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POLITY & GOVERNANCE



MONEY BILL & SUPREME COURT JUDGES

Why in news?

The passage of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, through the Money Bill route has renewed debate over the scope of Article 110 and the role of the Rajya Sabha in legislative scrutiny.

Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Act, 2026 The act increases Supreme court's sanctioned strength from 33 to 37 judges, excluding the CJI. The Supreme Court originally comprised 8 judges including the CJI in 1950. This act amends the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956. Article 124(1) empowers Parliament to determine the number of Supreme Court judges

What is a Money Bill?

A Money Bill deals exclusively with the financial matters specified under Article 110(1) of the Constitution, such as taxation, government borrowing and appropriation of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India.

Constitutional Provisions

Article 110: Defines a Money Bill.

Article 109: Prescribes the special procedure for Money Bills.

Article 110(3): Provides that the Speaker's decision on whether a Bill is a Money Bill shall be final.

Article 117: Deals with Financial Bills and their introduction.

Procedure and Key Features

Introduction: A Money Bill can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha, with the President's prior recommendation.

Certification: The Lok Sabha Speaker certifies the Bill as a Money Bill.

Rajya Sabha's role: It can recommend amendments but cannot reject or amend the Bill. It must return it within 14 days.

Lok Sabha's authority: It may accept or reject the Rajya Sabha's recommendations.

Joint sitting: No provision for a joint sitting exists for Money Bills.

Presidential assent: The Bill is presented to the President after parliamentary passage.

Key Concerns

Weakening bicameralism: Limits the Rajya Sabha's legislative scrutiny.

Broad interpretation: The incidental matters clause under Article 110(1)(g) may enable the inclusion of non-financial provisions.

Executive dominance: May weaken parliamentary checks when the government lacks a majority in the Rajya Sabha.

Judicial scrutiny: The classification of the Aadhaar Act, 2016, as a Money Bill raised constitutional concerns. A seven-judge Constitution Bench is examining the scope of Money Bill certification.

Way Forward

Strict interpretation: Ensure that Bills satisfy the constitutional criteria under Article 110.

Transparent certification: Provide clear and reasoned explanations for certification.

Stronger scrutiny: Improve parliamentary examination of legislation.

Judicial clarity: Establish clear standards for reviewing Money Bill classification.

JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (JPC)

Why in news?

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for detailed examination following objections from

Opposition parties and civil society. This highlighted the importance of parliamentary scrutiny in lawmaking.

What is a Joint Parliamentary Committee?

A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is an ad hoc committee comprising members of both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, constituted to examine a specific Bill or investigate an important issue. It enables detailed scrutiny beyond regular parliamentary debates.

Constitutional and Procedural Framework

Constitutional status: JPCs are not expressly mentioned in the Constitution. They are constituted under the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Parliament.

Formation: A motion is moved in one House and must be agreed to by the other House. The committee's mandate is limited to the specific Bill or issue referred to it.

Composition of a JPC

Representation from both Houses: Members are drawn from the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The number of members and distribution between the Houses are specified in the motion constituting the committee.

Relative representation: The Lok Sabha generally has more members than the Rajya Sabha, often following a 2:1 ratio, depending on the committee's composition.

Political party representation: Members are selected broadly in proportion to the strength of political parties in Parliament, enabling participation by the ruling party and Opposition.

Chairperson: The chairperson is appointed by the Lok Sabha Speaker and oversees deliberations and preparation of the report.

Tenure: A JPC is temporary and generally ceases to exist after submitting its report or completing its assigned task.

Functions and Powers

Detailed scrutiny: Examines Bills or issues in depth and identifies legal, administrative and implementation-related concerns.

Evidence collection: Can seek documents, obtain information from departments and summon officials or relevant persons.

Stakeholder consultation: May consult experts, civil society organisations and affected stakeholders.

Recommendations: Submits a report suggesting amendments or safeguards. Members may append dissent notes.

Significance and Limitations

JPCs strengthen parliamentary oversight, promote cross-party deliberation and help identify unintended consequences of legislation. However, proceedings can be time-consuming and affected by political differences. Their recommendations are generally advisory, and the final legislative decision rests with Parliament.

Way Forward

JPCs should ensure balanced representation, expert consultation, transparent scrutiny and timely reports

TRIBUNALS REFORMS BILL, 2026

Why in news?

The Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026, seeks to reform tribunal administration and strengthen judicial independence by establishing a National Tribunals Commission (NTC). It replaces the framework under the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021, following concerns over executive influence and Supreme Court interventions.

What Are Tribunals?

Tribunals are specialized quasi-judicial bodies that resolve disputes involving taxation, company law, environmental regulation and public service matters. They provide specialized adjudication alongside regular courts.

Key Provisions

National Tribunals Commission (NTC): The Bill establishes a statutory, permanent institutional mechanism to oversee tribunal appointments, administration, performance and complaints. It aims to reduce fragmented, executive-driven management and promote consistency across tribunals.

Composition: The Commission consists of five members: a chairperson, two Judicial Members and two Technical Members. The Chairperson must have served as a Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court. Judicial Members must have served as High Court judges or Chief Justices. Technical Members must possess at least 25 years of relevant experience in fields such as law, finance, public administration, accountancy, banking, management or technology.

Appointment and tenure: The Central Government appoints the Chairperson and Judicial Members in consultation with the Chief Justice of India. Commission members hold office for five years or until attaining 70 years of age, whichever is earlier.

Tribunal appointments: Search-cum-Selection Committees recommend candidates for tribunal vacancies. The Central Government must make appointments within three months of receiving recommendations.

Performance and accountability: The NTC reviews tribunal performance, oversees inquiries into complaints against tribunal members and submits annual reports to the government.

National Tribunals Data Grid: A centralised digital repository will consolidate tribunal case information, supporting monitoring of pendency, transparency and evidence-based administration.

Financial and administrative autonomy: Tribunals can identify their requirements for funds, staff and premises, while the Commission assesses these needs. Government grants remain subject to parliamentary appropriation.

Significance

The reforms aim to strengthen judicial independence, improve appointments and enhance tribunal efficiency. Their success depends on the Commission's autonomy and timely implementation.

CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITS ON ARREST

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has reiterated that the power to arrest is not absolute and must comply with constitutional safeguards protecting personal liberty, dignity and due process. The framework is primarily based on Articles 21 and 22 of the Constitution and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

Constitutional Safeguards

Article 21: No person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to a procedure established by law. As interpreted by the Supreme Court, the procedure must be fair, just and reasonable.

Article 22(1): An arrested person has the right to be informed of the grounds of arrest and to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.

Article 22(2): Every arrested person must be produced before the nearest Magistrate within 24 hours, excluding the time necessary for the journey. Further detention requires the Magistrate's authority.

Important BNSS Provisions

Section 35: Regulates arrest without a warrant. Police must comply with statutory conditions and assess whether arrest is necessary; where applicable, a notice to appear should be issued instead of arrest.

Section 47: Requires the arrested person to be informed of the full particulars of the offence or other grounds of arrest and of the right to bail, where applicable.

Section 58: Generally, prohibits detention without a Magistrate's special order beyond 24 hours, excluding journey time.

Section 187: Where investigation cannot be completed within 24 hours, the accused must be produced before a Magistrate, who decides whether further detention in police or judicial custody is justified.

Supreme Court: Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025)

The Supreme Court held that communicating the grounds of arrest is a mandatory constitutional requirement, not a mere procedural formality. The grounds must be effectively communicated so that the arrested person understands the reasons for arrest and can challenge it through appropriate legal remedies.

Other Important Judicial Safeguards

D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997): The Supreme Court laid down safeguards against arbitrary arrest and custodial violence, including preparation of arrest records, informing relatives or friends and medical examination of the arrested person.

Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014): The Court held that arrest should not be routine merely because the police have the legal power to arrest. Police must satisfy the statutory necessity conditions, while Magistrates must independently examine whether detention is justified.

Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978): The judgment expanded the interpretation of Article 21 by establishing that a procedure depriving a person of personal liberty must be fair, just and reasonable, rather than arbitrary or oppressive.

Significance

These constitutional and judicial safeguards prevent misuse of arrest powers, protect individual liberty and ensure accountability in criminal investigations. They also reinforce the principle that arrest and detention must comply with the law.

THE GORKHALAND ISSUE

Why in news?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened a tripartite meeting involving the West Bengal Government and Gorkha community leaders. Subsequently, the Union Government constituted a committee headed by Pankaj Kumar Singh to formulate a permanent political solution within the constitutional framework.

What is the Gorkhaland Issue?

About: A long-standing demand for a separate state for the Nepali-speaking Gorkha population of the Darjeeling hills and adjoining areas of northern West Bengal.

Basis of Demand: Ethno-linguistic identity, political representation, autonomy and perceived socio-economic neglect.

Historical Background: The movement dates to 1907. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led by Subhas Ghising, spearheaded the agitation during the 1980s.

Institutional Attempts

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), 1988: Established after the 1980s agitation but lacked adequate legislative and financial autonomy.

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), 2011: Created with greater administrative, executive and financial powers, but faced overlapping jurisdictions, inadequate devolution and limited legislative authority.

Gorkhas

Identity: Gorkhas are not a single ethnic group; they include communities such as Gurungs, Magars, Rais and Limbus.

Military Tradition: Gorkhas have served in British, Indian and Nepalese armies. Recruitment into the British Army expanded after the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816).

Challenges

Sub-Nationalism: Gorkha aspirations for autonomy conflict with opposition to the division of West Bengal.

Strategic Importance: The region lies near Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh and close to the Siliguri Corridor, which connects mainland India with the Northeast.

Fragmented Leadership: Rival political organisations complicate consensus on a permanent solution.

Financial Viability: Dependence on tea and seasonal tourism creates challenges for sustainable regional development.

Way Forward

Constitutional Autonomy: Explore an empowered autonomous arrangement that protects local identity and cultural rights within the Constitution.

Fiscal Devolution: Ensure adequate financial resources and meaningful administrative powers, addressing shortcomings of previous arrangements.

Economic Development: Revitalise the tea industry and promote eco-tourism, organic farming, horticulture and education.

Inclusive Governance: Involve diverse stakeholders in negotiations and ensure transparent, accountable administration.

RENAMING KERALA AS KERALAM AND ARTICLE 3

Why in news?

The President gave assent to the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Act, 2026, providing for the state's name to be changed from Kerala to Keralam. The change follows a resolution passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 2024 and invokes Parliament's powers under Article 3 of the Constitution.

Background

State initiative: The Kerala Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution seeking the name change in 2024 and forwarded it to the Union Government in June 2024.

Linguistic significance: Keralam reflects the name used in Malayalam, the state's official language. The change seeks to align the state's official English name with its Malayalam identity.

Article 3 of the Constitution

Article 3 empowers Parliament to form new states and alter the areas, boundaries or names of existing states.

Parliament's powers: Parliament may form a new state by separating territory from an existing state, unite states or parts of states, increase or diminish a state's area, alter its boundaries, or change its name.

Procedure: A Bill under Article 3 can be introduced in Parliament only on the recommendation of the President. If the proposal affects a state's area, boundaries or name, the President must refer it to the concerned State Legislature for its views within a specified period. Parliament is not bound by these views and passes the legislation by a simple majority, distinct from a constitutional amendment under Article 368

ZONAL COUNCILS

Why in news?

The 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council concluded at Mahabalipuram under the chairmanship of the Union Home Minister. The meeting highlighted the role of Zonal Councils in strengthening Centre–State coordination and resolving regional issues.

About Zonal Councils

Establishment: Zonal Councils were established in 1956 under Part III of the States Reorganization Act, 1956. They are statutory bodies, not constitutional bodies.

Five Zonal Councils: The Act provides for the Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern Zonal Councils.

North-Eastern Council: The eight northeastern states are not part of these five councils. They are covered separately by the North-Eastern Council, established under the North-Eastern Council Act, 1971.

Composition

Chairperson: The Union Home Minister is the chairperson of each Zonal Council.

Vice-Chairperson: The Chief Ministers of the member states serve as vice-chairpersons by rotation.

Membership: Each council includes the Chief Minister and two other ministers from each member state, nominated by the Governor. Administrators of Union Territories included in the zone also participate, along with other representatives as provided under the Act.

Objectives and Functions

Cooperative federalism: Provides a platform for the Centre and states to discuss common administrative, economic and developmental concerns.

