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**DECEMBER  
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# **INDEX**

❖ INDIAN ECONOMY	1-24
❖ INDIAN SOCIETY	25-27
❖ ART & CULTURE	28-29
❖ ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY	30-41
❖ BIODIVERSITY	42-51
❖ POLITY & GOVERNANCE	52-92
❖ SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	93-100
❖ PLACES IN NEWS	101-119
❖ AWARD & PRIZES	120-122
❖ DISASTER MANAGEMENT	123

## INDIAN ECONOMY

### Labour Codes in India

The Labour Codes have been notified as effective **from 21 November 2025**.

Government and international bodies (like International Labour Organization – ILO) have welcomed the move, calling it a major step for worker welfare and modernisation.

- The Labour Codes are a consolidation of 29 older central labour laws into four broad, simplified codes.
- **The four codes are:**
  1. Code on Wages, 2019 (Wage Code) — dealing with wages, minimum wages, bonus, timely payment, equal remuneration etc.
  2. Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (IR Code) — defines employer-employee relations, trade unions, industrial disputes, layoffs, etc.
  3. Code on Social Security, 2020 (SS Code) — social security, benefits like gratuity, Provident Fund/ESI, coverage for unorganised/gig sector, etc.
  4. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSHWC Code) — workplace safety, health, working conditions, rights of workers, safety norms across sectors.
- **Objective:** simplify and rationalise a fragmented web of colonial-era labour laws; improve compliance, transparency and modernise regulation of labour in line with today's economy.

#### Key Changes & New Provisions (2025)

Area / Provision	Key Change / What's New	Significance / Who Benefits / Concern
<b>Wages &amp; Remuneration</b>	Universal minimum wage floor + mandatory timely payment; applies to all (organised/unorganised).	Prevents wage exploitation; benefits low-income workers; reduces regional wage gaps.
<b>Definition of "Wage" / Salary Structure</b>	Minimum 50% of CTC must be Basic + DA; limits excessive allowances.	Makes PF, pension, gratuity fairer; stops employers from reducing statutory benefits.
<b>Gratuity &amp; Exit Benefits</b>	Fixed-term/contract workers eligible for gratuity after 1 year (240 days), instead of 5 years.	Provides security to contract workforce; supports a large share of Indian workers.
<b>Social Security &amp; Inclusion</b>	Gig, platform, unorganised workers included under social security coverage.	First-time protection for gig/platform workers; major welfare expansion.
<b>Occupational Safety, Health &amp; Working Conditions</b>	Uniform OSH standards; consolidation of multiple laws.	Safer working environment; especially helpful for hazardous sectors.
<b>Industrial Relations &amp; Flexibility</b>	Simplified IR rules; easier compliance.	May boost business expansion; unions fear potential weakening of job security.

<b>Overtime, Work Hours &amp; Flexibility</b>	Allows 8–12 hour shifts (within weekly cap); overtime rules clarified.	Aligns with modern work patterns; offers flexibility with protection.
<b>Formalisation &amp; Documentation</b>	Mandatory appointment letters for all workers, including contract staff.	More transparency; better dispute resolution and formalisation.
<b>Coverage &amp; Inclusivity</b>	Wide coverage: permanent, contract, fixed-term, gig, platform, MSME workers.	Extends legal protection to previously uncovered informal workers.
<b>Ease of Doing Business</b>	29 labour laws merged into 4 codes; simplified compliance.	Helps employers, reduces paperwork; promotes formalisation and job creation.
<b>Employer Flexibility (Concerns)</b>	More flexibility through fixed-term employment & simplified IR.	Businesses benefit; trade unions fear reduced job security/collective bargaining.

### What's Contentious / Criticisms & Concerns

- The change in definition of “wages” (higher PF, gratuity contributions) might reduce take-home pay for many employees (since allowances shift into wage component), even if total CTC remains same.
- Some critics/unions argue that increased flexibility will weaken job security — e.g., easier hiring/firing, prevalence of fixed-term contracts.
- Implementation challenges: although codes are central, state-level laws (e.g., Shops & Establishments Acts, state labour rules) may continue until new state-level rules are aligned. So there may be variation across states, leading to complexity.
- Transition period — not all provisions become operative immediately; some need further rules/regulations.

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## Labour Codes

**1. CODE ON WAGES (2019)**- To provide a uniform and simplified framework for wage regulation across India.

### a) Universal Minimum Wage Floor

- For the **first time**, minimum wages apply to all workers, irrespective of sector or skill.
- Central Government sets a **national floor wage**; states cannot set wages below this.

### b) Uniform Definition of “Wages”

- At least **50% of total remuneration must be counted as wages**.
- This affects PF, gratuity, bonus calculations.

### c) Timely Payment of Wages

- Wage periods & deadlines are standardised for all establishments.

### d) Equal Remuneration

- No gender-based wage discrimination.

**e) Simplification**- Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Payment of Wages Act, 1936, Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

2. **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE (2020)**- Balance industrial freedom, ease of doing business, and worker security.

a) **“Fixed Term Employment” (FTE) Legalised**

- Employers can hire workers for a fixed duration with **same benefits** as permanent employees.

b) **Strikes/Lockouts – Prior Notice**

- Workers in all sectors must give **14 days’ notice before going on strike**.
- Aims to reduce sudden production disruption.

c) **Larger Factories: Permission for Layoffs/Closure**

- Establishments with **300+ workers** must get prior Government permission for- Layoffs, Retrenchment, Closure
- Earlier limit was 100 employees.

d) **Trade Unions**

- Concept of **negotiating union / negotiating council** introduced to streamline industrial negotiation.

e) **Standing Orders**

- Mandatory for establishments with **300+ workers**.  
(Earlier 100 workers.)

**Acts Merged-** Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, Trade Unions Act, 1926, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946

3. **SOCIAL SECURITY CODE (2020)**- To bring **all workers, including the unorganised, gig and platform workers**, under social security.

a) **Universalisation of Social Security**

Covers:

- Gig workers
- Platform workers
- Contract workers
- Fixed-term workers
- Unorganised sector workers
- Self-employed

b) **PF, ESI, Gratuity**

- Establishments with **10+ workers** come under ESI.
- Gratuity for **fixed-term employees** is allowed — no 5-year condition.
- Expands PF coverage.

c) **Social Security Fund**

- A central and state social security fund created for gig/unorganised workers.

d) **Aadhaar-Based Registration**

- Workers get a **Universal Social Security Account Number (U-SSAN)**.

e) **Maternity, Disability, Old-age Protection**

- Consolidates various welfare schemes into one framework.

**Acts Merged-** EPF Act, ESI Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Payment of Gratuity Act, etc. (9 major laws)

4. **OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH & WORKING CONDITIONS CODE (2020)**- Ensure **safe, healthy, humane** working conditions across industries.

a) **Common License for Factories, Contract Labour & Inter-State Migrant Workers**

- Introduction of a **single, unified license** reduces compliance burden.

**b) Working Conditions & Safety**

- Mandatory safety standards across sectors.
- Specific provisions for mines, docks, factories, construction.

**c) Women's Employment**

- Women allowed to work **night shifts** with safety measures.
- Equality in all types of employment.

**d) Inter-State Migrant Workers**

- Comprehensive database; portability of benefits.

**e) Contract Labour**

- Contractors must provide facilities similar to principal employer.

**Acts Merged-** Factories Act, 1948, Mines Act, 1952, Contract Labour Act, 1970, Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979, Plantations Labour Act, 1951, Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961

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## 50 years of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

- ICDS was launched on **2 October 1975**.
- It is a flagship centrally-sponsored child development programme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD), Government of India.
- Over time, the scheme was restructured and expanded under the "Umbrella ICDS" framework to widen scope and improve coordination of services.
- Under Umbrella ICDS, the contemporary scheme is also implemented via "Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0" — integrating nutrition, early childhood care & education, maternal & child welfare, and convergence of related programmes.

**Beneficiaries**

- Children in age group **0-6 years**.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- Adolescent girls (especially in aspirational districts / North-eastern states) under certain components.

*In 2022, ICDS and related schemes were **restructured and subsumed** under **Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0**, but ICDS remains the core delivery framework.*

**SUB-COMPONENTS / SUB-SCHEMES OF ICDS**

ICDS has **six classic services**, delivered through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs).

These form the "sub-schemes" or **service components**:

**1. Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP)**

- Hot cooked meals & take-home rations (THR).
- Beneficiaries: **Children 6 months-6 years, pregnant women, lactating mothers**.
- Aim: prevent malnutrition, support growth.

**2. Early Childhood Care & Pre-School Education (PSE)**

- Non-formal pre-school learning for **3-6 years**.
- Key for cognitive, social and school-readiness.

### 3. Growth Monitoring & Home-based Care

- Weight/height monitoring via Mother–Child Protection Card.
- Home visits for children under 2 years.
- Flags SAM/MAM cases.

### 4. Immunisation

- Delivered through convergence with **MoHFW (Health Ministry)**.
- Anganwadi workers mobilise families; ANMs provide vaccines.

### 5. Health Check-ups

- Regular maternal, newborn and child check-ups at AWC.
- Screening for anemia, infections, pregnancy complications.

### 6. Referral Services

- Referral to Primary Health Centres (PHC), CHC or hospitals for illness, SAM treatment, pregnancy risk.

### Plus: Behaviour Change & Counselling (POSHAN Abhiyaan integration)

- Nutrition counselling
- IYCF (Infant & Young Child Feeding) messages
- Family-based care planning
- Use of mobile-based ICDS-CAS (under POSHAN 2.0)

**These six are the backbone of ICDS delivery.**

### **MAJOR SUB-SCHEMES UNDER ICDS UMBRELLA (ADMINISTRATIVE)**

Under MWCD's restructuring, ICDS includes:

#### **A. Anganwadi Services (AWS)**

- core ICDS services (nutrition, ECCE, health check-ups, referrals)

#### **B. POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)**

- real-time monitoring, growth charts, convergence, community mobilization

#### **C. Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)**

- nutrition + life-skills for out-of-school girls 14–18 (Now integrated under Mission Shakti's sub-scheme **Sambal**)

#### **D. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**

- maternity cash benefit (under Mission Shakti's **Samarthya** component)

#### **E. ECCE Strengthening**

- training of Anganwadi workers, new curriculum, smart anganwadis (Under Saksham Anganwadi)

#### **F. POSHAN 2.0**

— Integrates:

1. Anganwadi Services
2. POSHAN Abhiyaan
3. Scheme for Adolescent Girls

### **HOW SERVICES ARE DELIVERED: THE ANGANWADI SYSTEM**

Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) are the **operational unit** of ICDS.

#### **Three front-line personnel**

1. Anganwadi Worker (AWW)

2. **Anganwadi Helper (AWH)**
3. **ASHA + ANM** (from Health Ministry) — for health convergence

#### **Daily Activities at an Anganwadi Centre**

- Morning weighing/growth monitoring of children
- Hot cooked meals for 3–6 years
- THR distribution to P&L women and 6–36 month children
- Pre-school learning activities (rhymes, number games, ECCE curriculum)
- Monthly nutrition days (“**POSHAN Maah**”)
- Health check-ups by ANM
- Counselling sessions for mothers (breastfeeding, complementary feeding, hygiene)

#### **Home Visits (Key ICDS Practice)**

AWW conducts home visits for:

- newborns
- under-2 children
- anaemic women
- underweight / SAM children
- counselling families

#### **Convergence with Health System**

- Vaccination by ANM at AWC
- Referral of SAM/MAM to PHC/NRC
- Iron–folic acid tablets distributed
- ANC/PNC services during Village Health Sanitation & Nutrition Day (VHSND)

#### **HOW ICDS PERFORMANCE IS MEASURED**

##### **Growth Indicators**

- Stunting
- Wasting
- Underweight
- Anaemia prevalence  
(MWCD uses NFHS-5, Poshan Tracker data)

##### **Service Delivery Indicators**

- % children getting SNP
- % girls in adolescent nutrition program
- % pre-school attendance
- % digitisation (Tracker usage)

##### **Institutional Indicators**

- AWC with own building
- Water & toilet facilities
- Worker training levels
- Meal quality audits

#### **PRESENT STATUS OF ICDS (AS PER MWCD/PIB 2024–25)**

##### **Coverage**

- **13.9 lakh Anganwadi Centres** functioning (MWCD, 2024).

- Over **8.3 crore beneficiaries** (children + P&L women).
- **70% AWCs** now have drinking water and toilets (as per MWCD reply, 2024).
- **Poshan Tracker** covers **~10 crore individuals** (PIB, 2023–24).

### **Infrastructure Status**

- Government's push for **Saksham Anganwadis**:
  - Smart phones for AWWs
  - Growth monitoring devices
  - Improved ECCE classrooms
  - Nutrition gardens
  - Solarisation in many states
- Still, **1.4 lakh AWCs need building construction** (MWCD Standing Committee Report, 2024).

### **Human Resources**

- **26 lakh frontline workers**:
  - Anganwadi Worker (AWW)
  - Anganwadi Helper (AWH)
- Increased honorarium support through POSHAN 2.0 (PIB 2023).

### **Digital Monitoring**

- **Poshan Tracker App**: digitized beneficiary registration, THR distribution, growth monitoring.
- 90%+ workers equipped with smartphones (PIB 2024).

### **CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES / NITI AAYOG**

- Infrastructure gaps (buildings, water, kitchen sheds)
- Worker workload & low honorarium
- Variation in food quality across states
- Incomplete digitisation in some areas
- Supply chain and THR leakage issues
- Limited involvement of local governance institutions
- Malnutrition persists: NFHS-5 shows stunting (35.5%) & anaemia high among children/women

### **Recent Reforms & Initiatives**

- **Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0** (2021–): nutrition + ECCE + digitisation + infrastructure upgrade
- **Smart Anganwadis**: Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat pilots
- **Poshan Tracker 3.0**: improved dashboards & GIS mapping
- **Community Nutrition Gardens**
- **Fortification guidelines** for staples
- **Take-Home Ration reform** — recipe standardisation, overhauling supply chains
- **ICDS-CAS → Poshan Tracker migration** for real-time tracking

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## Tex-RAMPS Scheme

### Textiles Focused Research, Assessment, Monitoring, Planning and Start-up Scheme

The Government of India approved it in November 2025.

- It is a **Central-Sector Scheme**, fully funded by the Ministry of Textiles.
- Financial outlay: **₹305 crore** for the period **FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31** (i.e. over six years).
- Purpose: To strengthen research, innovation, data infrastructure and competitiveness in India's textiles and apparel (T&A) sector — effectively to “future-proof” it.

### Need & Context

India's textile and apparel sector is one of the largest manufacturing and employment sectors, and a major contributor to exports.

However, the sector faces several structural constraints that hinder global competitiveness:

- Low R&D intensity, limited innovation capacity (especially in high-value, technical or “smart” textiles)
- Fragmented data, weak analytics and lack of reliable nationwide data systems — making policy-making and supply-chain planning difficult
- Need for modernization: sustainability, technology adoption, efficiency, and shifting global demand for technical/smart textiles rather than just traditional textiles.
- Need to encourage start-ups, entrepreneurship and innovation in the textile value-chain, beyond traditional manufacturing — to move up the value chain.

Tex-RAMPS seeks to address these constraints — integrating research, policy planning, data infrastructure and innovation support — as a strategic, long-term step.

### Key Components of Tex-RAMPS

Tex-RAMPS is structured around **five core pillars**.

Pillar / Component	Focus & Activities
<b>Research &amp; Innovation</b>	Promote advanced research — smart textiles, sustainability, process efficiency, emerging/new textile technologies (technical textiles, high-value fabrics, eco-textiles etc.)
<b>Data, Analytics &amp; Diagnostics</b>	Build robust data systems: employment assessments, supply-chain mapping, supply-demand studies, skill & capacity mapping, “India-Size” study for size standards, etc.
<b>Integrated Textiles Statistical System (ITSS)</b>	A real-time, integrated national platform for textile statistics — enabling structured monitoring, supply-chain visibility, evidence-based policy and planning.
<b>Capacity Development &amp; Knowledge Ecosystem</b>	Strengthen state-level planning, disseminate best-practices across clusters, conduct training/workshops, promote technology diffusion and improve institutional capabilities.
<b>Start-up &amp; Innovation Support</b>	Support for incubators, hackathons, academia–industry linkages, and promotion of high-value textile start-ups/entrepreneurship — especially for technical and smart textiles.

### Expected Outcomes / Significance

As per the Ministry's release and commentary:

- Enhance global competitiveness of India's textile and apparel industries (especially in high-value, tech-enabled segments)
- Build a robust national research & innovation ecosystem in textiles — reducing dependence on foreign technology, improving domestic capabilities
- Enable data-driven policymaking — more reliable statistics, supply-chain visibility, employment & export forecasting
- Promote entrepreneurship and start-ups in textiles — encouraging value-addition, innovation and higher-value manufacturing
- Generate employment across the value chain — including skilled jobs in R&D, design, technical textiles, quality assurance, analytics, etc.
- Deeper collaboration between states, industry, academia and government — improving coordination, institutional capacity, and long-term growth planning

In short: Tex-RAMPS aims to transform India's textile sector from largely low-cost manufacturing to a **technology-driven, innovation-led, globally competitive textile ecosystem**.

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## The Changing Nature of IPOs in India

### What is an IPO?

#### **IPO = Initial Public Offering**

It is the process by which a private company **offers shares to the public** for the first time and becomes a **listed company** on the stock exchange.

#### **Purposes of Traditional IPOs**

- Raise **fresh capital** for expansion, new projects, R&D.
- Improve corporate visibility and transparency.
- Provide shares to the public and diversify ownership.

#### **Key Technical Terms**

##### **(A) Promoter**

A **promoter** is an individual or group who:

- Found / created the company
- Controls or manages it
- Holds a significant shareholding
- Has special rights under SEBI rules

They lead the company before the IPO and often retain control after listing.

##### **(B) Offer for Sale (OFS)**

OFS means **existing shareholders sell their shares** in the IPO.

The money raised goes to:

- Promoters
- Private Equity (PE) funds
- Venture Capital (VC) funds

**Important:**

In OFS, **the company receives no new funds.**

It is purely an **exit mechanism.**

(Business Standard's 2025 analysis: **63% of IPO proceeds are OFS**, not fresh funding.)

**(C) Fresh Issue**

The company issues **new shares**, and money raised goes into the company for:

- Capex
- Debt repayment
- Expansion
- Technology/marketing

Earlier, IPOs were mostly fresh issues. Now OFS dominates → this indicates a shift.

**(D) Valuation**

Valuation = Price at which company sells shares.

Overvaluation → IPO priced higher than fundamentals justify

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## Changing Nature of IPOs — What Has Changed?

**(1) IPOs are no longer for capital formation — they are now 'exit events'**

- Earlier: IPOs = raise money for growth.
- Now: IPOs = promoters and PE/VC funds **cash out**.
- In 2025, **63% of all IPO funds raised came from OFS** (existing shareholders selling).
- Fresh capital share is shrinking.

**(2) Promoter Exits Dominating IPOs**

- Recent large IPOs saw “promoters and early investors taking home most of the money”.
- IPOs are designed mainly as **monetisation opportunities**.

This changes IPOs from: “capital-raising tools” → “liquidity events”.

**(3) Surge in IPO Volume — Despite Weak Fundamentals**

- India expects an **\$8 billion IPO wave** even when broader markets are volatile.
- Firms list because there is heavy investor appetite, not always due to strong business fundamentals.

**(4) Overpricing and Hype**

- Many IPOs are priced above reasonable valuation.
- Retail investors face the biggest risk.
- Overpricing + hype = weak post-listing performance.

**WHY IS THIS SHIFT HAPPENING? (DRIVERS OF THIS SHIFT)**

**1. Private Equity / Venture Capital exit cycle-** Indian start-ups/companies backed by PE/VC funds use IPOs to exit.

**2. High liquidity in markets-** Domestic MF/SIP flows are strong → IPO demand high.

**3. Regulatory flexibility-** SEBI reforms for minimum dilution, anchor investor norms, easier disclosures  
→ Makes listing easier.

**4. FOMO among retail investors**

Fear of missing out → heavy oversubscription → encourages companies to list at high valuations.

**IPO Process in India (Step-by-Step)**

1. Appointment of merchant banker (lead manager)
2. Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed with SEBI
3. SEBI reviews & comments
4. RHP (final prospectus) prepared
5. Price band announced
6. Book building process- QIBs (Qualified Institutional Buyers), NIIs (Non-Institutional Investors) & Retail Investors
7. Allotment of shares
8. Listing on stock exchange (NSE/BSE)
9. Trading begins

**EFFECTS OF THIS CHANGING IPO LANDSCAPE**

**A. For Companies**

- Quick monetisation → promoters/VCs exit.
- Low fresh capital → weaker long-term growth investment.
- Short-termism in business decisions.

**B. For Retail Investors**

- Higher risk of **buying overpriced shares**.
- Post-listing corrections are common.
- Asymmetry of information: insiders know more than retail investors.

