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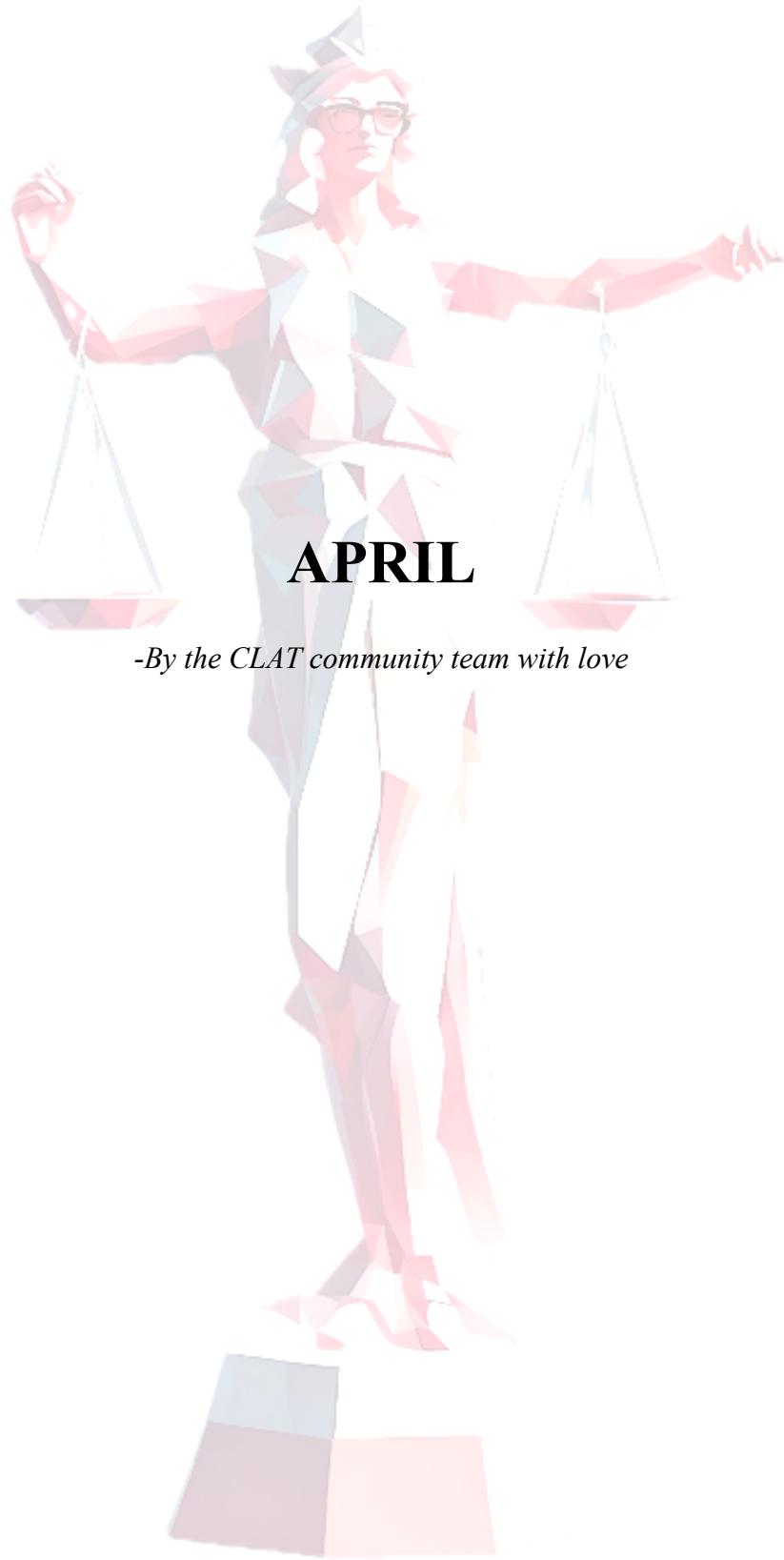
2026

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Vinod Kumar Shukla Wins the Jnanpith Award

Why in News?

A storyteller and eminent Hindi writer, Vinod Kumar Shukla won the Jnanpith Award, the first from Chhattisgarh to win the prize.



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About the Jnanpith Award

- It is India's highest literary honour, given annually to Indian writers for their outstanding contribution to literature.
- **Instituted in:** 1961
- **Instituted by:** Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain, founder of Bharatiya Jnanpith, the oldest and most prestigious literary accolade in India.
- It honors authors for their exceptional contributions to literature in Indian languages listed in the 8th Schedule (22 languages) of the Constitution.
- English has been included from the 49th award (2013) onwards.
- Once a language receives the award, it is not eligible for the next 2 years.

Selection Procedure

- Recommendations are made by various Language Advisory Committees.
- These recommendations are placed before the Selection Board, which chooses the awardee for the year.
- The award is not given posthumously, ensuring it recognizes living writers for their literary excellence.

Past Milestones

- **First recipient:** Malayalam poet **G. Sankara Kurup** in 1965
- **First woman recipient:** **Ashapurna Devi** in 1976

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About Vinod Kumar Shukla

- With this award, Shukla joins the ranks of 12 distinguished Hindi writers who have previously won the Jnanpith.
- He is regarded as one of the greatest contemporary Hindi writers, known for his distinctive linguistic texture and deep emotional appeal.
- Sahitya Akademi Award (1999): Won for his novel *Deewar Mein Ek Khirkee Rahati Thi*
- Notable works include:**
 - Naukar Ki Kameez* (1979) – adapted into a film by director Mani Kaul
 - Sab Kuch Hona Bacha Rahega* (1992) – poetry collection

Award Selection

- The decision to honour Shukla was made by the Jnanpith Selection Committee, chaired by storyteller and Jnanpith awardee Pratibha Ray.

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Meeting Convened by MHA on Gorkha Concerns

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened a meeting in New Delhi with key representatives of the Gorkha community, aimed at addressing their long-pending concerns.

Who are the Gorkhas?

The Gorkhas (also spelled Gurkhas) are a martial community originating from Nepal, renowned for their bravery, loyalty, and fierce fighting skills. The community derives its name from the Gorkha Kingdom in western Nepal, from where Prithvi Narayan Shah (1743–75), a Gorkha king, unified Nepal and expanded its power. Gorkhas are not a single ethnic group but rather a conglomerate of several ethnicities, including Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus, and others from the hilly regions of Nepal.



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What are the Concerns of Gorkhas?

1. A major demand of the Gorkha community has been for the creation of a separate state called Gorkhaland, comprising regions such as Darjeeling, Terai, and Dooars. This demand has been central to Gorkha identity politics since the 1980s. According to Gorkha leaders, the formation of Gorkhaland would provide them with long-denied political recognition, cultural autonomy, and administrative empowerment. In addition to territorial aspirations, Gorkhas are also seeking constitutional and cultural recognition within India. This includes protection of their language, customs, and distinct ethnic identity within the broader national framework.
2. Another longstanding issue is the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for various Gorkha communities such as Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang, and others. The recognition, they believe, would help in advancing social justice, improving access to education, and securing affirmative action benefits. Despite repeated assurances from the central government, the process for granting ST status has seen negligible progress, further aggravating the community's discontent.
3. The Agnipath scheme, introduced by the Indian government in 2022, has also become a point of contention. This scheme allows Indian youth to serve in the armed forces for a period of four years. However, it has generated concerns among Nepali Gorkhas due to its lack of pension provisions and long-term job security. Nepal views the scheme as a violation of the 1947 Tripartite Agreement between India, Nepal, and the United Kingdom, which historically guaranteed permanent service and pension benefits for Gorkha soldiers.

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4. Geopolitical concerns have added to the complexity, with reports, such as those by the Observer Research Foundation, indicating growing interest from China in recruiting Gorkhas. This has heightened the urgency for diplomatic resolution through high-level talks between India and Nepal.

Agneepath Scheme Overview

The Agneepath scheme is a central government initiative launched in 2022, allowing Indian youth to join the Indian Army for a fixed four-year tenure. Recruits under this program are designated as Agniveers (translated as Fire-Warriors), marking a new rank in the Indian armed forces. While the scheme is intended to modernize military recruitment, it has faced criticism for bypassing traditional structures that included longer service durations, pensions, and other post-service benefits. Critics argue that there was insufficient consultation and public debate before its implementation.

1947 Tripartite Agreement

This historic agreement between India, Nepal, and the United Kingdom regulates the military service of Gorkha soldiers recruited from Nepal. It provided for permanent service and pension benefits, terms which are now perceived to be threatened under the Agnipath model. The evolving situation calls for renewed diplomatic engagement to uphold commitments made under the original agreement.

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Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025

Why in News?

The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 was passed by the Parliament and has received the assent of the President. This Act amends the Waqf Act, 1995, enabling the government to regulate Waqf properties and settle related disputes. The purpose of the amendment is to improve the efficiency of Waqf Boards, update the definition of Waqf, streamline property registration processes, and increase the use of technology in record management.



What is Waqf?

Waqf refers to an endowment made by a Muslim for charitable or religious purposes such as the construction of mosques, schools, hospitals, or other public institutions. It is an inalienable endowment, meaning the property involved cannot be sold, gifted, inherited, or encumbered. Waqf entails the permanent dedication of movable or immovable property for religious, pious, or charitable purposes as recognized by Muslim law. The act of waqf implies the endowment of property to God for the benefit of the community, particularly the needy.

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Proceeds from Waqf properties are typically used to support educational institutions, graveyards, mosques, and shelter homes. These properties are regulated by the Waqf Act, 1995 and managed by a **mutawali (supervisor)**. Unlike trusts under the Indian Trusts Act, 1882, **Waqfs are perpetual, religious/charitable in nature, and cannot be dissolved.** The Central Waqf Council (CWC), **established in 1964, oversees and advises state Waqf Boards across India.**

Waqf Boards are currently considered **the third-largest landholder in India**, after the Railways and Defence department. There are 8.72 lakh registered Waqf properties covering more than 38 lakh acres, generating around Rs 200 crore in revenue annually. Once designated, a Waqf property becomes non-transferable and is perpetually held as a charitable act toward God.

