award: It is India's highest sporting award given for outstanding performances in sports over a four-year period.
- Arjuna Award: Awarded for consistently good performance over a period of four years. The recipients receive a statuette of Arjuna.
- Dronacharya Award: This award is the country's highest honour for coaches,

recognising those who produce medal winners at prestigious international events.

- Major Dhyan Chand Award: It honours lifetime achievements in sports and is named after India's legendary hockey player Dhyan Chand.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy: This trophy is given to an institution or university for top performance in inter-university tournaments over the preceding year.
- Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar: This award honours organisations, corporates, or individuals who have contributed to sports promotion and development over the past three years.

Conclusion

- The National Sports Awards 2024 continues to honour the remarkable talent and dedication of sportspeople across India, acknowledging not only their performances but also the pivotal roles of coaches, institutions, and organisations in developing and promoting sports in the nation.

India's Victory at the Inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025

Overview

-India triumphed in the Inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025, earning both the men's and women's world champion titles by defeating Nepal in the final matches.

Tournament Details

- The Kho Kho World Cup 2025 was fully backed by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).
- The tournament featured group stages and knockout rounds for both men's and women's divisions.

Historical Significance of Kho Kho

- Kho Kho is considered one of the oldest traditional tag games of India.
- The game is thought to have evolved from the Chakravyuha, a war formation in the Mahabharata, resembling a defensive tactic similar to the ring play seen in Kho Kho.
- The modern foot version of Kho Kho emerged in 1914 during the time of World War I, with Pune's Deccan Gymkhana Club officially laying down its rules and structure.

The Game: A Brief Introduction

- A Kho Kho team consists of 9 active players, with 3 substitutes available.
- Players alternate between chasing, defending, and tagging opponents.

Initial Global Recognition

- Kho Kho was showcased at the Berlin 1936 Olympics, alongside other indigenous Indian sports like kabaddi and mallakhamb.

Increase in Global Popularity

- The global popularity of Kho Kho has seen growth from being played in 6 countries in 2020 to 55 in 2025.
- The International Kho Kho Federation (IKKF) aims to expand the game to 90 countries and is targeting for the sport to be included in the Olympic games by 2036.

ICC Awards 2024

Overview of Awards Winners

- The International Cricket Council (ICC) Awards for 2024 recognised players and officials for their exceptional performances, contributions, and talents throughout the year.
- Emerging Cricketers of the Year were Annerie Dercksen(SA) and Kamindu Mendis(SL).
- The Associate Cricketers of the Year were Esha Oza(UAE) and Gerhard Erasmus(NAM).

- Umpire of the year went to Richard Illingworth.
- ICC's T20I Cricketer of the Year awards were bestowed on Melie Kerr(NZ) and Arshdeep Singh(IND).
- The teams of the year for T20I, Test and ODI categories for both Women's and Men's cricket were announced with captains leading their respective teams.
- Lastly, the Cricketers of the year for ODI and Test format were Smriti Mandhana(IND), Azmatullah Omarzai(AFG) and Jasprit Bumrah(IND), and Women's Cricketer of the Year was Melie Kerr(NZ).

Significance and Impact

- This annual occasion highlights the best talent in cricket from around the globe.
- Annerie Dercksen and Kamindu Mendis's awards recognise their remarkable rise and potential in international cricket.
- Esha Oza and Gerhard Erasmus have provided significant contributions to their respective associate cricket teams.
- The acknowledgment of Melie Kerr and Arshdeep Singh's performances in T20I cricket demonstrates their consistent and lethal playing style which has significantly impacted their team's performances.
- Celebrating Richard Illingworth as umpire of the year confirms the importance of fairness, consistency, and excellence in officiating the games.
- The teams of the year feature players who have been stalwarts in their respective formats and have delivered consistently throughout the year.
- The awards accorded to Smriti Mandhana, Azmatullah Omarzai, Jasprit Bumrah and Melie Kerr recognise their vital contributions to their teams' success, elevating their countries' stature in the cricketing world.

BCCI Awards 2024-2025: Recognising Legends and Upcoming Stars in Cricket

Overview of the BCCI Awards

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Awards are annual events that honour the performances of exceptional players in the cricketing year.
- The awards cover a wide range of categories, including the best international debut, highest run-getter, highest wicket-taker, best umpire, and multiple awards for Under-19 and Under-23 players.
- Both male and female cricketers are honoured equally at the BCCI Awards, showcasing talent and dedication from all segments of Indian cricket.

News & Current Winners of BCCI Awards

- The BCCI Awards 2024-2025 recognised distinguished performances from both seasoned cricketers and debutants.
- The Col. C. K. Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award for Men went to Sachin Tendulkar, honouring the jaw-dropping legacy of the sporting legend.
- Jasprit Bumrah received the Polly Umrigar Award for the Best International Cricketer (Men) while the female counterpart of the award went to Smriti Mandhana.
- Sarfaraz Khan and Asha Sobhana were recognised for their outstanding international debuts, receiving the award for Best International Debut in Men's and Women's category respectively.
- Ravichandran Ashwin received the BCCI Special Award for his outstanding contribution to Indian cricket.

Highlighting Under-19 and Under-23 Performances

- The U-19 and U-23 levels of cricket were acknowledged with the M.A. Chidambaram Trophy and the Jagmohan Dalmiya Trophy.

- Notable winners included, Kavya Teotia and Vishnu Bhardwaj for their high-scoring runs and wickets respectively in the U-19 Cooch Behar Trophy.
- For the U-23 CK Nayudu Trophy, Neizekho Rupreo, Hem Chetri, P Vidyuth and Aneesh KV received recognitions for being the highest run-getter and wicket-taker in both Elite and Plate Groups.

Domestic Cricket and All-rounder Performances

- The umpiring department was recognised with the award for Best Umpire In Domestic Cricket going to Akshay Totre.
- The Lala Amarnath Award for the best all-rounder in domestic limited-overs competitions and the Ranji Trophy were won by Shashank Singh and Tanush Kotian respectively.
- The award for Best Performance in BCCI Domestic Tournaments went to the team from Mumbai.