**C. For Indian Capital Markets**

**Positive:**

- Deeper markets, more listings, broader investor base.

**Negative:**

- IPOs may not contribute to real sector growth.
- Overpricing leads to distrust in primary markets.
- Volatility increases.

**Relevance for exam-**

**Potential Mains Angles**

- “Are Indian IPOs promoting capital formation or just promoter exits?”
- “Impact of private equity dominance on Indian capital markets.”
- “Need for strengthening investor protection in IPOs.”

**Ethics Link**

- Moral hazard:
  - Promoters exit at high valuations → retail investors bear losses later.
- Transparency and disclosure concerns.

**Quick Revision**

Feature	Earlier IPO Model	New IPO Model (2024-25)
Purpose	Raise capital	Exit for promoters/PE
Structure	Mostly fresh issue	Mostly OFS
Valuation	Reasonable	Inflated
Investors	Institutional heavy	Heavy retail participation
Risk	Balanced	Retail risk high

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## IBC

*The government has introduced a draft Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill 2025, expected to be debated in the forthcoming Winter Session of Parliament. The bill proposes major changes — including **out-of-court resolution mechanisms, group and cross-border insolvency frameworks, and a creditor-initiated insolvency resolution process.***

- The reforms aim to **speed up the insolvency resolution process**, reducing delays that have plagued many cases under the IBC.
- However, recent data shows recovery under IBC remains low: creditors have realised only about **33%** of their admitted claims on average (i.e. haircuts around 67%).
- There is also increased focus on **transparency and accountability** — e.g. a proposal (from regulatory or advisory bodies) requiring bidders for stressed assets to **disclose beneficial ownership** to avoid opaque “shell-company/resolution-agent” misuse.

**What Is IBC?**

- IBC was enacted in **2016** to replace and consolidate a fragmented web of older insolvency-related laws (like SICA, RDDBFI, etc.) into a **single, unified, time-bound bankruptcy law**.
- The objective: to provide a **clear, predictable exit mechanism** for insolvent companies / firms / individuals; protect creditors’ interests; ensure faster resolution of stressed assets; improve recoveries; promote credit availability and entrepreneurship by cleanly resolving bad debts.
- Before IBC, insolvency resolution could take **years** — often 4+ years — which eroded asset value and impaired banks and creditors.

**Key Technical Terms & Actors — Explained**

Term / Actor	Meaning / Role
<b>Corporate Debtor</b>	A company/LLP/firms that has defaulted on repayment or debt obligations.
<b>Financial Creditor</b>	Someone (e.g. bank / NBFC / any lender) who has given money as a loan to the debtor.
<b>Operational Creditor</b>	Entities who have provided goods/services to the debtor and are unpaid (e.g. suppliers, employees, utilities).
<b>Default</b>	Non-payment of debt — under IBC, typically default threshold is ₹1 crore (subject to amendment) before insolvency proceedings can start.

<b>Petition/Application</b>	Formal request to the adjudicating body (tribunal) to initiate insolvency process.
<b>National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)</b>	The tribunal that adjudicates corporate insolvency cases under IBC.
<b>Moratorium</b>	Legal freeze once IBC proceedings begin: no creditor can pursue debt recovery individually, and the debtor cannot dispose of assets — until resolution/liquidation. Protects value and avoids race among creditors.
<b>Interim / Resolution Professional (IRP / RP)</b>	Licensed professionals who take over management of debtor during resolution, handle claims, run bidding/valuation, negotiate plans. Regulated by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
<b>Committee of Creditors (CoC)</b>	Body of financial creditors (mainly banks etc.) that decides — by voting (typically 66% by value) — the resolution plan, continuation of RP, or liquidation.
<b>Resolution Plan</b>	Proposal for restructuring, sale, takeover or reorganisation of corporate debtor to satisfy creditors while preserving business (if viable).
<b>Liquidation</b>	If resolution fails/unsuitable — debtor’s assets sold, proceeds distributed among creditors as per priority.
<b>Information Utilities (IUs)</b>	Entities that maintain records of creditor-debtor transactions, loan agreements etc. — helps verify claims quickly.

**HOW IBC PROCESS WORKS (CORPORATE INSOLVENCY RESOLUTION)**

1. **Default occurs** (debtor fails to repay debt).
2. **Application / Petition filed** — by financial or operational creditor or even debtor itself — to NCLT.
3. **NCLT admits application → Moratorium declared:** freeze debt recovery actions; board of directors suspended; IRP appointed.
4. **Claims invited**, assets taken over by IRP, CoC formed comprising financial creditors.
5. **Resolution Plan or Liquidation:** CoC reviews proposals. If a viable resolution plan is accepted (by 66% creditor vote + tribunal approval), debtor revived under new structure; if not, liquidation begins.
6. **Distribution of proceeds** as per IBC priority — secured creditors, financial creditors, operational creditors, workmen dues, government dues, etc.
7. **Code applies to corporates, partnership firms, individuals** (with different procedures for personal bankruptcy / fresh-start / liquidation). IBC sets **time-limits:** for corporates, 180 days + possible 90-day extension — total 330 days ideally from admission to resolution / liquidation.

**ACHIEVEMENTS & BENEFITS (WHY IBC MATTERS)**

- Provided **single unified framework** for insolvency — replacing fragmented previous laws (SICA, RDDBFI, etc.) that were slow and inefficient.
- Improved creditor confidence and contributed to improving “ease of doing business / ease of exiting business” — important for investment environment.
- Enabled relatively faster resolution of many corporate insolvency cases — enabling earlier cleaning of stressed assets and reducing bad-loan burden on banks.

- Structured and transparent process — IRPs, CoC, statutory timelines, regulatory oversight — improved governance compared to earlier ad-hoc practices.

**CHALLENGES, CRITICISMS & LIMITATIONS**

- Despite reforms, actual recoveries remain low (around 30–35% on average) — many creditors face steep haircuts.
- Many cases get delayed due to litigation, contestation, valuation disputes, complex corporate structures, defeating the “time-bound” promise. Recent 2025 amendment attempts aim to address some of these delays.
- Sometimes, resolution plans are challenged in courts — even after CoC approval, creating uncertainty for investors and hindering timely revival. Example: a recent case where the Supreme Court overturned an approved plan.
- Concerns over transparency, especially with complex ownership structures, group companies, shell companies — leading to proposals mandating disclosure of beneficial ownership.
- For individuals / small firms, although IBC provides for personal insolvency, uptake has been limited; social stigma, lack of awareness & procedural complexity remains.

**What the 2025 Reforms Seek to Do**

- Allow out-of-court resolution — giving flexibility, reducing reliance on tribunals for straightforward restructure; faster and less costly.
- Broaden scope to include group-company insolvencies and cross-border insolvency — helps in dealing with business groups with multiple related entities, and foreign creditors/investors.
- Clarify definitions — e.g. status of statutory dues vis-à-vis secured creditor status to avoid confusion and litigation delays.
- Strengthen governance — e.g. requirement for bidders to declare beneficial ownership, to prevent misuse of resolution process by shell entities.

If passed fully, these changes could significantly improve resolution rates, speed, and reliability of IBC — enhancing ease of business and financial stability.

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**Capital Gains Account Scheme (CGAS)**

*On 19 November 2025, the government issued the Capital Gains Accounts (Second Amendment) Scheme, 2025 bringing major updates.*

**Key reforms:**

<b>Change</b>	<b>What it means / Why important</b>
Digital payments allowed (credit/debit cards, net-banking, UPI, IMPS, RTGS, NEFT, BHIM Aadhaar Pay) for deposits.	Makes deposit easier and instant; avoids delay/cheque-clearance issues.
Electronic statements accepted (in place of physical passbook).	Reduces paper-work; easier for verification & compliance.
Online account closure to be mandatory from 1 Apr 2027 (via digital signature or EVC).	More convenience; enables closure even if property purchase/construction happens later.

More banks (19 private banks + earlier public banks) allowed to maintain CGAS accounts — expanded “Deposit Office” definition.	Greater accessibility for taxpayers, including NRIs or those in metro / urban areas banking with private banks.
Includes gains under Section 54GA (transfer/shifting of industrial undertaking to SEZ) as eligible for deposit under CGAS.	Broadens scope of scheme beyond residential-property gains; benefits corporates/industrial-unit sellers relocating under SEZ incentive.

**Overall:** the 2025 amendment modernises CGAS — from a paper-based, cheque-dependent scheme to a mostly digital, user-friendly, widely accessible framework.

**How CGAS Works (with these updates) — Step-by-Step**

1. Taxpayer sells a capital asset (e.g., residential property) → generates long-term capital gains (eligible under IT Act).
2. If taxpayer doesn’t reinvest gains by ITR-filing deadline, they deposit the unutilised gain amount into a CGAS account in an authorised bank (public or any of the newly added private banks). After 2025 amendment, deposit can be via UPI/ net-banking/RTGS etc.
3. The date of deposit (for claiming exemption) is considered as the date when payment is received by the bank (even for electronic mode).
4. When taxpayer buys/constructs new property or otherwise fulfils conditions under relevant section (e.g., 54, 54F, 54GA), they withdraw from the CGAS account (can also be via electronic mode per revised norms) to complete reinvestment.
5. If they fail to meet conditions by the permitted time (or choose not to reinvest), the amount is withdrawn but tax exemption is lost — gain becomes taxable.

From April 2027 onward — account closure & withdrawal procedure itself will be electronic / online.

**When/Why CGAS is Used — Key Scenarios**

- Sale of residential property or land → taxpayer intends to buy/construct another property but needs time.
- Sale of assets under industrial undertaking relocation (under Section 54GA) — e.g. moving factory from urban area to SEZ; now gains can be parked via CGAS.
- Anytime gains arise but reinvestment is delayed — CGAS provides a “parking / cooling” buffer to retain tax exemption eligibility.

**Significance & Relevance**

- Demonstrates how tax policy adapts to digital economy — use of e-payments, digital records, broader bank participation.
- Reflects ease-of-compliance + investor convenience in direct-tax law — relevant under topics of taxation, fiscal policy, ease of doing business.
- Impacts real estate market, asset mobility, SEZ / industrial incentives — useful for economy / infrastructure / urbanization questions.
- Shows interplay between tax law (Income-tax Act), government schemes, banking regulations, important for integrated answers in GS-III.

**CAPITAL GAINS ACCOUNTS SCHEME, 1988 —**

**1. Why CGAS Was Introduced (Purpose)**

Before 1988, taxpayers could claim exemption under Sections 54, 54B, 54D, 54F, etc., only if the capital gains were fully utilised before the return-filing deadline.

This caused problems because:

- finding/buying a house takes time
- construction takes years
- reinvestment opportunities may not be immediate
- taxpayers lost exemption if they couldn't reinvest by 31 July (ITR deadline)

So in 1988, the government introduced the Capital Gains Accounts Scheme (CGAS) to provide a temporary parking mechanism for such gains.

If the reinvestment is not completed before filing ITR, the taxpayer can deposit the unutilised capital gains into CGAS and still claim exemption.

## 2. Legal Basis

- Launched via **notification dated 22 June 1988** under the Income-tax Act.
- Administered by the **Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)**.
- Implemented through designated **public sector banks (PSBs)** known as "Deposit Offices."

## 3. Who Can Use CGAS?

Any taxpayer who wants to claim capital gains exemption under:

- **Section 54** → Sale of residential house → Buy/build another house
- **Section 54F** → Sale of any long-term asset → Invest in a residential house
- **Section 54B** → Sale of agricultural land → Buy agricultural land
- **Section 54D/G/GA** → Compulsory acquisition / shifting industrial undertakings etc.

Both **resident** and **NRI** taxpayers can use CGAS (1988 rules + RBI permissions).

## 4. Types of Accounts Under CGAS (1988 Structure)

The 1988 scheme introduced **two types** of accounts:

### A. Account Type I — Savings Account (like SB Account)

- Similar to a normal savings account.
- Used when:
  - taxpayer needs **frequent withdrawals**
  - funds required for **ongoing construction** or staged payments
- Interest rate = savings account rate of the bank (low).
- Passbook issued recording deposits/withdrawals.

Typical for **house construction** where money is needed in multiple instalments.

### B. Account Type II — Term Deposit Account (like FD)

- Similar to a fixed deposit (FD).
- Used when money will remain unused for a longer period.
- Higher interest rate (FD-linked).
- Withdrawals permitted **only after converting to Type I** (with bank + AO approval).
- Premature withdrawal allowed but subject to penalties + approval.

Typical when waiting to identify/purchase property in future.

### 5. How Money Was Deposited (Pre-2025 Rules)

Under the 1988 scheme:

- Deposit had to be made before due-date of filing income tax return (usually 31 July).
- Only cheques, DD, or cash were allowed.
- The “date of deposit” was when the cheque was realised, not when deposited.
- A passbook or certificate of deposit was mandatory.

These rigid, paper-based rules are exactly what the **2025 digital amendments** are modernising.

### 6. Withdrawal Rules

Withdrawals were **tightly regulated** in the 1988 version to ensure funds were used only for the intended reinvestment.

#### Process:

1. Taxpayer submits Form C to withdraw amount.
2. Bank sends copy to Assessing Officer (AO).
3. Amount withdrawn is used only for the specified purpose (house purchase/construction).
4. Unspent withdrawn money must be re-deposited into CGAS Type I immediately (Form D).

#### Use restriction:

If money is used for **any other purpose**, IT exemptions are reversed → capital gains tax becomes payable.

### 7. Closure Rules (Original 1988 Version)

CGAS account could be closed only with written approval of Assessing Officer when:

- property was purchased/constructed (conditions fulfilled), or
- the permitted 2- or 3-year period ended, or
- taxpayer chooses not to reinvest.

#### In case of death of the depositor:

- the account is transferable to legal heirs but the exemption is not automatically inherited.
- unutilised deposit becomes taxable in the hands of the deceased's estate.

But the scheme became outdated due to:

- no online payments
- limited banks
- manual AO approvals
- physical passbooks
- hassles of converting Type II to Type I

Hence the **2025 amendment** to digitise and modernise.

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## NIDHI-EIR (Entrepreneur-in-Residence) Programme

- NIDHI-EIR is part of the larger National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI), launched by the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India.
- **The goal:** encourage motivated graduates / innovators / early-stage entrepreneurs (especially with technology-based ideas) to take up entrepreneurship by reducing early-stage risks and opportunity costs.
- It seeks to build a pipeline of startups — especially deep-tech / science/ technology driven — by helping transform “ideas → prototypes → startups.”

**Key Features of NIDHI-EIR**

<b>Feature / Parameter</b>	<b>Details / Explanation</b>
<b>Financial Support (Fellowship / Grant)</b>	Beneficiaries receive a subsistence grant (fellowship) — up to <b>₹ 30,000/month</b> (minimum ₹ 10,000) for a period of <b>12 months</b> .
<b>Purpose of Grant</b>	The grant is for “living expenses/subsistence,” not for product manufacturing, major capital expenditure or as salary. It helps innovators focus full-time on idea development without immediate income pressure.
<b>Access to Incubator Infrastructure</b>	EIR recipients get access to facilities at affiliated Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) / incubation centres — co-working space, labs/makerspace (if available), guidance, administrative support.
<b>Mentoring / Industry / Market Guidance</b>	They are provided mentorship by experienced entrepreneurs or experts, help with business-concept development, market insight, business planning, and building networks.
<b>Eligibility Criteria (Typical)</b>	- Indian citizen. - Must have at least a 4-year full-time undergraduate/post-graduate degree (or 3-year diploma + 2 yrs work experience) in science/engineering. - Must commit to full-time work on startup idea; cannot hold another full-time job / fellowship concurrently.- Preference for first-generation entrepreneurs with technology-based innovative ideas (especially ideas with higher technology risk / longer gestation / potential social or scientific impact).
<b>Duration &amp; Exit Conditions</b>	Fellowship is for up to 12 months; in earlier versions some EIRs got support up to 18 months (subject to performance, incubator’s discretion) when converting to startup/incubation. If the EIR raises external funding / investment (“first tranche” of funding) — grant support ceases.
<b>Scope / Sector-agnostic (but Tech-inclined)</b>	Officially sector-agnostic — any technology/innovation-based business idea eligible. In practice, emphasis tends to be on tech, scientific, innovation-heavy sectors (deep tech, biotech, med-tech, environment, etc.) though social-impact ideas may also be considered.
<b>Goal: Risk Mitigation + Pipeline for Incubators / Startups</b>	By reducing risk and offering support, NIDHI-EIR helps convert academic/research/innovative ideas into marketable ventures. Helps build a steady pipeline of startups for TBIs and seed funding schemes under NIDHI.

**What Has the Programme Achieved / Its Impact (So Far)**

- According to the official brochure: In the first two rounds ~225 EIR fellows from 22 states were supported.
- From that, around **146 companies** were formed; roughly **65% conversion rate** from EIR → startup.
- These resulted in employment generation — **711 jobs created**; intellectual-property outcomes: **65 patents, 45 trademarks, 19 copyrights**; also **146 initial prototypes developed**.
- This evidences that EIR is not just a fellowship but a **pre-incubation pipeline** that helps catalyse real startups — significant for innovation-driven entrepreneurship push.

**Why NIDHI-EIR Matters**

- **Promoting Innovation & Startup Ecosystem** — aligns with “Make in India”, “Atmanirbhar Bharat”, startup ecosystem, and efforts to transition India’s workforce from job-seeking to job-creating.

- **Science & Technology Translation** — helps convert research or academic innovation into market-ready products / enterprises (bridges “lab to market” gap), relevant in GS-III (Science & Technology) or Economy (innovation / technology adoption).
- **Entrepreneurship, Employment & Economic Diversification** — by enabling technology-based startups, it can generate skilled employment, new sectors, reduce over-reliance on traditional industries; relevant under “Indian economy & human development / employment”.
- **Risk-mitigation and Opportunity Cost for Potential Entrepreneurs** — high-skilled youth often avoid entrepreneurship due to risk / uncertainty; EIR reduces that barrier. A good case-study for essays on “Encouraging entrepreneurship in India”.
- **Institutional/Ecosystem Building** — shows role of government (DST), incubators (TBIs), mentorship, ecosystem support — useful for questions on institutional frameworks, innovation policy, public-private cooperation, startup policy.
- **Social Impact / Public-good Sector** — many EIR-supported ideas (especially in biotech, environment, social-tech) can address social issues, aligning with sustainable development, inclusive growth themes.

#### Limitations, Challenges & What It's Not

- The fellowship is modest — ₹ 30,000/month — enough for subsistence, not for heavy R&D equipment, manufacturing or scale-up. Hence, EIR only supports early-stage ideation / pre-startup / prototype stage.
- For heavy capital-intensive ventures (e.g. hardware manufacturing, biotech production), EIR alone may not suffice — external funding, seed capital, or follow-on grants will be necessary.
- Success depends heavily on post-EIR support: incubator quality, mentorship, access to investors, market conditions, regulatory support for tech sectors — gaps in any of these can undermine final outcome.
- Not all EIR ideas will become successful startups — typical startup risk applies. The conversion rate ( $\approx 65\%$  in initial rounds) is promising but not guarantee.
- Benefits skew toward those with technical education / innovative / high-tech ideas; general small entrepreneurs / low-tech sectors may not benefit — thereby limiting inclusivity unless complemented by other schemes.

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### Delayed Payments Report 3.0

The report is a joint publication by Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship (GAME), Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) and C2FO — this is the **third edition** of the study on payment delays to MSMEs in India.

#### Key Findings (2025 Report)

- Total value of **delayed payments owed to MSMEs** has dropped to **₹ 7.34 lakh crore** (inflation-adjusted) as of March 2024.
- This is a decline from **₹ 8.27 lakh crore in 2023** and from a **peak of ~₹ 10.7 lakh crore in 2022**.
- Nevertheless, the outstanding amount remains substantial: equals over **4.6% of India's Gross Value Added (GVA)** — signalling the extent of liquidity locked up.

- The backlog affects about **6.4 crore MSMEs** — meaning a significant portion of India’s small enterprises continue to struggle with delayed receivables.
- According to the report, about **40% of delayed payments** (i.e. buyer-side defaults) can be traced to **government-owned PSUs (central + state)** — which highlights systemic issues in public-sector procurement / payment practices.
- There has been some positive shift: the use of digital/structured platforms (like TReDS — Trade Receivables Discounting System) for invoice discounting / early payments has increased over recent years (invoices discounted on TReDS rose to about **₹ 2.4 lakh crore** as per the report).