Dispute resolution: Facilitates dialogue on inter-state boundary disputes, linguistic tensions and other regional disagreements.

Regional development: Encourages coordinated planning in areas such as agriculture, health, education, transport infrastructure and disaster management.

Security and water sharing: Promotes cooperation on coastal security, inter-state river issues and related regional concerns.

Standing Committee mechanism: A Standing Committee of state Chief Secretaries examines issues raised by states. Unresolved matters are placed before the Zonal Council for further deliberation.

Challenges

Their recommendations are not binding. Irregular meetings and political differences can delay consensus and weaken implementation.

Way Forward

Regular meetings, stronger follow-up mechanisms and time-bound action on recommendations can improve their effectiveness.

INTER-STATE RIVER WATER DISPUTES IN INDIA

Why in news?

The CWMA upheld the direction to Karnataka to release 3,500 cusecs of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu despite deficient reservoir inflows, highlighting inter-state water-sharing challenges.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Article 262: Empowers Parliament to provide for adjudication of inter-state river water disputes and exclude court jurisdiction over such disputes.

Legislative provisions:

Entry 17, State List: Water, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List.

Entry 56, Union List: Regulation and development of inter-state rivers in the public interest.

Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956: Provides for tribunals to adjudicate disputes.

River Boards Act, 1956: Provides for river boards for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers.

Cauvery River

Significance: Known as the "Ganga of the South", the Cauvery is an east-flowing river.

Origin and course: Originates at Talakaveri in the Brahmagiri Hills of Kodagu, Karnataka, and drains into the Bay of Bengal near Poompuhar.

Basin: Covers approximately 81,155 sq. km across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

River regime: Perennial, receiving rainfall from both the Southwest and Northeast monsoons.

Tributaries: Left-bank tributaries include Harangi, Hemavati, Shimsha and Arkavati.

Right-bank tributaries include Lakshmana Tirtha, Kabini, Suvarnavathi, Bhavani, Noyyal and Amaravati.

Major dams: Krishna Raja Sagara in Karnataka and Mettur in Tamil Nadu.

Mekedatu Reservoir Project

Proposed project: A 48 TMC ft balancing reservoir at Mekedatu, Karnataka.

Objectives: Drinking-water supply to Bengaluru, groundwater recharge and hydropower generation.

Karnataka's position: The project will not alter existing water allocations.

Tamil Nadu's concerns: Upstream storage could reduce downstream releases, especially during distress years.

Key issue: Tamil Nadu argues that upstream projects must not adversely affect scheduled water deliveries without the required agreement and consultation with the regulatory authority.

Other Major Inter-State River Disputes

Krishna River: Involves Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Mahanadi River: Primarily involves Odisha and Chhattisgarh, with technical consultations aimed at resolving the dispute.

Pennaiyar River: Involves Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In February 2026, the Supreme Court directed the constitution of a tribunal.

Challenges:

Competing demands for drinking water, irrigation and industrial use; delays in tribunal proceedings and implementation of awards; political differences between riparian states; and unpredictable rainfall and climate change affecting water availability.

Way forward:

Strengthen river-basin management and inter-state coordination, ensure transparent reservoir operations and real-time data sharing, expedite tribunal proceedings and negotiated settlements, and adopt climate-resilient water planning and sustainable irrigation practices.

SC/ST (PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES) RULES, 1995: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Why in news?

A government task force constituted in December 2025 recommended amendments to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995, to strengthen victim relief, rehabilitation and investigation.

Key Provisions of the Rules, 1995

Relief and Compensation: The Rules prescribe relief amounts for victims of specified atrocities, linked to the nature of the offence and stages of criminal proceedings. The relief schedule was revised in 2016, with amounts ranging from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh.

Investigation (Rule 7): Investigation must be conducted by a police officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) and completed on priority within 30 days.

Victim and Witness Support (Rule 11): Provides travelling allowance, daily allowance, maintenance expenses and transport facilities for victims, their dependents and witnesses.

District Administration (Rule 12): The District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police must visit affected areas, assess damage, ensure FIR registration and arrange immediate relief. Relief in cash or kind must be provided within seven days and may include food, water, clothing, shelter, medical aid and transport.

Preventive Measures (Rule 3): Provides for precautionary measures in atrocity-prone

areas, including identification of vulnerable areas, police patrolling and protection of victims and witnesses.

State Protection Cell (Rule 8): Provides for a State-level SC/ST Protection Cell to monitor cases and coordinate preventive action.

Proposed Amendments

Higher Compensation: Increase relief and rehabilitation amounts to account for inflation.

Counselling: Provide counselling for victims, accused persons and their dependents.

Special Cells: Establish dedicated Relief and Rehabilitation Cells in States and Union Territories.

Faster Investigation: Send FIRs and chargesheets to concerned government officials within 24 hours.

Counter-FIRs: Scrutinize counter-cases filed against atrocity complainants to prevent procedural misuse and intimidation.

National Commission for ST Proposals

Livelihood Protection: Permit tribal people dispossessed of disputed land to continue using it for livelihood while litigation is pending, subject to the competent authority's permission.

Protection Against Intimidation: Introduce safeguards against counter-FIRs being used to intimidate individuals reporting atrocities.

Way Forward

Effective implementation requires adequate funding, trained investigators, timely compensation, monitoring mechanisms and protection for victims and witnesses, while preserving the safeguards of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE (ED)

Why in news?

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) approved a one-year extension for Rahul Navin as the Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Establishment

Established On: May 1, 1956.

Original Name: Initially established as the Enforcement Unit under the Department of Economic Affairs, it was renamed the Enforcement Directorate in 1957.

Organisational Set-up and Tenure Rules

Head of Organisation: Led by the Director of Enforcement.

Cadre and Eligibility: The Director is typically an officer of the rank of Additional Secretary or Special Secretary to the Government of India, drawn from the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) or Indian Police Service (IPS).

Appointment Authority: Appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of a committee chaired by the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC).

Tenure: The Director has an initial tenure of two years, which may be extended by up to three one-year terms, subject to statutory provisions, taking the maximum tenure to five years.

Laws enforced by ED

Investigation of Money Laundering (PMLA): Investigates money-laundering offences, traces proceeds of crime, provisionally attaches properties and prosecutes offenders before Special Courts under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.

Restitution of Misappropriated Funds: Uses PMLA provisions for the restoration of attached assets to rightful victims, banks and defrauded investors, subject to applicable legal procedures.

Foreign Exchange Violations (FEMA): Investigates violations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, including illegal hawala transactions and trade mis-invoicing, and initiates proceedings for civil penalties.

Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEOA): Acts under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, to facilitate the confiscation of domestic and overseas properties of economic offenders who flee India to evade prosecution.

International Cooperation and Asset Recovery: Coordinates with foreign authorities and international bodies, including Interpol and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), to trace cross-border financial crimes and facilitate international legal assistance, including Letters Rogatory.

BAR COUNCIL OF INDIA (BCI)

Why in news?

The Bar Council of India (BCI) sparked controversy by issuing a circular directing State Bar Councils to freeze enrolment of the entire 2026 graduating batch of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. The directive was subsequently withdrawn. Establishment and Legal Basis

Established in: 1961 under Section 4 of the Advocates Act, 1961, following recommendations of the All-India Bar Committee (1953), chaired by Justice S.R. Das, and the 14th Law Commission Report (1958).

Nature: Apex statutory body regulating the legal profession, professional conduct and legal education in India.

Key Functions of the BCI

Professional Standards and Ethics: Prescribes standards of professional conduct and etiquette for advocates under Section 7(1)(b) and exercises appellate disciplinary jurisdiction over State Bar Councils.

Legal Education: Recognizes universities and law degrees qualifying graduates for enrolment as advocates, inspects institutions and prescribes standards of legal education.

Supervision of State Bar Councils: Exercises general supervision and control under Section 7(1)(g), with powers to issue directions under Section 48B of the Advocates Act.

Foreign Legal Qualifications: Recognizes foreign legal qualifications on a reciprocal basis under Section 7(1)(m).

Advocate Welfare and Legal Aid: Supports welfare funds, financial assistance and insurance for advocates, and legal aid programmes for disadvantaged litigants.

BCI–NALSAR Enrolment Controversy

Issue: The BCI directed State Bar Councils to freeze enrolment of the entire 2026 graduating batch of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, following protests concerning the participation of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant at the convocation. The directive was subsequently withdrawn.

Legal limitation: Enrolment is primarily handled by State Bar Councils under Sections 24–26 of the Advocates Act. A blanket restriction based solely on participation

in peaceful protest lacks a clear statutory basis where individual disqualification has not been established.

Supreme Court precedent: In Indian Council of Legal Aid & Advice v. Bar Council of India (1995), the Supreme Court struck down a BCI rule barring persons above 45 years from enrolment. It held that the BCI cannot use its rule-making power under Section 49 to introduce additional disqualifications beyond those prescribed by the Act. Such restrictions were held ultra vires and violative of Article 14.

PM CARES FUND AND PUBLIC AUTHORITY UNDER THE RTI ACT

Why in news?

The PM CARES Fund has come under scrutiny over transparency and financial disclosures. The debate centres on whether it qualifies as a "public authority" under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, and the extent of public accountability expected from the fund.

About PM CARES Fund

Full Form: Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund.

Establishment: Registered on 27 March 2020, under the Registration Act, 1908, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives: To provide assistance and relief during public health emergencies, natural calamities and other distress situations, including strengthening healthcare infrastructure, supporting research and assisting affected populations.

Governance: The Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairperson. The Union Ministers of Defence, Home Affairs and Finance are ex-officio trustees, along with other nominated trustees.

Funding: Relies on voluntary contributions from individuals and organisations, including eligible contributions from public-sector undertakings (PSUs). It does not receive budgetary support from the Government of India.

Tax and CSR Benefits: Contributions qualify for tax benefits and eligible corporate contributions count as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure.

Public Authority Under the RTI Act, 2005

Section 2(h): Defines a public authority as an authority, body or institution established or constituted under the Constitution, by legislation, or through a government notification or order.

Government Ownership or Control: The definition also covers bodies owned, controlled or substantially financed, directly or indirectly, by the government, as well as non-government organisations substantially financed by government funds.

Transparency Obligations: Public authorities are subject to applicable RTI disclosure requirements, including proactive disclosure under Section 4.

Why Is PM CARES' RTI Status Contested?

Government's Position: The government maintains that PM CARES is a public charitable trust and is not a public authority under the RTI Act.

Official Association: The involvement of the Prime Minister and Union Ministers as trustees, along with administrative support from the PMO, has raised questions about the fund's relationship with the government.

PSU Contributions: Contributions from government-owned PSUs have intensified the debate over public accountability and the disclosure of fund utilisation.

Audit Mechanism: The fund is audited by an independent chartered accountant rather than the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

Parliamentary Scrutiny: In 2026, the PMO informed the Lok Sabha Secretariat that questions concerning PM CARES were inadmissible because the fund was not primarily a Government of India concern. The admissibility of parliamentary questions remains subject to the Speaker's authority.

PM CARES Fund and NDRF

Different Institutional Frameworks: PM CARES is a public charitable trust, whereas the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) is a statutory fund under Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Supreme Court Position: In 2020, the Supreme Court treated PM CARES and the NDRF as distinct funds with different objectives and purposes.

Way Forward

Clarify Legal Status: Define PM CARES' status under the RTI Act.

Strengthen Audit: Improve audit disclosures and independent scrutiny.

Timely Disclosure: Publish audited accounts and project-wise expenditure regularly.

Improve Accountability: Disclose donations, allocations and outcomes while protecting privacy.

Parliamentary Transparency: Consider questions under established rules, subject to the Speaker's authority.

REPORT ON PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIS)

Why in news?

The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, chaired by Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, presented its report on August 5, 2026, examining the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and coordination among Panchayat tiers.

Three-Tier Structure

Gram Panchayat: Village level.

Panchayat Samiti: Intermediate or block level.

Zila Parishad: District level.

Article 243B: States with a population not exceeding 20 lakh may choose not to constitute the intermediate tier.

Key Challenges and Recommendations

Uneven Devolution: Devolution of functions, finances and functionaries remains inconsistent, leaving Panchayats as implementing agencies rather than autonomous institutions.

Recommendation: Periodically rank States across six dimensions: framework, functions, finances, functionaries, capacity enhancement and accountability.

Financial Dependence: Panchayats depend heavily on grants and have weak own-source revenue.