In conclusion, the BCCI Awards continue to honour cricketing talent across all levels of the sport, fostering a culture of recognition and motivation for players to excel further.

Cricket Updates and Milestones

Individual Achievements in Cricket

- Jasprit Bumrah became the fastest Indian bowler to accumulate 200 wickets in Test cricket, doing so within 44 Tests.
- Shreyas Iyer has been appointed as the captain of Punjab Kings for the IPL 2025 season.
- Martin Guptill from New Zealand retired after a career span of 14 years, scoring 14,877 runs across formats. His highest score in the 2015 World Cup remains a record till date.

- Australian cricketer Annabel Sutherland and Indian bowler Jasprit Bumrah were given the titles of ICC Men's and Women's Players, respectively, for the month.
- Smriti Mandhana set a record for scoring the fastest century by an Indian in women's ODIs during the 3rd ODI against Ireland Women.
- Arshdeep Singh became India's highest wicket-taker in T20 Internationals, surpassing Yuzvendra Chahal.
- Dinesh Karthik outperformed MS Dhoni to become the highest run-scoring Indian wicket-keeper in T20 cricket.

Tournament Outcomes and Appointments in Cricket

- The Santosh Trophy 2024 concluded with West Bengal clinching their 33rd title in a 1-0 victory over Kerala.
- Devajit Saikia, former Assam cricketer, and Prabhtej Singh Bhatia from CSCS are set to be the new BCCI secretary and treasurer, respectively.
- Jay Shah, the current ICC Chair, has been appointed as a member of the new World Cricket Connects advisory board, replacing the MCC's World Cricket Committee.
- Australia won the ICC Women's Championship for the third time in a row, hence qualifying for the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025.
- Steve Smith reached the milestone of 10,000 runs in Test cricket, becoming the 15th player and fourth Australian to achieve this feat.

Subtopic ♥3: Honour and Global Recognition in Cricket

- Former Australian cricket captain Michael Clarke was inducted into the prestigious Australian Cricket Hall of Fame, making him the 64th cricketer to obtain this honour.
- Australia clinched the ICC Women's Championship title for the third consecutive time, securing a path to the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup.

Key Decisions and Resignations in Cricket

- The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) replaced its existing World Cricket Committee with a new advisory board named 'World Cricket Connects'.
- Just 21 days prior to the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan, Geoff Allardice, CEO of the International Cricket Council (ICC), stepped down from his position.

Highlights from India Open Badminton and Tennis Tournament 2025

Introduction and News

- The India Open 2025 was a tournament for professional badminton and tennis players that saw prominent international athletes competing for the assorted titles. It was an event of great significance, drawing attention from sports followers around the globe.
- The competition ended with Viktor Axelsen and An Se-young dominating in the singles titles.
- The India Open 2025 was rife with exciting matches, with the results maintaining a fair share of suspense and drama before the final winners were declared.

Winners and Scorecards

- Viktor Axelsen from Denmark came out dominant in the Men's Singles category, followed by Lee Cheuk Yiu from Hong Kong as the runner-up.
- The Women's Singles title was secured by An Se-young from South Korea, with Pornpawee Chochuwong from Thailand claiming the runners-up spot.
- Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin from Malaysia emerged victorious in Men's Doubles, while Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-jae from South Korea put up a heated contest to earn the second spot.
- In Women's Doubles, Japanese team Arisa Igarashi and Ayaka Sakuramoto triumphed,

and the Korean duo Kim Hye-jeong and Kong Hee-yong finished in the runners-up position.

Indian Open Tournament - A General Knowledge Insight

- The India Open is a renowned annual badminton and tennis event, attracting some of the most skilled professional players from around the world.
- It provides an international platform for athletes to compete and further their reputation in the sports world.
- The tournament holds great prominence in the badminton and tennis calendar owing to its professional conduct, fair play, and the high-level competition that sees participation from globally celebrated athletes.
- The tournament holds significant worth for the contestants, providing rewarding exposure, a considerable prize pool, and a tough competition exhibiting the highest level of play.
- Lastly, for sports enthusiasts and followers, it is an amusing event packed with adrenaline-filled action and outstanding performances from the world's top athletes.

Recent Highlights in Other Sports

Chess Developments

- Koneru Humpy, aged 37, claimed her second Women's World Rapid Chess Championship title in New York. She successfully balanced her motherhood, familial responsibilities, and an intense chess career, exemplifying resilience and passion.
- A controversy erupted during the World Blitz Championship where Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi became joint winners. This led to accusations of match-fixing as video footage emerged suggesting that the two players might have conspired to force a co-win scenario. Many grandmasters and analysts voiced strong criticism.

Badminton Highlights

- India's badminton sensation, Lakshya Sen, achieved third place at the debut King Cup International Badminton Open in Bangkok, Thailand, demonstrating exceptional endurance and steadiness after a tight loss in the semifinals.
- PV Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medalist, has commenced a long-term partnership with PUMA India. This marks PUMA's official foray into the badminton sector.

Handball and Kabaddi Achievements

- Kerala won its inaugural Senior National Men's Handball Championship, triumphing over Chandigarh in a close final match.
- The Haryana Steelers, for the first time, claimed victory in the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) by outsourcing the Patna Pirates in the final.

Motorsport Achievements

- Hemanth Muddappa, known as the "Drag King" of Indian motorsport, secured a triple win at the MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship, enhancing his reputation as India's most decorated motorsport athlete with a total of 15 national titles.

Other Notable Events

- The first-ever Kho Kho World Cup was inaugurated at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in New Delhi, with 23 countries participating. This ceremony marked the growth of Kho Kho, an indigenous Indian game, on the global front.
- Indian grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi won the Titled Tuesday by defeating the leading Chess players Magnus Carlsen and Fabiano Caruana.
- Novak Djokovic set a new record for the most Grand Slam matches played in tennis history by competing in his 430th match at the Australian Open. He emerged victorious in a challenging match against Jaime Faria,

augmenting his place as one of the sport's greatest icons.