### What Remains Problematic: Structural Challenges & Risks

The report flags several persistent issues:

- **Bargaining power imbalance:** Micro-enterprises, especially the smallest firms, face much longer delays than bigger suppliers — sometimes **three times longer**.
- **Slow dispute resolution and weak enforcement:** Even when suppliers raise invoices or complaints (through the statutory portal or other mechanisms), resolution is often slow — delaying realisation of dues.
- **Cash-flow stress and credit access issues:** With large unpaid receivables, many MSMEs struggle to maintain working capital, invest in raw materials, or repay loans — which hurts growth and employment.
- **Dependence on large buyers, including PSUs:** Since a major share of defaults is attributed to PSUs, systemic reform in public procurement/payment cycles is required — otherwise problem may persist

### What the Report Suggests / Policy Implications

To improve timely payments and strengthen MSME liquidity, the report recommends (or notes) several measures:

- Scale up and mainstream **TReDS** (electronic invoice discounting / receivables financing), and integrate it with GST / Udyam (MSME registration) database — to help more MSMEs avail early payment.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms — e.g., more active use of the statutory portal (like the “Samadhaan” portal) for complaints, faster resolution, transparency in payment behavior, public disclosure of chronic defaulters.
- Reform payment-terms norms / procurement norms where PSUs and large buyers are prominent — to ensure payment discipline and timely clearances.
- Encourage alternate financing models: cash-flow-based lending, early-payment platforms, supply-chain financing — to reduce working-capital stress, especially for smaller MSMEs.
- Customize interventions (state-wise / sector-wise / size-wise), because the report notes **regional, sectoral and size gaps** — a “one-size-fits-all” approach may not work

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## Inland Waterways Authority of India

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has recently entered into several significant agreements worth nearly ₹3,000 crore, aimed at enhancing cargo transport, improving passenger mobility, and promoting river-based tourism across the Northeastern region.

### About the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)

- The IWAI is a statutory authority constituted under the Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985.
- It became operational on 27 October 1986, with the mandate to develop, regulate, and manage inland waterways for navigation and shipping.
- Parent Ministry: Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways
- The Authority is responsible for implementing projects related to infrastructure development and the upkeep of inland water transport (IWT) systems on National Waterways, funded primarily through grants from the Ministry.
- It also undertakes techno-economic assessments and drafts proposals for upgrading additional waterways to the status of National Waterways.
- IWAI serves as an advisory body to the Central Government on various inland water transport issues and collaborates with State Governments to strengthen the IWT sector.

### Organizational Presence

- **Head Office:** Noida, Uttar Pradesh
- **Regional Offices:** Patna, Kolkata, Guwahati, Kochi
- **Sub-offices:** Allahabad, Varanasi, Farakka, Sahibganj, Haldia, Swroopganj, Hemnagar, Dibrugarh, Dhubri, Silchar, Kollam, Bhubaneshwar, and Vijayawada.

### Practise Questions: With reference to the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), consider the following statements:

1. IWAI was established under a parliamentary Act but became functional only after 1990.
2. It is responsible for preparing proposals for declaring additional waterways as National Waterways.
3. The headquarters of IWAI is located in Noida, and it has regional offices in Patna, Kolkata, Guwahati, and Kochi.

### Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

### Correct Answer: B

### Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** IWAI was created under the *Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985* and came into existence on 27 October 1986, not after 1990.

- **Statement 2 is correct** : One of IWAI's functions is to conduct techno-economic feasibility studies and prepare proposals for declaring more waterways as National Waterways.
- **Statement 3 is correct** : IWAI's headquarters is in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, and it has regional offices in Patna, Kolkata, Guwahati, and Kochi.

Hence, **only statements 2 and 3 are correct** → **Option B**.

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## Bharat NCAP 2.0

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has unveiled the draft framework for Bharat NCAP 2.0, a greatly expanded upgrade of India's vehicle crash-testing and safety rating programme.

### About Bharat NCAP

The Bharat New Car Assessment Programme is India's own star-rating system for evaluating how well cars protect occupants during collisions. Vehicles are awarded one to five stars, offering buyers a clear sense of safety performance. Conceived as a collaborative effort between the Government of India and Global NCAP, the initiative officially debuted on 22 August 2023 and began operations on 1 October 2023.

Its core purpose is to empower consumers with reliable safety information so that market demand naturally shifts toward safer vehicles. Manufacturers may voluntarily submit their vehicles for testing under the procedures defined by Automotive Industry Standard (AIS) 197.

Cars tested under Bharat NCAP are assessed in three essential categories:

- **Adult Occupant Protection**
- **Child Occupant Protection**
- **Safety Assist Technologies**

### Applicability

The programme covers only right-hand-drive passenger vehicles sold in India that weigh under 3,500 kg. The base variant of each model is tested, and ratings remain valid for four years. Along with conventional internal-combustion vehicles, CNG cars and battery-electric models can also be evaluated. Participation is voluntary, and manufacturers bear the cost of both the vehicle and the testing process.

Although overseen by MoRTH, Bharat NCAP functions as an independent authority. Current rules remain effective until 30 September 2027, after which Bharat NCAP 2.0 is expected to come into force starting October 2027.

### Key Provisions in Bharat NCAP 2.0 (Draft)

- Introduces new mandatory tests, updated scoring criteria, and expanded safety parameters.
- For the first time, vehicle ratings will include protection for vulnerable road users.
- A 100-point scoring matrix will operate across five pillars:
  - Crash Protection
  - Vulnerable Road-User Protection
  - Safe Driving
  - Accident Avoidance
  - Post-Crash Safety

- Crash testing expands from two tests to five, using adult male, adult female, and child dummies.
- Proposed tests include: offset frontal impact, full-width frontal impact, side impact, pole side impact, and rear impact.
- Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and curtain airbags become mandatory for any model that wishes to earn a star rating.
- Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB) remains optional.
- Vehicles with side-facing seats will be ineligible for a rating.
- From 2027–29, a 5-star rating will require at least 70 points; between 2029–31, the threshold rises to 80 points.
- Minimum benchmarks will apply in each of the five pillars.

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## **Asia Power Index 2025**

India has climbed to third place in the Asia Power Index 2025, following the United States and China, which continue to hold the top two positions.

### **About the Asia Power Index**

Released each year by the Lowy Institute, an independent think tank based in Australia, the Index analyses how effectively countries in the broader Asian region shape and respond to their strategic environment.

This seventh edition measures the relative strength of 27 countries and territories across 131 indicators, which are grouped under eight broad dimensions:

- Military Capability
- Defence Networks
- Economic Capability
- Economic Relationships
- Diplomatic Influence
- Cultural Influence
- Resilience
- Future Resources

### **Key Takeaways from the 2025 Index**

- India holds the third rank in both economic capability and future resources.
- The report shows an improvement in India's economic standing and military strength compared to previous editions.
- India's weakest area remains its defence partnerships and network reach, where it is placed 11th.
- The assessment notes that India's robust economic growth has strengthened its regional profile, along with modest enhancements in its overall geopolitical influence — measured through connectivity, leverage in global affairs, and technological weight.

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## Research, Development and innovation scheme

The RDI Scheme was approved by the Union Cabinet with a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore.

It is implemented by the Department of Science & Technology (DST) as the nodal agency, with the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) as the custodian of the fund.

### Objectives :

- Encourage the private sector to scale up R&D and innovation in sunrise and strategic sectors.
- Finance “transformative” projects at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) (e.g., TRL 4 and above).
- Support the acquisition or development of technologies that are of strategic importance or indigenisation value.
- Facilitate the setting up of a Deep-Tech Fund of Funds to back high-risk, high-impact technology ventures (AI, quantum computing, biotech, etc).

### Funding mechanism :

- Two-tier funding mechanism:
  1. A **Special Purpose Fund (SPF)** housed within ANRF acts as the parent fund.
  2. Funds flow from the SPF to **Second-Level Fund Managers (SLFMs)** — such as AIFs, NBFCs, DFIs, or focused research organisations. Those SLFMs in turn provide long-term concessional loans or equity funding to eligible private sector projects.
- Funding Modes: long-term loans at low or nil interest; equity infusion for startups; fund-of-funds for deep-tech ventures.

### Significance:

- Helps fill the funding gap in R&D in India — private sector R&D investments have been comparatively low.
- Supports India’s goal of technological self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and strengthening economic and strategic security.
- Targets cutting-edge “sunrise” domains (AI, quantum, biotech, space) which are critical for future global competitiveness.
- Signals a shift: the government is no longer just a grant-maker, but a catalyst for private sector-led, large-scale R&D and innovation.

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## INDIAN SOCIETY

### Lucknow: UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy 2025

At the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Lucknow has been officially declared a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, marking a historic recognition of its legendary Awadhi cuisine and culinary traditions. With this, Lucknow becomes the second Indian city after Hyderabad (2019) to receive this global honor.

#### The Essence of Lucknow's Culinary Heritage

Often referred to as the City of Nawabs, Lucknow is famed for its Awadhi cuisine, which evolved during the Mughal and Nawabi eras. Its food culture reflects royal sophistication, hospitality, and refined artistry, making gastronomy an integral part of its identity.

**Signature delicacies** such as *Galouti Kebabs*, *Kakori Kebabs*, *Tunday Kebabs*, *Lucknawi Biryani*, *Nihari*, *Korma*, and *Sheermal* showcase a blend of **slow-cooking techniques (Dum Pukht)** and intricate use of spices and aromas. These dishes embody not just taste but a deep-rooted **cultural narrative of communal harmony and heritage**.

#### Reasons for Inclusion

Lucknow's inclusion in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) is a recognition of its:

- **Rich and diverse culinary heritage** deeply rooted in history.
- **Preservation of traditional recipes, ingredients, and cooking techniques.**
- **Community-driven food culture**, where festivals, street food, and royal cuisine coexist harmoniously.
- **Commitment to sustainability**, food education, and promotion of local produce.
- **Cultural exchange through gastronomy**, with its food festivals and hospitality fostering global connections.

This recognition positions Lucknow as a **living laboratory of creativity**, where food is a bridge between tradition and innovation.

#### About the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

**Established in 2004**, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network promotes **international cooperation** among cities that use creativity as a strategic tool for **sustainable urban development**.

The network currently comprises **408 cities from over 100 countries**, representing various creative fields.

#### These include:

- Crafts and Folk Art
- Design
- Film
- Gastronomy
- Literature
- Media Arts
- Music
- *(Newly added)* Architecture

Cities under the UCCN collaborate to **share best practices**, strengthen **creative economies**, and **preserve cultural diversity**.

### India's Presence in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network

With Lucknow's inclusion, **India now has 9 cities** recognized by UNESCO for their creative excellence across various categories:

City	Category	Year of Designation
Jaipur	Crafts and Folk Art	2015
Varanasi	Music	2015
Chennai	Music	2017
Mumbai	Film	2019
Hyderabad	Gastronomy	2019
Srinagar	Crafts and Folk Art	2021
Gwalior	Music	2023
Kozhikode	Literature	2023
<b>Lucknow</b>	<b>Gastronomy</b>	<b>2025</b>

### Significance of the Recognition

Lucknow's entry into this global network has far-reaching implications:

- **Global Promotion of Awadhi Cuisine:** International collaborations will enhance tourism and cultural exchange.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Strengthening of the local food industry, restaurants, and culinary startups.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Documentation and revival of age-old recipes and traditional food practices.
- **Education and Innovation:** Creation of culinary institutes and research on sustainable cooking practices.

This honor not only celebrates Lucknow's **culinary excellence** but also showcases **India's vibrant food heritage** on the world stage.

### Conclusion

Lucknow's recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy is a tribute to the city's **rich culinary legacy, cultural inclusivity, and commitment to sustainability**. It symbolizes how food can be more than nourishment — it can be **art, culture, and identity**.

Through this global platform, Lucknow stands poised to inspire the world with the timeless aroma of its *Awadhi tehzeeb* and *mehman-nawazi* (hospitality).

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## Ambaji Marble

The renowned Ambaji Marble has recently secured the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, recognizing its superior quality and distinctive white stone.

### About Ambaji Marble

Ambaji Marble derives its name from the **town of Ambaji in Gujarat**, which serves as the primary location for its extraction.

This marble variety is appreciated for its **pure milky-white tone**, high durability, and natural elegance.

### Features of Ambaji Marble

**Appearance:**

The stone is noted for its brilliant white surface, often highlighted by soft grey or beige veins. These natural streaks vary in intensity based on the minerals and impurities present during the rock's formation.

**Durability:**

Ambaji Marble is known for its exceptional strength and long-lasting polish, making it suitable for structures requiring longevity and aesthetic appeal.

**Applications:**

It has been prominently used in the construction of the Ambaji Temple and features in various religious monuments, memorials, and architecturally significant buildings across India.

**Key Facts About Marble**

- Marble is a metamorphic rock, produced when limestone undergoes metamorphism under high heat and pressure.
- Composition: It primarily consists of calcite ( $\text{CaCO}_3$ ), with additional minerals such as mica, quartz, pyrite, clay minerals, graphite, and iron oxides.

**Formation of Marble**

During metamorphism, calcite crystals within limestone recrystallize, forming tightly interlocked crystal masses characteristic of marble.

A similar rock type, known as dolomitic marble, forms when dolostone experiences the same metamorphic conditions.

The conversion of limestone into marble generally occurs along convergent plate boundaries, where large crustal regions are subjected to regional metamorphic forces.

Marble can also develop through contact metamorphism, triggered by heating of nearby limestone or dolostone by intruding magma bodies.

**Practise Question: Consider the following statements regarding Ambaji Marble:**

1. It is primarily composed of recrystallized calcite formed under conditions of regional metamorphism.
2. The marble's characteristic veining is a result of mineral impurities present during its formation.
3. Dolomitic marble is formed when limestone undergoes contact metamorphism.

**How many of the above statements are correct?**

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

**Correct Answer: B. Only two**

**Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** Ambaji Marble, like most marble, forms through the recrystallization of calcite under high pressure and temperature during metamorphism, especially regional metamorphism.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** The grey or beige veins in Ambaji Marble arise due to mineral impurities present when the marble was forming.
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect:** Dolomitic marble forms when *dolostone*, not limestone, undergoes metamorphism.

## ART & CULTURE

### Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay – Architect of Modern Indian Literary Nationalism

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay—often referred to as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee—stands among India’s most influential literary figures. Celebrated as a novelist, poet, and essayist, he played a pivotal role in shaping both modern Bengali prose and the early intellectual foundations of Indian nationalism.

#### Early Life and Education

Born on 27 June 1838 in Kantalpara village (24 Parganas, Bengal), Bankim Chandra belonged to a family employed under the British administration. He became one of the first two graduates of the University of Calcutta, later completing a law degree as well.

#### Literary Career

He began as a writer of poetry, but soon shifted to fiction, where he found his true voice. His debut novel, **Durgeshnandini (1865)**, revolutionized Bengali romantic fiction.

This was followed by notable works such as:

- Kapalkundala (1866)
- Mrinalini (1869)
- Vishbriksha (1873)
- Chandrasekhar (1877)
- Rajani (1877)
- Rajsimha (1881)
- Devi Chaudhurani (1884)

His most iconic novel, **Anandmath (1882)**, is set against the backdrop of the late-18th-century Sannyasi Rebellion.

#### VANDE MATARAM – A NATIONAL LEGACY

The novel *Anandmath* includes the celebrated patriotic hymn “**Vande Mataram**”, written in Sanskrit.

#### Major milestones:

- 1896: Rabindranath Tagore sang it publicly for the first time at the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta.
- 1950 (24 January): Adopted by the Constituent Assembly as India’s National Song.

Bankim Chandra passed away on 8 April 1894, yet his influence on literature and nationalism endures, earning him the title “**Sahitya Samrat**”—the Emperor of Literature.

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### Deepavali (Diwali) Added to UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List

Diwali, the festival of lights, has now been officially included in UNESCO’s **Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**.

This recognition places the festival alongside India’s other celebrated cultural elements such as Yoga, Durga Puja, Kumbh Mela, Kutiyattam, and Ramman.

#### The inscription highlights:

- its strong community participation,

- its traditions of craftsmanship (diyas, rangoli, lamps),
- and its deep social, cultural, and spiritual significance.

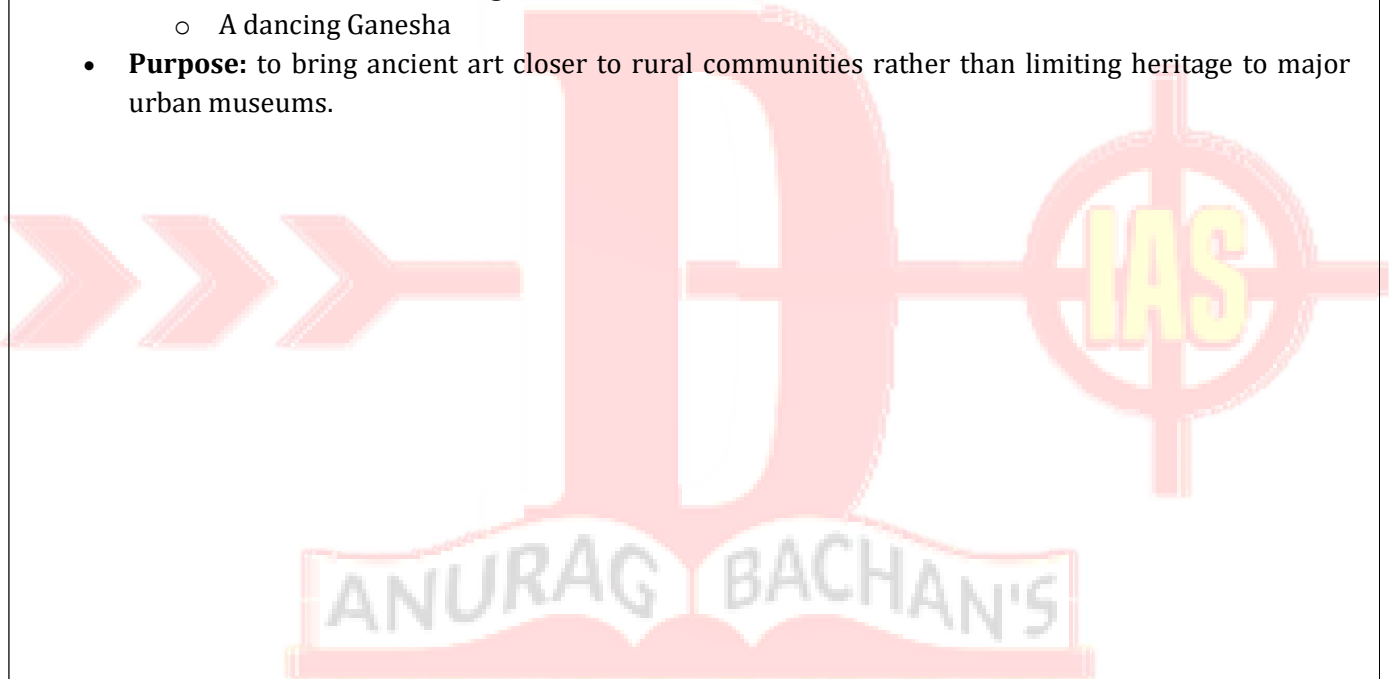
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### **Nachne Moortishala – New Village Museum Showcasing Gupta-Era Art**

The Archaeological Survey of India's Jabalpur Circle recently opened a village museum, **Nachne Moortishala**, in Panna district, Madhya Pradesh, on 19 November, coinciding with World Heritage Week.

**Key features:**

- Displays 58 sculptures and panels from the 5th–6th century CE (Gupta period).
- Exhibits include:
  - Ramayana-themed carvings
  - Bali–Sugriva battle scenes
  - A four-faced Shiva Lingam
  - A dancing Ganesha
- **Purpose:** to bring ancient art closer to rural communities rather than limiting heritage to major urban museums.



## ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### Emissions Gap Report 2025

The 2025 edition of the Emissions Gap Report (EGR) indicates that while some progress has been made through updated global climate commitments, it remains insufficient to keep global warming within safe limits.

#### About the Emissions Gap Report:

- The EGR is an annual assessment published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- Its primary purpose is to monitor global progress in keeping temperature rise well below 2°C and pursuing the 1.5°C goal as outlined in the Paris Agreement.
- The report is released each year ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP).
- It is jointly prepared by UNEP, the UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre (UNEP-CCC), and associated partners.

#### Key Findings of EGR 2025:

- Even if all countries fully implement their latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), global temperatures are expected to increase by 2.3–2.5°C this century.
- Global greenhouse gas emissions rose by 2.3% in 2024, reaching 57.7 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.
- Only 60 Parties, responsible for 63% of global emissions, have submitted updated NDCs for 2035.
- To meet the 1.5°C target, global emissions must decline by 55% by 2035.

**Practise Question:12. Which of the following statements regarding the Emissions Gap Report 2025 is/are correct?**

1. Global temperatures are expected to rise by 2.3–2.5°C even if all current NDCs are fully implemented.
2. Global greenhouse gas emissions decreased in 2024 compared to the previous year.
3. Only 60 Parties, responsible for 63% of global emissions, have submitted updated NDCs for 2035.
4. Limiting warming to 1.5°C requires a reduction in emissions by 55% by 2035.