Recommendation: Strengthen local revenue collection, constitute State Finance Commissions on time and introduce performance-based incentives.

Weak Intermediate and District Tiers: Power concentration at the Gram Panchayat level weakens integrated planning.

Recommendation: Block and district plans should consolidate gaps in Gram Panchayat Development Plans, with States following prescribed grant-sharing ratios.

Staff Shortages: One secretary often serves four to five Panchayats.

Recommendation: Establish dedicated Panchayat cadres and provide one secretary per Gram Panchayat in phases.

Women's Representation: Proxy representation by male relatives undermines elected women representatives.

Recommendation: Enforce advisories against proxy representation and provide training and mentoring.

Weak Gram Sabhas: Low public participation makes Gram Sabhas increasingly ceremonial.

Recommendation: Follow the 2021 advisory recommending 6–12 meetings annually and a minimum quorum of 10%. Use digital platforms and awareness campaigns to improve participation.

Progress and Government Measures

Devolution: The devolution index rose from 39.9% in 2013–14 to 43.9% in 2021–22.

Women's Reservation: Twenty-one States and two Union Territories provide 50% reservation for women.

16th Finance Commission: Recommended nearly double the grants compared with the 15th Finance Commission, allocated 80% to Gram Panchayats, 10% to intermediate Panchayats and 10% to district Panchayats.

Digital Governance: eGramSwaraj supports planning and accounting, while the Panchayat Advancement Index assesses progress across nine localized Sustainable Development Goal themes.

Capacity Building: The Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan supports training and institutional capacity.

Way Forward

Institutional Reform: Strengthen democratic decentralisation, fiscal sustainability and accountability.

Integrated Planning: Improve coordination among Panchayat tiers and prevent departments from bypassing elected bodies.

Administrative Capacity: Address staffing, training, infrastructure and connectivity gaps.

Participatory Governance: Strengthen Gram Sabhas, social audits and citizen engagement for transparent and effective local self-government.

ATMANIRBHAR PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

Why in news?

The Union Minister of Panchayati Raj launched the **Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme** and the **SAMARTH Panchayat Portal** to strengthen the financial autonomy of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

About the Programme

Ministry: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

Implementation Framework: Anchored under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).

Aim: To develop sustainable Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) for PRIs and reduce their dependence on Central and State government grants.

Approach: Helps Gram Panchayats and Block Panchayats identify idle local assets and untapped opportunities and convert them into bankable, revenue-generating projects.

Key Features

Project Target: Develops 350 projects over four years — 50 in the first year, followed by 100 projects annually in each of the next three years.

Eligibility: Gram Panchayats must have minimum annual OSR of ₹50 lakh and Block Panchayats ₹1 crore, with at least three years of tenure remaining. Criteria are relaxed for Special Category States.

Technical Assistance: The Ministry provides technical guidance to convert local ideas into commercially viable, bankable project proposals.

Diversified Financing: Uses blended finance through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions, convergence with government schemes and institutional bank credit.

SAMARTH Panchayat Portal

Purpose: A unified, configurable national digital platform for end-to-end management of OSR by Gram Panchayats.

Objective: To digitize, streamline and standardize revenue administration, improving fiscal transparency, tax collection efficiency and accountability.

Lifecycle Management: Covers taxpayer registration, automated demand notice generation, digital payment processing, receipt collection and real-time revenue monitoring.

Revenue Sources: Digitizes local revenue streams, including property taxes, user charges, trade licenses and other non-tax fees.

Progress: Operational in Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh, with over 51 lakh taxpayers registered, demand notices worth ₹95 crore generated and more than ₹27 crore collected.

Expansion: Onboarding was underway in Maharashtra, Mizoram, Assam, Haryana, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, according to the August 2026 source.

APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE OF THE CABINET (ACC)

Why in news?

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) approved a one-year extension of the Cabinet Secretary's tenure.

About the ACC

Nature: The ACC is the highest executive body responsible for approving appointments to specified senior positions in the Central Government, PSUs and other institutions.

Legal Basis: It is an extra-constitutional body functioning under the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961, framed under Article 77(3) of the Constitution.

Composition

Chairperson: Prime Minister of India.

Member: Union Minister of Home Affairs.

Key Functions

Senior Appointments: Approves appointments to specified senior administrative positions, including Secretaries, Additional Secretaries and Joint Secretaries.

PSU Leadership: Approves key appointments, including Chairpersons, Managing Directors and full-time Directors of Central Public Sector Enterprises.

Financial Institutions: Handles specified senior appointments in public sector banks and other institutions.

Empanelment: Approves the empanelment of officers for designated senior posts.

Tenure Extension: Approves extensions beyond prescribed limits for certain senior officers.

Administrative Support

The Establishment Officer's Division under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) handles the ACC's administrative work.

THE PREVENTION OF INSULTS TO NATIONAL HONOUR (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2026

Why in news?

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, proposes to extend the legal protection under Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, to the **National Song, Vande Mataram**, alongside the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.

Why Was the Amendment Proposed?

Existing Gap: Section 3 of the 1971 Act specifically penalizes intentional obstruction of the singing of the National Anthem, but did not provide equivalent protection to the National Song.

Constituent Assembly: On 24 January 1950, Dr. Rajendra Prasad stated that Vande Mataram should be honored equally with Jana Gana Mana.

Key Provisions

Section 3 Amendment: Extends protection to both the National Anthem and the National Song.

Offences: Intentionally preventing their singing or causing disturbance to an assembly engaged in singing them becomes punishable.

Punishment: Imprisonment up to three years, a fine, or both.

Repeat Offences: Under Section 3A, second and subsequent convictions under Sections 2 or 3 attract a minimum one-year imprisonment.

About the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971

Section 2 – National Flag and Constitution: Penalises public desecration or disrespect of the National Flag or Constitution with imprisonment up to three years, a fine, or both. Lawful criticism intended to secure constitutional or legal changes is protected.

Section 3 – National Anthem: Penalises intentionally preventing the singing of Jana Gana Mana or disturbing an assembly engaged in singing it.

Vande Mataram: Historical Significance

Composition: Written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and first published in *Bangadarshan* in 1875; later included in *Anandamath* (1882).

Music and Freedom Struggle: Rabindranath Tagore sang it at the 1896 Indian National Congress session. The song became a symbol of resistance during the Swadeshi Movement.

Constituent Assembly: On 24 January 1950, Dr. Rajendra Prasad recognised its historical significance and stated that it should be honored equally with the National Anthem.

LEGAL AID DEFENSE COUNSEL SYSTEM (LADCS)

Why in news?

The Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS), implemented by the Government of India under the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), provides dedicated legal representation in criminal cases to eligible persons under Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.

Key Features

Public Defender Model: Replaces the traditional empaneled-lawyer system with dedicated advocates focused on legal-aid cases.

Full-Time Staff: District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) engage advocates on a full-time contractual basis, typically for two-year terms.

Staff Structure: Chief Legal Aid Defense Counsel oversees administration, trial strategy and major bail or appeal matters. Deputy Chief Counsel assists with trials and bail applications, while Assistant Counsel handles research, preliminary work and field assistance. Support staff manage office operations.

Scope of Legal Aid

Criminal Proceedings: Covers criminal cases from pre-arrest and police-station stages through arrest, remand, bail, trial and appeals.

Prison Visits: Counsel visit prisons to interact with undertrial prisoners and provide timely legal assistance.

Limitations: Focuses on criminal defence and does not ordinarily cover civil disputes or complainant-side representation.

DISHA 2.0: HOLISTIC ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Why in news?

The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice approved the continuation of the Central Sector Scheme **Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice (DISHA)** as DISHA 2.0 for 2026–31.

Key Features

Financial Outlay: ₹255 crore for five years, from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2031, funded entirely through the Union Government's Gross Budgetary Support.

Objectives: Ensure accessible justice irrespective of economic or other disabilities, advance constitutional provisions and support Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Four Components

Tele-Law: Provides free pre-litigation legal advice through 2.5 lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs) across 784 districts in 36 States/UTs. Nyaya Sahayaks provide doorstep assistance in Aspirational Blocks. AI integration and multilingual access will strengthen service delivery.

Nyaya Bandhu: Promotes pro-bono legal services by connecting eligible persons with advocates for free legal assistance and court representation. It also encourages law colleges to establish Pro-Bono Clubs.

Legal Literacy and Legal Awareness Programme (LLLAP): Promotes legal awareness through partnerships with government departments, PSUs, civil society organisations, law universities and media.

VIDHI-Sanjeevani: New component providing a centralised digital platform for programme monitoring and data-driven decision-making. It includes an integrated dashboard and the multilingual, AI-powered Nyaya Setu chatbot, developed with BHASHINI, for legal queries and analytics.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE MAKKAH JOINT DEFENCE AGREEMENT

Why in news?

Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan recently signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA) at Al-Safa Palace in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The agreement states that an armed attack against any one of the three countries will be regarded as an attack against all three.

Key Features of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement:

Background: The MJDA builds on the Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) signed in September 2025.

In August 2026, Türkiye joined the framework, turning the bilateral pact into a trilateral security arrangement amid rising West Asian tensions, Iran-related threats and Türkiye-Israel tensions.

Collective Defence and Deterrence: The pact states that an armed attack against one member will be regarded as an attack against all three, creating a collective-deterrence commitment.

Its principle resembles North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Article 5 mutual-defence provision, although the MJDA should not be equated with a NATO-style alliance because its detailed operational commitments and enforcement mechanisms remain unclear.

Joint Military Coordination: To ensure interoperability and operational readiness, the agreement mandates regular joint training initiatives and combined military exercises among the Saudi, Pakistani, and Turkish armed forces.

Intelligence-Sharing Mechanisms: The framework establishes formal channels for the three nations to share strategic intelligence, security data, and threat assessments to proactively counter regional hostilities.

Strategic and Security Implications of the MJDA for India:

Maritime Security: Saudi–Pakistan military cooperation could expand across the Arabian Sea and Red Sea, complicating India's maritime interests near the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and its MAHASAGAR initiative.

Defence-Industrial Cooperation: Turkish defence technology, particularly drones, backed by Saudi financing, could enhance Pakistan's military capabilities and necessitate stronger Indian air defence and electronic warfare systems.

Strategic Autonomy: The pact complicates India's Look West policy and its balanced bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Iran, requiring careful diplomatic manoeuvring.

Counter-Terrorism Concerns: Intelligence-sharing within the bloc could provide Pakistan with diplomatic leverage and potentially dilute international scrutiny of cross-border terrorism.

Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's participation may raise concerns about a perceived Saudi–Pakistan nuclear nexus, potential proliferation risks and shifts in South Asia's strategic balance. However, the pact does not automatically imply a Saudi nuclear umbrella.

Energy Security: Potential geopolitical tensions or strategic use of energy supplies by alliance members could affect India's crude oil imports, energy prices and supply security.

HUANGYAN ISLAND

Why in news?

Recently, China announced the creation of a national nature reserve on Huangyan Island (Scarborough Shoal) in the South China Sea.

What it is?

A disputed coral atoll in the South China Sea, also called Scarborough Shoal (English), Huangyan Island (China), and Panatag Shoal (Philippines).

First appeared on the 1734 Velarde Map of the Philippines, claimed under Spanish rule and later the Treaty of Washington (1900). Named "Scarborough" after the British ship that grounded there in 1748. Subject of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff between China and the Philippines.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) under UNCLOS invalidated China's "nine-dash line" claims but did not rule on sovereignty.

Location: About 220 km west of Luzon (Philippines) and near the Manila Trench.

Dispute:

Claimed by China, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

Strategic for fisheries, hydrocarbon resources, and military presence.

About South China Sea:

A marginal sea of the western Pacific Ocean, bounded by:

Northeast: Taiwan Strait, linking to East China Sea.

East: Philippines.

South: Borneo, Gulf of Thailand, Malay Peninsula.

West/North: Asian mainland (China, Vietnam).

Features:

Contains Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Scarborough Shoal, and Macclesfield Bank.

Vital trade route – ~1/3rd of global shipping passes through.

Rich in oil, gas, and fisheries resources.

Strategic chokepoints: Luzon Strait, Malacca Strait, Taiwan Strait.

ICELAND REJECTS MOVE TO REOPEN EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

Why in news?

In a referendum, Icelanders rejected the government's proposal to reopen negotiations for joining the European Union (EU), with 52.8% voting against and

47.2% in favour. Concerns over fishing rights, sovereignty and national independence influenced the vote.