Key Provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025

The Act introduces several reforms:

- **Separation of Trusts from Waqf:** Muslim-created trusts under any existing law will no longer be treated as Waqf, allowing individuals to retain control over their private trusts.
- **Eligibility for Dedication:** Only Muslims who have been practicing for at least five years can dedicate property as Waqf.
- **Clarification on Property Status:** Properties already registered with Waqf Boards will remain under their purview unless disputed or identified as government land.
- **Women's Rights in Family Waqf:** Women must receive their inheritance prior to any Waqf dedication. Special provisions are included for widows, divorced women, and orphans.
- **Ending Arbitrary Claims:** Section 40 of the original Waqf Act, 1995 has been deleted, curbing the arbitrary declaration of properties as Waqf by Waqf Boards.

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Need for the Amendment

The principle of "once a Waqf, always a Waqf" has led to numerous legal disputes due to the irrevocability of Waqf status. For instance, the issue of ownership over islands in Bet Dwarka has involved complex litigation. Additionally, the 1995 Act failed to prevent widespread mismanagement and encroachment on Waqf lands, necessitating legislative reform.

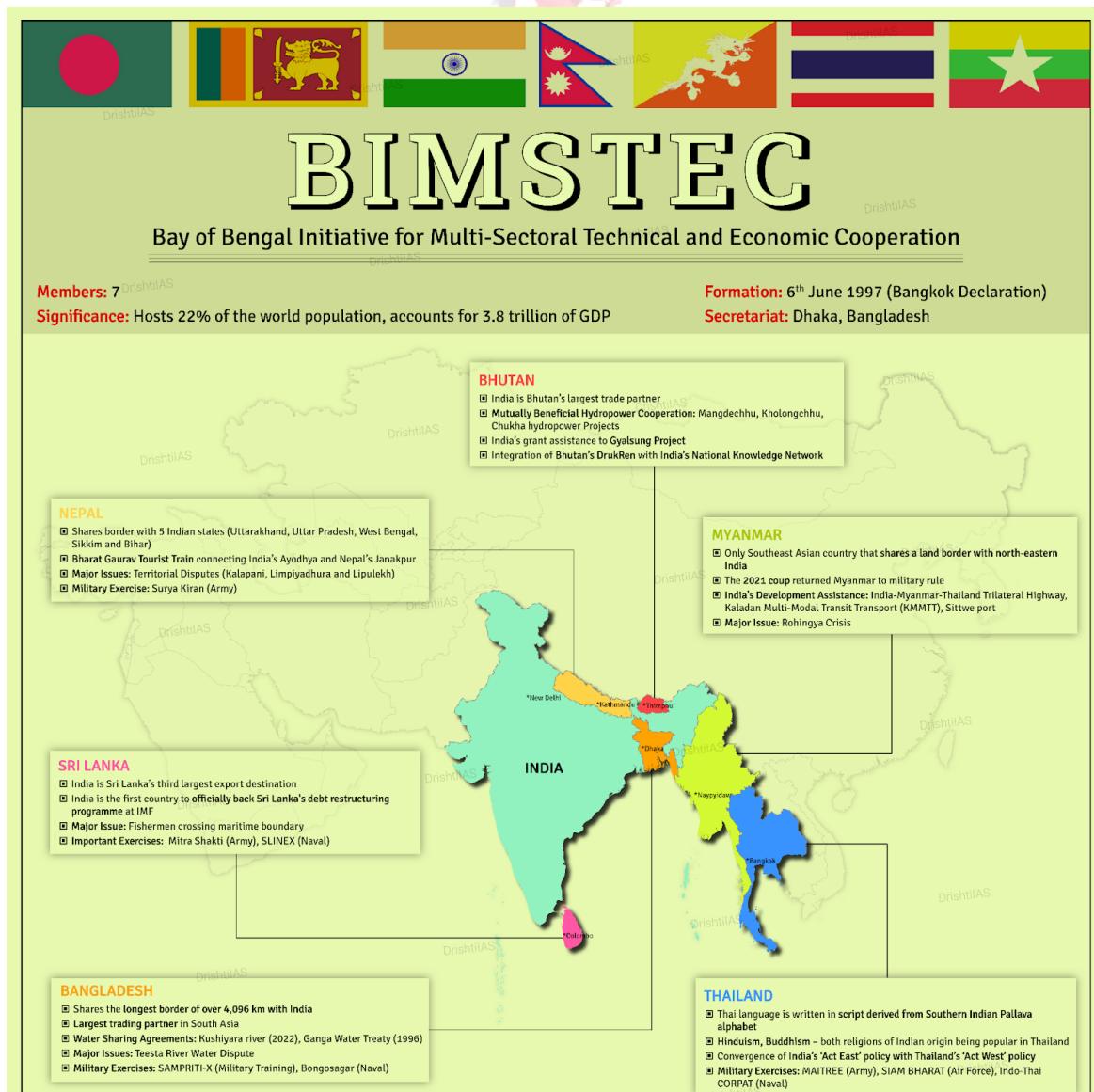
Concerns Regarding the Amendment

Critics argue that the amendment increases government control over Waqf matters, thereby reducing the autonomy of Waqf Boards. The deletion of Section 40 transfers the power to determine the Waqf status of properties to government officials, a move perceived as politically motivated. There are also concerns about the dilution of Muslim representation on Waqf Boards. Allowing non-Muslim officials to serve on these boards may infringe on the community's constitutional right under Article 26 to manage its own religious affairs.

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6th BIMSTEC Summit – India's Strategic Engagement



Why in News?

The Indian Prime Minister participated in the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, hosted by Thailand under its chairmanship. Held under the theme "BIMSTEC: Prosperous, Resilient, and Open," the summit focused on strengthening regional cooperation and addressing pressing transnational

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challenges. On the sidelines of the summit, India and Thailand also announced that they would elevate their bilateral relationship to a Strategic Partnership.

Key Highlights of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit

The summit resulted in the adoption of the Summit Declaration and the Bangkok Vision 2030, a strategic roadmap that emphasizes economic integration, enhanced connectivity, and joint efforts in infrastructure development and technological cooperation to boost regional prosperity and resilience.

India made significant announcements to bolster BIMSTEC's institutional and operational capacities:

- Establishment of BIMSTEC Centres of Excellence in India, focusing on:
 - Disaster Management
 - Sustainable Maritime Transport
 - Traditional Medicine
 - Research and Training in Agriculture
- India also proposed an initiative to link its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with BIMSTEC countries' payment systems, aiming to enhance financial interoperability in the region.
- The operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru was announced, to streamline energy cooperation and integration.
- A pilot study on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) was proposed, aimed at enhancing governance and public service delivery through scalable tech infrastructure across BIMSTEC nations.

Additionally, India introduced the **BODHI Program (BIMSTEC for Organized Development of Human Resource Infrastructure)**, a capacity-building initiative for training, scholarships, and skill development across professional sectors in the region.

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What is BIMSTEC?

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)

is a regional organization that brings together seven member countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Founded in 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration, BIMSTEC originally started as BIST-EC, comprising Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Myanmar's inclusion led to its renaming as BIMST-EC, and with the joining of Nepal and Bhutan in 2004, it was finally renamed BIMSTEC.

Its primary objective is to promote multi-sectoral cooperation in technical and economic fields, particularly among nations surrounding the Bay of Bengal.

Significance

The BIMSTEC grouping collectively represents 1.7 billion people (about 22% of the global population) and a combined GDP of approximately USD 5.2 trillion (2023). The bloc holds strategic importance for regional economic integration, connectivity, and sustainable development, especially in light of shifting global geopolitical alignments and trade dynamics.

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New GI Tags for Chapata Chilli and Kannadippaya

Why in News?

Telangana's Warangal Chapata Chilli (also known as Tomato Chilli) and Kerala's tribal handicraft Kannadippaya have been granted the **Geographical Indication (GI)** tag, further enriching India's growing GI registry. With these additions, the total number of registered GI products in India has surpassed 600.



About the Geographical Indication (GI) Tag

A GI tag is a name or sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation due to that origin. The tag serves as an indicator that the product comes from a distinct region and carries specific characteristics linked to that place.

GI tags are primarily granted to agricultural, natural, or manufactured products, including handicrafts and industrial goods, that originate from a defined geographical territory. These

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tags often convey an assurance of quality and distinctiveness directly linked to their place of origin.

Key features of GI tags include:

- Only authorised users or residents of the geographical region are permitted to use the registered name.
- GI protection helps prevent unauthorised use or imitation of the product by third parties.
- The GI tag is valid for 10 years, after which it can be renewed.

The GI tag also provides legal safeguards and fosters export promotion, particularly for artisanal and indigenous goods.

Legal and Institutional Framework

- **Administered by:** Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- **Legal basis in India:** Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999
- **International framework:** Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), under the World Trade Organization (WTO)
- **GI Registry location:** Chennai

National Target

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal recently set a national target of registering 10,000 GI products by 2030, up from the current tally of 605.

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Chandrayaan-3's ChaSTE and ISRO's Future Lunar Plans

CHANDRAYAAN 3

India's 3rd lunar mission; a successful attempt at achieving a soft landing on lunar south

BRIEF HISTORY

Lunar Mission	Aim	Launch Vehicle	Success
Chandrayaan 1 (2008)	Create a 3D atlas of moon & Mineralogical mapping	PSLV – C11	Detection of water and hydroxyl on lunar surface
Chandrayaan 2 (2019)	Exploring lunar south pole	GSLV MkIII-M1	Lander and rover crashed but orbiter successfully collected data

COMPONENTS

- Lander - **Vikram**; Rover - **Pragyan** (same as Chandrayaan 2)
 - Both designed to last for 14 days; not supposed to come back to the earth
- Spectro-polarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth (**SHAPe**)
 - An experimental payload in propulsion module
 - Study spectro-polarimetric signatures of Earth (near-infrared wavelength range)

ASPECTS TO STUDY

- Lunar quakes
- Thermal properties of lunar surface
- Changes in plasma near the surface
- Accurately measuring distance b/w Earth and the moon

MISSION LIFE

- 1 lunar day (~14 Earth days)

LAUNCH VEHICLE

Why Chandrayaan 3 Succeeded?

- A "failure-based design", unlike the "success-based design" of Chandrayaan-2
- Even if all the sensors failed and engines stopped, **Vikram was sure to make the landing**
- Provision of **multiple attempts** for landing if attempt 1 failed
- Developed accordingly to **rule out the scenario of crash landing**
 - Expanded landing area for more flexibility to land safely
 - Equipped with more fuel to enable longer-distance travel

Importance of Lunar South Pole

- Vastly different, more **challenging terrain** compared to lunar equatorial region
- Potential repositories of valuable **information about early Solar System**
- Impact **future deep space exploration** significantly
- Water may be concentrated** in the moon's southern hemisphere

Why in News?