Miscellaneous

India-Indonesia Relationship Enhancement: Notable Points and Importance

Introduction and Latest Developments

- The President of Indonesia was the Chief Guest at India's 76th Republic Day celebrations, marking the 75th anniversary of the diplomatic relationships between the two countries.
- Several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed between the leadership of the two nations on topics ranging from health cooperation to digital infrastructure and defence collaboration.

Key Highlights of India-Indonesia Ties

- Both countries affirmed their commitment to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that was upgraded in 2018.
- They committed to strengthen defence ties and agreed to boost bilateral trade, which is already worth USD 38.8 billion.
- Both nations are focusing on cooperation in sectors like energy and health security.
- Memorandums of Understanding on Health Cooperation and Quality Assurance of traditional medicine were signed.
- The leaders committed to greater technological and cultural cooperation as well.
- Multilateral cooperation was emphasized, mainly concerning the ASEAN bloc and other regional initiatives.

Evolution of India-Indonesia Relations

- The relationship between India and Indonesia dates back to the early post-independence

period, during which India supported Indonesia's fight against Dutch colonial rule.

- The relationship experienced strains in the 1960s due to geopolitical developments.
- In recent years, Indonesia has become India's second-largest trading partner in the ASEAN region.
- The past years have seen a significant boost in bilateral trade figures which have grown from USD 4.3 billion in 2005 to USD 38.84 billion in 2022.

Significance of Indonesia to India

- Indonesia holds strategic importance for India due to its position in the Indo-Pacific region and control over key sea lanes.
- Indonesia's abundance of natural resources presents opportunities for India in sectors such as energy, agriculture, and infrastructure.
- The potential \$450 million BrahMos missile deal highlights the importance of defence cooperation between the two nations.
- Indonesia's consistent police efforts in tackling terrorism are examples from which India can gain significant insights.
- Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN can enhance its cooperation with India, contributing to regional stability and mutual interests.

In conclusion, India and Indonesia share a relationship built on shared history, geographical connectivity, cultural links, and vast expectations for the future. The strengthening ties between the two countries are critical, giving them the potential to shape the geopolitical landscape of Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

The Legacy and Impact of Vikram Sarabhai

Overview and Introduction

- Vikram Ambalal Sarabhai was a renowned physicist and industrialist known for initiating

space research and promoting the use of nuclear power in India.

- Sarabhai's death is marked every year on the 30th of December.

Early Life and Education

- Vikram Sarabhai was born on 12th August 1919, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat into an affluent Jain family.

- An early talent for engineering was demonstrated when he built a model train engine at just 15 years old.

- Sarabhai completed his undergraduate degree in Natural Sciences from Cambridge's St. John's College in 1940.

- His research into cosmic rays, under Dr. CV Raman at the Indian Institute of Science, took place during World War II.

- In 1947, Sarabhai was awarded a doctorate from Cambridge for his thesis on cosmic rays.

Institutional Contributions

- Sarabhai had a significant role in the establishment of significant institutions that remain crucial in India's scientific and industrial landscape.

- These include the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad, the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, the Community Science Centre in Ahmedabad, Uranium Corporation of India Limited, and more.

Contributions Towards Space and Nuclear Programmes

- Sarabhai founded the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), advocating for the importance of space technology for societal development.

- He was instrumental in the creation of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment with NASA, which beamed educational programmes to rural areas and set the foundation for programmes such as Krishi Darshan.

- Sarabhai took over as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission following Homi Bhabha's

death, where he made advancements in nuclear science.

Recognition and Honours

- Sarabhai was the recipient of several awards including, the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award (1962), the Padma Bhushan (1966), and the Padma Vibhushan (awarded posthumously in 1972).

- Notably, Sarabhai was given the title 'Mahatma Gandhi of Indian Science' by former Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam.

Legacy

- Sarabhai's work left a lasting legacy, with the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre being named in his honour.

- In tribute, his name was also given to a lunar crater, known as "Sarabhai Crater".

Indonesia's Inclusion in BRICS

Introduction and About BRICS

- BRICS is a notable intergovernmental assembly of emerging economies globally.

- Initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, and China, South Africa joined the group in 2010, and hence the acronym BRICS.

- Throughout the years, the group expanded to include Iran, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Ethiopia, all of which joined in 2024.

- Saudi Arabia's participation is still in the pipeline, while Argentina, upon consideration, has chosen not to join.

Indonesia's Involvement in BRICS

- As of January 2025, Indonesia has officially become a member of the BRICS, increasing the count to 10 nations.

- This reflects Indonesia's growing international influence and the recognition of its economic emergence.

The Significance of BRICS

- Prior to the inclusion of Indonesia, BRICS economies accounted for 35% of global GDP and covered 46% of the world's population.
- BRICS work to solidify the influence of maturing economies and challenge the dominance of the traditionally Western-led financial setups like the G7.

Future Directions for BRICS

- Looking forward, BRICS seeks to decrease dependence on the US dollar in international transactions.
- It aims to amplify the strength of local currencies and facilitate non-US dollar transactions, which can significantly transform the world's trade and finances realms.
- BRICS intends to encourage broader fairness, inclusivity, and reforms within the key global institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations (UN).

Historical Highlight of BRICS

- The first official summit for BRIC (before South Africa joined) was held in Russia in 2009.
- This meeting launched a platform for dialogue and cooperation among the major emerging national economies.

Commemorating Swami Vivekananda's Life, Ideals and Contributions

Observance on National Youth Day

- Celebrated on the 12th of January, marking the birth anniversary of renowned philosopher, thinker and spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda.
- National Youth Day observed through numerous commemorations nationwide on the same day.