About Iceland:

Iceland is a Nordic island country in the North Atlantic, located close to the Arctic Circle; its capital is Reykjavík. It is not a member of the European Union, although it had formally applied for EU membership in 2009 before accession negotiations were later discontinued.

It belongs to the European Economic Area (EEA), giving it access to the EU Single Market without EU membership.

It is also part of the Schengen Area, which enables passport-free movement across participating European countries.

It is a founding member of NATO (1949) but notably maintains no standing army.

Fisheries are economically and politically important, making control over fishing waters a major issue in debates over EU membership. Iceland's strategic importance has increased due to its location amid growing Arctic geopolitical competition.

KURIL ISLANDS DISPUTE

Why in news?

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Iturup, called Etorofu in Japan, in the Kuril Islands for the first time. This triggered a strong protest from Japan and revived the long-running Russia–Japan territorial dispute.

About Kuril Islands:

The Kuril Islands are a volcanic island chain located between Japan's Hokkaido and Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula.

They strategically connect the Sea of Okhotsk with the Pacific Ocean. Four disputed southern islands are:

- Iturup, called Etorofu in Japan
- Kunashir, called Kunashiri in Japan
- Shikotan
- Habomai

Russia administers these islands as the Southern Kurils while, Japan calls them the Northern Territories and claims sovereignty over them.

Historical Background:

The Soviet Union occupied the islands in the final days of World War II in 1945.

Japan disputes Russia's sovereignty over the islands.

Japan maintains that the four islands are historically and legally Japanese territory.

The unresolved dispute has prevented Moscow and Tokyo from concluding a formal peace treaty despite decades of negotiations.

Why the dispute is important:

Strategic Location: The islands provide Russia with important access and military positioning in the Pacific and Sea of Okhotsk.

Security Dimension: Russia has strengthened its military presence in the region. The islands remain strategically significant amid wider tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

Diplomatic Impact: Japan's relations with Russia have already deteriorated following the Ukraine conflict.

This makes settlement of the territorial dispute even more difficult.

LAKE ONTARIO RENAMED AS LAKE AMERICA

Why in news?

Recently, the US President signed an executive order to rename Lake Ontario as "Lake America", citing its significance as a US asset and part of American heritage.

Lake Ontario:

Lake Ontario is one of the five Great Lakes of North America (Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario) and lies between the Ontario province of Canada and New York State of the USA. It is the only Great Lake that does not border Michigan. It is the smallest of the five Great Lakes by surface area and forms the easternmost and final lake of the Great Lakes system.

Major Inflow: The Niagara River is the principal source of water for Lake Ontario, contributing about 85% of its inflow.

Ecological Importance: The lake supports diverse aquatic ecosystems, including species such as the Lake Sturgeon, which faces conservation challenges.



NAURU RENAMED AS REPUBLIC OF NAOERO

Why in news?

Recently, the country Nauru has officially adopted the indigenous name Republic of Naoero, and its citizens are now referred to as dei-Naoero.

About Nauru:

Located northeast of Australia, Naoero is a coral-limestone island covering approximately 21 square kilometres. It is the world's smallest island country and, with a population of about 12,000, the third-smallest country by population. By land area, it is the world's third-smallest sovereign country, after Vatican City and Monaco.

Change in Identity: The country's international code will change from NRU to NRO, while its citizens will be called dei-Naoero instead of Nauruans. National aircraft, ships and official records will also adopt the revised name.

The Namechange:

Naoero was altered to Nauru because foreign colonisers found the indigenous pronunciation difficult. The name Nauru entered official usage during German colonial rule and continued after independence in 1968.



Language Preservation: The renaming seeks to protect dorerin Naoero, the country's indigenous language, which UNESCO classifies as severely endangered, and to strengthen its transmission to future generations.

International Recognition: The government has formally notified countries and international organisations, while the United Nations and several foreign governments have begun using the name Naoero.

Broader Significance: The change reflects a wider process of decolonisation in which countries reclaim indigenous names, similar to Eswatini, Türkiye and the Micronesian State of Chuuk.

OPERATION ECONOMIC OUTCAST

Why in news?

Recently, the United States has launched 'Operation Economic Outcast', a new sanctions campaign aimed at economically isolating Iran. The initiative seeks to cut off Iran's remaining economic lifelines and pressure countries and entities involved in trade with Tehran.

About the Operation Economic Outcast

The US campaign seeks to sever Iran's remaining economic and financial links with the global economy. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced the new sanctions campaign and called on countries to reduce economic and diplomatic engagement with Iran.

Targeted Sectors: The campaign covers areas including oil and petrochemicals, shipping, aviation, gold, digital assets and technology.

Secondary Sanctions: Countries and companies continuing significant economic dealings with Iran could face secondary sanctions or restrictions on access to the US financial system.

Impact to India:

The measures could affect India through higher energy costs, trade disruptions, payment difficulties and shipping-related challenges.

Energy Security: Any disruption to Iranian oil supplies or wider West Asian energy flows could put upward pressure on global crude oil prices, affecting India's import bill.

India-Iran Trade: India's trade with Iran could face additional difficulties because of restrictions on payments, shipping and financial transactions.

Chabahar Port: Increased US pressure on Iran could create complications for India's strategic engagement with Chabahar Port, which is important for India's connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Strategic Autonomy: The developments present India with the challenge of balancing its strategic partnership with the US with its longstanding economic and connectivity interests in Iran.

Alternative Trade Routes: Indian businesses may need to explore alternative payment mechanisms, shipping routes and trading partners to minimise disruptions.

Diplomatic Challenge: India may need to pursue diplomatic engagement with both Washington and Tehran while protecting its economic and strategic interests.



INDIA-UZBEKISTAN COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Why in news?

Recently, Our Prime Minister undertook a State Visit to Uzbekistan to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership (2011). During the visit, the two nations elevated their bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Key Outcomes of the PM Visit to Uzbekistan:

Highest Civilian Honour: The Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred with the "Oliy Darajali Do'stlik" Order, Uzbekistan's highest state honour.

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: Both nations formally upgraded their bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, broadening long-term engagement across strategic, economic, and technological domains.

Defence, Security & Counter-Terrorism: Both countries adopted a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism and called for action against terror financing, safe havens and perpetrators. Both sides agreed to expand defence-industrial cooperation through the Joint Working Group on Military Cooperation.They welcomed the successful Dustlik military exercise, held in Uzbekistan in April 2026.

Trade, Investment & Economic Integration:

Set a bilateral trade target of USD 5 billion by 2030, up from the current volume of over USD 1 billion. Both Nations agreed to establish a Coordination Council led by Foreign Ministers to oversee bilateral cooperation and upgrade the existing Joint Commission from the secretarial to the ministerial level.

Uzbekistan Strategically Important to India:

Geopolitical Pivot of Central Asia: Uzbekistan is at the "heart" of Central Asia, sharing borders with all other Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) as well as Afghanistan. It acts as the linchpin for India's "Connect Central Asia Policy".

Energy and Mineral Security: Beyond uranium for nuclear energy, Uzbekistan possesses abundant reserves of gold, natural gas, and critical minerals essential for India's transition to clean energy technologies.

Countering Regional Threats: The Taliban takeover in neighboring Afghanistan has heightened the shared risk of radicalization, drug trafficking, and cross-border terrorism.

Collaborative intelligence sharing and joint exercises (like Exercise Dustlik) act as a buffer against these threats.

Balancing China's Influence: Through infrastructure investments and digital diplomacy (like UPI integration), India is offering a transparent, capacity-building alternative to China's debt-heavy Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region.

Unlocking Connectivity: Since India lacks direct land access to Central Asia, partnering with Uzbekistan is crucial for operationalizing trade transit routes, notably the Chabahar Port (Iran) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).





SOCIAL JUSTICE

5 YEARS OF E SHRAM PORTAL

Why in news?

The e-Shram Portal completed five years on August 26, 2026, marking a major milestone in building a digital social security ecosystem for India's unorganised workers.

e Shram portal:

The e-Shram Portal was launched on August 26, 2021, by the Ministry of Labour and Employment as India's first Aadhaar-authenticated National Database of Unorganised Workers. Developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), it provides each registered worker with a 12-digit Universal Account Number (UAN) linked to Aadhaar-based e-KYC..

Registration Eligibility:

Any worker aged 16 years and above, engaged in the unorganised sector, is eligible to register on the e-Shram Portal. A worker must not be an income tax-payer or a member of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) or the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

Cost & Requirements:

Registration is 100% free of cost; required documents are an Aadhaar number and a mobile number (preferably linked to Aadhaar).

Core Functions:

Integrates welfare, jobs, skilling, apprenticeship and pension services into a one-stop digital hub.

Enables data sharing with States/Union Territories (such as Building and Other Construction Workers - BOCW Boards) and across central ministries via APIs.

Provides portability of welfare benefits for migrant and construction workers.

Five-Year Performance and Key Facts

Total registrations: 31.89 crore.

Women: 54.28%; men: 45.72%.

Leading occupational categories: Agriculture, domestic and household work, construction, and apparel.

States with the highest registrations: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Gig and platform workers registered: Approximately 11.5 lakh.

Registration channels: Common Service Centres (CSCs) accounted for most registrations, followed by self-registration.

Multilingual functionality in 22 languages was introduced in 2025 through Bhashini.

e-Shram One-Stop Solution:

Launched on 21 October 2024, it transformed e-Shram from a worker-registration portal into a unified service-delivery platform. It brings together 15 Social Security and Welfare Schemes on a single platform. It integrates services related to social security, employment, skilling, apprenticeship and pensions.

CANCER AS A NOTIFIABLE DISEASE

Why in news?

Supreme Court asks 19 States and UTs to consider making cancer a notifiable disease.

Supreme Court Directive

In the case **Anurag Srivastava v. Union of India & Ors,** the Supreme Court directed the 19 States and Union Territories that had not yet notified cancer to

consider doing so. At the time of the report, 17 of India's 36 States and UTs had already notified cancer as a notifiable disease.The Court directed the concerned States and UTs to file compliance affidavits on the steps taken. The PIL invoked Articles 14 and 21, linking uniform cancer reporting with equality and the right to health and a life with dignity.

Notifiable Disease:

A notifiable disease is a disease whose cases must be reported to designated public-health authorities under applicable legal requirements. Reporting may be required from public and private healthcare providers, hospitals and medical practitioners, according to the applicable rules.

Purpose of notification:

For systematic collection of disease data that aids in monitoring disease burden and trends, supporting early detection and surveillance, planning healthcare resources and treatment facilities and formulating evidence-based public-health policies.

Examples: Tuberculosis, dengue, malaria, cholera, measles and polio. Lists vary across states and UTs.

Cancer Surveillance in India

The National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) operates under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). It collects cancer data through:

Population-Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs): Collect data on cancer cases among populations in defined geographical areas.

Hospital-Based Cancer Registries (HBCRs): Collect data on cancer patients treated at specific hospitals.

Mandatory notification could improve the coverage, timeliness and consistency of cancer data. The PIL highlighted limitations in existing registry coverage, including gaps in rural areas.

Constitutional and Legal Aspects

Article 14: Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.

Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty; relevant to arguments concerning health and dignity.

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897: Provides a legal framework for measures to address dangerous epidemic diseases.

International Health Regulations (2005): A legally binding WHO framework requiring countries to notify WHO of specified public-health risks and events with potential international implications.

Public health and sanitation fall under the State List (Entry 6), making state governments important in public-health regulation. India does not have a single, uniform national list of notifiable diseases; requirements can vary across states and UTs.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT ON HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

Why in news?

Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health & Family Welfare, presented three reports to Parliament on August 7, 2026.

175th Report: Vector-Borne Diseases in North-East India

The study on Vector-Borne Diseases in North-East India focuses on disease surveillance, public health infrastructure, research and innovation, recommending measures for their prevention, control and elimination. It covers diseases such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya and Japanese encephalitis, emphasising the One Health approach that links human, animal and environmental health. It also highlights Integrated Vector Management (IVM), which combines multiple methods to control disease-carrying vectors.