India's **Chandrayaan-3** mission achieved a scientific milestone when its onboard payload, **ChaSTE (Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment)**, became the first instrument ever to measure subsurface temperature near the Moon's south pole.

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About ChaSTE

ChaSTE was deployed by the Vikram lander following Chandrayaan-3's successful soft landing in August 2023. It is equipped with a needle-like probe fitted with 10 temperature sensors, each placed 1 cm apart along its length. Instead of a hammering deployment method, it used a rotation-based mechanism to gradually descend into the lunar regolith.

The probe successfully reached a depth of 10 cm and collected data until September 2023. The thermal readings suggested a greater-than-expected presence of water ice near the lunar south pole—an insight of significant importance for planning long-term missions and potential lunar habitats. The effectiveness of ChaSTE was credited to its rotating deployment technique, which proved more successful than the hammering methods used by previous missions.

What are ISRO's Future Expeditions?

Chandrayaan-4: Sample Return Mission

Chandrayaan-4 is currently under conceptual development as a possible sample return mission. If realized, it would be the natural successor to Chandrayaan-2 and 3, allowing India to bring back actual lunar material for terrestrial analysis. This step would greatly enhance our understanding of the Moon's geological history and composition.

LUPEX: Lunar Polar Exploration Mission

LUPEX, short for Lunar Polar Exploration, is a collaborative venture between ISRO and JAXA (Japan). The mission aims to explore the Moon's permanently shadowed polar regions, which are considered prime locations for discovering stable water ice. LUPEX will not only probe these dark zones but also assess their suitability for sustainable lunar outposts.

NISAR: Earth Observation Collaboration

NISAR (NASA-ISRO SAR Mission) is a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite observatory jointly developed by NASA and ISRO. It will use advanced radar imaging to monitor changes in Earth's

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surface—including glaciers, forest biomass, and land subsidence—playing a crucial role in disaster response and resource management.

About ISRO

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), established in 1969, functions under the Department of Space (DoS) and focuses on harnessing space technology for national development. Its mission spans **communication, broadcasting, weather monitoring, navigation, and earth observation**, alongside ambitious goals in planetary exploration.

As of January 13, 2025, **Dr. V. Narayanan**, Distinguished Scientist (Apex Grade), has taken charge as the Secretary of DoS, Chairman of the Space Commission, and Chairman of ISRO.

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De-Extinction Breakthrough

A US-based biotechnology company, Colossal Biosciences, has announced the successful birth of three genetically modified grey wolf pups—Romulus, Remus, and Khaleesi—engineered to resemble the extinct dire wolf (*Aenocyon dirus*). This marks a significant development in the emerging field of de-extinction science.

What is De-Extinction?

De-extinction refers to the scientific process of reviving extinct species using their genetic material. It typically involves genome reconstruction through ancient DNA sequencing and gene editing of a closely related living species to express the traits of the extinct one. Cloning and assisted reproduction technologies are often used to complete the process.

Scientific Process: How Was It Done?

Colossal Biosciences followed a multi-stage approach:

- **DNA Extraction:** Researchers extracted DNA from two ancient dire wolf remains—a 13,000-year-old tooth and a 72,000-year-old skull. The petrous bone in the skull, known for its exceptional DNA preservation, played a key role.
- **Genome Reconstruction:** The extracted DNA was sequenced to reconstruct the complete genome of the dire wolf. Comparative genomics showed that grey wolves shared 99.5% of their DNA with dire wolves, making them ideal genetic templates.
- **Gene Editing:** Scientists used advanced tools to introduce 20 unique edits across 14 genes in the grey wolf genome. These edits were aimed at replicating key dire wolf traits:
 - Light-colored coat
 - Increased hair length
 - Distinct coat patterns
 - Larger body size
 - Enhanced musculature

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- **Surrogacy and Birth:** The modified embryos were implanted into domestic dog surrogates, which successfully carried and delivered the genetically altered pups.

This experiment is a significant proof of concept for de-extinction efforts and may pave the way for similar initiatives involving other extinct species.

About the Dire Wolf

The dire wolf, or *Aenocyon dirus*, was a massive prehistoric canine species that once roamed across southern Canada and the United States, becoming extinct around 13,000 years ago. Although similar in appearance to modern grey wolves (*Canis lupus*), dire wolves were larger, had thicker white coats, and preyed on megafauna like bison, horses, and mammoths. Their extinction is believed to be the result of a combination of prey scarcity and human interference.



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India's Maternal Mortality Status

Why in News?

A report released by the United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group (MMEIG), titled "*Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000–2023*", has highlighted India as the second-largest contributor to global maternal deaths after Nigeria.

About MMEIG-

MMEIG comprises multiple global organizations: the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank Group, and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. It works to produce reliable estimates and monitor trends in maternal mortality worldwide.

About UNICEF-

UNICEF, originally the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, officially United Nations Children's Fund since 1953, is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

About UNFPA-

The United Nations Population Fund, formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, is a UN agency aimed at improving reproductive and maternal health worldwide.

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Trends in Maternal Mortality

India recorded 19,000 maternal deaths in 2023, contributing to 7.2% of global maternal mortality, making it the second-highest after Nigeria. It was followed closely by the Democratic Republic of Congo (7.2%) and Pakistan (4.1%).

Despite the numbers, India has made substantial progress in reducing maternal mortality. The country's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has fallen sharply:

- From 384 in 2000 to 103 in 2020, and
- Further to 80 in 2023,

marking an 86% reduction since 1990, which is well above the global average decline of 48%.

Global Maternal Mortality Trends

Globally, maternal deaths declined from 443,000 in 2000 to 260,000 in 2023. Correspondingly, the global MMR fell from 328 to 197 per 100,000 live births—a 40% reduction.

To achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.1, which aims to reduce global MMR to below 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, countries must now sustain an Annual Rate of Reduction (ARR) of 14.8% from 2024 onward.

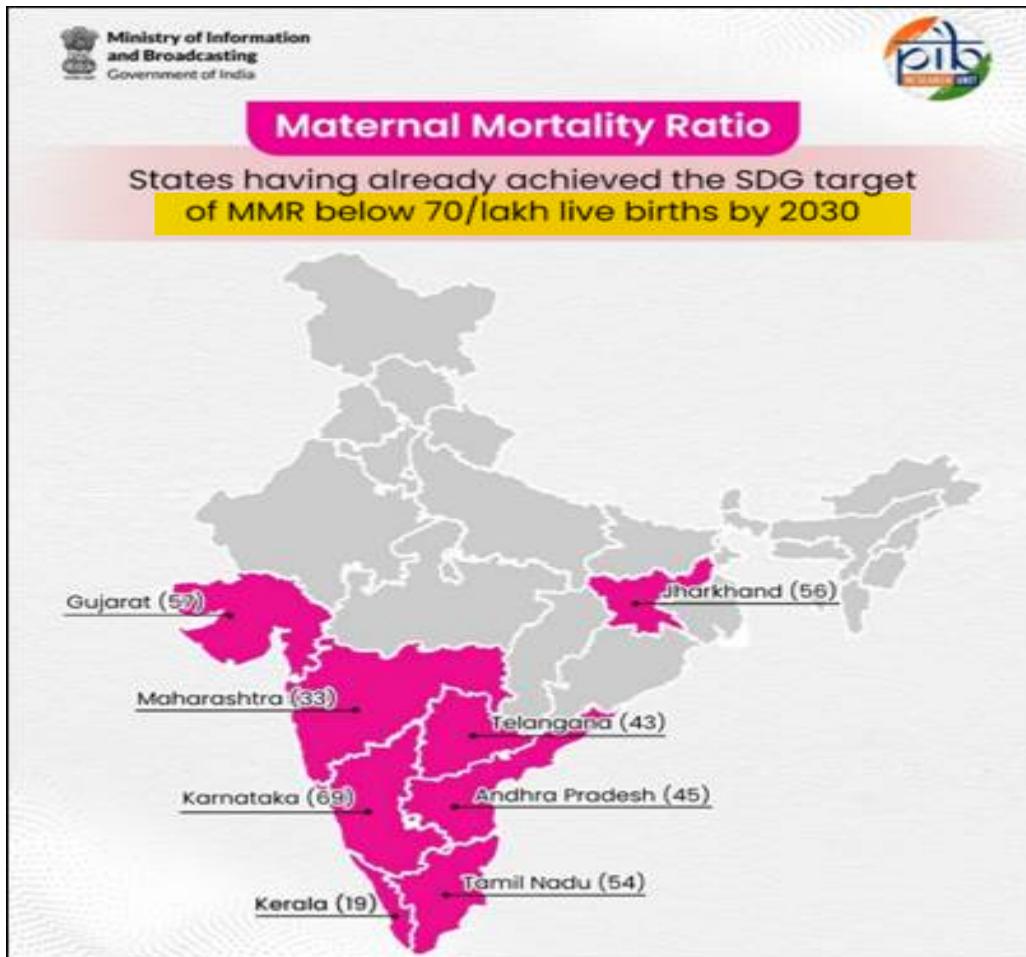
Understanding Maternal Death and MMR

- Maternal Death refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy or within 42 days of its end, due to pregnancy-related causes, excluding accidental or incidental causes.
- Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births during a specific period.

MMR is a critical indicator of maternal healthcare quality and reflects access to timely medical services during pregnancy and childbirth.

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India's Regional Disparities

While states like Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu have achieved MMRs below 70, several others continue to lag behind the national average:

- **Assam:** 195
- **Madhya Pradesh:** 173
- **Uttar Pradesh:** 167
- **Bihar:** 118

Read also- Anganwadis, Poshan Vatikas, and POSHAN

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Ottawa Landmine Convention

Several NATO members—Poland, Finland, and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania)—have announced their withdrawal from the 1997 Ottawa Convention. This decision comes amid heightened security concerns following the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. These countries argue that a future ceasefire could give Russia an opportunity to re-arm, posing increased security threats along NATO's eastern flank.

Key Features:

- Landmines are concealed explosive devices activated by proximity or pressure.
- Anti-personnel mines specifically target individuals, including combatants and civilians.
- Signatories are required to destroy existing stockpiles within four years of accession.
- Countries must clear mined areas and assist victims.

What is the Ottawa Convention (1997)?

The Ottawa Convention, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty, is an international agreement that prohibits the use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

Objective: The convention seeks to reduce civilian harm and long-term humanitarian damage caused by landmines, which often remain active for years after conflicts conclude.