- One such prominent celebration is the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025, an event participated by the Prime Minister, dedicated to engaging youth in nation-building.

The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue: An Overview

- Aims to involve 1 lakh youth, aged 15-29, in Indian politics without the necessity of political affiliations.
- Selects 3,000 participants via a merit-based process known as the Viksit Bharat Challenge.
- Areas of dialogue include technology, sustainability, women empowerment, manufacturing and agriculture.

Swami Vivekananda's Life and Ideologies

- Swami Vivekananda is known as a major disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa.
- Born as Narendra Nath Datta, he took the name Vivekananda in 1893 as per Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri State's request.
- His philosophical contributions include the introduction of the western world to the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga.
- He suggested spiritual growth along with material progress and advocated the doctrine of service – serving living beings as a form of worship.
- He emphasized the importance of a man-making character-building education and the need for nationalism based on humanism, universalism and political and spiritual freedom through selfless service.

Organisations Founded and International Addresses

- Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and the Belur Math in 1899.
- He participated in international forums such as the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893 where he represented Hinduism and the London Hindu Association in 1896.

Swami Vivekananda's Insights on Society and Religion

- He highlighted the dignity of humanity in Hinduism and spoke about the religion's treatment of the underprivileged sections of society.
- He held the view, as reflected in several of his quotes, on the responsibility to care for the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor and the illiterate.

National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 and Draft NYP 2024

- NYP 2014, by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, aimed to empower Indian youth to actively participate in the development of the country.
- The government is in the process of reviewing and updating the NYP 2014 with a draft for NYP 2024 in development.
- The draft NYP 2024 sets a 10-year vision for youth development in India, along lines of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- It focuses on crucial areas such as education, employability, leadership, health, and social justice. Crucial points include implementing youth development goals by 2030, integration with the National Education Policy 2020, leveraging technology for youth empowerment and ensuring the safety and support for marginalised youth.

Indian Harvest Festivals: Historical, Cultural, and Astronomical Significance

Introduction

- Indian Harvest Festivals are a rich part of Indian culture, traditions and customs with unique regional representations seen all across the country.
- The President of India recently greeted citizens on these festive occasions, which

include Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Pongal, and Magh Bihu.

Significance of Indian Harvest Festivals

- These celebrations are held to mark the end of the harvesting season under a variety of names such as Makar Sankranti, Pongal, Magh Bihu, Lohri, and others.
- The festivals have an astronomical significance as they mark the transition of the Sun into the Capricorn (Makara) zodiac sign, beginning the Sun's northward journey or Uttarayan.
- Symbolising the end of winter and the onset of warmer months, these festivals represent the shift from inactivity.
- Unique to other lunar cycle-based festivals, the harvest festivals adhere to the solar cycle, usually observed around 14th January.

Cultural and Religious Practices

- Certain rituals including ritual bathing, offering Naivedhya (food) to Lord Surya, giving charity, Shraddha rites, and breaking the fast are performed during the day.
- People often gather to purify themselves in sacred rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery.

Regional Celebrations of Harvest Festivals

- In Tamil Nadu, Pongal is observed as a four-day celebration to mark the rice harvest with traditional house decorations made from rice powder.
- Regions like Punjab witness Lohri, involving bonfires, folk songs, and offerings to the fire including groundnuts and popcorn during their harvest festivities.
- Bihar hosts a festival named 'Khichdi' where a dish of the same name (rice and lentils) is prepared, and snacks like sesame and jaggery ladoos or chikkis are distributed.
- Rajasthan and Gujarat state's celebrations include sky lantern displays and kite-flying competitions, most notably the International Kite Festival in Ahmedabad.

- Similarly, in Karnataka, locals share a sesame and jaggery mixture symbolising harmony and goodwill. Farming communities also engage in a display called 'Kicchu Haisodu' where dressed-up cattle jump over a fire pit.
- Assam celebrates the annual harvest and the start of the Assamese new year with Magh Bihu.

Buddhism's Global Legacy through Odisha

Archaeological Findings and Their Influence

- The Archaeological Survey of India has unearthed Buddhist relics from the 8th and 9th centuries AD in Ratnagiri, Odisha. This includes a large Buddha head, a giant palm, and an ancient wall.
- The discoveries shed light on how Buddhism spread to southeast Asia, with Odisha playing a significant role.
- Ratnagiri served as a major Buddhist learning centre, known for its unique Buddha sculptures, distinctive for their intricate hairstyles.

Historical Influence on Buddhism's Spread

- Despite no record of Buddha visiting Odisha, his disciples Tapassu and Bhallika propelled Buddhism's popularisation.
- The Mauryan Emperor Ashoka's invasion of Kalinga (modern-day Odisha) led him to embrace Buddhism and spread it across South and Southeast Asia.
- It is believed that Chinese Buddhist monk, Hiuen Tsang, visited Ratnagiri during 638-639 AD, offering insights into local culture, religion, art, and architecture.
- Odisha, having over 100 ancient Buddhist sites, stands as a testament to its rich Buddhist heritage.
- Odisha's trade links with Bali, Java, Sumatra, and Sri Lanka played a crucial role in Buddhism's spread in Southeast Asia.

- The Bhaumakara dynasty (8th-10th centuries) contributed significantly to Odisha's Buddhist heritage.

Buddhist Sects and Their Origins

- Mahayana, a major Buddhist sect, believes in Buddha's heavenliness and worships Buddha and Bodhisattvas.
- Vajrayana, also known as tantric Buddhism, involves complex rituals, visualizations, mantras, and meditation techniques.
- Hinayana Buddhism emphasises nirvana through self-discipline and meditation, focusing on strict monastic rules, meditation practices, and ethical conduct.

Nalanda University's Role in Buddhism

- Founded by Emperor Kumaragupta I of the Gupta Empire in the 5th century CE, Nalanda University was an epicentre of Buddhist learning.
- The university was the world's first residential university, attracting scholars worldwide.
- Islamic invader Bakhtiyar Khilji destroyed this sanctuary of knowledge in 1193, killing the monks and burning the invaluable library.