176th Report: Affordability and Accessibility of Healthcare

A study on the affordability and accessibility of healthcare in the public and private sectors recommends capping costs for essential treatments, diagnostic tests and routine procedures in private hospitals, expanding Jan Aushadhi Kendras, reviewing GST on healthcare and introducing voluntary contributory health insurance. It also proposes an additional AIIMS facility or satellite centre in northern Delhi. In 2022–23, Government Health Expenditure was 1.43% of GDP, while Out-of-Pocket Expenditure accounted for 43.4% of total health expenditure; average hospitalisation costs were ₹6,631 in government hospitals and ₹50,508 in private hospitals. (National Health Policy, 2017: Set a target of increasing government health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP by 2025)

177th Report: Chronic Kidney Disease in India

The study on the prevalence of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) in India recommends a dedicated National CKD Programme and Registry, screening of high-risk populations, public awareness campaigns, and expansion of dialysis and kidney transplantation services. It proposes extending post-transplant care under AB-PMJAY from 15 days to one year, promoting home-based peritoneal dialysis and digital health technologies, and mandating insurance coverage for CKD patients.

SOCIAL MEDIA REGULATION

Why in news?

Meta Platforms reached a reported USD 17.1 billion settlement with multiple US states over allegations of addictive social-media design and child-privacy violations, with new safety restrictions for users under 18 on Facebook and Instagram.

What Is Social Media Addiction?

Social media addiction refers to excessive or compulsive use of social networking platforms that becomes difficult to control and interferes with everyday activities, relationships, sleep, education or mental well-being. It is often associated with repeated checking of notifications, prolonged scrolling and a persistent urge to remain connected.

Social media use is not automatically an addiction. The concern arises when usage becomes difficult to regulate and causes significant harm to a child's physical health, emotional well-being, academic performance or social development.

How Do Social Media Platforms Hook Children?

Dopamine loops and variable rewards

Frictionless design

Algorithmic curation

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Key Issues Associated with Social Media Addiction

Child safety and mental health, data privacy and targeted advertising, platform accountability and parental supervision and digital literacy.

Key provisions of the reported US settlement

The reported US settlement includes measures to limit minors' social media

use to two hours a day, restrict access during late-night hours (midnight to 6 a.m., subject to parental override), strengthen age verification and remove users under 13, and curb features such as notifications, visible likes and cosmetic filters. It also reportedly provides options for non-personalised feeds, enhanced parental controls and independent audits. The proposed settlement remains subject to court approval, and Meta has denied wrongdoing.

Significance for India

Growing digital exposure among children, policy debate on age restrictions and usage limits and need for stronger parental-consent mechanisms.

Legal and Statutory Framework in India

India regulates children's online safety and social media platforms through the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, which defines a child as an individual below 18 years and provides for verifiable parental consent, restrictions on tracking and behavioural monitoring, and targeted advertising to children, subject to applicable exemptions. The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, particularly Section 79, provides conditional safe-harbour protection to intermediaries, while the IT Rules, 2021 prescribe due-diligence obligations for social media intermediaries.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, protects children below 18 years of age from sexual offences, including online sexual exploitation and abuse. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution protects life and personal liberty, with privacy recognised as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court in K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017). Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression, subject to the reasonable restrictions specified under Article 19(2).

PM SVANIDHI

Why in news?

The PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme completed one year of its restructured phase in August 2026.

About PM SVANidhi

PM SVANidhi (Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi) was launched on 1 June 2020 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) as a Central Sector Scheme, fully funded by the Central Government. It aims to provide collateral-free working-capital loans to street vendors and facilitate their access to formal credit, reducing their dependence on informal lenders. Initially launched during the

COVID-19 pandemic to support street vendors' livelihoods, the scheme was restructured and approved by the Union Cabinet in August 2025. The lending period has been extended until 31 March 2030, with a target of 1.15 crore beneficiaries, including 50 lakh new street vendors.

Loan Structure and Financial Incentives

Under the PM SVANidhi Scheme, the working-capital loan is provided in three successive tranches: the first tranche offers a loan of up to ₹15,000 with a repayment tenure of 12 months, the second tranche offers up to ₹25,000 with a tenure of 18 months, and the third tranche offers up to ₹50,000 with a tenure of 36 months.

No collateral is required for the working-capital loans. Interest subsidy is 7% per annum, credited quarterly through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for standard, non-NPA accounts. UPI-linked RuPay Credit Card is given. Initial credit limit of ₹10,000, extendable to ₹30,000, with five-year validity; available after successful repayment of the second loan tranche, as described in the source.

Eligible beneficiaries

Eligible beneficiaries include street vendors, hawkers and certain informal service providers operating within the relevant Urban Local Body (ULB) jurisdiction.

Eligible vendors may possess:

A Certificate of Vending or identity card issued by the ULB.

A verified Letter of Recommendation (LoR) issued by the ULB or Town Vending Committee (TVC), including eligible surveyed or left-out vendors.

SVANidhi se Samriddhi

This initiative aims to improve the socio-economic well-being of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families by profiling them and facilitating access to eight Central Government welfare schemes.

1. The eight schemes listed are:
2. Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY).
3. Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY).
4. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).
5. Registration under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) framework.
6. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana (PM-SYM).
7. One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC).
8. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY).

DRUG FREE YOUTH

Why in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan on August 2, 2026, as a nationwide campaign to build a drug-free youth population for Viksit Bharat@2047.

About the Abhiyan

The Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan is a nationwide youth-led campaign aimed at preventing substance abuse and promoting healthy lifestyles among young people. Launched on 2 August 2026 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the campaign seeks to mobilise youth, educational institutions and community organisations in building a drug-free society as part of the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047. It follows a sustained public participation approach rather than limiting anti-drug awareness to a one-day event.

Nodal Ministry and Implementation

The campaign is associated with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and uses youth mobilisation platforms such as Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) and the National Service Scheme (NSS). It envisages a 100-week campaign, with youth-led activities planned every Sunday. The campaign encourages participation by students, volunteers, educational institutions and local communities through awareness programmes, volunteering and community engagement.

Four Pillars of the Campaign

he campaign is based on four pillars: Prevent, Protect, Recover and Lead. Prevent focuses on awareness and preventing substance abuse; Protect seeks to safeguard young people and communities from its harmful effects; Recover emphasises support and recovery for people affected by substance use; and Lead encourages young people to become community leaders and agents of social change.

Difference Between Nasha Mukt Yuva Abhiyan and Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan

The Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan is a youth-focused campaign launched in 2026 and associated with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. It emphasises youth leadership, healthy lifestyles, community participation and a sustained 100-week programme. In contrast, the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA) was launched on 15 August 2020 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. It focuses on awareness, prevention of substance abuse, demand

reduction, treatment and rehabilitation. Initially launched in 272 vulnerable districts, NMBA was expanded to all districts of India from August 2023.

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985

The NDPS Act, 1985 provides the principal statutory framework for controlling and regulating narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in India. It addresses offences involving the unlawful production, manufacture, possession, sale, purchase, transport and trafficking of controlled substances, subject to the provisions of the Act. It also provides for legitimate medical and scientific uses under applicable legal controls.

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It was constituted on 17 March 1986 under Section 4(3) of the NDPS Act, 1985. Its primary functions include coordinating the activities of central and State agencies involved in combating drug trafficking, gathering intelligence and supporting enforcement of drug-control laws.

E-PRATYAROPAN

Why in News?

The Union government launched the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) e-Pratyaropan / National Organ Transplant Portal and mobile app in August 2026 to streamline organ donation and allocation in India.

About the e-Pratyaropan Portal

The e-Pratyaropan portal is a unified digital platform designed to strengthen coordination and transparency in organ donation and transplantation in India. Unlike the earlier system, in which hospitals largely maintained separate transplant databases, the portal connects hospitals, State authorities and the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) through a common digital interface.

A real-time digital platform developed by NOTTO in collaboration with C-DAC to manage organ allocation.

Registration and Data Integration: Patients can register for organ transplantation through a hospital of their choice. Hospitals, State governments and NOTTO have secure access to the portal, enabling transplant centres to upload recipient details directly into the system.

Multi-Level Waiting Lists: Based on the information uploaded, the portal

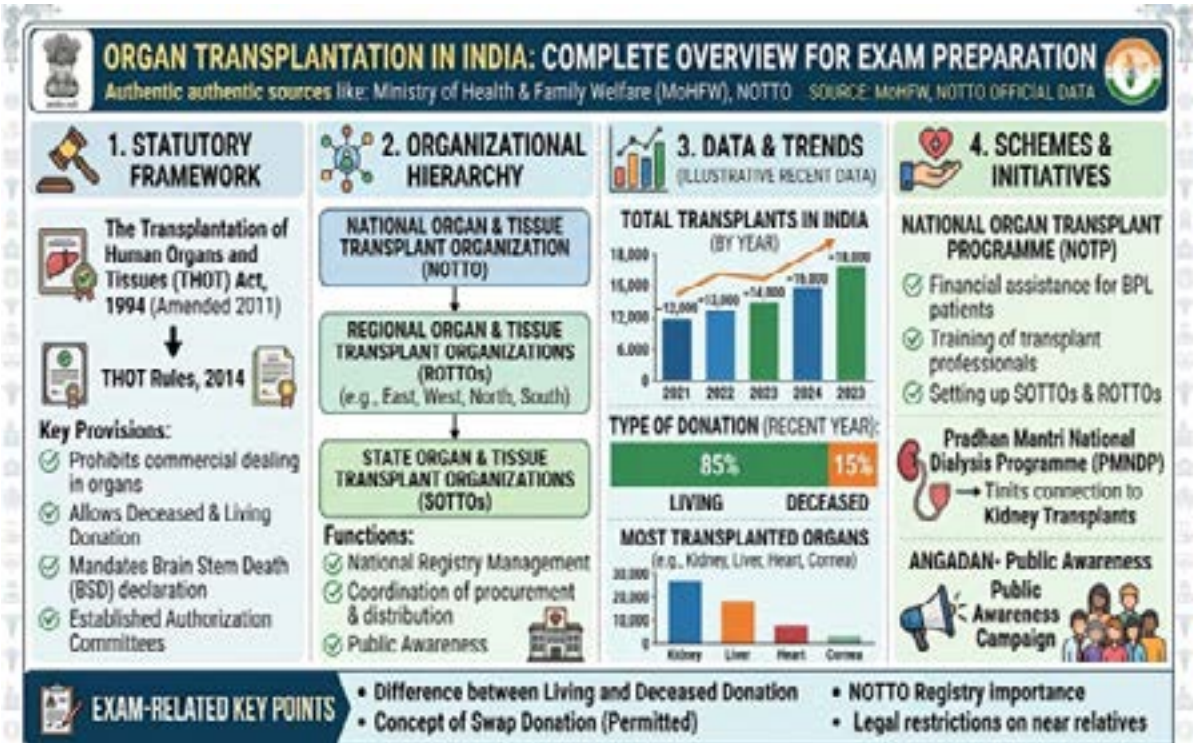
automatically generates waiting lists at the hospital, State, regional and national levels. This facilitates the identification of suitable recipients and supports timely organ matching and allocation.

Real-Time Tracking and Transparency: The platform records each stage of organ allocation and movement, reducing dependence on manual coordination through telephone calls and messaging between transplant coordinators. This improves traceability, information sharing and monitoring of the transplantation process.

Super-Urgent Requests: Hospitals and State authorities can raise "super urgent" requests through the portal for critically ill patients who require immediate transplantation. This enables urgent cases to be communicated through a structured digital mechanism, subject to applicable allocation rules and medical criteria.

Significance:

The portal aims to improve coordination among transplant centres, streamline administrative procedures, strengthen transparency and facilitate more efficient utilisation of available organs. By integrating transplant-related information across multiple administrative levels, it can help improve access to transplantation for patients requiring life-saving treatment.





Economic Development & Agriculture

10 YEARS OF THE UNIFIED PAYMENTS INTERFACE (UPI)

Why in News?

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) completed 10 years in August 2026, marking a decade of transformation in India's digital payments ecosystem. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI has emerged as a key component of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

Key Features and Growth

UPI enables instant, interoperable bank-to-bank transfers through mobile applications. It supports person-to-person (P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) payments using UPI IDs, QR codes and other supported identifiers. Between FY 2016–17 and FY 2025–26, annual transaction volume increased from approximately 1.78 crore to over 24,162 crore, with transaction value reaching around ₹314 lakh crore.

Significance

Financial inclusion: Facilitates digital payments for individuals, small businesses and rural communities.

Economic formalisation: Digital transaction records can support accounting, credit assessment and tax compliance.

Digital governance: Complements digital delivery of public services and the broader digital economy.