#### Options:

- a) 1, 2, and 4 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

**Correct Answer:** c) 1 and 4 only

#### Explanation :

- 1: Even with full implementation of NDCs, warming is projected at 2.3–2.5°C.
- 2: Emissions rose by 2.3% in 2024, not decreased.
- 3: While 60 Parties submitted new NDCs, the option focuses on emissions coverage only.
- 4: Achieving 1.5°C requires emissions to fall by 55% by 2035.

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## United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Leaders and delegates from around the world have convened in Belém, located in Brazil's Pará state, for the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

### About the UNFCCC:

The UNFCCC serves as the central international framework for coordinating global action against climate change. It laid the groundwork for subsequent major climate agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015).

Its overarching aim is to foster international collaboration to limit global temperature rise, thereby reducing the adverse effects of climate change, protecting food security, promoting timely adaptation, and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

Adopted during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the UNFCCC is one of the three "Rio Conventions", the other two being:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

With 198 Parties—comprising 197 countries and the European Union—it is among the most widely ratified global treaties.

Every year, the member countries meet at the **Conference of the Parties (COP)** and other technical sessions to evaluate progress, negotiate new commitments, and further the objectives of the **Paris Agreement**.

The UNFCCC's policy decisions are guided by scientific evidence provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—a body established in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to assess climate-related science.

### The Kyoto Protocol (1997):

The Kyoto Protocol, adopted under the UNFCCC framework in 1997, set binding emission reduction targets for developed nations. These countries were required to collectively reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 5% during 2008–2012, relative to 1990 levels.

A hallmark of the Protocol was its introduction of market-based mechanisms, including the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which enabled developed nations to invest in emission reduction projects in developing countries. These mechanisms were designed to make climate mitigation more cost-effective while fostering sustainable development.

### The Paris Agreement (2015):

Adopted at COP21 in Paris, the Paris Agreement reinforced the foundational principles of the UNFCCC while setting three key objectives:

1. To limit global warming to well below 2°C, and pursue efforts to restrict it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;
2. To enhance adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related impacts; and
3. To align global financial flows with low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways.

The Agreement introduced a new system of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), requiring all countries—both developed and developing—to periodically submit their climate action plans. Each NDC reflects a nation's self-defined strategies and commitments to mitigate and adapt to climate change, respecting its domestic priorities, capacities, and sovereignty.

An enhanced transparency framework ensures accountability by tracking progress toward these commitments.

**Summary Insight for UPSC:**

- **UNFCCC (1992)** – Mother treaty for global climate cooperation.
- **Kyoto Protocol (1997)** – Binding emission targets for developed nations; introduced CDM.
- **Paris Agreement (2015)** – Universal participation; NDC-based approach; goal: <math>2^{\circ}\text{C}</math> (preferably <math>1.5^{\circ}\text{C}</math>).

**Question: 18. With reference to the evolution of global climate governance under the UNFCCC framework, consider the following statements:**

1. The UNFCCC established the principle of “*common but differentiated responsibilities*”, which was later operationalized through binding emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol.
2. The Kyoto Protocol introduced flexibility mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to enable developing countries to trade emission credits among themselves.
3. The Paris Agreement shifted from a legally binding top-down emission target system to a voluntary, self-determined contribution framework applicable to both developed and developing nations.
4. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), functioning under the UNFCCC Secretariat, periodically assesses the progress of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only**

**Explanation:**

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** The UNFCCC (1992) established the guiding principle of “*common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)*”, recognizing that while all countries share responsibility for addressing climate change, developed nations bear a greater historical burden. This was operationalized through binding targets under the Kyoto Protocol.
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect:** The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) allowed developed countries to invest in emission reduction projects in developing countries, not among developing nations themselves.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** The Paris Agreement (2015) replaced the *top-down legally binding emission targets* of Kyoto with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) — a bottom-up, universal framework applying to both developed and developing countries.

- **Statement 4 – Incorrect:** The IPCC is an independent scientific body created by UNEP and WMO in 1988, not under the UNFCCC Secretariat. It provides scientific assessments but does not monitor or evaluate NDC implementation — that’s the role of the UNFCCC through its *transparency framework*.

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## National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has recently approved 13 defence and paramilitary infrastructure projects, most of which are located in high-altitude protected regions of Ladakh, along with one project in Arunachal Pradesh.

These clearances are part of efforts to enhance national security infrastructure while maintaining ecological balance in sensitive zones.

About the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):

The NBWL is a statutory advisory body constituted by the Central Government in 2002 (not 2022) under Section 5A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

It functions as the apex body for wildlife conservation in India, advising the government on matters relating to the protection and management of wildlife and Protected Areas (PAs).

The Board’s primary mandate includes providing guidance on conservation policy, overseeing project clearances in protected regions, and reviewing the implementation of wildlife protection measures across the country.

### Organizational Structure:

- The NBWL comprises 47 members.
- It is chaired by the Prime Minister of India, with the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) serving as the Vice-Chairperson.
- **Other members include:**
  - Officials from ministries and institutions associated with conservation and wildlife protection.
  - The Chief of Army Staff, Defence Secretary, and Expenditure Secretary to the Government of India.
  - 10 eminent experts—conservationists, ecologists, and environmentalists—nominated by the Central Government.
- The Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife) and Director, Wildlife Preservation acts as the Member-Secretary of the Board.

### Functions of the National Board for Wildlife:

The NBWL’s major functions include:

1. **Policy Guidance – Advising Central and State Governments on matters related to wildlife protection and conservation.**
2. **Protected Area Management** – Recommending measures for the establishment and effective management of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and other protected areas.

3. **Prevention of Wildlife Crimes** – Suggesting measures to curb poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and its derivatives.
4. **Project Evaluation** – Conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) of proposed projects that may affect wildlife habitats.
5. **Review and Monitoring** – Assessing the progress of wildlife conservation programmes across India and proposing improvements.
6. **Documentation and Reporting** – Publishing a biannual status report on the condition of wildlife and forests in the country.

**Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife:**

- The Standing Committee is a smaller, independent body functioning under the NBWL framework.
- It consists of up to 10 members of the main Board and is chaired by the Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.
- While the NBWL handles policy formulation and long-term conservation strategies, the Standing Committee focuses on project-level decisions—especially those involving land diversion within protected areas and eco-sensitive zones (ESZs).
- This makes the Standing Committee primarily a project clearance body, ensuring that proposed developmental projects comply with conservation norms.

**Question: 19. With reference to the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), consider the following statements:**

1. The NBWL is a statutory body established under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, to advise the Central Government on matters of wildlife conservation and management.
2. The Prime Minister of India serves as the Chairperson of the NBWL, while the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change functions as the Vice-Chairperson.
3. The Standing Committee of the NBWL, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, is empowered to grant clearance for projects located within Protected Areas.
4. The NBWL is responsible for preparing an annual status report on the condition of wildlife and forests in the country.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 2, 3 and 4 only

**Correct Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 4 only**

**Explanation:**

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is a statutory advisory body, constituted under Section 5A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972). It provides guidance to the Central Government on matters of wildlife policy, conservation, and management of Protected Areas.

- **Statement 2 – Correct:** The Prime Minister of India is the Chairperson of the NBWL, and the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) acts as its Vice-Chairperson.
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect:** The Standing Committee of the NBWL is not chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. It is chaired by the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The committee clears or rejects proposals for projects within or near Protected Areas and Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs).
- **Statement 4 – Correct:** The NBWL is mandated to publish a biannual (twice a year) report reviewing the status of wildlife and forest conditions across India —

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## Climate Investment Fund (CIF)

### Latest Update (COP 30 – 2025)

- **Event:** COP 30 of UNFCCC
- **Announcement:** Germany and Spain jointly pledged \$100 million for a new CIF programme titled ARISE – Accelerating Resilience Investments and Innovations for Sustainable Economies.
- **Objective of ARISE:** To strengthen climate resilience, promote green economic growth, and support innovative adaptation projects in developing economies.

### About Climate Investment Fund (CIF)

Feature	Description
Launch Year	2008
Nature	Multilateral climate finance mechanism
Coverage	Works in over 70 low and middle-income countries
Purpose	To finance comprehensive measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation
Focus Areas	Clean technology, renewable energy, nature-based solutions, climate resilience, sustainable economies
Funds Under CIF	1. Clean Technology Fund (CTF) 2. Strategic Climate Fund (SCF)
Partner Institutions (6 MDBs)	- Asian Development Bank (ADB) - African Development Bank (AfDB) - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) - Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) - International Finance Corporation (IFC) - World Bank
Governance	The CTF Trust Fund Committee is the main decision-making body.
Innovative Mechanism (2024)	Became the first multilateral climate fund to issue bonds in capital markets through the CIF Capital Markets Mechanism (CCMM).
Secretariat	Hosted by the World Bank.

**Question:20.** With reference to the Climate Investment Fund (CIF), consider the following statements:

1. It is a multilateral climate fund established under the UNFCCC in 2010.
2. It provides concessional finance for both climate mitigation and adaptation projects.
3. Its Secretariat is hosted by the World Bank.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: b).**

**Explanation:** CIF was launched in 2008 (not under UNFCCC) and provides concessional finance via MDBs. The World Bank hosts its Secretariat.

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## Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority

During the 21st Foundation Day of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA), the Union Agriculture Minister announced that the PPV&FR Act, 2001 will soon undergo amendments to strengthen the legal framework governing plant variety protection and farmers' rights.

### About the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA)

The PPV&FRA is a statutory institution, created on 11 November 2005, under the provisions of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001.

It functions under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, with its headquarters in New Delhi.

### Objectives of PPV&FRA:

The Authority has been established with the following key aims:

- To provide intellectual property protection to plant breeders for developing novel plant varieties.
- To acknowledge and reward farmers and farming communities that conserve traditional varieties and plant genetic resources.
- To safeguard farmers' rights, allowing them to save, use, reuse, sow, exchange, share, and sell farm-saved seeds of registered varieties.
- To promote scientific advancement in plant breeding and agricultural innovation.
- To maintain the National Register of Plant Varieties (NRPV) and ensure proper documentation and conservation of important germplasm.

### Organisational Structure.

- The Authority is headed by a Chairperson, who serves as the Chief Executive.
- It comprises 15 members nominated or appointed by the Government of India.
- Of these, eight are ex-officio representatives from various ministries and departments.

- Three members are drawn from State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and State Governments.
- Four nominated members represent:
  - Farmers
  - Tribal organisations
  - The seed industry
  - Women's groups involved in agriculture
- The Registrar General of PPV&FRA serves as the ex-officio Member Secretary.

**Functions of PPV&FRA:**

The Authority performs several important regulatory and conservation functions, including:

- **Registration** of new plant varieties, extant varieties, and **essentially derived varieties (EDVs)**.
- Providing **compulsory cataloguing services** for all plant varieties.
- **Conservation and preservation** of economically valuable plant genetic resources and their wild relatives.
- Managing and updating the **National Register of Plant Varieties**, and maintaining the **National Gene Bank** for long-term storage of genetic material.

**Question:26. With reference to the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA), consider the following statements:**

1. It is a statutory body established directly under the PPV&FR Act, 2001.
2. It functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
3. It maintains the National Register of Plant Varieties.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**Correct Answer: A (1 and 3 only)**

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** PPV&FRA is a statutory authority created under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001.
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect:** It works under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, not the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** PPV&FRA maintains the National Register of Plant Varieties (NRPV).

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### **Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade**

The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) to the UNFCCC has officially unveiled the Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade (IFCCT), marking a major step in linking global climate action with international trade policies.

### **About the Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade (IFCCT)**

The IFCCT has been established as a politically supported platform enabling countries to deliberate on the growing tensions and overlaps between trade regulations and climate commitments.

#### **Launch Details:**

The forum was formally introduced on 15 November 2025 during COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

The initiative aims to narrow gaps between trade policy frameworks and climate ambitions, while strengthening the capacity of developing nations to influence new trade rules emerging from global climate strategies.

The IFCCT will be co-chaired by Brazil along with a developed-country partner, and membership will be open to all UNFCCC Parties.

Importantly, the forum will remain institutionally independent of both the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UNFCCC. It will also not engage in negotiating binding decisions, interpreting existing trade or climate agreements, adjudicating disputes, or reviewing specific national actions.

#### **Key Features of the IFCCT**

- The IFCCT will begin operations with a broad consultation process extending into 2026, aimed at identifying the subjects for discussion and setting the scope of the forum.
- It seeks to promote interoperability rather than fragmentation in climate-related negotiations and policy frameworks.
- The platform will also convene a wide set of stakeholders, including civil society groups, industry bodies, and international initiatives, enabling inclusive engagement on climate–trade linkages.

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### **Climate Change Performance Index**

In the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2026, India's position dropped by 13 places, moving from 10th to 23rd in the global ranking.

#### **About the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)**

The CCPI is released by the international think tanks Germanwatch, New Climate Institute, and Climate Action Network International.

It evaluates how the world's major emitters are progressing in key climate-related areas, including greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, and climate policy.

#### **Countries are assessed across four key parameters:**

1. **GHG emissions**
2. **Renewable energy**
3. **Energy use**
4. **Climate policy**

The index was introduced in **2005**.

#### **Key Findings of CCPI 2026**

- Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Morocco secured the top positions in this year's index.

- Among the G20 countries, the poorest performers include:
  - **China (54th)**
  - **Russia (64th)**
  - **United States (65th)**
  - **Saudi Arabia (67th)**All of these countries received a very low overall rating.
- India's ranking declined to 23rd place, with a score of 61.31, marking a significant fall from last year's 10th position.
- The report also highlighted that India remains among the largest global producers of coal, oil, and gas, which contributed to its downgrade from a "high-performing" to a "medium-performing" country in the latest index.
- India received medium scores in GHG emissions, climate policy, and energy use, but recorded a low rating in the renewable energy category.

**Practise Question: With reference to the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2026, consider the following statements:**

1. The CCPI assesses countries in the areas of GHG emissions, renewable energy, energy use, and climate finance.
2. India's downgrade in CCPI 2026 is partly attributed to being one of the world's largest producers of coal, oil, and gas.
3. Denmark, the UK, and Morocco secured the top positions in the latest CCPI rankings.

**How many of the above statements are correct?**

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

**Correct Answer: B. Only two**

**Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect:** CCPI evaluates countries based on GHG emissions, renewable energy, energy use, and climate policy, not climate finance.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** India's fall from 'high performer' to 'medium performer' is linked to being among the biggest global producers of coal, oil, and gas.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** Denmark, the UK, and Morocco led the CCPI 2026 rankings.

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## Global Methane Status Report 2025

The Global Methane Status Report 2025 has raised concerns that crop-residue burning is increasingly making India a major global methane hotspot.

### About the Global Methane Status Report

The report is jointly prepared by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC).

Its purpose is to track global progress on methane reduction efforts and assess how much more needs to be done to meet the goals of the Global Methane Pledge.

### Key Findings of the Global Methane Status Report 2025

- Methane levels in the atmosphere have more than doubled since the pre-industrial era.
- Rising methane emissions could lead to about 24,000 additional premature deaths and roughly 2.5 million tonnes (Mt) of annual crop losses by 2030.
- India is identified as the third-largest emitter of methane globally.
- Agriculture in India accounts for 12% of global agricultural methane emissions, placing it among the highest contributors worldwide.
- If all countries fully achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and implement Methane Action Plans, global methane emissions could be reduced by 8% by 2030.
- The report highlights that 72% of the world's methane reduction potential exists within G20+ countries, as they collectively produce 65% of global human-caused methane emissions.

### What is Methane?

- Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a hydrocarbon and the main constituent of natural gas.
- It is a colorless, odorless, flammable, and water-insoluble gas.
- Commonly known as marsh gas or methyl hydride.
- It is responsible for around one-third of the current global warming, making it one of the most critical greenhouse gases to control.

**Practise Question: With reference to the Global Methane Status Report 2025, consider the following statements:**

1. The report is jointly produced by the UN Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
2. The report identifies India's agriculture sector as contributing 12% of global agricultural methane emissions.
3. Fully implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Methane Action Plans could reduce global methane emissions by nearly 8% by 2030.

**How many of the above statements are correct?**

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

**Correct Answer: b) Only two**

**Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect:** The report is produced by UNEP and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), not the IPCC.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** India’s agricultural activities contribute 12% of global agricultural methane emissions.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** If countries fully implement their NDCs and Methane Action Plans, methane emissions could drop by 8% by 2030.

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### **11th Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) Partner Countries’ Meeting**

The **11th Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) Partner Countries’ Meeting** was recently attended by India’s Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, marking another step in India’s engagement with this collaborative climate framework.

#### **About the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM)**

Initially put forward by Japan and formally launched in **2013**, the JCM serves as a bilateral platform designed to spread advanced, low-carbon technologies and climate-friendly infrastructure across partner nations through Japanese investments. The arrangement supports sustainable development in participating countries while also helping Japan account for its climate contributions in a transparent, measurable way.

Aligned with Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, the mechanism enables both countries involved to count the resulting reductions toward their respective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It functions within the broader architecture of the UNFCCC, standing alongside older tools like the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI).

India is among the 31 countries partnering with Japan under this mechanism.

#### **Priority Areas Under the JCM**

The initiative channels its efforts into sectors critical for deep decarbonization — renewable energy systems with storage, sustainable aviation fuels, compressed biogas, green hydrogen and ammonia, and a range of hard-to-abate industrial segments.

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## BIODIVERSITY

### Kunming Biodiversity Fund

Recently, seven nations received financial assistance amounting to USD 5.8 million from the Kunming Biodiversity Fund to promote and scale up environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.

#### About the Kunming Biodiversity Fund:

The Kunming Biodiversity Fund is a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) that was announced in 2021 during Part I of COP-15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Its core purpose is to support the on-ground execution of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) at national, sub-national, regional, and local levels.

#### Financial Base and Institutional Support:

- **Initial Contribution:** China committed 1.5 billion yuan (approximately USD 200 million) as seed funding.
- The Fund operates under the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), China, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with:
  - Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD)
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

#### Primary Objective:

The Fund is designed to **strengthen and expedite biodiversity conservation initiatives in developing nations**, particularly by helping them implement and upscale their **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)**.

#### Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF):

- The KMGBF was **adopted at COP-15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022**.
- It provides a **strategic global pathway** to align biodiversity protection with **sustainable development goals (SDGs)**.
- The Framework envisions achieving **“Living in harmony with nature” by the year 2050**.

#### Targets and Structure:

- **23 Global Targets** to be achieved by **2030**.
- **4 Long-term Global Goals** set for achievement by **2050**.
- These goals and targets are intended to **halt biodiversity loss**, ensure the **sustainable use of biological resources**, and secure **equitable sharing of benefits** for present and future generations.

**Practise Question:1. With reference to the Kunming Biodiversity Fund, consider the following statements:**

1. It was created to facilitate the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework across multiple governance levels.
2. The initial capital contribution to the Fund was provided jointly by China, India, and UNEP.

3. The Fund aims to assist developing countries in scaling up their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
4. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework sets 23 short-term targets for 2030 and four long-term goals for 2050.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer:** (c) 1, 3 and 4 only

**Explanation:**

- Statement 2 is incorrect because the initial seed funding (1.5 billion yuan) was contributed solely by **China**, not jointly.
- All other statements accurately reflect the fund's objectives and the structure of the KMGBF.

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## Cycad Plant

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhubaneswar has begun an investigative study on Cycad plants due to concerns regarding the presence of BMAA, a suspected neurotoxic compound linked with neurological disorders. This research seeks to understand possible public health implications, given the plant's cultural and ecological significance.

**About the Cycad Plant:**

Cycads are palm-like, woody gymnosperms, representing one of the world's most ancient surviving plant lineages, believed to have existed alongside dinosaurs for more than 300 million years.

**Habitat and Distribution:** Cycads inhabit diverse ecological zones, ranging from moist tropical rainforests to semi-arid environments. They are found across tropical and subtropical regions including:

- The Americas and the Caribbean
- Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar
- Eastern India, China, Japan, Southeast Asia
- Oceania and Australia

**Key Characteristics:**

- They are long-lived, unisexual plants with a sturdy, woody structure.
- The primary root system is typically thick, fleshy, and sometimes tuber-like.
- They are identified by large pinnately compound leaves arranged in a crown and the presence of cones (male and female separate).
- Many cycad species are adapted to fire, shedding leaves during burning but regenerating through rapid new leaf growth.

- They can survive in a wide range of soil types—from rich humus to sandy, rocky substrates, swampy conditions, and even saline soils.

**Conservation Concerns:**

Despite their resilience, cycads face a high extinction risk due to:

1. Habitat loss for agriculture and developmental projects,
2. Illegal collection for ornamental and landscaping purposes,
3. Climate change, which threatens their slow regeneration capacity.

Their slow reproductive rate and naturally small population sizes further heighten vulnerability.