Adoption and Scope:

- Finalized at the Diplomatic Conference in Oslo on 18 September 1997.
- Came into force on 1 March 1999.
- Bans only anti-personnel landmines; anti-vehicle mines remain outside its purview.
- Currently includes 164 countries.
- Notable non-signatories include the United States, Russia, and India.

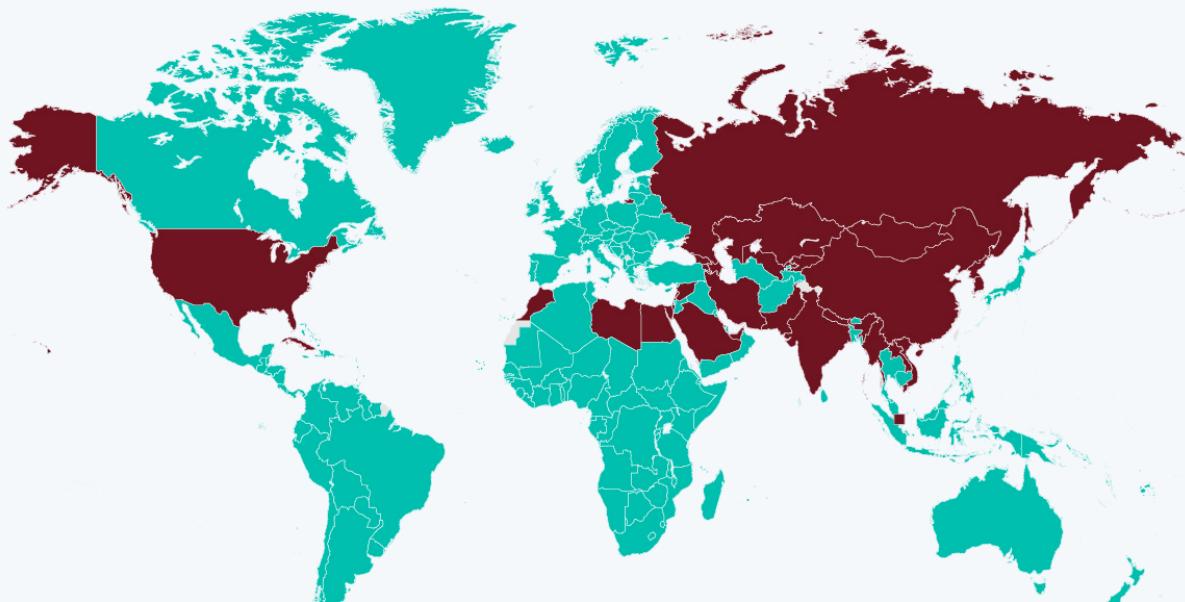
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Major Powers Among Non-Signatories of Mine Ban Treaty

Countries which have/have not signed and ratified the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty of 1999

■ Parties to the treaty ■ Non-signatories



2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions-

This separate international treaty prohibits all use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of cluster munitions. These are weapons that disperse multiple smaller submunitions (bomblets) over a wide area, increasing the risk of civilian casualties and post-conflict hazards.

- The treaty currently has 112 state parties and 12 signatories.
- Lithuania recently withdrew from this convention as well, aligning its military policy with its strategic threat assessments.
- India, along with the US, Russia, China, Ukraine, and Israel, has not signed the treaty.

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US-China Tariff War Escalates

China has raised tariffs on US goods from 84% to 125% in response to US President Donald Trump's decision to hike tariffs on Chinese imports to 145%. While a 90-day suspension of reciprocal tariffs was announced for most countries—including India—China was notably excluded. These developments have heightened global concerns over economic instability and intensified the ongoing trade conflict between the world's two largest economies.

What Factors Led to the Intensifying Tariffs Between the US and China?

A significant factor behind the tariff escalation is the persistent **US trade deficit with China**, which stood at USD 295 billion in 2024. The US perceives this deficit as a sign of disadvantage in global trade and sees China's trade surplus as strategically concerning.

A trade deficit occurs when a country imports more goods and services than it exports, resulting in a negative balance of trade. This means the total value of imports is higher than the total value of exports over a specific period. In simpler terms, a country is buying more from other countries than it's selling to them.

Other contributing factors include:

- **Intellectual Property Disputes:** The US has long accused China of intellectual property theft and forced technology transfers.
- **Protection of Domestic Industries:** The raised tariffs aim to shield American producers from unfair foreign competition.

China's response came after the US tariffs on Chinese imports increased to 145%, reinforcing a long-standing trade dispute that reflects deeper strategic mistrust.

Supply Chain Security

Both nations are actively trying to reduce mutual dependence, especially in areas like:

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- Semiconductors, Rare Earth Metals and Electric Vehicle (EV) components

In response, the US has:

- Enacted the **CHIPS Act**
- Strengthened **India-US COMPACT Initiative**
- Formed trade partnerships with **Vietnam**

The US-India COMPACT (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) for the 21st Century was launched by President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The CHIPS Act prohibits funding recipients from expanding semiconductor manufacturing in China and countries defined by US law as posing a national security threat to the United States.

Beyond trade, the conflict encompasses tensions over:

- **Taiwan, South China Sea and Technological dominance** in fields such as Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing

Role of WTO

The World Trade Organization (WTO) regulates tariffs under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Member countries are committed to observing tariff ceilings and trade discipline. The WTO also offers a dispute resolution mechanism to determine the legality of imposed tariffs.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was an international trade agreement signed in 1947, primarily aimed at reducing trade barriers and promoting global trade. It primarily focused on goods, and while it wasn't a formal organization, it functioned as one, negotiating and implementing trade rules. The GATT was eventually replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

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About Tariffs

A **tariff** is a government-imposed tax on imported goods or services.

Types of Tariffs

- **Specific Tariff:** Fixed amount per unit (e.g., \$5 per ton of steel)
- **Ad Valorem Tariff:** Percentage of product value (e.g., 10% of a car's value)

Purpose of Tariffs

- **Revenue Generation**
- **Protectionism** to support domestic producers
- **Retaliation and Strategic Influence** to pressure or negotiate with trade partners

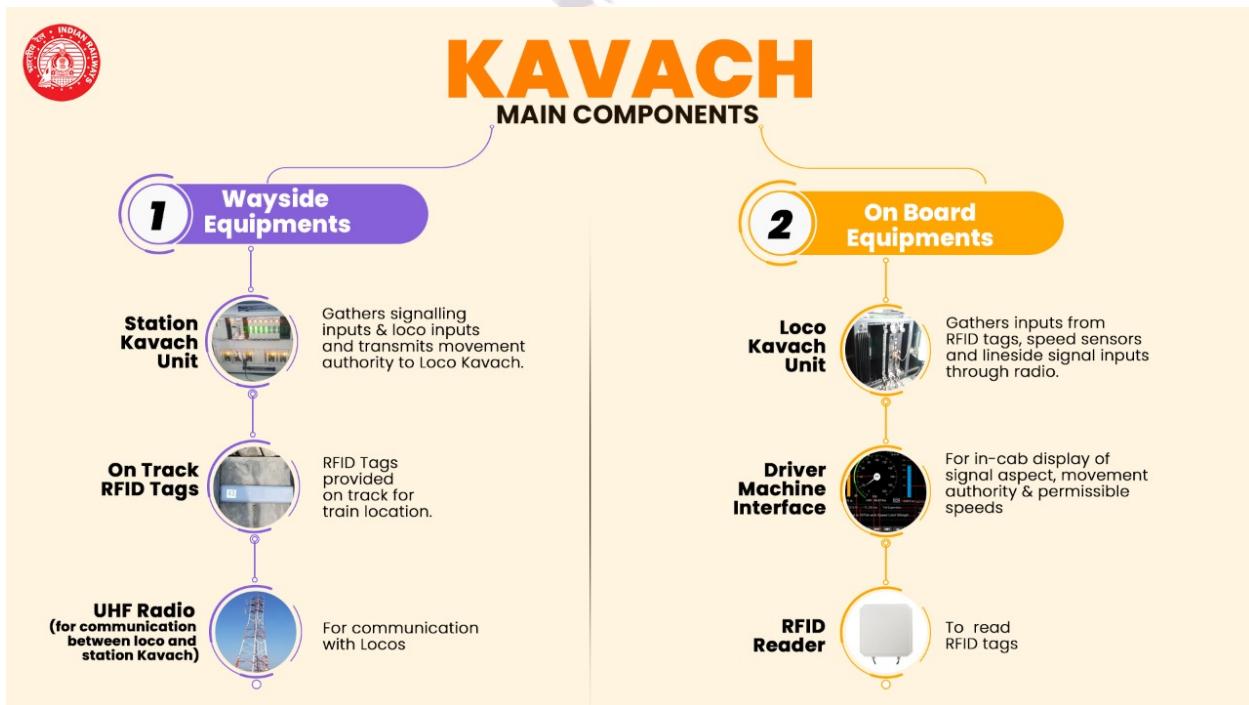
Other Trade Tools

- **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Quotas, licensing rules, anti-dumping duties
- **Sanctions:** Broader political or economic restrictions (e.g., on Iran, North Korea)

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KAVACH 5.0



Why in News?

The Union Minister for Railways has announced the implementation of **Kavach 5.0**, India's upgraded Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system aimed at improving safety across the national railway network. The earlier version, **Kavach 4.0**, is currently under phased deployment across Indian Railways.

Kavach 5.0 will be first deployed and launched in Mumbai.

What is Kavach?

Kavach is India's indigenous cab signaling train control system developed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in collaboration with three Indian vendors. It serves as the **National ATP System**, designed to prevent collisions by automatically applying brakes if the loco pilot fails to respond.

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Kavach was adopted by Ministry of Railways as the National ATP System in July 2020. Development of Kavach began in the year 2011 as an open architecture system. In 2014, field trials commenced. First field trial experiments on passenger trains was done in February 2016.

Current Status and Challenges

- **Coverage:** Only 1,500 km of the railway network is currently equipped with Kavach, despite the national network spanning over 68,000 km.
- **Cost:** Deployment costs are approximately ₹50 lakh per kilometer for trackside infrastructure and ₹70 lakh per train.
- **Target:** Indian Railways aims to expand coverage to 6,000 km by 2025, focusing on key corridors like Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah.
- **Capacity Growth:** Present installation capacity is 1,500 km annually, with expectations to increase to 5,000 km per year by 2026.