Global outreach: International acceptance and cross-border payment linkages strengthen India's digital payment ecosystem.

Important Facts

NPCI: An umbrella organisation for retail payment and settlement systems in India. It operates UPI under the regulatory oversight of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Legal framework: The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 provides the statutory framework for regulating payment systems in India.

UPI 123PAY: Enables UPI transactions through feature phones.

UPI Lite: Facilitates convenient small-value payments.

UPI Circle: Allows a primary user to authorise secondary users to make payments, subject to prescribed limits and controls.

Credit Line on UPI: Enables eligible users to access pre-sanctioned bank credit through UPI.

International expansion: UPI has expanded to overseas markets, including the UAE, France, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Singapore, Mauritius, Qatar, Cambodia, Greece and the Maldives. The operational status and scope of services may differ across countries.

Challenges and Way Forward

Cyber fraud, phishing, digital illiteracy, connectivity gaps and transaction failures remain major concerns. Strengthening cybersecurity, consumer awareness, grievance redressal and system resilience is essential. Expanding secure digital access and international interoperability can further improve inclusion.

Conclusion: UPI demonstrates how interoperable digital infrastructure can transform everyday transactions. Its next phase must balance innovation and convenience with security, inclusion and sustainability.

NITI AAYOG REPORT ON INDIA AS A MANUFACTURING HUB

Context

In August 2026, NITI Aayog released *Key Sectors to Position India as a Global Manufacturing Hub*, a report prepared with CRISIL Intelligence under NITI Aayog's Research Scheme. It identifies opportunities to strengthen India's manufacturing competitiveness and advance the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Key Findings

The report shortlisted 12 sectors from an initial assessment of 62 sectors, considering domestic and global market size, growth prospects, strategic importance, employment potential and competitiveness. Its first volume examines four sectors: **chemicals, textiles, solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing, and telecom and networking equipment**. Further volumes are intended to cover the remaining sectors.

Significance

Global value chains: Offers opportunities to diversify supply chains and strengthen India's integration into global manufacturing networks.

Employment generation: Supports labour-intensive industries and the creation of skilled jobs.

Import substitution: Encourages domestic production of critical components and reduces strategic import dependence.

Export competitiveness: Focuses on productivity, technology adoption, quality and market diversification.

Recommendations and Challenges

The report emphasises sector-specific interventions, stronger industrial clusters, research and development, skill development, improved infrastructure and targeted investment incentives. Key challenges include fragmented production, high input costs, dependence on imported raw materials and components, technology gaps and limited integration into global value chains.

Must-Know Facts

NITI Aayog: Established in 2015 through a Union Cabinet resolution, replacing the Planning Commission; it is a non-constitutional and non-statutory body.

National Manufacturing Mission: Announced in the Union Budget 2025–26 to promote manufacturing, with emphasis on ease and cost of doing business, workforce readiness, MSMEs, technology and quality products.

Conclusion: The report provides a sector-specific roadmap for transforming India from a major consumer market into a globally competitive manufacturing and export hub.

THE MSME DEVELOPMENT (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2026

Why in News?

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Act, 2026 received Presidential assent on 13 August 2026, amending the MSMED Act, 2006. It aims to improve ease of doing business, address delayed payments and strengthen the institutional framework for MSME development.

Key Provisions

MSME Classification: Establishes investment in plant and machinery or equipment and turnover as the twin criteria for classification. The Central Government can prescribe the applicable thresholds.

Udyam Registration: Provides for a free and voluntary digital registration framework for MSMEs, with provision for national and state-level platforms.

Delayed Payments: Introduces provisions requiring Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to route payments for goods and services procured from MSMEs through the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS). States may prescribe similar requirements for their public sector entities.

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR): Strengthens digital mechanisms for resolving delayed-payment disputes faced by Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs).

Decriminalisation: Replaces certain conviction-based offences and fines with graded civil penalties and warnings, promoting trust-based regulation.

Institutional Strengthening: Empowers State Governments to make rules relating to Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils (MSEFCs).

Significance

MSMEs contribute significantly to employment, manufacturing, exports and regional development. According to the Economic Survey 2025–26, the sector accounts for 31.1% of GDP, 35.4% of manufacturing output and 48.58% of exports. The reforms seek to improve liquidity, formalisation, dispute resolution and enterprise competitiveness.

Must-Know Facts:

TReDS: An RBI-regulated electronic platform for financing or discounting trade receivables of MSMEs.

MSEFC: Facilitates resolution of delayed-payment disputes involving Micro and Small Enterprises.

Udyam Assist Platform: Helps bring eligible informal micro enterprises into the formal ecosystem.

Conclusion: The amendment seeks to strengthen MSME competitiveness by improving payment discipline, simplifying compliance and enabling enterprises to scale up.

National Offshore Exploration Scheme (Samudra Manthan)

Why in News?

On 31 July 2026, the Union Cabinet approved Samudra Manthan, the National Offshore Exploration Scheme, with an outlay of ₹84,084 crore up to FY 2030–31. The Central Sector Scheme, under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, aims to strengthen India's energy security by accelerating offshore hydrocarbon exploration.

Key Features

The scheme adopts a risk-sharing approach to encourage public and private investment in deepwater and ultra-deepwater exploration. It provides for:

Seismic data acquisition: ₹28,534 crore for offshore surveys, data processing and interpretation using modern technologies, including Artificial Intelligence.

Exploratory drilling: ₹43,200 crore to support drilling 60 deepwater exploration wells, with government assistance of up to 50% of eligible drilling costs, capped at ₹675 crore per well.

Common offshore infrastructure: ₹10,000 crore for shared production and evacuation facilities.

Manufacturing and services zones: ₹2,000 crore to promote domestic manufacturing of critical equipment and offshore services.

Significance

India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and remains heavily dependent on imports. The scheme seeks to expand domestic hydrocarbon reserves, reduce import dependence, attract private investment, generate employment and strengthen indigenous offshore technology. Subject to exploration success, it aims to add over 600 million metric tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE) to hydrocarbon reserves.

Must-Know Facts

Exploration basins: Key prospective areas include the Krishna-Godavari, Cauvery and Mahanadi basins, and the Andaman region.

Seismic surveys: Use seismic waves to investigate subsurface geological structures and identify potential hydrocarbon-bearing formations.

National Data Repository (NDR): Stores and provides access to geological and geophysical data relevant to hydrocarbon exploration.

MMTOE: Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent, a unit used to express energy resources on a common basis.

Challenges and Way Forward

Deepwater exploration involves high costs, technological complexity, long gestation periods and environmental risks. Strong environmental safeguards, advanced technology, skilled manpower and transparent risk-sharing mechanisms are essential for successful implementation.

Conclusion: Samudra Manthan seeks to unlock India's offshore energy potential while advancing energy security and domestic technological capabilities.

REIMAGINING SKILLING FOR VIKSIT BHARAT@2047: NITI AAYOG

Why in News?

In August 2026, NITI Aayog released *Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047*, prepared by its Skill Development, Labour and Employment Division. The report proposes reforms to align education, vocational training and employment with India's changing labour-market requirements.

Key Recommendations

The report identifies five core reforms and four system enablers to create an inclusive, industry-aligned and lifelong skilling ecosystem.

Skill integration in schools: Introduce early vocational exposure and integrate employability and entrepreneurship skills into education.

Embedded degree programmes: Strengthen links between academic education, vocational training and workplace learning.

Industry-backed programmes: Align training with industry demand and

employment outcomes.

Apprenticeships for all: Expand apprenticeship opportunities and establish unified state-level platforms for apprenticeships and internships.

Guidance and perception building: Strengthen career counselling and awareness of skilling pathways.

The four system enablers include a Digital Skills Passport, outcomes-based financing, adoption of the National Credit Framework (NCrF), and skills-first policies and infrastructure.

Significance

The report seeks to address skill mismatches, improve employability, support women's workforce participation and prepare workers for artificial intelligence, automation and the green transition. It advocates flexible pathways allowing individuals to move between education, training and employment throughout their lives.

Must-Know Facts

National Credit Framework (NCrF): Enables the accumulation, recognition and transfer of credits across general education, vocational education and experiential learning.

NSQF: The National Skills Qualifications Framework organises qualifications according to levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude.

NEET: Refers to young people not in education, employment or training.

Integrated Scheme in Skilling Architecture (ISSA): Introduced in the Union Budget 2026–27, with ₹600 crore allocated to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship for FY 2026–27. State Skills Transformation Pilots cover Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam.

FIVE-POINT ROADMAP BY THE NATIONAL SHIPPING BOARD

Why in News?

On 25 August 2026, the National Shipping Board (NSB) unveiled a five-point roadmap at its inaugural *Sagar Samvad* in New Delhi to strengthen India's merchant shipping fleet and reduce dependence on foreign shipping lines. The roadmap aims to add 100 vessels to India's fleet over the next five years.

Key Features

The roadmap focuses on five pillars:

Fiscal reforms: Rationalising taxes and other cost burdens to improve the competitiveness of Indian-flagged ships.

Assured cargo support: Improving cargo availability and revenue certainty for domestic shipping operators.

Competitive financing: Enabling access to affordable, long-term finance for vessel acquisition and fleet expansion.

Regulatory streamlining: Simplifying procedures while maintaining maritime safety and environmental standards.

Ease of doing business: Reducing administrative burdens and improving the operating environment for Indian shipowners.

Significance

India reportedly spends around US$75 billion annually on freight paid to foreign shipping lines. Expanding the domestic merchant fleet could retain more freight earnings within the country, improve supply-chain resilience and support the transportation of crude oil, natural gas, coal and fertilisers. It can also create employment for seafarers and strengthen indigenous shipbuilding and maritime services.

Must-Know Facts

National Shipping Board: A statutory advisory body under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

Legal framework: Its current statutory basis is the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, which replaced the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958.

Sagar Samvad: A stakeholder dialogue on India's maritime development and shipping policy.

Maritime India Vision 2030: A roadmap for developing India's maritime sector.

Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047: A long-term vision for transforming India into a leading global maritime nation.

Challenges and Way Forward

High operating costs, expensive financing, limited domestic shipbuilding capacity and competition from foreign operators may constrain implementation. Coordinated

fiscal reforms, stronger shipbuilding capabilities, skilled maritime personnel and transparent performance monitoring will be essential.

Conclusion: The roadmap seeks to make Indian shipping more competitive, strengthen maritime self-reliance and support India's ambition of becoming a developed economy by 2047.

NATIONAL HANDLOOM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (NHDP)

Why in News?

The Ministry of Textiles continues to implement the National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) to support weavers, improve productivity and promote traditional Indian handloom products. For 2026–27, ₹205 crore has been allocated to the programme.

Key Features

NHDP is a Central Sector Scheme implemented through the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms. It supports weavers both within and outside the cooperative sector through need-based financial assistance.

Its major components include:

Cluster Development: Provides infrastructure, improved looms, worksheds, lighting and design support to handloom clusters.

Handloom Marketing Assistance: Promotes exhibitions, marketing events, e-commerce and access to domestic and international markets.

Concessional Credit: The Weaver MUDRA Scheme facilitates institutional credit for working capital and investment.

Mega Cluster Development: Supports large handloom clusters through infrastructure, technology and market linkages.

Weavers' Welfare: Provides social-security coverage and educational assistance to eligible beneficiaries.

Significance

The handloom sector preserves India's cultural heritage while generating rural employment, particularly for women. NHDP seeks to improve weavers' incomes, encourage design innovation, strengthen market access and make traditional products more competitive. It also supports the formalisation of weavers through producer companies and institutional credit.

Must-Know Facts:

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Textiles.

Implementing office: Development Commissioner for Handlooms.

Scheme type: Central Sector Scheme.

Weaver MUDRA: Provides credit support; eligible handloom organisations can receive concessional loans at 6% interest for three years, subject to scheme conditions.

National Handloom Day: Observed on 7 August, commemorating the launch of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905.

Handloom Mark: Helps identify genuine handloom products, distinguishing them from powerloom-made products.

Challenges and Way Forward

Limited access to credit, fluctuating raw-material costs, competition from powerlooms and weak market linkages affect weavers' livelihoods. Better branding, digital marketing, skill development and stronger producer organisations can improve sustainability.

Conclusion: NHDP combines livelihood support with heritage preservation, helping India's handloom sector become more productive, competitive and market-oriented.