**Practise Question: 9. With reference to Cycad plants, consider the following statements:**

1. Cycads are gymnosperms with unisexual cones and a crown of pinnately compound leaves.
2. Cycads are found only in humid tropical rainforests and cannot survive in dry or saline soil conditions.
3. Many cycad species are fire-adapted, regenerating leaves rapidly after wildfires.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3 only

**Correct Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only**

**Explanation:**

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Cycads are ancient gymnosperms, dioecious, and bear cones. They have **large feather-like leaves**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Cycads occur across diverse habitats including dry grasslands, rocky slopes, and saline soils, not just rainforests.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Cycads are fire-resilient; they regrow leaves from stored energy after fires.

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**Indian Mouse Deer**

Indian Mouse Deer has recently been recorded at the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in Vasai, drawing attention to the species' habitat and conservation status.

The Indian Mouse Deer, also referred to as the Indian Spotted Chevrotain, belongs to the family Tragulidae and is among the smallest ungulates found in India.

Scientific Name: *Moschiola indica*

This species is endemic to the Indian subcontinent, primarily distributed across Peninsular India. Historical reports also mention its presence in Nepal, while Sri Lanka hosts a distinct but related species (*Moschiola meminna*). In India, the Indian Mouse Deer is commonly observed in the Western Ghats, extends into the Eastern Ghats up to Odisha, and is also found in certain central Indian forest landscapes.

**Key Characteristics:**

- Very small body size: About 25–30 cm tall at the shoulder.

- Weight: 2 to 4 kg.
- Fur is dark brown with white underparts, and the back is marked with rows of white spots.
- Males exhibit upswept, tusk-like upper canines.
- Unlike typical ruminants with four stomach chambers, this species has a three-chambered stomach.

#### Feeding Behaviour:

It generally forages on the forest floor, consuming fruits, leaves, herbs, roots, and occasionally insects, crustaceans, or very small animals, indicating opportunistic omnivory.

#### Life Span:

Typically 8–12 years.

#### Conservation Status:

- **IUCN:** *Least Concern*, though local populations may face pressure from habitat disturbance.

**Practise Question: 10.** With reference to the Indian Mouse Deer (*Moschiola indica*), consider the following statements:

1. It belongs to the family **Tragulidae** and is considered one of the smallest ungulates in India.
2. The species possesses a typical **four-chambered ruminant stomach**, similar to deer and cattle.
3. In India, its distribution spans the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and parts of central forest regions.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Correct Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only**

#### Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** It is a small even-toed ungulate belonging to **Tragulidae**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** It has a **three-chambered stomach**, unlike most ruminants.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Found across **Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and central Indian forests**.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Black-Headed Ibis

A flock of the rare White Ibis, commonly referred to as the Black-headed Ibis, was recently observed in the salt pan regions of Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu, highlighting its seasonal presence in coastal wetlands.

#### About Black-Headed Ibis:

- **Scientific Name:** *Threskiornis melanocephalus*
- **Other Names:** Oriental white ibis, Indian white ibis, black-necked ibis.
- **Family:** Threskiornithidae (ibis family).
- **Type:** Wader bird, adapted to a variety of aquatic habitats.

#### Habitat and Distribution:

- Found across South and Southeast Asia, ranging from India to Japan.

- Inhabits wetlands, agricultural fields, and occasionally coastal areas. Also seen foraging in dry fields and human-modified landscapes.

**Physical Features:**

- Large wader, adults measure 65–76 cm in length.
- Only native ibis in its range with white plumage and a black head and neck.
- Males and females are similar; both have greyish tail feathers.
- During the breeding season, adult tail feathers turn from light grey to jet black.

**Conservation Status:**

- Listed as **Least Concern** on the IUCN Red List.

**Practise Question: 15. Which of the following statements about the Black-headed Ibis is/are correct?**

1. It is also known as the Oriental white ibis and black-necked ibis.
2. It primarily inhabits deserts and arid regions of South Asia.
3. Adult Black-headed Ibises have white plumage with a black head and neck.
4. The species is listed as Least Concern under the IUCN Red List.

**Options:**

- a) 1, 2, and 4 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 3 and 4 only

**Correct Answer:** d) 3 and 4 only

**Explanation :**

**3:** Adults are white with black head and neck.

**4:** Listed as **Least Concern** on the IUCN Red List.

**1:** While alternative names exist, for this question we are emphasizing the distinguishing physical and conservation traits.

**2:** It inhabits **wetlands, agricultural fields, and coastal areas**, not deserts.

\*\*\*\*\*

## New Lichen Species Discovered.

Researchers have recently identified four new lichen species in the Western Ghats, contributing significantly to the region's biodiversity knowledge.

**The newly discovered species include:**

- *Parmotrema sahyadricum* (Wayanad)
- *Solenopsora rhizomorpha* (Eravikulam and Mathikettanshola National Parks)
- *Buelloa ghattensis* (Mathikettanshola National Park)
- *Pyxine janakiae* (Mathikettanshola National Park)

This research, initiated in **2022**, also recorded **over 50 lichen species** as new reports for Kerala's Western Ghats. These findings were published in international scientific journals.

**About Lichens:**

- A lichen is a symbiotic organism consisting of a fungus and a photosynthetic partner (algae or cyanobacterium).
- The algae/cyanobacteria produce carbohydrates that nourish the fungus, while fungi provide water absorption and shade for the algae.
- The main body is called the thallus, anchored to its substrate via rhizines.
- Lichens grow worldwide, often on tree bark, rocks, and soil crusts.

**Ecological Importance:**

- Keystone species supporting food and habitat for animals such as birds, rodents, and deer.
- Provide nesting material and protect surfaces from extreme weather.
- Act as primary colonizers, aiding in soil formation by breaking down rock minerals, paving the way for mosses, liverworts, and other species.

**Practise Question: 16. Consider the following statements about Lichens:**

1. Lichens are a symbiotic association between a fungus and an alga or cyanobacterium.
2. The body of a lichen is called a thallus, anchored by structures known as rhizines.
3. Lichens are primary colonizers and contribute to soil formation by breaking down rocks.
4. Lichens are restricted to tropical rainforests and cannot survive in temperate or arid regions.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 1 and 4 only
- c) 2, 3, and 4 only
- d) All of the above

**Correct Answer:** a) 1, 2, and 3 only

**Explanation:**

- 1: Correct; lichens are a symbiosis of fungus + algae/cyanobacterium.
- 2: Thallus is the main body, anchored by rhizines.
- 3: They are pioneers, aiding in soil formation.
- 4 : Incorrect; lichens occur **worldwide** in diverse habitats, not just tropical rainforests.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Rhesus Macaque

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has recently proposed reinstating the Rhesus Macaque under Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

**About Rhesus Macaque:**

- **Scientific Name:** *Macaca mulatta*
- **Description:** These Old World monkeys have brown fur, red faces, and rumps, with closely cropped hair on their heads that highlights their expressive facial features.
- **Distribution:** Native to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Afghanistan, Vietnam, southern China, and surrounding regions.

- **Habitat:** Found across forests, mangroves, grasslands, scrublands, and hilly regions. They adapt well to human-dominated areas, often forming larger troops than in natural habitats.
- **Diet:** Omnivorous; feeds on seeds, roots, bark, fruits, and cereals.

**Key Characteristics:**

- **Social Structure:** Lives in large groups, generally led by a dominant male.
- **Lifestyle:** Diurnal, social, and both arboreal and terrestrial.
- **Communication:** Uses facial expressions, vocalizations, and body gestures.

**Conservation Status:**

- **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern
- **Wildlife Protection Act 1972:** Schedule II

**Practise Question: 17. Consider the following statements regarding Rhesus Macaques:**

1. They are Old World monkeys with brown fur and red faces and rumps.
2. They are strictly forest-dwelling animals and avoid human settlements.
3. Rhesus macaques live in social groups often led by a dominant male.
4. They are classified as 'Endangered' under the IUCN Red List.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 3, and 4 only
- d) All of the above

**Correct Answer: a) 1 and 3 only**

**Explanation:**

- 1: True; Rhesus macaques are brown-furred Old World monkeys with red faces and rumps.
- 2: False; they adapt well to human-dominated landscapes.
- 3: True; social animals living in troops led by a dominant male.
- 4: False; IUCN lists them as **Least Concern**, not Endangered.

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## Sal Tree (*Shorea robusta*)

Researchers from the **Department of Environment, Himachal Pradesh University (HPU), Shimla** have discovered that the **Sal Tree (*Shorea robusta*)** is among the **most effective natural air purifiers**, capable of significantly reducing air pollution levels.

The study highlighted that Sal trees can absorb and neutralize harmful pollutants, making them highly suitable for afforestation and pollution-control programs.

**About the Sal Tree:**

- **Scientific Name:** *Shorea robusta*
- **Common Name:** Sal tree or Shala tree

- **Notable Feature:** Known as the “**Sentinel of the Forests**” due to its longevity, resilience, and ecological importance.
- **Lifespan:** Can survive for over **100 years**, showing strong adaptability to environmental fluctuations.
- **Cultural Significance:** Considered sacred in several Indian traditions, especially in Buddhism and Hinduism.

**Geographical Distribution:**

The Sal tree is **native to the Indian subcontinent** and is predominantly found in:

- **Uttarakhand**
- **Terai region of Uttar Pradesh**
- **Jharkhand**
- **Odisha**
- **Madhya Pradesh**
- **Chhattisgarh**
- **West Bengal**

It is also common across parts of **Nepal, Bhutan, and southern Himalayas.**

**Climatic and Soil Requirements:**

Parameter	Favourable Conditions
<b>Temperature</b>	Tolerates 5°C (winter) to 40–45°C (summer)
<b>Rainfall</b>	1000 mm – 3000 mm annually
<b>Soil Type</b>	Prefers light loamy soil with good drainage
<b>Altitude</b>	Thrives up to 1500 metres above sea level
<b>Climate Type</b>	Warm and humid
<b>Maintenance</b>	Requires minimal watering and low care; ideal for hilly terrains

**How Sal Trees Help Control Pollution:**

1. **Dust and Particulate Trapping.**
  - The **thick, wax-coated leaves** efficiently trap **dust, carbon particles**, and **fine airborne pollutants**.
  - This prevents resuspension of particulate matter into the atmosphere.
2. **Air Purification Capability.**
  - High **chlorophyll content** enables the tree to absorb and resist **toxic gases** such as **carbon monoxide (CO)** and **sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>)**—commonly emitted from vehicles and industries.
3. **Natural Filtering System.**
  - The **dense canopy** acts like a **natural air filter**, reducing the concentration of airborne pollutants and improving surrounding air quality.

4. **Environmental Resilience.**

- Its ability to thrive in **pollution-prone urban and industrial areas** makes it one of the best species for **urban plantation and green belt development**.

**Question: 20. With reference to the *Sal tree (Shorea robusta)*, consider the following statements:**

1. It belongs to the family Dipterocarpaceae.
2. It is native to tropical South America and Southeast Asia.
3. It is known as the “Sentinel of the Forests” due to its longevity and resilience.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: A.**

**Explanation:**

Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) belongs to the family Dipterocarpaceae and is native to the Indian subcontinent, not South America. Its long lifespan and ecological significance have earned it the title “Sentinel of the Forests.”

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## Humboldt Penguin (*Spheniscus Humboldt*)

**Latest Context (2025)**

- **News:** Chilean scientists have warned of further risks to the world’s shrinking Humboldt penguin population due to intensifying climate change and marine disturbances.
- **Main Concern:** Rising sea surface temperatures and reduced fish availability due to El Niño and overfishing have pushed the species toward greater endangerment.

**About the Humboldt Penguin**

Feature	Details
<b>Scientific Name</b>	<i>Spheniscus humboldti</i>
<b>Common Name</b>	Humboldt Penguin
<b>Group</b>	Belongs to the “banded” penguin genus ( <i>Spheniscus</i> ) — known for the black band across the chest.
<b>Named After</b>	The Humboldt Current — a cold, nutrient-rich oceanic upwelling along the west coast of South America.
<b>Distribution</b>	Endemic to the Pacific coasts of Chile and Peru; about 80% of the global population is found in Chile.
<b>Appearance</b>	Medium-sized (~2 feet tall); black-and-white plumage with large bare skin patches around eyes for heat regulation.
<b>Breeding Season</b>	Occurs twice a year — either March–April or September–October, depending on the colony’s latitude.
<b>Behavior</b>	Monogamous; mates are recognized by distinct vocal cues.

**Ecological Context: The Humboldt Current**

- A cold oceanic current flowing northward along the western coast of South America.
- It is one of the most productive marine ecosystems globally, sustaining abundant fish species (especially anchovies).
- The penguin's distribution closely mirrors this current, as it provides the penguin's primary food resources.

**Major Threats**

1. **Overfishing** → Reduces availability of anchovies and sardines.
2. **Habitat loss** → Due to coastal development and guano extraction (used as fertilizer).
3. **Pollution** → Oil spills, marine litter, and heavy metal contamination.
4. **Disease outbreaks** → Bird flu has emerged as a new threat.
5. **Climate Change** → Ocean warming & acidification disrupt breeding and feeding cycles.

**Conservation Status**

Organisation	Status
IUCN Red List	Vulnerable
CITES	Appendix I (highest protection — international trade prohibited)

**Question: 22. Consider the following statements about the Humboldt Penguin (*Spheniscus Humboldt*):**

1. It belongs to the “banded penguin” group.
2. It is named after a warm equatorial ocean current.
3. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: a) Explanation:** The species is named after the cold Humboldt Current, not a warm one. It belongs to the banded group and is classified as Vulnerable.

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## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

### Euthanasia

#### 1. Concept and Meaning

Euthanasia refers to the deliberate ending of life to relieve a person from irreversible suffering arising from terminal illness, extreme disability, or permanent vegetative state.

It is situated at the intersection of ethics, law, medical science, human rights, and public policy.

#### Important Terminology

- Active euthanasia – Direct act to end life (e.g., injection).
- Passive euthanasia – Withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment.
- Voluntary – With explicit consent of the patient.
- Non-voluntary – Patient unable to consent (coma, vegetative state).
- Assisted dying – Doctor provides means; patient performs final act.
- Advance Directive / Living Will – Legal document expressing patient's future medical refusal preferences.

India currently recognises passive euthanasia and advance directives, not active euthanasia.

#### 2. Evolution of the Debate in India

##### ❖ Early Phase

- The Indian Penal Code had strong prohibitions against suicide and assisted suicide.
- Attempts to challenge IPC 309 (attempt to suicide) led to brief decriminalisation in the P. Rathinam case (1994), but it was reversed in Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996).
- However, Gian Kaur clarified that the right to life with dignity may include the right to die with dignity in specific contexts such as terminal illness.

##### ❖ Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011)

- A 40-year vegetative state patient triggered national debate.

##### ❖ Key outcomes:

- Recognised possibility of passive euthanasia.
- Allowed withdrawal of life support in rare, exceptional cases.
- Introduced High Court-supervised procedure.
- Emphasised need for legislative clarity.

#### Common Cause Judgment (2018)

*A constitution bench delivered a transformative ruling:*

- ❖ Established right to die with dignity as part of Article 21.
- ❖ Legalised passive euthanasia nationwide.
- ❖ Recognised living wills.
- ❖ Created safeguards: multi-medical board review, involvement of judicial magistrate, documentation requirements.
- ❖ This became the foundational framework for India.

#### Procedural Simplification (2023)

- ❖ The Supreme Court acknowledged that the 2018 process was “operationally impractical.”

#### Key reforms:

- ❖ Magistrate involvement reduced.
- ❖ Verification of Advance Directive simplified.
- ❖ Hospital-level and district-level medical boards streamlined.
- ❖ Documentation burden significantly eased.

These changes made end-of-life decisions more humane and realistic for families and healthcare institutions.

### 3. Philosophical and Ethical Dimensions

*Euthanasia touches several deep ethical frameworks:*

- ❖ **Autonomy-** Respecting an individual's freedom over their own body, pain, and medical choices. A living will is seen as the purest expression of autonomy.
- ❖ **Beneficence and Non-Maleficence-** Medical ethics requires minimizing suffering. If treatment offers no therapeutic benefit, continuing it may cause harm, opposite of medical duty.
- ❖ **Dignity-** A core component of Article 21 jurisprudence. Prolonging a vegetative existence can violate personal dignity.
- ❖ **Sanctity of Life-** Many religious traditions oppose deliberate ending of life. Life is considered inviolable, not subject to human discretion.
- ❖ **Slippery Slope Argument-** Legalising euthanasia may lead to coercion, abuse of elderly, or societal undervaluation of disabled persons.
- ❖ **Resource Allocation-** High medical costs and limited critical care infrastructure may influence decisions unethically. Raises concerns about inequality.

### 4. Legal and Constitutional Framework in India

*Key Constitutional Articles*

- ❖ Article 21 – Interpreted to include right to die with dignity.
- ❖ Article 14 – Requires fairness in procedure for withdrawal of life support.
- ❖ Article 19(1)(a) – Supports autonomy and privacy, linked to Advance Directives.

*Other Relevant Laws*

- ❖ IPC 309 – Attempt to suicide remains on statute but effectively decriminalised by the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.
- ❖ Medical Council Regulations – Prohibit active euthanasia but permit withdrawal of futile treatment under guidelines.
- ❖ Transplantation of Human Organs Act – Defines brain-stem death, important for determining futility.

### 5. Medical and Clinical Dimensions

- ❖ Determining Futility of Treatment
- ❖ A central question is when a medical intervention becomes non-beneficial.

**Criteria involve:**

- ❖ Irreversible coma
- ❖ End-stage organ failure
- ❖ Terminal cancer
- ❖ Persistent vegetative state
- ❖ Multi-organ failure with no chance of recovery

### Role of Medical Boards

- ❖ Assess physical condition, prognosis, quality of life, and medical evidence.
- ❖ Prevent unilateral decision-making.

### Palliative Care Gap

- ❖ India has one of the world's weakest palliative care infrastructures.
- ❖ Less than 3–4% of the population has access to quality end-of-life care.
- ❖ This raises concerns that euthanasia may be chosen due to lack of alternatives, not genuine autonomy.

## 6. International Perspectives and Models

*Different countries have adopted varied frameworks reflecting cultural values:*

- ❖ Netherlands- Both active and passive euthanasia legal under strict conditions. Mandatory reporting and review committees.
- ❖ Belgium- Allows euthanasia even for minors under limited circumstances.
- ❖ Switzerland- Assisting suicide legal if motivated by altruistic reasons.
- ❖ United States- Several states follow the Oregon Death with Dignity Act model: Prescription of lethal dose permitted, patient must self-administer.
- ❖ Canada- Strong MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) framework. Expanding eligibility to mental illness has generated global debate.
- ❖ United Kingdom-Euthanasia illegal; emphasis on palliative care and patient autonomy within limits. India's model is more conservative, permitting only passive euthanasia.

## 8. Major Challenges in Indian Context

1. Absence of legislative clarity — reliance on court guidelines alone.
2. Low awareness of living wills and patient rights.
3. Weak palliative care infrastructure creates moral hazards.
4. Family pressure and socio-economic coercion possible.
5. Fear of litigation among doctors — medical fraternity seeks statutory protection.
6. Administrative delays even after 2023 simplification.
7. Cultural, religious and societal resistance in many regions.

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## Presidential Reference on Articles 200 & 201

Important questions and their answers of presidential address wrt powers of governor

### 1. What options does a Governor have under Article 200?

**Answer:** The Governor has three options: (a) grant assent; (b) withhold assent (but withholding is inextricably linked with returning the bill with comments); (c) reserve the bill for the President. The Court re-read Article 200 so that “withholding” cannot be treated as an open-ended, forever option that acts as veto by inaction.

**Implication:** Governors cannot indefinitely sit on bills by simply “withholding” without parliamentary dialog or returning the bill with reasons — the Constitution envisages a dialogic/consultative process.

**2. Is the Governor bound by the aid & advice of the Council of Ministers for all options?**

**Answer:** The Governor normally acts on the aid & advice of the Council of Ministers, but the Governor does possess limited constitutional discretion in specific cases envisaged by Article 200 (e.g., reserve for President, refer to President). The Court clarified the functional contours: certain decisions require Governor's subjective constitutional satisfaction.

**Implication:** While aid & advice is primary, the Governor does retain constitutionally-recognised limited discretion; this does not mean unfettered inaction.

**3. Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the Governor justiciable?**

**Answer:** Yes, but narrowly. The Court held the Governor's action under Article 200 is amenable to judicial review when it vitiates constitutional parameters (e.g., acting mala fide, in violation of constitutional limits, or subverting the legislative process). However, purely subjective satisfaction that is genuinely exercised and not justiciably challengeable will be respected.

**Implication:** Courts can examine governor actions for abuse of power, but they will not substitute their own view for bona fide constitutional discretion.

**4. Does Article 361 bar judicial review of Governor's actions under Article 200?**

**Answer:** No. Article 361 (immunity of President and Governors) is not an absolute bar to judicial review in all circumstances. The Court explained the immunity is limited and does not preclude review where constitutional limits are breached.