About Indian Railways

Indian Railways operates the **world's fourth-largest railway network**, extending over **65,000 km** and projected to account for **40% of global rail activity by 2050**, making it a cornerstone in India's sustainable transport ambitions.

- It functions under the **Ministry of Railways**, headed by Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**.
- As of 2024, Indian Railways has **17 operational zones** divided into **68 divisions**.
- Each zone is led by a **General Manager**, and divisions are headed by **Divisional Railway Managers (DRMs)**.
- A proposal for an **18th zone**, named the **South Coast Railway Zone**, was introduced in 2023 but is yet to become operational.

Historical Note- The first passenger train in India ran on **16 April 1853**, covering a distance of **34 km** between **Bori Bunder (Bombay) and Thane**.

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Telangana Implements SC Sub-Categorisation Under New Law



Telangana has become the first state in India to implement sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) with the operationalisation of the Telangana Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act, 2025.

This development follows the 2024 Supreme Court judgment in *State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh*, which upheld the constitutionality of sub-classifying SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

What is the Telangana Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act, 2025?

The Act aims to restructure SC reservations in Telangana by sub-categorising Scheduled Castes based on socio-economic and educational backwardness. This approach seeks to ensure a more equitable distribution of reservation benefits among SC communities.

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The Shamim Akhtar Commission was tasked with studying intra-SC disparities. It received over 8,600 representations from different SC groups and considered multiple indicators including:

- Population distribution
- Literacy rates
- Employment and education access
- Financial aid received
- Political representation

Currently, SC reservations in Telangana are based on the 2011 Census, which recorded SC population at 17.5%. The government has expressed intent to consider raising the reservation ceiling after the release of updated Census data.

What is Sub-Categorisation Within Castes?

Sub-categorisation refers to the process of forming sub-groups within SC, ST, or OBC categories for more targeted reservation benefits. It addresses intra-category inequalities, ensuring that the most deprived sub-groups within larger caste blocks receive adequate support and representation.

Legal History of Sub-Categorisation

Several states like **Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu** have attempted to introduce sub-categorisation, often encountering legal challenges.

- In the E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh (2004) case, the Supreme Court ruled that only Parliament has the authority to create and notify SC/ST lists and that sub-classification by states was unconstitutional.
- In contrast, the State of Punjab vs Davinder Singh (2020) ruling by a five-judge bench held that states could determine the quantum of reservation benefits for different SCs/STs already in the list, without altering the list itself.

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Due to this contradiction, the matter was referred to a larger bench. In 2024, a seven-judge Constitution Bench overruled *Chinnaiah* and upheld the right of states to sub-classify SCs/STs based on empirical data and historical disadvantage.

Constitutional Provisions Supporting Sub-Categorisation

- **Article 14:** Allows for reasonable classification to achieve substantive equality. Any sub-classification must be based on *intelligible differentia* and have a *rational nexus* to the objective.
- **Article 15(4) and 15(5):** Empower the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes, including SCs and STs, particularly in the context of education and public institutions.

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52nd Chief Justice of India



Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna has recommended Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai to be appointed as the 52nd Chief Justice of India. Justice Gavai is currently the second-most senior judge in the Supreme Court and is set to become the second Dalit CJI, after Justice K.G. Balakrishnan (2007).

Key Judgments by Justice B.R. Gavai

- Part of the Bench that upheld the 2016 demonetisation.
- Member of the Constitution Bench that upheld the abrogation of Article 370.
- Played a crucial role in the Electoral Bonds case (Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India), which declared the scheme unconstitutional.
- In the State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024) case, he advocated the application of the creamy layer principle to SCs/STs to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits.

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Chief Justice of India: Appointment and Tenure

- The CJI is appointed by the President of India under Article 124(2) of the Constitution.
- Appointment is typically based on seniority, although this is a convention, not a constitutional mandate.
- To be eligible, one must:
 - Be a citizen of India, and
 - Have served as a High Court judge for at least 5 years, or
 - Practised as an advocate in a High Court for 10 years, or
 - Be, in the President's opinion, a distinguished jurist.
- A CJI can only be removed by the President following a special majority vote in both Houses of Parliament.

About the Supreme Court of India

- Established on 28 January 1950, under Article 124 of the Constitution.
- It is the highest constitutional court, with the power of judicial review.
- It has a sanctioned strength of 34 judges (1 Chief Justice and 33 other judges).
- The Supreme Court's rulings are binding on all courts within the territory of India.
- India follows a single, unified judiciary structured into three tiers: Supreme Court, High Courts, and Subordinate Courts.

The Collegium System in Judicial Appointments

The Collegium System governs the appointment and transfer of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts. It is a judicial innovation that is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution but has evolved through key Supreme Court judgments.

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Genesis of the Collegium System

- **First Judges Case (S.P. Gupta v. Union of India, 1981):** Consultation does not mean concurrence.
- **Second Judges Case (Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India, 1993):** Overruled the first case. The CJI's advice is binding on the President and must be based on consultation with two senior-most judges.
- **Third Judges Case (1998):** Expanded the collegium to include the CJI and four senior-most judges. Even if two judges dissent, the recommendation cannot be sent forward.

Attempt to Replace the Collegium: NJAC

- The 99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2014 established the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to replace the collegium.
- The Supreme Court struck down the NJAC as unconstitutional, citing that executive involvement violated the basic structure doctrine, particularly the independence of the judiciary.

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UK Supreme Court Ruling on the Legal Definition of 'Woman'

Why in News?

The United Kingdom (UK) Supreme Court has ruled that the legal definition of a "woman" under the Equality Act, 2010 is based strictly on biological sex, marking a major development in the ongoing legal and societal discourse around gender identity.

UK Supreme Court Ruling

The Court clarified that under the Equality Act, the definition of sex is binary and anchored in biological criteria. This ruling establishes that:

- Individuals not born as biological females cannot claim the legal protections reserved for women under the Act, even if they have obtained a Gender Recognition Certificate.
- The Act's protections for "women" apply only to biological females.
- Transgender women are not included under this legal definition of women for the purposes of sex-based protections.

However, the Court reaffirmed that trans women continue to be protected under the Equality Act's separate provision for 'gender reassignment', which recognizes them as a vulnerable minority.

Biological Sex vs. Gender

- **Biological Sex** refers to physical characteristics such as chromosomes (XX for females, XY for males), reproductive organs, and hormonal profiles.
- **Gender**, on the other hand, is a **social construct** influenced by cultural roles, behaviors, and stereotypes. It may or may not align with an individual's biological sex.

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How Has the Supreme Court of India Addressed Gender and Sexuality?

- **National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India (2014):** The Supreme Court recognized the **right to self-identify gender**, affirming that gender identity transcends biological sex and that individuals have the right to be identified as **male, female, or transgender**.
- **Puttaswamy Case (2017):** The Court held that **sexual orientation** is protected under the **right to privacy**, declaring that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates fundamental rights to **dignity and equality**.
- **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018):** The Court **decriminalized homosexuality** by reading down **Section 377** of the Indian Penal Code (now Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita), thereby affirming the right to consensual same-sex relationships.

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Pope Francis Passes Away – The Election of Pope Leo XIV



Why in News?

Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio), the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, has passed away. His death marks a historic transition for the Catholic Church, which has now entered the *sede vacante* period—an interregnum that lasts until a new Pope is elected.

On May 8, the College of Cardinals elected Robert Francis Prevost as the 267th Pope, who will now be known as Pope Leo XIV. He becomes the first American Pontiff in the history of the Church. The decision was signaled by the traditional white smoke rising above the Sistine Chapel.

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About the Pope and the Papacy

The Pope is the Bishop of Rome and the visible head of the Roman Catholic Church, which views Jesus Christ as its invisible head. The Pope resides in Vatican City and holds supreme spiritual and administrative authority over the global Catholic community. He is also known as the Supreme Pontiff, and his office is referred to as the Papacy.

Election of the Pope

- The Pope is elected by the College of Cardinals through a Papal Conclave.
- The conclave is governed by strict protocols laid out in the apostolic constitution Universi Dominici Gregis (UDG).
- Only cardinals under the age of 80 are eligible to vote.
- A two-thirds majority is required to elect a new Pope, ensuring a broad consensus.
- While cardinals over 80 cannot vote, they do participate in pre-conclave deliberations and can influence the electoral atmosphere.

The Conclave Process

The conclave is marked by ritual, secrecy, and diplomacy. It is held in complete isolation within Vatican City, particularly within the Sistine Chapel, to prevent external interference. The voting process is designed to be a spiritual and reflective act, but it also involves alliances, strategic negotiation, and influence from senior cardinals known as ‘great electors’

About Vatican City

Vatican City is the world's smallest sovereign state, landlocked within Rome, Italy. It became independent through the Lateran Treaty of 1929. Governed by the Pope, Vatican City maintains its own postal service, financial system, and internal governance mechanisms.

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India's 5-Point Action Plan Against Pakistan After Pahalgam Terror Attack



The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved a five-point strategic response against Pakistan following the terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Baisaran valley (Pahalgam), which claimed 26 civilian lives. The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, claimed responsibility for the attack.

TRF was designated a terrorist organization by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2023 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

Background on TRF

The TRF emerged in 2020 following the elimination of top LeT leadership in 2018 and the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019. It has been involved in terror recruitment, cross-border infiltration, and weapons smuggling from Pakistan.

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India's 5-Point Action Plan

- **Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT):** India has suspended the 1960 IWT until Pakistan ceases support for terrorism. This marks a shift in strategic thinking, using control over water as leverage.
- **Closure of Attari-Wagah Check Post:** The Integrated Check Post at Attari, Punjab has been shut, suspending all civilian and trade movement. Only individuals with valid documents already in transit are allowed to return by 1 May 2025.
- **Cancellation of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) for Pakistan:** All SVES visas for Pakistani nationals have been declared void. The scheme, launched in 1992, exempted select dignitaries from visa requirements for intra-SAARC travel.
- **Expulsion of Pakistani Military Advisors:** Defence, Naval, and Air attachés from Pakistan in New Delhi have been declared persona non grata. India will also recall its own military advisors from Islamabad.
- **Reduction in Diplomatic Personnel:** India will reduce the staff at its High Commission in Islamabad from 55 to 30 by 1 May 2025, significantly downgrading diplomatic engagement.

Pakistan's Response

- **Suspension of Bilateral Agreements:** Pakistan has threatened to suspend all bilateral agreements, including the 1972 Simla Agreement.
- **Trade Suspension:** All trade, including via third countries, has been suspended. India-Pakistan trade had reached USD 1.2 billion in 2024—a 127% rise from 2023—but this decision reverses recent progress.
- **Condemnation of IWT Suspension:** Pakistan termed the IWT suspension unacceptable and warned that any diversion of water would be viewed as an “act of war.”