The Global Spread of Buddhism

- Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia via Indian traders, sailors, and monks, with trading ports serving as key centers for learning and cultural exchange.
- Buddhism blended with local beliefs and Hinduism in Southeast Asia, influencing local cultures in places like Bali and Java.
- It spread to China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet, intertwining with local traditions.

Prominent Buddhist Sites in India

- Bodh Gaya in Bihar, where Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment, is a significant site. The location is marked by the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mahabodhi Temple.
- Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh is where Buddha delivered his first sermon, outlining the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

- Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, especially McLeod Ganj, is home to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Dalai Lama.
- Maharashtra's Ellora and Ajanta Caves and Madhya Pradesh's Sanchi Stupa are known for their intricate Buddhist monasteries, murals, and stupas.

India's 76th Republic Day Celebration

General Overview

- India commemorated its 76th Republic Day (26th January 2025) with the theme, 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas,' emphasising military prowess, development, and national unity.
- The Indonesian President, Prabowo Subianto, attended as the chief guest.

Importance of Republic Day

- Republic Day in India is a significant national event, celebrating the adoption of the Indian Constitution on 26th January 1950, which affirmed India as a democratic republic.
- This day embodies the values of democracy and the nation's rich heritage, marked annually with solemnity and grandeur.

Key Highlights from the Republic Day

Tableaux

- A key highlight was the first-ever Tri-Services Tableau, showcasing the synergy between the Army, Navy, and Air Force, aligning with the theme, 'Shashakt aur Surakshit Bharat'.
- It demonstrated India's robust defense technologies, including the Arjun Main Battle Tank, Tejas MKII fighter aircraft, Advanced Light Helicopter, and INS Visakhapatnam destroyer.
- The DRDO Tableau, themed 'Raksha Kavach–Multi-layer Protection against Multi-domain Threats,' exhibited cutting-edge defense technologies aimed at enhancing India's national security.

Padma and Gallantry Awards

- A total of 139 citizens were honoured with the prestigious Padma Awards on the 76th Republic Day.
- Gallantry Awards and Defence Decorations were conferred upon 93 Armed Forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel, in recognition of their bravery in the face of enemy combat and in peacetime duties.
- The President also conferred 305 Defence Decorations, including Param Vishisht Seva Medals and Ati Vishisht Seva Medals, amongst others.
- Services Personnel from Police, Fire Services, Home Guard & Civil Defence (HG&CD), and Correctional Services were also recognised with various Gallantry and Service Medals.

Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards

- The 76th Republic Day also saw 49 civilians receive the Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards for their bravery and quick action in saving lives.

Cultural Representation

- Raman Rajamannan, Kerala's tribal king of the Mannan community, attended the celebration marking the first-time participation of the Mannan king. The Mannan community consists of about 3,000 members mainly settled in Kerala's Idukki district.

Significance of Republic Day

- The Republic Day signifies India's transition to a sovereign democratic republic with the adoption of the Constitution on 26th January 1950.
- The date, 26th January, holds further historical significance as it marks the Indian National Congress (INC)'s declaration of Purna Swaraj on 26th January 1930.
- On this day, the Indian flag is unfurled by the President, symbolising India's transition from a British colony to a sovereign republic.

Quick Headlines

- The Supreme Court has affirmed the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (MWPSA) Act, 2007's empowerment of tribunals to restore property to parents if care responsibilities are neglected by their children. Section 23 of the Act allows tribunals to deem property transfers void if the transferee fails to deliver basic needs. The Act, administered by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, provides legal protection for senior citizens, facilitating recourse for maintenance. It enforces penalties, such as fines or imprisonment, on disobedient caregivers while abandonment may result in up to 3 months imprisonment.
- The State Bank of India (SBI) report has revealed a significant decrease in poverty rates across both rural (25.7% in 2011-12 to 4.86% in FY24) and urban India (13.7% in 2011-12 to 4.09% in FY24), which is credited to targeted governmental interventions and improved infrastructure. The analysis also shows that rural consumption rates have increased, thereby closing the gap between rural and urban spending. However, findings indicate that low-income states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar still exhibit low investment rates - with Bihar showing negative savings - due to high levels of outward migration. State-based initiatives including the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana have been implemented to address these issues.
- The recent increase in respiratory illnesses in China due to Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is causing concern but the World Health Organisation has yet to declare a health crisis. First discovered in the Netherlands in 2001, HMPV is a common respiratory pathogen found globally, causing symptoms such as coughs and fever, typically lasting 2-5 days. The virus predominantly affects children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems, and spreads through close contact or contaminated surfaces. Although the majority of HMPV cases are mild, severe conditions such as pneumonia may develop in 5-16% of cases.
- India's first organic fisheries cluster was launched in Soreng, Sikkim by the Ministry of Fisheries, under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY). The cluster aims to produce antibiotic, chemical, and pesticide-free organic fish while promoting sustainable aquaculture and protection of aquatic ecosystems. Funding and support will be provided by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development. This development follows Sikkim becoming India's first fully organic state, with 75,000 hectares of land certified under the National Programme for Organic Production.
- Indian Railways has conducted a successful trial run on the Anji Khad Bridge, India's first cable-stayed rail bridge, situated in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district. This bridge forms part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link project. Spanning 725.5 meters with a 331-meter-high pylon, the bridge is built to resist 213 km/h winds and sustain trains

moving at 100 km/h. The construction of the bridge used the efficient DOKA Jump Form Shuttering technique, contributing to a 30% reduction in construction time.