**Implication:** Victims of mala fide gubernatorial conduct can seek judicial remedies; immunity is not blanket protection.

**5. Can courts impose timelines for Governor's exercise of Article 200 powers?**

**Answer:** No, generally. The Court held that Article 200 does not prescribe a timeline and that judiciary cannot lay down rigid one-size-fits-all deadlines. The only temporal aspect is limited textual references (e.g., return "as soon as possible"). Mandating judicial timelines is inconsistent with separation of powers and federal design. That said, indefinite delay which subverts legislative function is impermissible and may invite review.

**Implication:** The April 2025 decision that imposed fixed timelines was held to be incorrect in principle; courts should not routinely fix statutory-style deadlines for Presidents/ Governors. But courts can intervene against unreasonable or mala fide delay.

**6. Is the President's exercise under Article 201 justiciable?**

**Answer:** Assent by the President is not ordinarily justiciable. The Court emphasised that the President's subjective satisfaction under Article 201 is generally conclusive; the President's assent is not susceptible to judicial review in normal course. Previous conflicting precedents were discussed and harmonised.

**Implication:** Challenges to validity of a law on the basis that the President improperly assented are not straightforward — the Court will not ordinarily probe the President's subjective satisfaction.

**7. Can courts impose timelines on the President under Article 201?**

**Answer:** No. Same reasoning as for Governors — Article 201 does not contain temporal prescriptions; the Court cannot impose judicial timelines on the President's decision to assent, withhold, or return.

**Implication:** The April 2025 order's three-month timeline for Presidential approval was unsustainable.

**8. Is the President required to seek the Supreme Court's opinion by way of Article 143 whenever a Bill is reserved?**

**Answer:** No. The President is not required to refer every reserved bill to the Supreme Court under Article 143. The President's subjective satisfaction suffices; Article 143 is a discretionary mechanism for the President, not a required step each time a bill is reserved.

**Implication:** Article 143 remains a presidential tool for questions of law/fact of public importance — not a procedural step for every reservation.

**9. Are Governor/President decisions justiciable at a stage earlier than the law coming into force (pre-enactment review)?**

**Answer:** The Court drew a distinction: while courts should not ordinarily perform pre-enactment substantive adjudication on the contents of a pending Bill (that would be judicial law-making), actions of Governor/President that amount to constitutional breaches (e.g., mala fide delay) can be reviewed. But courts should avoid intrusive examination of legislative text before it becomes law.

**Implication:** Judicial restraint is required; courts won't normally engage in content review pre-enactment, but procedural constitutional violations are reviewable.

**10. Can Article 142 be used to substitute/override Governor/President orders ?**

**Answer:** No. The Court held that Article 142 cannot be used to artificially 'deem assent' or override constitutional or statutory provisions that prescribe procedures. Article 142 is broad but cannot be used to bypass constitutional mandates or create a substitute for the President's functions. The earlier use of Article 142 to "deem assent" was criticised as inconsistent with the constitutional scheme.

**Implication:** The April 2025 invocation of Article 142 to deem assent on pending bills was not permissible.

**11. Is a State law valid without Governor's assent?**

**Answer:** No — a Bill becomes law only upon compliance with constitutional requirements (including assent). The Court reiterated that the formal requirement of assent is constitutionally critical; courts cannot treat a Bill as "law in force" absent due process, except in narrow circumstances recognized by the Constitution.

**Implication:** Formalities matter; judicial curiosity about "deeming" a law in force is constrained.

**12. Bench-size question (Article 145(3)) — is a 5-judge bench mandatory?**

**Answer:** The Court addressed procedural technicalities: issues involving substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution may require constitution bench consideration. The Court concluded procedural norms were followed; there was no mandatory requirement in the facts to stop the hearing.

**Implication:** Bench constitution rules remain important, but the Court's administrative allocation of the reference was lawful.

**13. Scope of Article 142 — can SC issue orders contrary to substantive constitutional/statutory provisions?**

**Answer:** No. Article 142 is not override clear constitutional or statutory prescriptions. It can remedy deficiencies and do complete justice, but within constitutional bounds. Orders that effectively rewrite constitutional procedures are impermissible.

**Implication:** The Court reined in expansive use of Article 142 that alters constitutional balances.

**14. Is Article 131 the sole route for Union-State disputes?**

**Answer:** The Court explained jurisdictional contours: while Article 131 provides an exclusive original forum for disputes between governments, it does not oust other constitutional remedies in every case; Article 32 public interest petitions may still be entertained for rights violations. The answer is nuanced — forum selection depends on subject-matter and relief sought.

**Implication:** States and Union must pick correct procedural routes; not all federal issues are shoe-horned to Article 131 automatically.

**Practical implications for governance & constitutional law**

- ❖ The April 2025 Tamil Nadu Governor judgment's strict timelines and the use of Article 142 to deem assent have been effectively rolled back in principle.
- ❖ Courts retain power to check mala fide or unreasonable gubernatorial delay — protecting legislatures' functioning — but will not routinely micromanage timelines.
- ❖ The President's discretionary role and the political/diplomatic contours of assent are protected from routine judicial intervention.

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**Right to Vote & Freedom of Vote**

**Right to Vote-** The right to vote is the legal right of a citizen to participate in choosing government representatives through periodic elections. In India, it flows from statutory law (Representation of the People Act) and constitutional principles of democracy, adult suffrage, and equality.

**Freedom of Vote-** Freedom of vote refers to the voter's autonomy to exercise their choice freely, secretly, and without coercion, including the right to refuse to vote for any candidate (as affirmed through NOTA and judicial interpretation).

Together, these rights form the core of political freedoms, democratic legitimacy, and popular sovereignty.

**2. Constitutional Position** - The Indian Supreme Court has consistently held that the right to vote is not a fundamental right; it is a statutory right granted by Parliament. However, modern jurisprudence increasingly recognises voting as integral to constitutional democracy.

**Constitutional Foundations-** Even though not explicitly a fundamental right, the right to vote draws strength from

- ❖ Article 326 – Adult suffrage.
- ❖ Article 14 – Equality of the vote (one person, one vote).
- ❖ Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of expression (interpreted to include the act of voting and non-voting).
- ❖ Article 21 – Dignity and autonomy aspects.

**5. Freedom of Vote — Meaning & Components**

*Freedom of vote means that the voter must be able to decide freely:*

Whom to vote for

Whom not to vote for

Whether to vote at all

Without intimidation, inducement, threat, bribery, or undue influence

## Key Elements

1. Secrecy of the ballot — foundational to free choice.
2. Freedom from coercion — social, economic, political pressure.
3. Right to negative vote — NOTA reinforces autonomy.
4. Right to information — knowledge about candidates is part of meaningful choice.
5. Poll accessibility — logistical freedom (PWD facilitation, postal ballot expansion).

## 6. Supreme Court's Jurisprudence

### 1. Right to Vote is Statutory — but the act of voting is expression

- PUCL v. Union of India (2003, 2013)
- Though the right to vote is statutory, the decision to vote is an element of Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of expression).
- Introduction of NOTA upheld.

### 2. Secrecy of Ballot as Constitutional Principle

- Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006) — secrecy is essential in direct elections but not always in indirect ones.
- People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India (2003) — secrecy is integral to freedom of vote.

### 3. Right to Know — Part of Informed Voting

- ADR case (2002) and PUCL case (2003) established that voters have a right to know candidates' assets, criminal records, qualifications, etc.
- Treated as part of Article 19(1)(a) freedom of expression.

### 4. Negative Vote as Expression

- PUCL v. UOI (2013) — NOTA is an expression of dissent and enhances democratic participation.

## 7. Relationship Between Right to Vote & Freedom of Speech

*The Court has drawn a distinction between:*

- Right to vote (statutory)
- Freedom in voting (constitutional)

*Thus:*

- Casting a vote is statutory.
- Choice of how to vote, or whether to vote, is part of free expression under Article 19(1)(a).
- NOTA, Right to Know, and ballot secrecy emerge from this constitutional dimension.
- This is similar to the idea that the act originates in statute, but the freedom is protected by the Constitution.

## Threats to Freedom of Vote in India

### 1. Money Power

- Vote-buying, bribery undermine free choice.
- Cash inducements particularly prevalent in certain states.

### 2. Muscle Power

- Intimidation of voters, booth capturing (although EVM + VVPAT has reduced this).

### 3. Misuse of Government Machinery

- Misuse of public offices, welfare announcements close to elections.

#### 4. Communal & Caste Mobilization

- Identity pressure dilutes independent choice.

#### 5. Digital Manipulation

- Targeted misinformation, deepfakes, WhatsApp propaganda influencing voter autonomy.

#### 6. Social Pressure

- Collection of voter slips by local strongmen.
- Community-based intimidation.

### 12. Comparative Perspective

#### United States

- Voting considered a constitutional right; several amendments protect it (15th, 19th, 26th).
- Freedom of political expression expansive.

#### UK

- Right to vote is statutory but deeply embedded in democratic tradition.
- Strong restrictions on undue influence.

#### South Africa

- Constitutionally guaranteed voting rights
- High standard for free and fair elections.

India falls between UK's statutory tradition and rights-based frameworks.

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## Constitution Day

Constitution Day is observed on 26 November every year. On 26 November 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India formally adopted the Constitution of India.

The Constitution came into force later, on 26 January 1950, which is celebrated as Republic Day. Prior to 2015, 26 November was informally observed by legal institutions as "Law Day."

In 2015, the Government of India formally declared 26 November as Constitution Day — partly in commemoration of the 125th birth anniversary year of B. R. Ambedkar (the chairperson of the Drafting Committee), to honour the Constitution and promote constitutional awareness.

### Significance & Purpose of Constitution Day

Constitution Day is more than a commemorative date — it serves several key purposes:

- Reminds citizens of the constitutional foundation of India: justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, democracy, rule of law.
- Celebrates the vision of the framers of the Constitution — their foresight, debates and efforts that led to a democratic, secular and republican India.
- Promotes constitutional literacy among citizens (especially students, civil servants, general public) — encouraging understanding of rights, duties, institutional framework, fundamental values.
- Acts as a reaffirmation of India's commitment to constitutional values in changing times — ensuring that democratic values are revived regularly.

### Constitution Day 2025 —

- 2025 marks the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution (since 1949).

- The official theme for 2025: “Hamara Samvidhan – Hamara Swabhiman” (Our Constitution – Our Pride).
- The central national function is scheduled at Samvidhan Sadan, Central Hall in New Delhi on 26 November 2025 at 11:00 AM.
- The day will be used to reaffirm India’s constitutional values, encourage awareness among citizens, and pay tribute to framers.

### **How Constitution Day is Celebrated**

- Preamble reading in schools, colleges, government offices — reaffirming foundational values.
- Seminars, quiz competitions, essay-writing, debates on constitutional themes, rights–duties, contemporary issues.
- Public functions, including at national level (e.g., in Samvidhan Sadan in 2025) involving government dignitaries.
- Awareness campaigns — promoting constitutional literacy, voter registration (especially first-time voters), civic responsibilities. As seen in 2025 — special emphasis on youth and democracy.
- Outreach through educational institutions — schools & colleges encourage students to understand and discuss the Constitution; government encourages translation and distribution for wider reach.

### **Key Takeaway: What Constitution Day 2025 Symbolises**

Constitution Day 2025 underlines that the Constitution of India is not a relic of the past — it remains a living, evolving document that binds and guides citizens and institutions. By celebrating it with the theme “Hamara Samvidhan – Hamara Swabhiman,” the nation reaffirms the pride, responsibility, unity, and democratic spirit entrusted by its founding document.

This day invites every citizen — young and old — to revisit constitutional values, understand rights and duties, respect democratic norms, and contribute to building a just, inclusive, egalitarian society.

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## **NJAC- National Judicial Appointment Commission**

### **Origins & Background**

- The conventional method of appointing judges to the higher judiciary (Supreme Court + High Courts) in India is the Collegium system. Under this, senior judges appoint new judges.
- Over time, criticism of the Collegium system grew: allegations of opacity, nepotism, lack of transparency, inadequate representation, and absence of clear objective criteria for appointments.
- To address these concerns, the government (then) proposed a reform — replacing Collegium with a broader, more transparent commission involving judiciary, executive, and eminent persons. This led to the creation of NJAC.

### **Legal & Constitutional Steps for NJAC**

- The Constitution (Ninety-ninth Amendment) Act, 2014 (99th Amendment) and the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014 sought to formalise NJAC as a constitutional body.
- NJAC’s proposed composition: six-member body consisting of:
  1. The Chief Justice of India (chairperson)
  2. Two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court

3. Union Law and Justice Minister
4. Two “eminent persons” (from civil society / non-judicial background) nominated via a special committee.

### **What Happened in 2015 — NJAC Struck Down**

- The NJAC Act and the 99th Amendment were challenged in the top court.
- In 2015, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India struck down NJAC (in a 4:1 majority), declaring the amendment unconstitutional and void.
- The Court reaffirmed the Collegium system. The key reasoning: NJAC curtailed the primacy and independence of the judiciary (a core part of the “basic structure” of the Constitution). Inclusion of the Law Minister and “eminent persons” was seen as impinging on separation of powers and opening the door to executive/ political influence.
- The Court left open the possibility that Parliament could try again (through a new amendment) — provided judicial independence is preserved.

### **Why NJAC Debate Has Resurfaced in 2025 —**

*Recently, several developments have reignited interest in NJAC and judicial-appointment reforms. Key triggers:*

- Allegations of misconduct: A major flashpoint was the case of a senior judge (Yashwant Varma) — whose residence reportedly had large sums of unaccounted-for cash discovered. This raised serious questions about transparency and accountability in the judiciary.
- Following that, calls from political leadership: The Vice-President / Rajya Sabha Chairman (Jagdeep Dhankhar) publicly argued that if NJAC had been operative, such controversies might have been avoided.
- A fresh petition was filed before the Supreme Court requesting revival of NJAC and dismantling of the Collegium system. As of 26 November 2025, the Court (under Chief Justice Surya Kant) has said it will “consider” the plea.
- In parallel, the idea of a broader National Judicial Policy has been mooted — meant to bring systemic judicial reforms (case management, uniform standards, reducing pendency), but often discussed alongside the NJAC-collegium debate.
- Hence 2025 marks a renewed phase of public, political, and judicial scrutiny of how judges are appointed in India.

### **Arguments in Favour of Reviving / Reforming with NJAC**

1. Transparency & Accountability — Inclusion of non-judicial members aims to make appointments less opaque, reduce “judges appointing judges in secret.”
2. Diverse Representation — Eminent persons from civil society / executive participation could help ensure broader representation and reduce clique-like selection / nepotism inside Judiciary.
3. Public Trust & Legitimacy — Given instances like alleged corruption or misconduct (e.g. cash-discovery), public faith in judiciary can improve if selection process is visibly accountable.
4. Checks & Balances — Executive + civil-society role along with judiciary could avoid insularity, echo chambers, and ensure that judges are selected on merit + broader societal criteria.
5. Possibility of Reform — The 2015 judgment itself left open the door to a new constitutional amendment — provided it safeguards judicial independence.

6. Reducing Bias & Regional Imbalances — A more objective and diverse commission could mitigate allegations of caste/creed/regional bias in judicial appointments.

#### Arguments Against NJAC / In Favour of Retaining Collegium

1. Judicial Independence — Core Concern: The 2015 judgment flagged that giving executive a decisive role threatens the independence of judiciary — a basic feature of Constitution.
2. Risk of Executive / Political Influence — Government's stake in appointments could lead to politicisation of judiciary, especially problematic in a polarized polity.
3. Veto Power Creates Deadlocks / Protects Mediocrity — Under NJAC design, any two members could veto a recommendation — potentially undermining consensus or blocking meritorious candidates
4. Lack of Clear Criteria / Risk of Patronage — Eminent persons were not defined in terms of judicial qualifications; selection left to "free will," which could lead to favoritism or compromise
5. Collegium Already Has Some Checks / Transparency Improvements — Over years, Collegium has adopted some transparency measures (e.g. publishing resolutions, inviting objections) — reducing some of earlier criticisms.
6. Risk of Undermining Basic Structure of Constitution — The Supreme Court in 2015 had held that primacy of judiciary in appointments is part of "basic structure." Any dilution may threaten constitutional principles.
7. Institutional Memory & Collegiality — Judges understand institutional needs, seniority, jurisprudential culture — a body dominated by non-judicial members may lack this depth.

#### Analysis:

- **Need for balance:** The core debate is about balancing judicial independence and insulation from politics vs transparency, accountability, and public legitimacy.
- **Structural reforms beyond appointments:** Even if NJAC returns, deeper reforms are needed — e.g. objective criteria for merit, representation of diverse social backgrounds, efficient case-management, vetting & accountability mechanisms.
- **Risk of politicisation vs capture by insiders:** A commission with executive/civil-society members may invite political influence; but unchecked judicial appointments risk nepotism, opacity and lack of diversity.
- **Trust deficit vs institutional autonomy:** Judicial misconduct (if any) erodes public trust, but over-regulation may hamper judicial independence to check executive/legislature.
- **Need for wider consensus:** For any sustainable reform (if NJAC revived or new system devised), there must be broad cross-party, civil society, and judicial acceptance — to preserve legitimacy.

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## Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill, 2025

### Context

Assam Legislative Assembly introduced and passed the Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill, 2025 in November 2025. The Bill criminalises entering into a second (or further) marriage when a subsisting marriage exists, prescribes imprisonment/fines, creates enforcement duties for village authorities and religious functionaries, and provides compensation mechanisms for victim women. The Bill exempts Sixth-Schedule tribal areas and recognises certain pre-existing, duly registered polygamous marriages entered before commencement.

### Key Provisions of Bill

#### 1. Short title, extent & commencement

- The Bill is titled “The Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Act, 2025.”
- It extends to the whole of the State of Assam, with specific exemption for Sixth-Schedule areas and members of Scheduled Tribes covered by Article 366(25) read with Article 342.

### Prohibition (substance of offence)

Section 4: No person shall marry if (i) they have a living spouse; or (ii) not legally separated following due legal procedure; or (iii) they are party to a marriage not yet dissolved / annulled or where appeals are pending. In short: a second marriage while the first subsists is prohibited.

### Penal provisions & grading of offences

- Basic offence — Whoever during subsistence of a valid marriage contracts a subsequent marriage in contravention of Section 4: imprisonment up to 7 years + fine.
- Aggravated offence — If the subsequent marriage is contracted with concealment of the earlier marriage from the later spouse, the offender is punishable with imprisonment up to 10 years + fine.
- Repeat offence— Subsequent commission after conviction attracts double punishment (i.e., enhanced sentence).
- Offences by village authorities/parents/guardian — Gaonburah, Village Head, Quazi, parents or legal guardians who dishonestly or fraudulently hide and participate in a polygamous marriage shall face up to 2 years imprisonment + fine up to RS 1 lakh.
- Offence by priests/Quazis— Any priest/Quazi knowingly solemnising a marriage contrary to Section 4 faces up to 2 years imprisonment and fines

### 5. Enforcement duties & police powers

- Duty to inform Gaonburah / Village Head / Quazi and parents/legal guardians must immediately inform the police on receiving information of polygamous solemnization or planning. Failure to inform or willful concealment attracts liability under Sections 4 & 5.
- Police role: On receiving information, Officer-in-Charge shall visit or depute officer (not below Sub-Inspector); police must announce illegality at gathering and endeavour to disperse the gathering. Police must take steps to prevent the marriage and explain the punishability.
- Search & seizure / entry : Police (not below Sub-Inspector) and authorised officers may enter, inspect premises, seize material and arrest/detain suspected persons for enforcement purposes.

### Cognizability, trial forum & administrative consequences

- Cognizability The Bill expressly makes offences under it cognizable despite anything in the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (i.e., the new criminal code), enabling police to register FIRs and arrest without prior approval.
- Court jurisdiction - Cases are to be placed before courts within whose territorial jurisdiction the offender resides at the time of the polygamous marriage or where the marriage was solemnized.
- Effect of conviction A person convicted under the Act shall not be entitled to public employment/appointments funded or aided by the Assam government; cannot receive or claim benefits under state schemes; and cannot contest local elections (Panchayati Raj, urban local bodies, municipalities).

### **Compensation & victim relief**

State shall notify an authority to consider compensation for victim women of polygamous marriage. The designated authority will process claims by victims and award compensation as prescribed.

### **Savings and transitional provisions**

The Act shall not apply to polygamous marriages that entered into prior to commencement of the Act if they were (i) duly registered under any State authority as required by law at the time; or (ii) duly registered under any institute/body under customary law along with valid proof. In other words, pre-existing registered polygamous marriages may be saved.

### **Extra-territorial / territorial reach**

**Special provision:** The Act reaches persons who were ordinarily resident in Assam but have entered into polygamous marriages outside Assam after commencement — such persons will be punishable under this law. Conversely, non-residents marrying in Assam are also within territorial reach. The “ordinarily resident” definition is deliberately expansive.