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About the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

The CCS is chaired by the Prime Minister and oversees key decisions on defence, national security, and related appointments. It includes senior ministers and is assisted by the National Security Advisor (NSA). The current NSA is Ajit Doval, who holds Cabinet rank.

About the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)

SVES was launched in 1992 to facilitate intra-regional travel by exempting certain categories of SAARC dignitaries from visa requirements. It covers 24 categories, including judges, officials, businesspeople, journalists, and sportspersons. The visa is generally valid for one year and reviewed regularly by immigration authorities of member states.

About SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established on 8 December 1985 to enhance regional cooperation. The Secretariat is in Kathmandu, Nepal. SAARC has eight members: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Line of Control (LoC) and Simla Agreement

- **LoC:** The de facto military boundary between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir. It was redesignated from the Ceasefire Line to the Line of Control after the

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Simla Agreement.

- **Simla Agreement (1972):** Signed between Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after the 1971 war. It aimed to resolve disputes bilaterally and maintain peace.

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

Signed in 1960 and brokered by the World Bank, the IWT allocated:

- **Western rivers (Indus, Chenab, Jhelum):** To Pakistan
- **Eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej):** To India

India can use the western rivers for non-consumptive purposes. The treaty also mandates a **Permanent Indus Commission**, which must meet annually for information exchange and conflict resolution.

Operation Sindoor

India launched Operation Sindoor in retaliation for the April 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack, targeting 9 terrorist infrastructure sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK).

- Wing Commander Vyomika Singh and Colonel Sofiya Qureshi led the Indian government's briefing about the operation.

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- **About:**

Operation Sindoar was a coordinated precision strike operation launched by the Indian Armed Forces on 7th May 2025, in retaliation for the Pahalgam terror attack.

- It was executed through the coordinated efforts of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, conducted from Indian territory.
- Unlike past operations with aggressive names meant to project strength, this operation's name was chosen as a personal tribute to the victims, particularly the widows of the Pahalgam attack.
- **Targets:** Under 'Operation Sindoar,' the Indian Armed Forces targeted terror facilities linked to Jaish-e-Mohammed,** Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Hizbul Mujahideen** in Pakistan and PoJK.

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Deputy Speaker in Lok Sabha

Despite being a constitutionally mandated post vital for maintaining impartiality and continuity in the functioning of the Lok Sabha, the office of the Deputy Speaker has remained vacant throughout the 17th Lok Sabha and continues to be unfilled in the 18th Lok Sabha as well.

The 17th Lok Sabha is the first and only Lok Sabha that did not have a deputy speaker. In February 2023, Chief Justice of India D. Y. Chandrachud led a body seeking responses to public interest litigation, contending that the protracted vacancy is “against the letter and spirit of the Constitution”.



Constitutional Mandate and Relevance

The Indian Constitution does not specify a strict timeline for the election of the Deputy Speaker. However, Article 93 of the Constitution uses the phrase “shall” and “as soon as may be,” making it mandatory for the Lok Sabha to elect both a Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

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Key Provisions and Role of the Deputy Speaker

- **Article 93:** States that the Lok Sabha shall choose two members of the House to be the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, respectively.
- **Election Process:** The Deputy Speaker is elected by the Lok Sabha members through a simple majority of those present and voting.

Historical Background

The office of the Deputy Speaker has its roots in colonial legislative traditions. During British rule, the position was known as the “Deputy President” of the Central Legislative Assembly.

- Sachidanand Sinha was the first to hold this position in 1921.
- Post-independence, M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar became the first elected Deputy Speaker of the Indian Lok Sabha.
- In 1956, after the demise of Speaker G.V. Mavalankar, Ayyangar served as Acting Speaker and was later elected Speaker of the Second Lok Sabha.

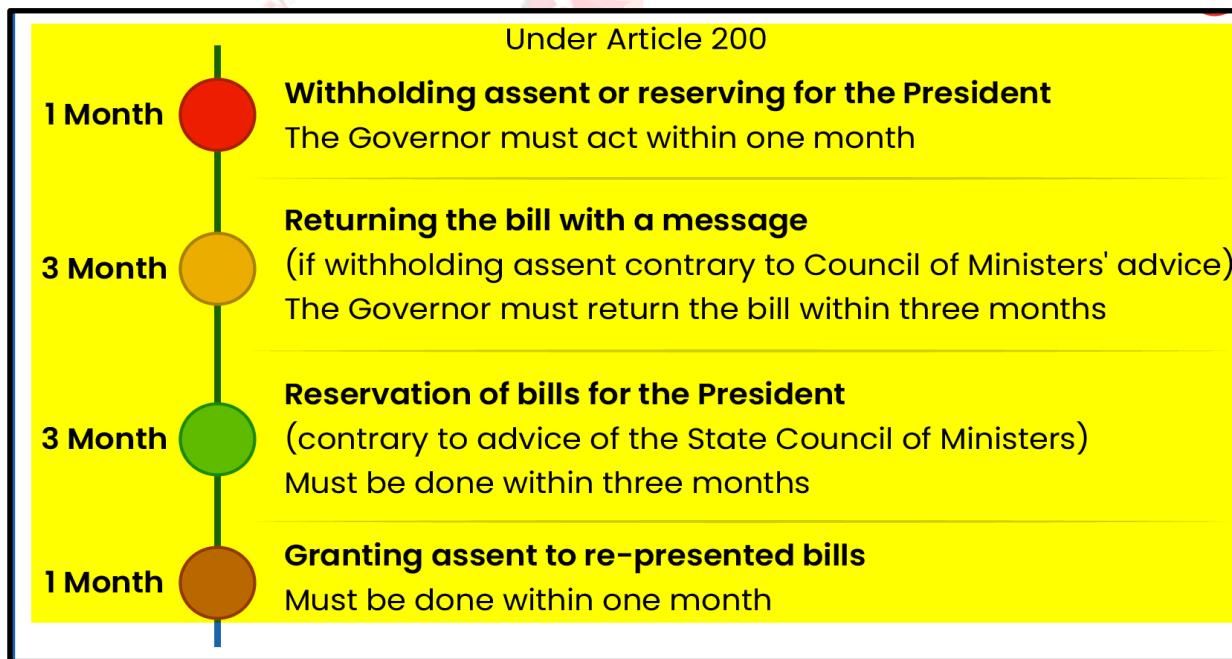
Parliamentary Functions

- The Deputy Speaker presides over the Lok Sabha sessions in the absence of the Speaker.
- The Deputy Speaker automatically chairs any Parliamentary Committee of which they are appointed a member.

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Supreme Court Fixes Timelines for Governor's Assent to Bills



Why in News?

The Supreme Court of India has delivered a landmark verdict in response to a petition by the Tamil Nadu government, which challenged the prolonged delay and refusal of assent by Governor R.N. Ravi to ten state bills. The verdict establishes clear constitutional limits and timelines for Governors under Article 200.

Background and Case Context

In 2023, the Tamil Nadu government approached the Supreme Court citing deliberate delay by the Governor in granting assent to twelve bills, one dating back to 2020. On 13 November 2023, the Governor withheld assent to ten of these bills. The Assembly re-enacted these bills on 18 November 2023, but the Governor again reserved some for the President's consideration on 28 November 2023.

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Key Constitutional Provisions Involved

- **Article 200:** Powers of the Governor regarding assent to state bills.
- **Article 201:** Presidential veto over bills reserved by the Governor.

Judicial Oversight and Article 142

The Supreme Court invoked Article 142 to declare that the re-presented bills are deemed to have received assent. It also introduced judicial review of the Governor's inaction if timelines are violated.

Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass any order or decree necessary for complete justice in any pending case before it. This power is discretionary and unique to the apex court.

Clarification on Reserve Powers (Article 200)

- Once a bill is re-enacted by the Assembly in its original form, the Governor cannot reserve it again unless it materially differs from the earlier version.
- The Governor must abide by the constitutional oath and not act to obstruct the legislature.

Key Takeaways from **State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu**

- The Constitution **does not allow an absolute or pocket veto.**
- The term "**as soon as possible**" under Article 200 implies **urgency and expediency.**

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I4C Brought Under PMLA

Why in News?

In a significant development aimed at tackling transnational cyber frauds and illicit financial flows, the Revenue Department under the Ministry of Finance has brought the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the ambit of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, specifically under Section 66.

This move authorizes I4C to share and receive information with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the anti-money laundering framework, bolstering its capacity to detect and disrupt cybercrime-linked money laundering networks.



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About Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

- I4C functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- It acts as a national-level nodal agency for coordinating efforts to combat cybercrime.
- Provides an ecosystem for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to work together in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
- Engages academia, industry, public, and government stakeholders for prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of cybercrimes.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi

About the Directorate of Enforcement (ED)

- The ED is a multi-disciplinary financial investigation agency functioning under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
- It is tasked with investigating:
 - Money laundering offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002
 - Foreign exchange law violations, originally under the now-repealed FERA, 1947
- Established originally as an Enforcement Unit on 1 May 1956 in the Department of Economic Affairs.
- The ED plays a critical role in tracking money trails, seizing illicit assets, and ensuring financial accountability in accordance with the laws of India.

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First Indigenous LLM under IndiaAI Mission



The Indian government has selected Bengaluru-based start-up Sarvam to develop the nation's first homegrown Large Language Model (LLM) under the IndiaAI Mission, marking a pivotal move in building India's foundational AI infrastructure.

About Sarvam's AI Model Development

Sarvam is tasked with building a 70 billion parameter AI model, designed to be fluent in Indian languages and capable of advanced reasoning. While the model is not expected to be open-sourced, it aims for population-scale deployment.

The company is developing three variants:

- **Sarvam-Large:** Optimized for advanced reasoning tasks.
- **Sarvam-Small:** Designed for real-time applications.
- **Sarvam-Edge:** A compact model for on-device tasks.

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To support this effort, Sarvam will receive access to 4,000 Graphic Processing Units (GPUs) for six months under the IndiaAI Mission.

This development comes in response to global disruptions caused by China's DeepSeek model, which is known for its open-source accessibility and low cost, highlighting the strategic importance of indigenous AI capability.

What is the IndiaAI Mission?

Approved in 2024, the IndiaAI Mission operates under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). It aims to drive responsible, inclusive, and self-reliant AI development in India.