- Hawaii's Kilauea Volcano, one of the most active globally, has once again begun erupting. Located in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on Hawaii Island, USA, Kilauea is the youngest and most active Hawaiian Shield Volcano, famed for its frequent eruptions, with over 30 since 1952. Its slopes converge with those of Mauna Loa, another active volcano to its west and north. A volcano is an opening on the surface that permits warmer material to escape from its interior.
- The Z-Morh tunnel, inaugurated by the Prime Minister, aimed at enhancing year-round connectivity between Ladakh and Kashmir. Located in Ganderbal, Kashmir, this 6.5 km tunnel bypasses avalanche-prone areas on the Srinagar-Leh highway. Built under the Thajiwas glacier at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore, it began in 2015 under the Border Roads Organisation and was completed by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited. Alongside the Zojila tunnel, it shortens the route between Srinagar and Ladakh by 6 km and holds significant strategic value for both military and civilian necessities.
- The National Turmeric Board (NTB), headquartered in Nizamabad, Telangana, was inaugurated by India's Ministry of Commerce & Industry. The NTB aims to enhance the income of turmeric farmers by promoting cultivation, production, processing, and marketing. Board members include representatives from several governmental departments. Turmeric, an underground stem from the *Curcuma longa* plant, is grown in over 20

states in India, with the country being the largest global producer, consumer, and exporter. Specifically, in 2022-23, India produced over 75% of the world's turmeric and recorded a global export market share of 62%. In addition to this, several regional turmeric varieties have earned the GI tag, signifying region-specific unique characteristics.

- India is in advanced discussions to establish UAE's first data embassy in Andhra Pradesh, intending to provide nations with sovereign data storage whilst retaining control over it. These data centres will operate similarly to consular divisions, ensuring data privacy, handling, and access. The initiative, aimed at ensuring data continuity during natural disasters or geopolitical unrest, will also enhance India's geopolitical credibility for secure data storage globally. Notably, Estonia pioneered the concept, storing a digital copy of its citizen's data in Luxembourg following a 2007 cyberattack.
- In 2025, Nigeria was announced as the 9th partner country of the BRICS bloc, joining nations like Belarus, Bolivia, and Malaysia. As a "partner country", Nigeria can participate in summits and joint ventures but does not hold membership status or decision-making power. The Giant of Africa, with its large population and economy, was introduced to the bloc by Brazil, which held the BRICS presidency that year. Other recent inclusions include Iran, Egypt and the UAE, while Indonesia became the 10th official member in January 2025.
- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued new guidelines for the implementation of the Principal Purpose Test (PPT) under India's Double Tax Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs), with the goal of hindering tax evasion tactics. The

PPT, a part of international tax regulation, determines if a business transaction is genuine or primarily designed for tax avoidance. These new guidelines will not affect past investments made before 1st April 2017 and treaties with Cyprus, Mauritius, and Singapore have exclusions due to specific agreements. In order to apply PPT provisions, Indian tax authorities are encouraged to consult international tax regulations, particularly the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Action Plan 6 and the UN Model Tax Convention.

- The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act, 1996, aimed at protecting the rights, welfare, and working conditions of Indian construction workers, has been underutilised with Rs 70,744 crore of collected welfare cess unused. The Act empowers state governments to levy a 1-2% cess from employers for worker benefits, including health, education, and social security. However, states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh have large unspent balances, with inadequate enforcement of the Act and underinvestment in welfare measures. Accompanying these concerns are incidences of cess evasion, misreporting, and lack of transparency around project costs, with the proposed Code on Social Security threatening to further erode worker entitlements.
- The Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras case in 1950 marked a landmark ruling in India, protecting free speech under Article 19(1)(a) and limiting arbitrary state censorship. This followed the Madras government's ban on the CrossRoads weekly magazine, which was later deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court (SC). Other significant cases include Brij Bhushan v. State of Delhi in 1950, Sakal Papers Ltd vs Union of India in 1961,

Bennett Coleman & Co. v. Union of India in 1973, Indian Express Newspapers v. Union of India in 1985, and Shreya Singhal vs Union of India in 2015. These cases collectively safeguarded press freedom, countered censorship, and struck down restrictive laws and excessive taxation affecting the press.

- Indore and Udaipur have become the first Indian cities to receive international accreditation as wetland cities by the Ramsar Convention. This recognition is granted to cities committed to the conservation and sustainable management of their wetlands. Currently, 85 Indian wetlands are protected under the Ramsar Convention, including the notable Bhoj Wetland in Bhopal which was not accredited due to potential ecological risks from a proposed road project. Globally, there are over 2,400 Ramsar Sites, with the highest number of accredited cities in China (22) followed by France (9).
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) plans to pump over Rs 1.5 lakh crore into the economy to boost money liquidity. This follows a liquidity shortfall due to the RBI's forex sale to stabilise the rupee resulting from foreign institutional investors outflows. The liquidity infusion plan features three key measures: government bond buyback, Repo Auction, and US Dollar-Rupee Swap Auction. This liquidity boost may pave the way for a possible repo rate cut in the upcoming monetary policy review.
- Bhuvnesh Kumar, a 1995-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre, has been appointed as the CEO of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). He assumed the position on 1st January 2025, succeeding Amit Agrawal.