### **Legislative competence**

Marriage & divorce fall in the Concurrent List (Seventh Schedule, List-III — Entry 5), i.e., both Parliament and State legislatures can make laws on these subjects. States therefore have legislative competence to legislate on marriage/divorce matters, subject to repugnancy rules vis-à-vis central laws. Uttarakhand’s UCC and Goa’s civil code are precedents for state action on personal law matters.

### **Likely constitutional/legal challenges —**

#### **A. Violation of Article 25 (freedom of religion) / interference with religious practices**

**Challenge:** Criminalising polygamy as practised under Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) interferes with free exercise of religion.

**State counter:** The law is a secular, general law addressing marriage and public order/welfare; earlier Supreme Court jurisprudence (e.g., Shayara Bano on triple talaq) permits state action to regulate practices that harm equality/women’s rights. States can regulate secular aspects of marriage even if practices are religiously justified; the Bill is framed as gender-neutral and applies to all communities (not just Muslims) and exempts tribal areas.

#### **B. Article 14 (equality) — discriminatory application, or overbroad penalties and disabilities**

**Challenge:** Political disabilities (disqualification from state benefits or local elections) and collateral consequences could be disproportionate and discriminatory; enforcement duties on religious/community leaders might single out certain communities.

**State counter:** Offence is uniformly applicable across religions; penalties are proportionate to protect women’s rights and social order; savings and exemptions reduce retroactivity concerns. Courts will examine proportionality and nexus to legitimate state aim

#### **C. Article 21 (personal liberty) / retrospective effect / extra-territorial reach**

**Challenge:** Broad definition of “ordinarily resident” and extra-territorial reach may affect personal liberty and create conflict with law of another state.

**State counter:** Residence tests are necessary to prevent circumvention; the law applies to conduct with nexus to Assam (residence, solemnization in Assam) — valid territorial principle.

#### **D. Conflict with Central laws / Repugnancy (Concurrent List)**

**Challenge:** If a central law governs certain personal law aspects, Assam's law could be repugnant. However, bigamy is already criminalised for Hindus/Parsis etc., and Muslim personal law permits polygamy subject to Shariat.

**State counter:** Under Concurrent List, state law stands unless repugnant to central law — but marriage/polygamy is not comprehensively protected in a way that prevents state action aimed at public order/welfare. Courts will analyse repugnancy and the central government's policy.

### **E. Separation of powers / policing & local authority duties**

**Challenge:** Penalising Gaonburah and religious heads may be seen as overreaching into customary authority.

**State counter:** The duties are limited and intended to prevent illegal marriages; guilty failure to report indicates complicity or facilitation and is punishable.

What the courts will weigh: The constitutional test will be whether the law pursues a legitimate state aim (gender justice, protection of marriage rights, prevention of fraud), whether measures are proportionate, and whether the law unreasonably targets religious practice rather than neutral regulation of civil status.

#### **Arguments in favour**

- **Gender justice:** Protects women from abandonment, financial insecurity and social stigma arising from polygamous relationships.
- **Clarity & enforcement:** Moves bigamy/polygamy from informal social practice to a clearly enforceable statutory prohibition.
- **Victim relief:** Compensation mechanism provides remedy for affected women.
- **Consistency with other state reforms:** Aligns with Uttarakhand and Goa examples where states pursued monogamy to protect women.

#### **Arguments against / risks**

- **Religious backlash & communal politics:** Perceptions that the law targets particular communities could inflame tensions; political fallout likely.
- **Constitutional litigation risk:** Expect challenges under Articles 14/25/21, especially around religious freedom and equality.
- **Implementation problems:** Proof of previous marriage, covert polygamy, under-reporting, and administrative capacity (registry/police) pose practical hurdles.
- **Collateral disenfranchisement:** Disqualifying convicted persons from state benefits/elections raises concerns about proportionality and due process.

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## **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance IDEA**

### **1. What is International IDEA**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1995 to support and strengthen democracy worldwide through policy advice, comparative knowledge, capacity building, and operational electoral assistance. Its mission is to promote sustainable, inclusive and resilient democratic institutions and processes.

## 2. History & legal status

**Founded:** 1995 (by a group of governments responding to the democratic transitions of the late 20th century).

**Legal status:** Intergovernmental body with Member States; it operates from a secretariat in Stockholm and has UN observer status and partnerships with international organisations.

## 3. Mandate & core functions

International IDEA's mandate (from its Statutes and strategy documents) centres on four complementary roles:

1. Knowledge production & comparative research — indicators, indices and databases that measure democratic performance and electoral integrity.
2. Norms & policy advice — guidance on constitutional design, electoral law, political party regulation and democratic governance.
3. Capacity development — training and advisory support for election management bodies, parliaments, political parties and civil society.
4. Practical electoral assistance — technical support during electoral processes (electoral management, observation support, dispute prevention).

These functions are implemented via global programmes, country projects and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## 4. Governance & membership

**Governing Council / Council of Member States:** composed of Member States and a small number of observers; the Council sets strategic priorities and approves budgets. Recent practice includes rotating chairship among members.

**Secretariat:** Headquartered in Stockholm; led by a Secretary-General/Director who manages programmes and operations.

**Advisory bodies & partners:** Experts, regional partners, civil society organisations and election agencies provide technical inputs.

**Recent governance note:** In December 2025 India's Chief Election Commissioner assumed the chairship of the Council — a signal of India's active role in the organisation's governance and closer cooperation between International IDEA and Election Commission of India.

## Programme areas & methods of work

**International IDEA groups work into thematic programmes and uses a combination of approaches:**

- **Electoral processes & integrity:** advising on electoral laws, voter registration, EVMs/technology, observation, dispute resolution.
- **Political parties & representation:** support for party regulation, internal democracy, candidate selection, gender quotas.
- **Constitutional processes & civic engagement:** technical assistance on constitution-making, referendum design, civic education.
- **Gender & inclusion:** programmes to increase women's political participation and inclusive electoral access.
- **Digital democracy & integrity:** work on misinformation, AI risks, digital campaigning norms and legal frameworks.

- **Methods:** country assessments, legal reviews, capacity building workshops, deployment of technical experts, multi-stakeholder dialogues and toolkits. ([idea.int][2])

### 7. Funding, donors & partnerships

- **Funding model:** mixed — core funding from Member States (unrestricted funding that supports strategy/budget) plus project funding from external donors, foundations and partner governments. Annual programme & budget documents list specific projects and donor contributions.
- **Major partners/donors:** a mix of national governments (European and non-European), multilateral institutions, development agencies and philanthropic foundations
- **Partnerships:** close cooperation with national election management authorities (EMBs), UN agencies, regional organisations (African Union, OAS, EU), civil society and research institutions.

### Strengths

- **Comparative expertise & neutral knowledge base:** IDEA's indices and toolkits are globally respected.
- **Intergovernmental legitimacy:** Being an IGO with Member States gives IDEA access to governments and EMBs for policy dialogues.
- **Operational flexibility:** Can combine advisory/technical support with research and capacity building.

### Limitations / Critiques

- **Dependence on donor funding:** Shifts in donor priorities (e.g., aid reductions or restructuring) can affect project continuity; IDEA's recent convenings reflect concern about "when aid fades."
- **Perceptions of bias:** In politically charged contexts, technical assistance from an international body can be portrayed as partisan by local actors — IDEA must manage perceptions via transparency and local partnerships.
- **Scope vs capacity:** Rising demand for digital-era support (AI, deepfakes, cyber threats) strains institutional capacity; rapid scaling required.

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## Supreme Court of India (SC) to review political donations

**Context-** On 24–25 November 2025, SC issued notices on a public interest litigation challenging the legality of a provision in Income Tax Act, 1961 (Section 13A(d)) which allows political parties to receive anonymous cash donations up to RS 2,000.

The petition argues that this provision undermines transparency and allows untraceable political funding — thus impacting fairness and integrity of elections.

The Bench hearing this matter comprises Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, and the Court has also issued notices to the Centre, the Election Commission of India (ECI), and a number of recognised political parties.

The petitioner seeks not only to strike down the anonymous-donation clause, but also to mandate full disclosure of donor identity and impose restrictions (or ban) on cash donations to parties.

### Legal & Institutional Background:

Earlier major reform: End of Electoral Bond Scheme (2024)- In Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India (2024), a five-judge bench struck down the now-defunct Electoral Bond Scheme (2018-24), calling

it unconstitutional. The Court held that anonymous, unlimited corporate and individual funding under the scheme violated the voters' right to information (Article 19(1)(a)). Post that judgment, there was expectation and pressure for broader reforms of political financing, including closing other loopholes that enable opacity.

**The loophole under challenge now-** Even though electoral bonds are gone, Section 13A(d) of the Income Tax Act still allows cash donations up to RS 2,000 anonymously. Many argue that this small-amount exemption is now redundant in the era of digital payments, and enables "dark money" funding. The petition contends it undermines transparency, disclosure norms, and thus the electoral process. Thus, SC's current review can be seen as the next logical step in political-funding reform — addressing residual opacity even after the major elimination of the bonds scheme.

### **What the Petitioner Seeks — Key Legal Questions & Demands**

#### **1. Strike down anonymous cash-donation clause**

- Petitioner seeks removal of Section 13A(d) of Income Tax Act.
- This clause allows anonymous cash donations up to RS 2,000 to political parties.

#### **Argument:**

- violates- Transparency in political finance
- Voters' right to information under Article 19(1)(a)
- Fairness in elections & democracy

#### **2. Complete ban on cash donations**

- Not just anonymous donations; petitioner demands prohibition of all cash donations.

#### **Rationale:**

- Ensures traceability of political funds
- Prevents use of unaccounted money / hawala routes
- Encourages digital & bank-linked channels

#### **3. Mandatory full disclosure of donor identity**

- For every contribution, political parties must disclose:

##### **Donor name**

- PAN
- Bank details / payment method

##### **Objective:**

- Enhance accountability
- Prevent illegal or foreign-linked funding
- Improve verifiability of party finances

#### **4. Empower & direct Election Commission of India (ECI)**

##### ***Petitioner seeks directions to ECI to:***

- Scrutinise Form 24A contribution reports of parties
- Flag non-compliance publicly
- Consider suspending election symbol of repeat offenders
- Strengthen ECI's oversight and enforcement powers

#### **5. Independent audit of political party accounts**

- Demand for annual accounts to be audited by auditors appointed by ECI, not by parties themselves.

**Objective:**

- Avoid conflict of interest
- Ensure credible verification
- Prevent manipulation or under-reporting of donations

**6. Penalties, taxation & prosecution for violations****Petitioner asks SC to mandate:**

- Tax penalties for parties that hide or misreport contributions
- Prosecution for deliberate non-disclosure or accepting illegal funding
- Strong enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance
- Legal & Constitutional Considerations: What's at Stake
- When SC examines the challenge, the following constitutional and institutional principles are likely to be central:

❖ **Right to Information & Democracy**

Transparency in political funding is argued to be part of voters' right to make informed decisions. The 2024 Electoral Bonds judgment already recognized this under Article 19(1)(a).

❖ **Equality & Fair Elections**

Opaque donations, especially untraceable or "dark money," can distort competitive balance — giving unfair advantage to parties with hidden funding sources. Thus regulation is needed to preserve electoral equality and level playing field.

❖ **Regulatory Power over Political Parties**

Political parties are not purely private actors; they affect public governance. Hence, they may be subject to stricter regulation and disclosure norms under the public-interest and democratic accountability rationale.

**Tax Incentives & Public Interest**

Since Section 13A(d) deals with tax exemptions for voluntary contributions, misuse of this exemption undermines public finance and fair tax-benefit exchange. Demanding disclosure guards against misuse and ensures transparency of benefits derived.

**Feasibility & Privacy Balance**

Donor identity disclosure must balance transparency and donor privacy — constitutional courts often weigh privacy vs public interest. The Court may need to examine whether a complete ban on cash, or mandatory disclosure, is proportionate and reasonable in context.

**Expected Impact & What SC's Review Could Achieve**

*If the Court strikes down or modifies the anonymous-cash-donation provision, potential outcomes:*

- Full disclosure regime for all political donations — ending untraceable cash flows to parties.
- Strengthened financial accountability for parties — through audit, oversight, stricter reporting norms.
- Reduced influence of "dark money," illicit cash, or black money in elections — improving fairness.
- Precedent for further reforms — may prompt legislation for comprehensive political-funding regulation (transparency, caps, audit, public funding, etc.).

- Increased public trust — better transparency can improve citizen confidence in political process and institutions.

#### Potential Debates & Challenges —

- **Donor privacy vs public interest:** Disclosure norms must respect individual privacy but safeguard democratic transparency.
- **Small donors & grassroots funding:** A total ban on cash donations might deter genuine small-donor participation— a balance must be struck so that regulation does not hinder democratic participation.
- **Administrative feasibility & policing resources:** Ensuring compliance, verifying small donors' identity, auditing hundreds of parties — a significant burden on ECI/other agencies.
- **Risk of evasion or alternate clandestine channels:** Even with cash ban, donors may find illicit routes — window-dressing via shell organisations, trusts, etc.
- **Need for comprehensive political-funding reform:** SC's review may lead to piecemeal restrictions; a holistic statutory/regulatory framework may be more effective (contribution caps, audit, state funding, corporate funding norms, transparency).

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### Special Leave Petition

#### Context-

- Recently, a Bench of J&K & Ladakh HC held that mere dismissal of an SLP by the Supreme Court — with or without reasons — does not automatically trigger the “doctrine of merger.” In other words: just because an SLP is dismissed doesn't mean the underlying High Court judgment is “merged” or replaced by the SC dismissal.
- This ruling came in a case where after the SLP was withdrawn earlier, a review petition was filed before the HC — prompting a question of maintainability. The HC's answer (that merger doctrine does not apply) is being seen as significant, and has drawn attention across legal and academic circles.
- Because many litigations from J&K involve sensitive issues (detentions, land, administrative orders, legacy of pre-2019 laws), the treatment of SLPs and consequences of their dismissal affects many such cases. Recent citation of the new HC ruling indicates lawyers and litigants may strategically use review petitions even after SLP dismissal.
- This trend raises important jurisprudential questions: the limits of SC's discretionary jurisdiction under Article 136; the finality of High Court judgments; the scope and effect of SLP dismissal; and the interplay of HC review powers.

#### What's the Legal Issue: SLP Dismissal & Doctrine of Merger

- Under Article 136, SC's leave jurisdiction to hear appeals from any court/ tribunal — discretionary, not a right.
- In appellate jurisprudence, when a higher court hears an appeal and passes a detailed judgment, the lower court's decision may “merge” into the higher court's decision. The lower-court order loses independent existence; only the higher court's ruling remains.

- If SC dismisses an SLP, does that count as a “reviewed appeal” Or is it simply a rejection of the right to appeal — and the original High Court judgment remains intact and independently operative?
- The recent J&K & Ladakh HC ruling answers that: dismissal of SLP — even without detailed reasoning — does not by itself trigger merger. Only when SC gives a reasoned judgment (i.e. declares law on point) does Article 141 (binding precedent) apply.
- Thus, litigants from J&K with dismissed or withdrawn SLPs may still approach the HC (for review / other remedies) — a development that alters the finality calculus of many cases.

### **Background: SLPs & Jammu & Kashmir**

- After 2019 reorganisation, constitutional and legal status of J&K changed; HC judgments now come under general SC jurisdiction.
- Many cases pending from pre-2019 era involve property, land, detentions, statutory rights, etc.
- SLPs from J&K HC are frequently filed under Article 136 to challenge HC rulings — on grounds of fundamental rights, procedural unfairness, administrative law, etc.

### **Traditional Understanding of SLP Dismissal**

- Historically, courts and lawyers treated SLP-dismissal as terminus ad quem: once SC declines leave, the HC judgment stands.
- Whether this “merger” doctrine applied usually hinged on whether SC gave a reasoned order (declaration of law) or a simple non-reasoned dismissal.
- Doctrine of merger was thought to apply only if SC pronounces a binding precedent — not all dismissals automatically merged.

### **J&K & Ladakh HC Decision –**

- A Single-Judge Bench held that mere dismissal or refusal of SLP, with or without reasons, does not amount to merger. What matters is whether SC has made a declaration of law under Article 141.
- If SC’s dismissal comes without a full-fledged judgment, the underlying HC order remains independently valid — and not “superseded.”
- As a result, litigants may still approach the HC with review petitions, claims or fresh applications — unless and until SC gives a reasoned ruling.

### **Consequences & Implications**

#### **1. Litigation & Access to Justice**

- A large number of cases — especially post-2019 transition matters (land, detentions, administrative orders) — may get reopened via HC review petitions even if SLP was dismissed earlier.
- This offers a “second chance” for litigants; may reduce needless finality in cases where SC simply declined leave without evaluating merits.

#### **2. Precedent & Legal Certainty**

- The ruling reinforces principle that only reasoned apex-court judgments are binding precedents (Article 141).
- It discourages presumption that SLP dismissal = binding law — preserves HC rulings’ autonomy.

#### **3. Administrative / Procedural Overhaul**

- Courts will need to more carefully distinguish between reasoned judgments vs simple dismissals.
- Lawyers may push more HC review petitions (or new applications) — raising workload and ensuring better grievance redressal.

#### **4. Uniformity across judiciary**

- Other High Courts (outside J&K) may follow this reasoning; it might influence national jurisprudence on SLPs, dismissals, and merger doctrine.

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## **“Dedicated Courtroom for Scheduled Caste Cases”**

### **Why in News-**

In November–December 2025, several High Courts (including Allahabad, Madras and Rajasthan bench references) discussed and directed the need for dedicated courtrooms / special courts to exclusively try offences under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 because:

- High pendency of SC/ST atrocity cases, some pending for over 5–10 years.
- Infrastructure gaps—many districts have notified “Special Courts” on paper, but they function from general courtrooms, with no separate space, staff or facilities
- Concerns raised by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) about delay, hostile witnesses, and lack of sensitivity in PoA trials
- Supreme Court monitoring of implementation of the PoA Act highlighted structural inadequacies.
- These judicial discussions and administrative orders brought the proposal for dedicated courtrooms exclusively for SC/ST atrocity cases back into national focus.

### **What is a “Dedicated Courtroom” for SC Cases?**

- A dedicated courtroom refers to: A physically separate, exclusive courtroom within a District Court Complex; Assigned exclusively for conducting trials under: The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and Related offences involving victims belonging to Scheduled Castes.
- It is more than a “notified special court” — it means dedicated space, infrastructure, staff, and scheduling strictly for atrocity cases.

## **LEGAL BASIS FOR SPECIAL COURTS UNDER THE SC/ST ACT**

### **1. Section 14 — Special Courts**

- ❖ The PoA Act mandates States to establish Exclusive Special Courts in every district to:
  - Ensure speedy trial,
  - Provide a victim-sensitive environment,
  - Prioritise atrocity cases.

### **2. Section 14A — Appeals**

- ❖ Provides fast-track appellate mechanism to ensure time-bound justice.

### **3. SC/ST Amendment Act, 2015**

- ❖ **Introduced:**
  - “Exclusive Special Courts” (not shared courts).

- Special Public Prosecutors specifically for PoA cases.

#### 4. Section 15A — Rights of Victims & Witnesses

##### ❖ Guarantees:

- Respectful treatment, safety, protection, privacy, and
- Information regarding investigation and prosecution.
- A courtroom dedicated solely to SC/ST cases helps operationalise these statutory rights.

#### WHY HAS THE ISSUE ARISEN NOW?

**1. High pendency & poor conviction rate-** National conviction rate under the PoA Act is around 30%, with pendency exceeding 50–60% in many states.

**2. Non-functional “special courts”-** Though many courts are notified as special courts under Section 14, most: Share courts with other IPC matters, Lack exclusive judges, Conduct hearings only occasionally.

**3. Supreme Court monitoring** - SC expressed concern that trials under the Act spill over indefinitely, frustrating the purpose of speedy justice.

#### 4. Continuous atrocities against SC communities

- ❖ Frequent incidents across states have renewed demands from Dalit groups and the NCSC for:
  - Dedicated spaces,
  - Trained judges,
  - Victim-friendly environments,
  - Faster disposal.

#### 5. Infrastructure grants released by central government

- ❖ To strengthen district judiciary, funds were earmarked for:
  - Exclusive SC/ST court infrastructure,
  - Witness rooms,
  - Barrier-free facilities.

#### OBJECTIVES OF DEDICATED COURTROOMS

##### 1. Ensure speedy trial

- ❖ Atrocity cases often drag due to crowded dockets; exclusive scheduling ensures continuous hearings.

##### 2. Protect victim dignity & safety

##### ❖ Dedicated rooms reduce:

- Intimidation by caste-dominant groups,
- Hostile crowding,
- Secondary victimisation.