Mission Objectives:

- Establish a robust AI computing infrastructure with over 10,000 GPUs.
- Develop foundational models with 100+ billion parameters.
- Build AI systems trained on multi-lingual datasets to serve key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and governance.
- Enhance data quality, promote ethical AI, and nurture AI talent.
- Support AI startups and foster industry-academic collaborations.

Financial Outlay:

- The Union Cabinet approved a budget of Rs 10,372 crore for the IndiaAI Mission in March 2024.

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Call for Retrieval of Katchatheevu Island

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly has once again unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Union Government to retrieve Katchatheevu Island from Sri Lanka. The island has remained a long-standing point of contention in the India-Sri Lanka relationship, particularly around maritime boundary demarcation and fishing rights.



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What is the Dispute Related to Katchatheevu Island?

About the Island:

- Katchatheevu is a 285-acre uninhabited island situated in the Palk Strait, between India and Sri Lanka.
- It lies approximately 33 km from Rameswaram (India) and 62 km southwest of Jaffna (Sri Lanka).
- The island lacks fresh water sources and permanent habitation. Its only structure is St. Anthony's Church, a Catholic shrine jointly celebrated by Indian and Sri Lankan devotees during an annual festival.

Historical Dispute:

- **India's Claim:** Katchatheevu was part of the Madras Presidency under British India and hence claimed by India post-independence.
- **Sri Lanka's Claim:** Based on Portuguese-era jurisdiction (1505–1658 CE), Sri Lanka asserted sovereignty.

Key Agreements:

- **1974 Indo-Sri Lankan Maritime Agreement:** India officially ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka.
- **1976 Agreement:** Further clarified that both nations would not fish in each other's Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Katchatheevu lies at the maritime boundary, leading to ambiguity over fishing rights.

Post-2009 Developments:

- After the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, tensions escalated due to Indian fishermen crossing into Sri Lankan waters, resulting in arrests and allegations of mistreatment.
- This reignited demands from Tamil Nadu for the retrieval of Katchatheevu.

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Contentious Issues:

- The 1974 agreement permitted Indian fishermen access for resting, drying nets, and attending the annual church festival.
- Disagreements on interpretation have led Sri Lanka to restrict fishing access, denying Indian fishermen their traditional rights.

Stand of Stakeholders

Tamil Nadu's Position:

- In 1973, the then Chief Minister opposed the cession and urged the Centre to retain the island.
- In 1991, the issue re-emerged, with political leaders calling for retrieval or perpetual lease.
- Both ruling and opposition leaders have petitioned the Supreme Court, asserting that Katchatheevu belongs to India.

Union Government's Position:

- In 2013, the Centre told the Supreme Court that no Indian territory was ceded, affirming the matter was settled by the 1974 and 1976 agreements.
- In 2022, the government reiterated in the Rajya Sabha that Katchatheevu lies on the Sri Lankan side of the maritime boundary.
- The matter remains sub judice in the Supreme Court of India.

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Beijing India Report 2024

Progress & Achievements of BPfA



Legal Reforms: 1,531 laws passed since 1995 for gender equality.



Workplace Rights: Countries banning gender job discrimination rose from 58 to 162.



Women in Politics: Parliamentary representation has doubled since 1995.



Ending Violence: 88% of countries strengthened laws against gender-based violence.



Social Protection: Women receiving financial & social support grew by one-third since 2010.



Global Initiatives: UN Programs like Generation Equality Forum (2021) and Pact for the Future (2024) uphold gender equality and human rights.

The Beijing India Report 2024, released on the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), highlights India's progress toward gender equality while drawing attention to persistent challenges—especially in linking gender and climate resilience.

Background: Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action (1995)

- Adopted at the **Fourth World Conference on Women** by the **United Nations**, the Beijing Declaration serves as a landmark global policy framework.
- It outlines **12 critical areas of concern**, including poverty, education, health, violence, economic participation, and political representation.
- The Declaration reaffirmed that **women's rights are human rights** and called for **comprehensive legal and social reforms**.

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India's Progress

India, a signatory to the Declaration, has introduced key legislations:

- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)**
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act (2013)**

However, the report highlights that **implementation is inconsistent**, reflecting a gap between legislative intent and ground realities.

Key Challenges for Women Highlighted in the Report

- **Economic Inequality:**
 - Women earn **20% less** than men.
 - A large proportion remain in **unpaid, insecure work**.
 - Ending **extreme poverty among women** could take **137 years** at the current pace.
- **Violence & Safety:**
 - **1 in 3 women** globally face **physical or sexual violence**.
 - **53%** have experienced **online gender-based abuse**.
 - **25% of countries** reported a **backlash against women's rights** in 2024.
- **Political Exclusion:**
 - Only **87 countries** have ever had a **woman head of state or government**.
 - Women hold just **27% of parliamentary seats** and **36% of local government positions** globally.

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- **Climate Crisis:**

- By **2050**, an estimated **236 million women** are projected to face **food insecurity due to climate change**.

- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:**

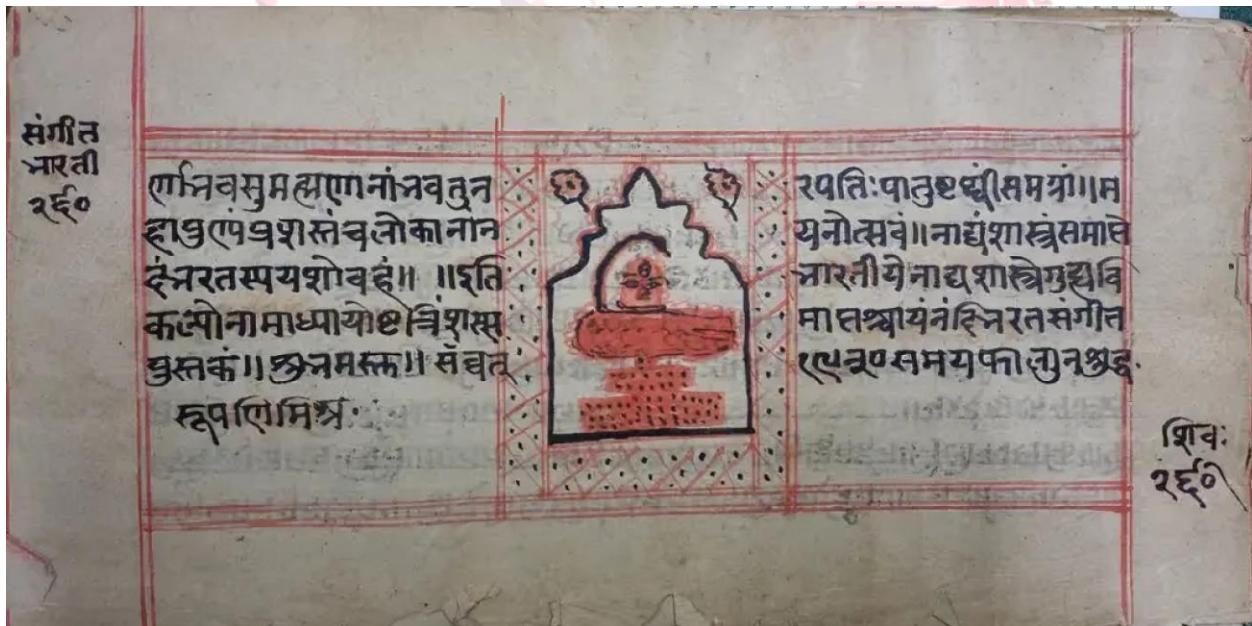
- Only **54% of countries** track gender equality spending.
- Merely **26%** meet the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) standards** for gender-responsive budgeting.

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UNESCO's Memory of the World Register

UNESCO has added manuscripts of the Bhagavad Gita and Bharata's Natyashastra to the Memory of the World (MoW) Register in 2025. These manuscripts are preserved at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune.



About the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme

- The MoW Programme was launched by UNESCO in 1992 to preserve documentary heritage of global and universal value.
- It aims to prevent “collective amnesia” by safeguarding rare and fragile documents such as manuscripts, oral traditions, audio-visual records, and archival material.
- The MoW Register is updated biennially and serves as a global inventory of heritage collections deemed vital to human history.
- The programme emphasizes making such materials permanently accessible to the public, while respecting cultural sensitivities and practices.

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India's Contributions to the MoW Register

India has contributed **13 entries** to the Register, including **two joint submissions**:

- **Rig Veda** (2005)
- **Works of Abhinavagupta**, Shaivite philosopher (2023)
- **Archives of the Non-Aligned Movement's first summit** in Belgrade, 1961 (joint submission)
- **Dutch East India Company archives** (joint submission)

2025 Additions:

- **Natyashastra** by Bharata Muni: A foundational treatise on **Indian performing arts**, including drama, dance, and music.
- **Bhagavad Gita**, attributed to Vyasa: A revered **spiritual-philosophical text** that forms part of the Mahabharata.

Both manuscripts have been preserved and curated at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, a leading center for Sanskrit and Indological studies.

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ISRO's CROP System

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), using its advanced CROP (Comprehensive Remote Sensing Observation on Crop Progress) system, has projected that India's wheat production from eight key wheat-producing states will reach 122.724 million tonnes as of March 31, 2025.



What is CROP?

CROP is a semi-automated, scalable remote sensing framework developed by the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), which functions under ISRO. Its core objective is to provide near real-time monitoring of crop sowing, growth, and harvesting, particularly during the Rabi season.

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Technological Components of CROP

The system integrates data from multiple satellite sources to monitor agricultural progress:

- **EOS-04 (RISAT-1A):** Provides **Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)** data, suitable for all-weather crop observation.
- **EOS-06 (Oceansat-3):** Delivers **optical remote sensing data** for assessing vegetation and soil conditions.
- **Resourcesat-2A:** Offers **high-resolution optical imaging** of agricultural zones for detailed crop mapping.

CROP leverages both Optical and SAR datasets to maintain consistent crop monitoring under diverse climatic and lighting conditions.

Major Wheat-Producing States Covered

ISRO's wheat production estimate encompasses eight leading Rabi wheat-growing states:

- Uttar Pradesh
- Madhya Pradesh
- Rajasthan
- Punjab
- Haryana
- Bihar
- Gujarat
- Maharashtra

These states are essential contributors to India's national food security and form the backbone of its Rabi wheat output.

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GAVI the Vaccine Alliance

Gavi, the international vaccine alliance, is actively engaging with the administration of former US President Donald Trump to maintain essential US funding, arguing that continued financial support would also benefit the American vaccine industry.