GI TAGS: SCALING TRADITIONAL WEALTH INTO GLOBAL BRANDS

Why in News?

Initiatives such as the *GI & Beyond 2.0 Summit* and the *Bharat GI* initiative aim to improve market access, commercialisation and export opportunities for regional products.

Key Features

A GI tag identifies goods originating from a specific geographical area whose quality, reputation or other characteristics are essentially attributable to that origin. India's GI framework covers agricultural, natural, manufactured and handicraft products, as well as food products.

Recent initiatives include:

Bharat GI: A collaboration between the Ministry of MSME and DPIIT to promote GI products through platforms such as the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) and Government e-Marketplace (GeM).

GI & Beyond 2.0: Promotes collaboration among weavers, artisans, exporters and buyers.

GI tourism: Links traditional production centres with cultural tourism and local livelihoods.

Export promotion: APEDA supports the marketing and export of eligible agricultural and processed food products.

Significance

GI protection helps prevent misuse of regional names, preserves traditional knowledge, improves product authenticity and strengthens producers' bargaining power. It can generate rural employment, support MSMEs, promote exports and encourage the preservation of traditional skills.

Must-Know Facts

Legal framework: Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999; the Rules were notified in 2002.

Nodal department: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Registration period: Ten years, renewable for successive ten-year periods.

Eligible applicants: Associations of producers, organisations or statutory authorities representing producers' interests.

Examples: Darjeeling Tea (West Bengal), Kanchipuram Silk (Tamil Nadu), Nagpur Orange (Maharashtra) and Basmati Rice.

Important distinction: A GI identifies a product's geographical origin and associated reputation or qualities; a trademark distinguishes the goods or services of one enterprise from those of others.

PRADHAN MANTRI JAN-DHAN YOJANA (PMJDY)

Why in News?

The Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) completed 12 years on **28 August 2026**, marking an important milestone in India's financial inclusion journey.

Key Features

Launch: 28 August 2014, under the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance.

Objective: To ensure access to basic banking services, savings, remittances, credit, insurance and pension facilities for underserved sections.

Basic Savings Bank Deposit (BSBD) Account: Allows account opening without a mandatory minimum balance.

RuPay debit card: Provides access to digital payment services and eligible accident-insurance coverage, subject to applicable conditions.

Overdraft facility: Eligible account holders may receive an overdraft of up to ₹10,000, subject to prescribed conditions.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT): Supports the direct transfer of government benefits into beneficiaries' bank accounts.

Significance

PMJDY has widened access to formal financial services, encouraged savings and strengthened women's participation in the banking system. It forms a key pillar of the **Jan-Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile (JAM) Trinity**, which supports efficient welfare delivery and reduces dependence on intermediaries. The scheme also provides a banking platform through which eligible beneficiaries can access social-security initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana.

Challenges and Way Forward

The opening of accounts does not automatically ensure meaningful financial inclusion. Dormant accounts, limited financial literacy, digital fraud, connectivity gaps and inadequate access to formal credit remain challenges. Greater financial awareness, stronger grievance-redressal mechanisms, secure digital banking and improved last-mile banking infrastructure are essential to improve account usage.

Conclusion: The next phase of PMJDY should focus on transforming account ownership into active, secure and productive participation in the formal financial system.

SAPT DHARA OF SHAKTI

Why in News?

On 15 August 2026, during his Independence Day address from the Red Fort, the Prime Minister outlined *Sapt Dhara* (Seven Streams of Strength), a multi-sectoral roadmap to accelerate India's journey towards **Viksit Bharat@2047**.

Seven Streams of Sapt Dhara

Manufacturing Power: Strengthening domestic manufacturing, industrial scale, quality and integration into global value chains.

Agriculture and Food Processing: Connecting farmers to global markets and promoting Indian agricultural products as global brands.

Technology and Innovation: Advancing artificial intelligence, robotics, semiconductors, data centres and indigenous technologies.

Gati Shakti and Connectivity: Improving multimodal transport infrastructure and reducing logistics costs.

Raksha Shakti: Promoting defence indigenisation, advanced defence technologies and exports.

Green and Blue Economy: Expanding renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy storage, fisheries and ocean-based economic activities.

Soft Power: Promoting India's cultural influence through yoga, handicrafts, films, tourism and the creative economy.

Significance

Sapt Dhara adopts an integrated approach to economic growth by linking manufacturing, agriculture, technology, infrastructure, defence, sustainability and cultural influence. It seeks to strengthen strategic autonomy, generate employment, enhance export competitiveness and build resilient supply chains. The framework also complements the broader vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and *Viksit Bharat@2047*.

Conclusion: Sapt Dhara provides a broad strategic direction for combining economic competitiveness, technological self-reliance and sustainable development on the path to 2047.

ELECTRONICS COMPONENTS MANUFACTURING SCHEME (ECMS)

Why in News?

The Union Budget 2026–27 increased the outlay of the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS) from ₹22,919 crore to ₹40,000 crore to strengthen domestic electronics manufacturing and reduce import dependence.

Key Features

Launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), ECMS was notified on 8 April 2025. It aims to develop a robust domestic ecosystem for electronic components, sub-assemblies, raw materials and manufacturing equipment.

The scheme provides turnover-linked, capital expenditure (capex) and hybrid incentives, depending on the product category. It covers printed circuit boards (PCBs), camera and display modules, connectors, capacitors, lithium-ion cells and other critical components. It has a six-year tenure, with an optional one-year gestation period for specified segments.

Significance

Import substitution: Reduces dependence on imported components and critical materials.

Domestic value addition: Moves India beyond final-product assembly towards deeper manufacturing capabilities.

Employment generation: Encourages investment, skilled jobs and industrial development.

Global value chains: Strengthens India's position as a competitive electronics manufacturing destination.

Related Initiatives

India Semiconductor Mission (ISM): Supports the development of India's semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem.

PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing: Incentivises eligible production based on incremental sales.

Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0): Supports common infrastructure and facilities for electronics manufacturing.

National Policy on Electronics, 2019: Seeks to position India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM).

Challenges and Way Forward

Dependence on imported advanced components, technology gaps, infrastructure costs and shortages of specialised skills remain challenges. Strengthening research and development, domestic supply chains, workforce training and industry partnerships is essential.

Conclusion: ECMS seeks to deepen India's electronics value chain, enhance domestic value addition and support its emergence as a globally competitive manufacturing hub.

POLYMER BANKNOTES

Why in News?

The Union Government approved the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) proposal to conduct field trials of polymer banknotes in denominations of ₹10 and ₹20. The proposal envisages one billion notes of each denomination, with regular issuance subject to successful completion of the trials. Polymer notes are expected to circulate alongside existing paper-based banknotes; there is no proposal to replace all paper currency

Key Features

Polymer banknotes are made using a durable synthetic plastic substrate, commonly polypropylene, instead of the cotton-based substrate used in conventional Indian banknotes. They are designed to resist moisture, dirt and tearing, and can incorporate advanced security features.

Significance

Durability: Polymer notes can last considerably longer than conventional banknotes, particularly in frequently handled, low-denomination currency.

Cost efficiency: Longer circulation life may reduce replacement, printing, transportation and disposal costs over time.

Security: Transparent windows and other specialised features can make counterfeiting more difficult.

Environmental benefits: Reduced replacement frequency may lower resource consumption and waste, although the overall impact depends on production, recycling and disposal practices.

Challenges and Way Forward

Polymer notes may have higher initial production costs and require specialised printing technology. Recycling infrastructure, environmental impacts and domestic availability of the substrate also require consideration. Gradual field trials can help assess durability, public acceptance, machine compatibility and cost-effectiveness before wider issuance.

Important Facts

RBI: The Reserve Bank of India is responsible for currency management and issues banknotes under Section 22 of the RBI Act, 1934.

₹1 note: Issued by the Government of India, Ministry of Finance, rather than the RBI.

BRBNMPL: Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RBI involved in banknote printing.

Global precedent: Australia pioneered the issuance of polymer banknotes in 1988.

Conclusion: Polymer banknotes represent an effort to improve currency durability and security while managing the long-term costs of cash circulation.

INDIA'S MAKHANA SECTOR

Why in News?

The Government highlighted the growth potential of India's makhana sector in August 2026, emphasising its role in farmer incomes, value addition and agricultural exports

Key Features

Makhana, commonly known as fox nut or gorgon nut, is obtained from the seeds of *Euryale ferox*, an aquatic plant grown in ponds, lakes and wetlands. India is the world's largest producer, with Bihar contributing nearly three-fourths of national production and around 80–85% of global supply. The major producing districts include Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnia, Katihar, Saharsa and Supaul.

Government Initiatives

National Makhana Board: Constituted in September 2025 under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to promote production, processing, value addition, marketing and exports.

Central Sector Scheme for Development of Makhana: Approved with an outlay of ₹476.03 crore for 2025–26 to 2030–31.

GI protection: Mithila Makhana received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2022, recognising its regional identity and traditional production knowledge.

Significance

Makhana offers opportunities for rural employment, women's livelihoods, food processing and export diversification. Improved seed varieties, mechanisation, branding and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) can increase productivity and farmers' share in consumer prices.

Challenges and Way Forward

Labour-intensive harvesting, traditional processing, limited mechanisation, inconsistent grading and inadequate market linkages constrain growth. Investment in processing infrastructure, research, quality standards and export promotion can strengthen the value chain.

Conclusion: Makhana illustrates how a regionally concentrated traditional crop can become a high-value agricultural product through scientific innovation, institutional support and global branding.

NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2026

Why in News?

The National Co-operative Development Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2026 received Presidential assent on 14 August 2026.

Key Provisions

Expanded scope: Broadens the definition of cooperative development to include planning, promoting and financing programmes for cooperative societies, directly or through intermediary entities.

Direct financial assistance: Enables NCDC to provide loans and grants directly to cooperative societies and eligible entities engaged in cooperative development, subject to prescribed conditions and security requirements.

Equity participation: Permits NCDC, with Central Government approval, to participate in the share capital of additional categories of cooperative societies and eligible entities.

Wider coverage: Expands the scope of eligible food products to include processed food and other notified food items. It also removes geographical restrictions relating to industrial goods.

Credit information: Authorises NCDC to collect or furnish credit and other relevant information to the Central Government, RBI, banking companies and notified financial institutions.

Incidental powers: Explicitly empowers NCDC to undertake actions necessary for performing its statutory functions.

Significance

The amendment aims to improve access to institutional finance, support agricultural processing and rural industries, strengthen cooperative enterprises and promote activities such as dairy, fisheries, handloom and food processing. Direct funding may reduce procedural delays and help cooperatives expand their economic activities.

Important Facts

NCDC: A statutory corporation under the Ministry of Cooperation, established under the NCDC Act, 1962.

97th Constitutional Amendment: Added Article 43B and Part IXB concerning cooperative societies.

Seventh Schedule: "Co-operative societies" falls under Entry 32 of the State List, subject to constitutional provisions and applicable exceptions.

Conclusion: The amendment seeks to strengthen cooperative-led economic development by widening NCDC's financing powers, improving institutional flexibility and expanding support for cooperative enterprises.

WINDFALL TAX

Why in News?

India revised export levies on petroleum products, imposing ₹2.50 per litre on petrol exports and ₹8.50 per litre on diesel exports. The rates are reviewed periodically in response to international energy-market conditions.

Concept and Significance

A **windfall tax** is a tax imposed on unusually high profits earned by companies due to exceptional circumstances, such as a sudden rise in global oil prices, rather than increased productivity or investment.

India introduced windfall profit taxation on domestic crude oil production and exports of certain petroleum products in July 2022. The measures aim to capture extraordinary gains, discourage excessive exports when domestic supplies are under pressure and protect energy security.

Important Facts

Nature: An additional levy; in India, relevant measures have been implemented through instruments such as Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) and export duties.

Tax base: Can target extraordinary profits from domestic crude production or specified petroleum-product exports.

Economic trade-off: While windfall taxes can raise government revenue and support domestic availability, excessive taxation may discourage investment and affect export competitiveness.

Conclusion: Windfall taxation is a fiscal tool to address exceptional gains and energy-market pressures; its effectiveness depends on balancing revenue, domestic supply and long-term investment.

PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI (PM-KISAN)

Why in News?

the Union Cabinet approved the continuation of PM-KISAN from 2026–27 to 2030–31, with a financial outlay of ₹3.15 lakh crore.