- Manish Singhal has taken over as the Secretary General of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), succeeding Deepak Sood. He brings to the role over 35 years of experience, which includes previous roles at Tata Motors and FICCI.
- Faiz Ahmed Kidwai is the Director-General (DG) of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). A 1996-batch IAS officer from the MP cadre, he replaced Vikram Dev Dutt. One of his key responsibilities is resolving disputes related to pilot duty and rest periods.
- Azimul Haque is the appointed CEO of the Delhi Waqf Board. He was appointed by L-G V.K. Saxena, after the post, remained vacant from 28 November 2024. This lack of a CEO resulted in the delay of salary disbursements for both imams and Board employees.
- Dr. V. Narayanan is the Secretary of the Department of Space and Chairman of ISRO, succeeding S. Somanath. With nearly 40 years in propulsion, he has been a key contributor to the GSLV Mk III and Chandrayaan-3 missions. His appointment became effective on 14 January 2025.
- Bahadur Singh Sagoo has succeeded Adille Sumariwalla as the President of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI). In an effort to bolster Indian athletics, he has announced major initiatives such as organising a significant javelin competition and hosting international events.
- Tuhin Kanta Pandey has been reassigned as the Secretary of the Department of Revenue and Finance Secretary by the Ministry of Finance in anticipation of the Union Budget 2025. He retains his role as Finance Secretary and this move is designed to strengthen leadership for critical budget decisions.
- Arunish Chawla, Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), has been assigned additional responsibilities for DPE and the Ministry of Culture. This appointment is a strategic move aimed to heighten financial oversight prior to the Budget 2025. Mr. Chawla's new duties fall under the umbrella of the Finance Ministry.
- Ashish Naithani has been commissioned as a Judge of the Uttarakhand High Court under Article 224 of the Constitution. This appointment aims to address the shortage in the court's sanctioned strength of 11 judges, which had been operating with only 6 judges.
- On 17th January 2025, Vineet Joshi was officially appointed as the Secretary of the Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education. The announcement was made at Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi. Mr. Joshi will now lead the department responsible for higher education matters.
- Justice Arun Mishra has been appointed as the Ombudsman and Ethics Officer for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). This key appointment utilises his legal expertise and leadership skills. His role will focus on ensuring ethical practices and addressing disputes within the BCCI.
- Gyanendra Pratap Singh is the Director General (DG) of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). He is a 1991-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer. His tenure in the role is set to last until 30th November 2027.
- Sanjiv Ranjan is the Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). He belongs to the 1993-batch of the Indian

Foreign Officer (IFo). His contributions have been instrumental in the functioning of the IORA.

- On January 1, 2025, Alok Kumar Agarwal took on the roles of MD and CEO at Zurich Kotak General Insurance. He succeeded the former boss, Suresh Agarwal. The official change in leadership signifies a new phase for the insurance company.
- Ambarish Kenghe assumed the position of Group CEO at Angel One in March 2025. He took on the role with a wealth of experience and a strong commitment to strategic leadership. His arrival marked a significant moment in the company's history.
- Dhananjay Shukla has been elected as the President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) for the year 2025. He will lead the organisation in its mission to develop high calibre professionals, whilst promoting good corporate governance. His tenure symbolises an important phase in the institute's expansion.
- Pawan G Chandak has been elected as the Vice President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) for the year 2025. Mr Chandak will hold this prestigious position, furthering his commitment to the institution. The election indicates confidence in his leadership within the industry.
- Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal is currently serving as the Additional Director General (ADG) of the Border Security Force (BSF). He is a 1994-batch IPS officer and will serve in this position for a tenure of 4 years.
- Neeraj Parakh has been appointed as the Executive Director and CEO of Reliance

Power Limited. His term will begin on the 20th of January 2025 and will continue for a period of three years.

- Akhil Gupta holds the position of Chairman at Bharti AXA Life Insurance. He is also the Vice Chairman of Bharti Enterprises. His contributions have been influential within these major organisations.
- Amrit Mohan Prasad holds the position of Additional DG at the BCAS, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security. His tenure began on 1 November 2024 and is set to last for a duration of six months. Simultaneously, Prasad is also the DG of SSB.
- Sridhar Vembu, the Chief Scientist at Zoho Corporation, has stepped down from his role as CEO. He made this decision to concentrate on the company's Research and Development department.
- Shailesh Kumar Davey has been appointed as the Group CEO of Zoho Corporation, succeeding Sridhar Vembu. Davey is a co-founder of Zoho, a globally recognised software development company. His appointment marks a significant change in the company's leadership.
- Deshnee Naidoo serves as the CEO of Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL), bringing with her over 20 years of experience in the resources industry. Prior to joining VRL, Naidoo held the position of CEO at Vale Base Metals.
- Rajesh Nirwan has been approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) for the role of Director General at the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). His tenure is slated to continue until further orders are provided.

- M. Mohan succeeded Dr. V. Narayanan as the Director of the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre. Mohan is renowned for his extensive experience in liquid propulsion systems. His expertise has been pivotal in enhancing India's progression in space capabilities.

New Appointments

- Bhuvnesh Kumar is the CEO of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). He is a 1995-batch IAS officer from the UP cadre. Kumar assumed his role on 1st January 2025, succeeding Amit Agrawal.
- Manish Singhal has succeeded Deepak Sood as the Secretary General of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM). Singhal brings over 35 years of experience to the role. His illustrious career includes key positions at renowned organisations like Tata Motors and FICCI.
- Faiz Ahmed Kidwai is the Director-General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). He is a 1996-batch IAS officer from the MP cadre and has succeeded Vikram Dev Dutt in his position as DG. Kidwai's duties include the resolution of disputes related to pilot duty and rest periods.
- Azimul Haque has been appointed as the CEO of Delhi Waqf Board by L-G V.K. Saxena. The position had been vacant since 28th November 2024, leading to substantial delays in salary disbursements for imams and Board employees.
- Dr. V. Narayanan has been appointed as the Secretary of the Department of Space and Chairman of ISRO, effective from January 14, 2025. He succeeds S. Somanath and brings with him nearly 40 years of experience in propulsion. Dr. Narayanan has notably contributed to the GSLV Mk III and Chandrayaan-3 missions.
- Bahadur Singh Sagoo has succeeded Adille Sumariwalla as the President of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI). He has launched initiatives including a major javelin competition and plans to host international events. These efforts aim to elevate Indian athletics at the global level.
- Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary of the Department of Revenue, has been assigned a key role ahead of the Union Budget 2025. In addition to maintaining his existing responsibilities as the Finance Secretary for the Ministry of Finance, this reassignment further solidifies his leadership in making critical budget decisions.
- Arunish Chawla, Secretary of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), has been assigned additional charges for the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Finance's decision aims to bolster financial oversight in anticipation of Budget 2025.
- Ashish Naithani has been appointed as a judge to the Uttarakhand High Court under Article 224 of the Constitution. This appointment is significant as it addresses the shortage in the sanctioned strength of

11 judges, considering the court was operating with only six judges prior to this.