About GAVI the Vaccine Alliance

- Gavi is an independent public-private partnership established in 2000 with the mission to improve access to new and underused vaccines for children, especially in the world's poorest countries.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland

Partnership Structure: Gavi brings together a broad coalition of public and private actors:

- Developing country and donor governments
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- UNICEF
- World Bank
- The vaccine industry
- Research and technical agencies
- Civil society organizations
- Private philanthropists

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Key Activities and Impact:

- **Vaccine Access:** Gavi supports low- and middle-income countries in accessing new and underused vaccines through financial aid and technical assistance.
- **Market Shaping:** It negotiates with vaccine manufacturers to lower costs and make vaccine procurement more affordable.
- **Global Collaboration:** By uniting stakeholders in global immunization efforts, Gavi combines development sector expertise with private sector efficiency.
- **Impact:** Since its inception, Gavi has helped vaccinate over 1.1 billion children and saved an estimated 18.8 million lives (as of 2023).

Role in COVAX: From 2020 to 2023, Gavi was a core organization behind COVAX, the multilateral initiative that aimed to ensure equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic.

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Tahawwur Rana Extradited to India

On April 10, 2025, **Tahawwur Hussain Rana**, a key conspirator in the **2008 Mumbai terror attacks**, was extradited from the **United States to India** after prolonged legal proceedings. The extradition marks a major breakthrough for Indian agencies in their pursuit of justice for the **26/11 attacks**, which resulted in **166 deaths** and **over 238 injuries**.



Who is Tahawwur Rana?

- A former Pakistani military doctor, Rana later migrated to **Canada**, becoming a citizen before relocating to the **United States**.
- He founded a business named **First World Immigration Services**, headquartered in **Chicago** with a branch in **Mumbai**.

Involvement in 26/11 and Legal Proceedings

- Rana was arrested in **2009** in the US for **aiding Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)**, the Pakistan-based terrorist group responsible for the 26/11 attacks.

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- In 2011, he was convicted of providing material support to LeT and sentenced to 14 years in prison, though acquitted of direct charges related to the Mumbai attacks.
- Hafiz Muhammad Saeed is the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

Extradition Timeline

- In February 2025, US President Donald Trump announced approval of Rana's extradition, calling him one of the "plotters" of the Mumbai attacks.
- In January 2025, the US Supreme Court upheld a lower court's ruling, dismissing Rana's appeal.
- In March 2025, Justice Elena Kagan rejected a second stay petition, removing the last legal hurdle to his extradition.

Legal Basis: India–US Extradition Treaty (1997)

- The extradition was conducted under the India–US Extradition Treaty, signed on June 25, 1997, and enforced from July 21, 1999.
- The treaty provides the legal foundation for cooperation between the two countries in extraditing fugitives wanted for serious offenses.

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India's Improving Performance in the SDG Rankings

India has shown notable improvement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index 2024, rising to a global rank of **109 out of 166 countries**. This marks significant progress in India's efforts to achieve the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



India's Performance on SDGs: Key Highlights

- Overall Progress:

- India's SDG Index score has improved from **57 in 2018 to 71 in 2023–24**, indicating strengthened national policies and wider adoption of sustainable practices.

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- **State-Level Performance:**

- **Kerala and Uttarakhand lead among Indian states, with more than 8 goals scoring above 80.**
- However, **9 states recorded declines in performance on several critical goals, pointing to regional disparities in implementation.**

About the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- The SDGs are a universal set of **17 interconnected goals** adopted by all **193 United Nations Member States** in **September 2015** at the **UN Sustainable Development Summit** in New York.
- These goals aim to create a **shared blueprint for peace, prosperity, and sustainability** for both people and the **planet by the year 2030.**

Origin and Background

- The SDGs evolved from the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, which were adopted in **2000** and focused on **eight goals** related to poverty, education, gender equality, and health, with a target year of **2015**.
- The SDGs represent a broader, more inclusive agenda formulated after the **Rio+20 Conference in 2012**, emphasizing the need for a **comprehensive global development framework.**

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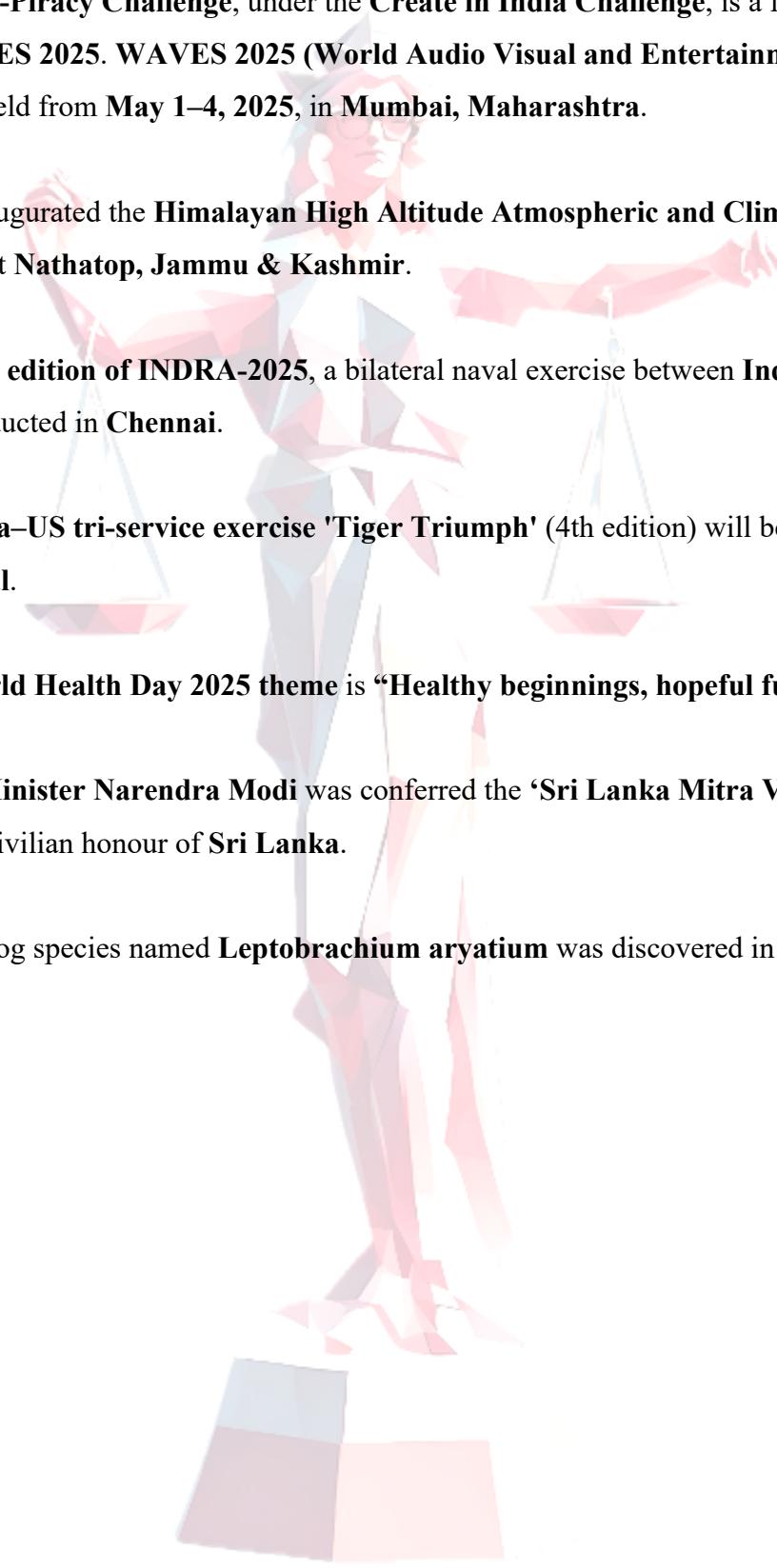
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ONE LINERS

1. **Japan** is set to provide India with **two Shinkansen train sets (E5 and E3 series)** at no cost in **2026**. The **E5 Series Shinkansen**, operational since 2011 with a speed of **320 km/h**, was initially chosen for India's first bullet train project.
2. **World Earth Day** is celebrated every year on **22nd April**. The **2025 Earth Day theme** is "**Our Power, Our Planet**", focusing on tripling renewable energy capacity by **2030**.
3. **Dr. K Kasturirangan**, former ISRO chairman and chairman of the **NEP 2020 drafting committee**, passed away in Bengaluru.
4. **Bihar** will host the **Khelo India Youth Games** and **Khelo India Para Games** in **May 2025**. The **Khelo India initiative**, launched in **2018**, promotes youth participation in sports and aims to identify potential Olympians.
5. **Jyotiba Phule**, born on **11th April 1827**, was a key social reformer, anti-caste activist, and advocate for women's rights. Phule and his wife **Savitribai Phule** opened India's first **girls' school** in **1848** and later **night schools** for laborers in **1855**.
6. **China** is set to unveil the **Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge**, expected to be the **world's highest bridge**.
7. The **Lok Sabha Speaker** led the Indian delegation to the **150th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** held in **Tashkent, Uzbekistan**.
8. **Nepal** celebrated its **first-ever National Yak Day** on **April 20, 2025**, honoring the yak's cultural and ecological significance.

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9. The **Anti-Piracy Challenge**, under the **Create in India Challenge**, is a flagship initiative of **WAVES 2025**. **WAVES 2025 (World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit)** will be held from **May 1–4, 2025**, in **Mumbai, Maharashtra**.
 10. India inaugurated the **Himalayan High Altitude Atmospheric and Climate Research Centre** at **Nathatop, Jammu & Kashmir**.
 11. The **14th edition of INDRA-2025**, a bilateral naval exercise between **India and Russia**, was conducted in **Chennai**.
 12. The **India-US tri-service exercise 'Tiger Triumph'** (4th edition) will be held in the **Bay of Bengal**.
 13. The **World Health Day 2025 theme** is “**Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures**”.
 14. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred the ‘**Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana**’, the highest civilian honour of **Sri Lanka**.
 15. A new frog species named **Leptobrachium aryatium** was discovered in **Assam**.

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CLAT COMMUNITY

*EVERY SETBACK IS JUST A SETUP FOR A
GREATER COMEBACK. KEEP PUSHING
FORWARD – YOUR BREAKTHROUGH IS
CLOSER THAN YOU THINK.*