Key Features

Launched in February 2019 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, PM-KISAN is a **Central Sector Scheme** providing ₹6,000 annually to eligible landholding farmer families in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 directly into their bank accounts.

Funding: Fully funded by the Central Government.

Beneficiary identification: State and Union Territory administrations identify eligible beneficiaries.

Family definition: Husband, wife and minor children.

Digital delivery: Aadhaar-linked verification, e-KYC and digitised land records help improve transparency and reduce duplication.

Coverage: The scheme is applicable across India, subject to prescribed eligibility and exclusion criteria.

Significance

PM-KISAN provides supplementary income for agricultural inputs and household needs. It supports rural consumption, promotes financial inclusion and reduces farmers' dependence on informal borrowing.

Important Facts

Exclusions: Institutional landholders, income-tax payers and specified categories of serving or retired government employees and constitutional office-holders are generally excluded, subject to scheme guidelines.

e-KYC: Mandatory for registered beneficiaries.

Payment mechanism: Three instalments annually through DBT.

Distinction: PM-KISAN provides income support; PM-KISAN is distinct from PM Fasal Bima Yojana (crop insurance) and the Kisan Credit Card (institutional credit).

Conclusion: PM-KISAN is a technology-enabled income-support scheme aimed at strengthening farmers' financial security and supporting agricultural livelihoods.

INTEGRATED FERTILIZER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IFMS)

Why in News?

In August 2026, the Department of Fertilizers introduced new digital initiatives under iFMS to strengthen supply-chain monitoring, improve transparency and enable data-driven fertilizer management.

Key Features

Developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) for the Department of Fertilizers, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, iFMS is a digital platform tracking fertilizers from production and imports to transportation, retail sales and subsidy processing.

Real-time monitoring: Tracks fertilizer movement, stocks and availability across States, districts and retailers.

Digital transactions: Records subsidised fertilizer sales through Aadhaar-authenticated Point of Sale (PoS) devices.

Data analytics: Helps identify unusual purchase patterns, potential diversion and emerging supply shortages.

Recent integration: Links fertilizer management with agricultural and land-related data to improve planning and monitoring.

Significance

iFMS supports timely fertilizer availability, transparent subsidy administration and more efficient supply-chain management. It also helps authorities plan production, imports and distribution according to regional agricultural requirements.

Important Facts

Nodal department: Department of Fertilizers, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Subsidy mechanism: Under DBT in fertilizers, subsidy is released to fertilizer companies based on actual retail sales to farmers, rather than as a direct cash transfer to farmers.

Institutional role: NIC developed the digital platform.

Coverage: As reported in August 2026, iFMS connected over 14 crore Aadhaar-linked buyers and more than 2.5 lakh retailers.

Conclusion: iFMS uses digital technology to improve fertilizer distribution, strengthen subsidy monitoring and support evidence-based agricultural policy.

PAIMANA PORTAL

Why in News?

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) highlighted the PAIMANA portal as a digital tool for monitoring major Central Sector infrastructure projects and improving implementation efficiency.

Key Features

PAIMANA stands for **Project Assessment, Infrastructure Monitoring and Analytics for Nation-Building**. Launched on 25 September 2025, it replaced the earlier Online Computerized Monitoring System (OCMS-2006).

Project monitoring: Tracks ongoing Central Sector infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore and above.

Data integration: Uses Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to obtain project information from other government monitoring platforms, reducing manual data entry.

Performance analytics: Helps identify delays, cost overruns and implementation bottlenecks.

PAIMANA-CRIP: Introduced in July 2026 to strengthen integrated project monitoring and develop a central repository of infrastructure projects.

Significance

The portal promotes transparency, accountability and evidence-based decision-making. It enables ministries to monitor project progress and take corrective action to improve timely execution of infrastructure investments.

Important Facts

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Coverage: Central Sector infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore or more.

Related platform: DPIIT's Integrated Project Monitoring Portal (IPMP) has been integrated with PAIMANA through APIs.

PRAGATI: Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation; a separate platform for reviewing major projects and resolving implementation issues.

Conclusion: PAIMANA strengthens digital governance by integrating project data and enabling more efficient monitoring of India's infrastructure development.

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2026: THE PROMISE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Why in News?

The World Bank released the *World Development Report 2026: The Promise of Artificial Intelligence* on 4 August 2026. The report examines how AI can accelerate development in low- and middle-income countries.

Key Findings

Development opportunity: AI can improve productivity, expand access to expertise and strengthen public-service delivery.

Employment: The report estimates that 4.5% of existing jobs in low- and middle-income countries are at risk from generative AI, compared with 14.2% in high-income countries. However, AI could meaningfully enhance productivity in 16.2% of jobs in developing economies.

"Small AI": Affordable, locally adapted AI tools can support healthcare, education and agriculture without requiring countries to develop expensive, large-scale AI models.

Enabling conditions: Reliable electricity, digital connectivity, relevant skills, quality data and effective institutions are essential to realise AI's benefits.

Framework: Adopt, Adapt and Advance

The report proposes a three-part approach: **adopt** existing AI solutions, **adapt** them to local languages and development needs, and **advance** domestic capabilities over time. Countries should also promote competition, interoperability and responsible AI governance.

Significance for India

AI can strengthen digital public services, agricultural advisories, healthcare screening and educational support. However, unequal digital access, skill gaps, privacy concerns and dependence on external technology providers may limit inclusive benefits.

Conclusion: The report argues that developing countries should focus on inclusive, locally relevant AI adoption rather than merely competing to build the largest AI models.

PM-KISAN SCHEME

Why in news?

Recently, The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme from 2026–27 to 2030–31.

About PM-KISAN:

PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Scheme launched in 2019 to provide assured income support to landholding farmer families with cultivable land.

The Union Budget 2026–27 allocated ₹60,000 crore for PM-KISAN, reflecting continued support for farmers' income security.

The Union Cabinet has approved the Scheme's continuation from 2026–27 to 2030–31 with a total outlay of ₹3.15 lakh crore to support agricultural investment and strengthen farmers' livelihoods.

Under the scheme, each eligible farmer family receives ₹6,000 per year in three equal installments of ₹2,000 each.

The amount is transferred directly into Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism.

Objective: The scheme aims to increase farmers' income, support purchase of agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, improve crop health and productivity, and reduce dependence on informal credit.

Beneficiary Identification: State Governments identify eligible farmer households and maintain a database containing details such as name, age, category, Aadhaar

number, bank account details and mobile number.

Monitoring Framework: PM-KISAN is monitored through a multi-tier framework at the national, State and district levels, with the national review mechanism chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.

Digital Delivery: The PM-KISAN portal and mobile app support registration, verification, fund-transfer tracking and e-KYC, improving transparency and accessibility.

Key Achievements:

Overall Transfers: More than ₹4.47 lakh crore has been transferred directly to farmers' bank accounts through 23 instalments under PM-KISAN.

Inclusive Support: More than ₹1.71 lakh crore was disbursed during the Covid-19 pandemic, while women farmers have received over ₹1.06 lakh crore and constitute nearly one-fourth of all beneficiaries.

Around 85% of beneficiaries reported higher agricultural income and reduced dependence on informal credit.

INTEGRATED FERTILIZER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IFMS)

Why in news?

The Department of Fertilizers has transitioned the Integrated Fertilizer Management System (iFMS) into a comprehensive, data-driven oversight platform by integrating it with state land records, Meri Fasal Mera Byora (MFMB), and the central AgriStack.

About Integrated Fertilizer Management System:iFMS is a digital platform that tracks fertilizer production, imports, movement, stocks, sales and subsidy.The National Informatics Centre (NIC) developed and provides technical support for iFMS for the Department of Fertilizers.

Aim: Its aim is to improve fertilizer availability, strengthen transparency and enable data-driven monitoring and decision-making.

Key Features:

Wide Coverage: It covers more than 14 crore Aadhaar-linked fertilizer buyers, over 2.5 lakh retailers and around 7 crore metric tonne fertilizer sale transactions annually.

Subsidy Management: The system supports administration of fertilizer subsidy of nearly ₹2 lakh crore annually.

Digital Monitoring: New dashboards provide a consolidated view of production,

imports, dispatches, movement, stocks and retail sales at national, State, district and retailer levels.

Data Analytics: It enables analysis of fertilizer purchases across buyer categories, landholdings, crops, districts and fertilizer types to identify consumption patterns.

Farmer and Agricultural Data: Integration with Meri Fasal Mera Byora (MFMB) and AgriStack help link fertilizer transactions with farmer, land and crop information.

GOBARDHAN: NATIONAL CIRCULAR BIOENERGY SCHEME

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved GOBARdhan, National Circular Bioenergy Scheme, to convert organic waste into clean energy and promote rural prosperity.

About GOBARdhan National Circular Bioenergy Scheme:

GOBARdhan, or the National Circular Bioenergy Scheme, aims to convert organic waste such as animal waste, crop residue, kitchen waste and market waste into compressed biogas and bio-slurry.

Approved on 6th August 2026, the scheme will be implemented from FY 2026–27 to FY 2035–36 under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The scheme has a total outlay of ₹23,731 crore and consolidates the previously fragmented CBG ecosystem under a unified national framework.

The scheme is structured around six growth engines covering assured offtake, pricing, capital support, pipelines, credit guarantees and ecosystem development.

Objectives and Vision: The scheme seeks to increase domestic CBG production nearly ten-fold, attract private investment and develop a circular bioeconomy in which waste supports growth, villages become clean-energy centres and farmers contribute to national energy security.

India imports nearly half of its natural gas requirements, while disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz—through which about 55–60% of its LNG imports pass—highlight the urgent need to strengthen domestic energy production and security.

GOBARdhan Unified Registration Portal: The GOBARdhan Unified Registration Portal enables existing and proposed CBG/Bio-CNG plants to obtain the registration number required for accessing MoPNG support.

MITHILA MAKHANA EXPORT TO AUSTRALIA

Why in News?

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) facilitated the first-ever commercial sea shipment of GI-tagged Mithila Makhana from Bihar to Australia.

Export: An 18 Metric Tonnes (MT) consignment of GI-tagged Mithila Makhana was exported from BIADA Industrial Area, Bihta, Bihar, to Australia through the sea route.

The consignment was sourced directly from Makhana growers of Darbhanga district and consisted of premium-quality raw GI-tagged Mithila Makhana.

Exporter: The consignment was exported by M/s NIAD Green, with logistics support from Jitban Supply Chain Pvt. Ltd.

Mithila Makhana is a Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged agricultural product associated with the Mithila region of Bihar.

HS Code: A separate HS Code for Makhana came into effect from July 2025 under the Finance Bill, 2025, facilitating better tracking and promotion of Makhana exports.

During FY 2025–26, India exported over 7,000 MT of Makhana and value-added Makhana products to more than 20 international destinations, including the USA, Middle East and Africa.

Institutional Support: The export was facilitated by APEDA under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry in association with the Department of Agriculture, Government of Bihar.

About APEDA:

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority functions under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It is a statutory body established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act, enacted by Parliament in December 1985. It succeeded the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPC).

NON-GMO POPCORN MAIZE HYBRID SEED

Why in news?

Recently, The Vice-President of India launched the country's first indigenous, non-GMO (Genetically Modified Organism), high-expansion popcorn maize hybrid seed at the Gourmet Popcornica facility in Musunuru, Eluru district, Andhra Pradesh.

About Non-GMO High-Expansion Popcorn Maize Hybrid Seed:

It is an indigenously developed hybrid maize seed specifically designed for producing high-expansion popcorn, launched in association with Gourmet Popcornica.

It is non-GMO, meaning its desired characteristics have been developed without genetic modification.

High-expansion refers to the ability of kernels to produce a larger volume of popped corn, an important commercial quality parameter in the popcorn industry.

Key Features:

Indigenous Hybrid Technology: Developed as an Indian alternative to imported high-quality popcorn maize hybrids, strengthening domestic seed capabilities.

Non-GMO Variety: Offers improved commercial popcorn characteristics without using genetically modified technology.

High-Expansion Capability: Produces kernels with high popping expansion, improving their suitability for premium popcorn processing and markets.

Farmer–Enterprise Integration: Gourmet Popcornica works with over 17,500 farmers across eight States, covering nearly 40,000 acres, linking cultivation with processing and markets.

Integrated Value Chain: Supported by processing, quality control, cold storage, packaging and marketing infrastructure, creating a farm-to-market popcorn ecosystem.