- Vineet Joshi has been appointed as the Secretary of the Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education. The appointment took place on 17th January 2025 at Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi. Joshi now heads the department overseeing higher education in the UK.
- Justice Arun Mishra has been appointed as the Ombudsman and Ethics Officer for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). This represents a key milestone in his legal career. His imperative role involves leveraging his extensive legal experience and leadership skills to uphold ethical practices and resolve disputes within the BCCI.
- Gyanendra Pratap Singh serves as the Director General (DG) of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). He is a 1991-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer. His tenure in the role is set to last until 30th November 2027.
- Sanjiv Ranjan is the Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). He belongs to the 1993 batch of IFO officers. His leadership within the IORA is instrumental to the functioning and administration of the association.
- Alok Kumar Agarwal has been appointed as the MD and CEO of Zurich Kotak General Insurance, effective from 1st January 2025. He is set to succeed Suresh Agarwal in this role.
- Ambarish Kenghe has been appointed as the Group CEO of Angel One. He assumed the role in March 2025.
- Dhananjay Shukla has been elected as the President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) for the year 2025. Shukla will hold this coveted position for the entire year. This marks an important point in his professional career within the realm of company secretaries.
- Pawan G Chandak has been elected as the Vice President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) for the year 2025. Chandak is expected to bring significant leadership and innovation to the prestigious institution. His term in the role will contribute to the fields of governance, risk management, and company law in India.
- Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal is the Additional Director General (ADG) of the Border Security Force (BSF). He is a 1994-batch IPS officer and holds the position for a tenure of 4 years.
- Neeraj Parakh has been appointed as the Executive Director and CEO of Reliance Power Limited. His tenure begins on 20 January, 2025 and is set to last for a period of three years.
- Akhil Gupta holds the position of Chairman at Bharti AXA Life Insurance. Additionally, he serves as the Vice Chairman of Bharti Enterprises.
- Amrit Mohan Prasad is the Additional Director General of BCAS, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security. His tenure began on 1st November 2024 and will last for six months. Prasad also holds the position of Director General for the SSB.
- Sridhar Vembu, the Chief Scientist of Zoho Corporation, has stepped down from his position as CEO. His decision is driven by a desire to focus more on research and development within the company.

- Shailesh Kumar Davey, the co-founder of Zoho Corporation, has taken over as the Group CEO. He succeeds Sridhar Vembu who previously held the position.
- Deshnee Naidoo serves as the CEO of Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL). She has over two decades of experience in the resources industry. Prior to this, Naidoo held the position of CEO at Vale Base Metals.
- Rajesh Nirwan has been appointed as the Director General of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). The Appointment Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved this appointment. Nirwan's tenure is set to continue until further orders are issued.
- M. Mohan has taken over as the Director of Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre, succeeding Dr. V. Narayanan. His vast experience in liquid propulsion systems has significantly contributed to the advancement of India's space capabilities.

Books And Author

Book Title	Author/Editor	Key Points
Jammu Kashmir & Ladakh Through the Ages: A Visual Narrative of Continuities and Linkages	Indian Council of Historical Research	Published by National Book Trust, the book highlights India's geo-cultural unity, refutes myths of disunity, and emphasizes Kashmir's integral role in Indian history for over 8,000 years.
Parliament: Powers, Functions & Privileges; A Comparative Constitutional Perspective	Dr. K.S. Chauhan	Launched by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, this book provides an in-depth analysis of Parliament's role, functions, privileges, and its impact on democratic accountability.
The World After Gaza	Pankaj Mishra	Examines the ongoing war in Gaza, portraying it as a major humanitarian and moral crisis.
How India Scaled Mt G20: The Inside Story of the G20 Presidency (Rupa Publications)	Amitabh Kant	Chronicles India's journey as G20 President, offering behind-the-scenes insights.
Soumitra Chatterjee and His World	Soumitra Chatterjee (by Sanghamitra Chakraborty)	Explores the actor's life through personal writings, letters, and conversations, showcasing his influence on Indian cinema and Bengal's cultural landscape.
Indian Renaissance: The Modi Decade	Dr. Aishwarya Pandit	Launched at the NDMC Convention Center, New Delhi, and published by Westland Non-Fiction, the book examines India's transformation under PM Modi from 2014-2024, featuring contributions from 27 authors. The event was attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

Important Days

January Dates	January Important Days
1 January	Global Family Day
3 January	DRDO Foundation Day
4 January	World Braille Day
5 January	National Birds Day
6 January	World Day of War Orphans
6 January	Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti
8 January	Earth's Rotation Day
9 January	NRI (Non-Resident Indian) Day or Pravasi Bharatiya Divas
10 January	World Hindi Day
12 January	National Youth Day
13 January	Lohri Festival
14 January	Makar Sankranti
15 January	Indian Army Day
21 January	Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya Foundation Day
23 January	Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Jayanti
24 January	National Girl Child Day
24 January	International Day of Education
25 January	National Voters Day
25 January	National Tourism Day
26 January	Republic Day
26 January	International Day of Clean Energy 2025
26 January	International Customs Day
27 January	National Geographic Day
27 January	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust 2025
28 January	Birth Anniversary of Lala Lajpat Rai
29 January	Indian Newspaper Day
30 January	Martyrs Day or Shaheed Diwas
30 January	World Leprosy Day

12 Dec	International Universal Health Coverage Day
18 Dec	International Migrants Day
18 Dec	Minorities Rights Day
19 Dec	Good Governance Week
19 Dec	Goa Liberation Day
20 Dec	Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Raising Day
20 Dec	International Human Solidarity Day
21 Dec	World Meditation Day
21 Dec	World Basketball Day
22 Dec	National Mathematics Day
27 Dec	International Day of Epidemic Preparedness



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