##### 3. Enhance sensitivity & expertise

##### ❖ Judges and staff become specialised in:

- Handling caste-based offences,
- Recording vulnerable witness testimony,
- Applying PoA provisions properly.

##### 4. Guarantee privacy & non-hostile environment

##### ❖ Especially crucial in:

- Sexual violence cases,

- Cases involving social boycott, humiliation, untouchability practices.

### **5. Improve conviction rates**

- ❖ Properly framed charges, timely evidence, and trained prosecutors directly improve case outcomes.

### **FEATURES OF A DEDICATED SC/ST COURTROOM**

A fully functional dedicated courtroom typically includes:

1. Exclusive physical space- Separate hall, waiting rooms, witness rooms.
2. Victim/witness protection mechanisms- Screens, video-conferencing facilities, separate entry/exits.
3. Specially trained judges- Familiar with: Caste atrocity jurisprudence, SC/ST Rules, Victim rights, Bail restrictions under Section 18.
4. Exclusive scheduling- Trials conducted day-to-day, avoiding adjournments.
5. Special Public Prosecutors- Appointed under Section 15 for PoA cases.
6. Monitoring by District Judge & NCSC

### **CURRENT STATUS ACROSS INDIA (2025)**

- Many states have notified special courts but not provided exclusive rooms.
- Some states (TN, Rajasthan, UP districts, Maharashtra urban areas) are beginning to identify dedicated spaces.
- High Courts have issued circulars directing District Judges to make separate courtrooms mandatory.
- NCSC has written to states recommending: Faster operationalisation of exclusive courts, No adjournments without compelling reasons, Infrastructure upgrades.

### **CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION**

1. Infrastructure deficits- District courts lack space for separate courtrooms.
2. Inadequate staffing- Shortage of: Special public prosecutors, Trained judges, Court clerks & stenographers.
3. Frequent adjournments- Accused parties often delay proceedings.
4. Witness intimidation- Especially in rural caste-hierarchical contexts.
5. Budgetary gaps- Funds allocated but underutilised.
6. Low awareness among victims- Many victims do not know their protected rights under Section 15A.

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## **2025 Bihar Legislative Assembly Election 2025**

### **Election Overview:**

- Elections for the Bihar Legislative Assembly were held in two phases — 6 November and 11 November 2025.
- Counting and results declared on 14 November 2025.
- The result was a landslide victory for the ruling coalition: the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 202 out of 243 seats, a very wide majority, defeating the opposition bloc.
- For the first time, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the single largest party in Bihar assembly elections, winning 89 seats. Its ally Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)) — led by Nitish Kumar — won 85 seats.

### New Chief Minister & Government Formation

- After the election, JD(U) legislators meeting elected Nitish Kumar as leader of their legislative party.
- Nitish Kumar took the oath as Chief Minister for the 10th time, making him one of the longest-serving and most recurrent Chief Ministers in Indian history.
- The swearing-in was scheduled for 20 November 2025.
- Deputy Chief Ministers, also from NDA allies, continue, aligning with coalition arithmetic.

### Government's Immediate Responsibilities & Challenges

1. **Governance & Delivery** — fulfill promises on jobs, rural development, infrastructure, women's welfare. Early signals indicate heavy focus on youth employment & development roadmap.
2. **Law & Order Reforms** — with rising demand for crackdown on crime, especially in the light of recent portfolio redistribution (Home ministry control shifting to a BJP ally) the government is under pressure to deliver policing and order.
3. **Social Justice & Inclusion** — address caste, minority representation, social inequality. Opposition and civil society have raised concerns over under-representation of minorities and fair representation in the new assembly.
4. **Development & Welfare Programs** — implementation of schemes for youth, women, education, health, rural infrastructure (roads, electrification, schools), especially in backward and remote regions. Early assembly sessions prioritised agricultural roadmap, rural connectivity, and public services.
5. **Handling of Opposition & Dissent** — opposition (led by RJD) is regrouping, with internal crises; how the government responds to dissent, protects minority representation and ensures fair governance will be watched closely.

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### CAG's Plan for Two New Cadres

#### What has been announced — the basic facts

- ❖ On 6 November 2025, the CAG gave in-principle approval to create two centralized specialised cadres within the Indian Audit and Accounts Department (IA&AD).
- ❖ **The two cadres are:**
  1. Central Revenue Audit Cadre (CRA Cadre) — dedicated to auditing government revenues/receipts (tax, non-tax, customs, excise, etc.).
  2. Central Expenditure Audit Cadre (CEA Cadre) — focused on auditing government expenditures/disbursements (ministries, departments, public spending, subsidies, schemes).
- ❖ The new structure will come into effect from 1 January 2026.
- ❖ These cadres will involve around 4,000 audit professionals (Senior Audit Officers and Assistant Audit Officers) out of the total IA&AD strength ( $\approx 42,000$ ).

#### What problems does this reform aim to address

##### 1. Fragmented audit structure

- Earlier, audit of central receipts and expenditures was carried out by multiple offices: nine Director-General (Audit)/Principal Director (Audit) offices, various branches, and state-level audit offices,

plus independent controllers of accounts. This meant cadre control was dispersed across many authorities.

- For revenue audit and expenditure audit functions, there were 16 and 19 different Cadre Controlling Authorities (CCAs), respectively. This led to inconsistencies in manpower deployment, oversight, training, transfers, and capacity building.

## 2. Need for domain-specialization, professionalism and efficiency

- Audit of revenue and audit of expenditure — though both under the broad “audit” mandate — require different skill sets, training, and expertise (e.g. tax law, customs rules vs. public expenditure, procurement norms, subsidy schemes, project audits).
- Consolidating professionals into two dedicated cadres will help build deep domain expertise, ensure consistent audit standards, and improve audit quality and reliability.

## 3. Better manpower management & flexibility

- Centralised cadres will allow all-India transfer liability, meaning officers can be posted across the country as per organisational needs, instead of being permanently tied to fragmented state-level/cadre-level posts. This improves mobility, equitable posting and career progression.
- A single cadre-controlling authority (for each vertical) will reduce bureaucratic overhead, improve transparency in postings/transfers, and ensure uniform training and evaluation.

### What exactly will change — Structural, Institutional, Functional & Procedural Aspects

#### 1. Cadre Control

##### Before (Old Structure)

- Cadre control dispersed across 16–19 different CCAs (DGAs, PDAs, State AG offices).
- Highly fragmented administrative oversight.

##### After (New CRA & CEA Cadres)

##### Centralised cadre control:

- One CCA for CRA (Revenue Audit)
- One CCA for CEA (Expenditure Audit)
- Controlled directly by DG/PD at the Centre.

#### 2. Functions Handled

##### Before

- **Mixed responsibilities:**
  - Revenue audit
  - Expenditure audit
  - State civil audits
  - PSU audits
- Work was fragmented across many audit offices.

##### After

Clear functional segregation:

- CRA Cadre → Only revenue audits
- CEA Cadre → Only expenditure audits
- Other audits (State, PSU, Local bodies) remain outside CRA/CEA vertical.

### 3. Staff Strength & Composition

#### Before

- Total IA&AD staff  $\approx$  42,000, but
- Revenue & expenditure audit personnel were scattered across many offices.

#### After

- About 4,000 specialised professionals consolidated into CRA + CEA.
- Includes SAOs, AAOs forming unified central audit verticals.

### 4. Recruitment & Examination Streams

#### Before

- Single recruitment/ training system: SAS (Statutory Audit Service) exam, General IA&AD recruitment
- No domain-specific exam structure.

#### After

- Two separate specialised streams: CRA exam/training, CEA exam/training
- Domain expertise built before postings begin.

### 5. Deployment & Transfers

#### Before

- Cadre-wise/region-wise postings.
- Often attached to local/state audit offices.
- Limited all-India transfer mobility.

#### After

- Full all-India transfer liability for CRA and CEA officers.
- Greater flexibility to deploy manpower where required.
- Improved uniformity and resource distribution across audit needs.

### Benefits & Significance

#### 1. Improved Audit Quality and Depth

- With domain-specific training and focus, CRA and CEA cadres will build specialist capacity in revenue and expenditure audits — likely yielding more comprehensive, accurate and insightful audit reports.
- Better audits can help detect leakages, inefficiencies, irregularities, mis-allocation, misuse of funds effectively — strengthening fiscal discipline and public accountability.

#### 2. Uniform Standards and Professionalism

- Centralised cadre control ensures uniform standards of audit practices, training, reporting and methodology across the country.
- Internal mobility and periodic postings may discourage local capture, corruption, or collusion at local levels.

#### 3. More Efficient Human Resource Management

- Flexible staffing, rotation, and all-India liability help match human resources with demand (e.g. large ministries, big projects, infrastructure audits, major schemes).
- Can address manpower and capability shortages where they exist, particularly for complex audits (e.g. multi-modal logistics, major infrastructure, public expenditure schemes).

#### **4. Strengthening the Institutional Role of CAG / IA&AD**

- A reorganised, professional audit machine increases the capacity of the CAG to conduct timely and high-quality audits — vital for parliamentary oversight (e.g. reports to Public Accounts Committee).
- This reform signals a modernisation push, improving the credibility and legitimacy of the audit institution.

#### **5. Enhanced Oversight and Governance**

- Systematic revenue audits and expenditure audits will improve transparency over tax/non-tax receipts, spending, subsidy distribution, public investment etc.
- Better audits can support FP (fiscal prudence), fight corruption, ensure efficient use of public funds, and contribute to better governance, budgeting and public trust.

#### **Challenges / Implementation Risks**

- Transition Challenges: Re-allocating 4,000 officers, transferring them under new cadre-control, deciding postings — may create temporary disruption.
- Resistance from existing cadre-controlling authorities / local bureaucracies due to loss of autonomy or relocation — may lead to turf battles.
- Training and capacity building burden: Specialist audits (revenue / customs / expenditure / procurement / projects) require deep domain knowledge; training large cadre properly will take sustained effort.
- Workload pressure & audits backlog: With larger consolidated cadre, demand for audits (especially of large central schemes, projects, PSUs) would increase — risk of overburdening unless resources are scaled.
- All-India transfer liability vs. local knowledge: Frequent transfers might undermine local institutional memory or contextual understanding; audit effectiveness depends on contextual awareness.
- Ensuring independence & insulation: While centralisation helps standardisation, political or administrative pressure on audit outcomes may increase — requires strong internal safeguards and professional autonomy.

### **Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021**

#### **Why Tribunal Reform Act is in News**

- On 19 November 2025, the Supreme Court of India (SC) struck down major provisions of the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021.
- The Court said the Act re-introduced (with minor tweaks) provisions previously declared unconstitutional — amounting to a legislative override of judicial verdicts.
- The judgments reignited broader debate on independence of tribunals, separation of powers, executive influence over quasi-judicial bodies, and the need for systemic reform.
- The Court also directed the Government to set up a statutory National Tribunals Commission (NTC) within four months — a body to oversee appointment, functioning and service conditions of tribunal members uniformly.

#### **What is the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021**

### **Purpose**

The Act was enacted to “restructure and rationalize” India’s myriad tribunals (tax, regulatory, administrative, environmental, telecom, services etc.), with aim to standardize appointments, conditions of service, tenures and administrative control across tribunals. ([Wikipedia][4])

### **Key Provisions (as per the 2021 Act)**

- Uniform procedure for appointment of tribunal chairpersons and members: via a Search-cum-Selection Committee (SCSC), with central government representation.
- Minimum age of 50 years for appointment.
- Fixed term of 4 years (or till upper age limit, whichever earlier), with provision for re-appointment
- Government empowered to frame rules determining salaries, allowances, service conditions, removal, etc.
- Overhaul/amendments across many tribunal-specific statutes (e.g. tax tribunals, regulatory tribunals, environmental tribunals, debt tribunals, etc.) to bring them under uniform regime.

### **What the Supreme Court Held (2025) — Key Findings & Rationale**

1. Those provisions unduly empowered the executive — via control over appointment, tenure, salary, service conditions — which undermined judicial independence and separation of powers.
2. Specific provisions struck down:
  - Age minimum 50 years for tribunal members/Chairpersons (arbitrary and exclusionary).
  - Tenure fixed at 4 years (short, not guaranteeing institutional continuity or independence).
  - Government’s power to set service conditions, salaries, and removal — making members dependent on executive, not insulated.
  - Provision permitting re-appointment under same conditions.
3. The Court held that tribunal members are performing judicial/quasi-judicial functions — thus, they must enjoy safeguards like judges: independence, security of tenure, protected service conditions.
4. The Court directed the Centre to establish a National Tribunals Commission (NTC) within 4 months for appointment and administration of tribunals — to ensure uniformity, transparency, autonomy.

### **Key Constitutional & Legal Issues**

#### **• Constitutional Basis for Tribunals**

Under the Constitution, tribunals derive power from Article 323A and Article 323B, introduced by the 42nd Amendment. They are meant to be specialised, efficient, quicker alternatives to regular courts for administrative, tax, service, regulatory disputes.

#### **• Judicial Independence & Separation of Powers**

The SC has repeatedly held that tribunals must be independent from executive control — in appointments, tenure, service conditions — because they perform quasi-judicial functions. (Earlier rulings: e.g. on 2017 finance rules; 2021 ordinance; etc.) The 2025 verdict reiterates these principles.

Security of tenure, fixed but adequate term, and insulation from executive reprisals are essential for impartiality and fair adjudication.

#### **• Doctrine of Basic Structure & Judicial Supremacy**

By trying to re-enact struck-down provisions, Parliament attempted what amounts to “legislative overruling” — the Court found this impermissible as it undermines the basic structure (judicial independence, separation of powers).

## Implications & Way Forward

### 1. Immediate Consequences

- The impugned provisions of Tribunal Reforms Act, 2021 are null and void. Tribunals cannot function under those conditions.
- All prior selections/appointments made under the invalidated regime are subject to review; earlier decisions remain valid but future appointments must comply with principles laid down in earlier SC rulings (e.g. selection by search-committee without executive dominance; adequate independent tenure; secure service conditions).
- Centre required to establish National Tribunals Commission (NTC) within 4 months to oversee tribunal appointments and administration.
- Legal uncertainty and transitional challenges for many pending cases before tribunals — status, continuity, backlog, reconstitution of benches etc.

### 2. Structural & Long-Term Implications

- The verdict reaffirms judicial independence and sends strong signal that executive/legislative attempts to override judicial safeguards will be struck down.
- It underscores the need for a robust institutional mechanism (NTC) for tribunals — not ad-hoc laws or repeated tinkering, but a permanent, transparent, independent commission.
- Creates opportunity to re-examine the broader tribunal architecture: appointment norms, tenure, service conditions, funding, benches, vacancies, backlog, transparency.
- May trigger reforms in existing tribunals — e.g. renewed appointments under proper procedures, efforts to clear backlog, improved institutional capacity.
- Likely to affect sectoral tribunals (tax, consumer, environment, telecom, bankruptcy, regulatory) — leading to possible redesign of entire tribunal system.

## Challenges

- **Establishment of NTC:** Whether government sets up a truly independent National Tribunals Commission within timeline, and whether it is empowered enough (financial autonomy, rule-making, oversight) to ensure real independence.
- **Vacancies & backlog:** After striking down provisions, there may be vacancies; reconstitution will take time — backlog may worsen temporarily.
- **Implementation across many tribunals:** Over 50+ tribunals affected — coordinating uniform compliance, rules and administration will be hard.
- **Resistance & political push-back:** Executive/ministries may resist ceding control; drafting new law that satisfies independence demands could be politically contentious.
- **Transitional uncertainty for litigants:** Pending matters — especially in areas like tax, environment, insolvency — face uncertainty; delay could affect rights, business, regulatory clarity.
- **Need for safeguards beyond appointments:** Independence cannot just be about who appoints — also funding, infrastructure, salaries, removal protection, institutional culture, transparency, accountability are needed.

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## Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2025.

### What is the 131st Amendment Bill

- The 131st Amendment Bill, 2025 proposes to bring the Chandigarh (a Union Territory and shared capital of Punjab and Haryana) under the ambit of Article 240 of the Constitution of India.
- Article 240 empowers the President of India to promulgate regulations for certain Union Territories that do not have their own legislatures — for the “peace, progress and good governance” of those territories.
- Under this arrangement, the President can make regulations (i.e. laws) for the UT; effectively the legislature’s functions are replaced by executive-promulgated regulations.
- If the Bill becomes a law, Chandigarh would be constitutionally put in the same category as other UTs without legislatures (e.g. the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, etc.).
- Practically, this could lead to creation of an independent Administrator/Lieutenant-Governor for Chandigarh, rather than continuing the current arrangement where the Governor of Punjab holds additional charge as UT Administrator.

### Recent Developments

- The Bill was listed among proposals for the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament (starting December 1, 2025).
- Publication of the parliamentary bulletin triggered strong political reactions, especially from parties in Punjab, which viewed the move as a threat to Punjab’s claim over Chandigarh
- The proposed inclusion under Article 240 was described by critics as effectively “taking away” Chandigarh from Punjab/Haryana’s shared control — prompting accusations of undermining federal-state arrangements.

However — as of late November 2025 — the Union Home Ministry issued a clarification that “no final decision has been taken” on the Bill; the proposal remains under consideration, and the government says it has no immediate intention to alter Chandigarh’s administrative status.

Thus, while the Bill is very much in public/political spotlight, its fate is not sealed — the Home Ministry appears cautious following backlash.

### Key Proposals of the 131st Amendment (Chandigarh)

#### 1. Inclusion of Chandigarh under Article 240

- President would gain power to issue direct regulations for Chandigarh.
- Parliamentary legislation for the UT may no longer be required when such regulations exist.
- Effectively shifts law-making from Parliament to the executive.

#### 2. Appointment of an independent Administrator / Lt. Governor

- **Current system:** Punjab Governor acts as Chandigarh’s Administrator.
- **Proposed change:** Chandigarh may get a separate, centrally appointed Administrator/LG.
- Alters historic linkage between Punjab and Chandigarh.

#### 3. Simplification of law-making process

- Centre would be able to govern Chandigarh through executive regulations, without passing individual laws in Parliament each time.

- Intended to improve administrative efficiency and reduce procedural delays.

#### **4. Realignment with other UTs without legislatures**

- Chandigarh's governance structure would be made uniform with other UTs that lack elected legislatures (like Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands).
- Governance would follow a President/Administrator-led regulatory model.

### **Concerns Raised**

#### **1. Federal balance and State claims**

- Critics argue the Bill undermines the long-standing arrangement under which Chandigarh serves as shared capital of Punjab and Haryana. They claim the Bill threatens state interests, federal balance and political settlement.
- The proposal is viewed by some as a "power grab" by central government over a shared capital — potentially leading to contestation over ownership and control.

#### **2. Democratic legitimacy and representative governance**

- Bringing the UT under Article 240 would mean Chandigarh would be governed by regulations by President/Administrator — no legislative assembly for UT. This reduces direct democratic representation for residents compared to a borough/state setup. Analysts argue it may weaken local accountability.
- For a "capital city" with high political and administrative importance, governance without local legislature may be seen as centralised control.

#### **3. Identity and emotional stakes for Punjab/Haryana**

- Political parties in Punjab (and some in Haryana) have strong emotional, historical and political claims over Chandigarh — any move seen as diluting their link becomes a flashpoint. This raises risk of social unrest, regional alienation, electoral fallout.

#### **4. Precedent for other shared/shared-capital / UT-state relationships**

- Acceptance of the Bill may set a precedent for re-arranging other shared-capital or border-region governance arrangements — potentially destabilising negotiated inter-state/ center-state balances.

### **Historical Context**

- Chandigarh has been a shared capital of Punjab and Haryana since State reorganisation in 1966. Its governance model has involved dual arrangements: Punjab Governor doubling as Administrator of UT.
- Over decades, the special status of Chandigarh, its shared-capital character and unique inter-state political sensitivity have made its governance a sensitive federal issue.
- The proposal under 131st Amendment seeks structural change in this governance model — not merely administrative — which has deeper constitutional and political implications for center-state relations, federal balance, UT governance, and shared capital arrangements.

### **Why This Bill is Important**

- It touches upon federalism, union territory governance, centre-state relations, constitutional amendment processes, role of President/Parliament, a core theme in Indian polity.
- Raises questions of democratic legitimacy vs administrative efficiency — trade-offs between representative governance and centralized regulation.

- Highlights complexity of shared capital cities / inter-state arrangements in India — useful example for broader federal architecture analysis.
- Demonstrates how a constitutional amendment (even a “small” one) can have far-reaching political and administrative consequences — helpful for understanding interplay of law, politics and governance.
- Useful for case studies on governance reform, decentralisation/centralisation, federal balance, constitutional design.

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## Talaq-e-Hasan

### What is Talaq-e-Hasan

Talaq-e-Hasan is one of the classical Islamic methods of divorce under Sunni Muslim personal law (also accepted in many Muslim schools of jurisprudence) — distinct from “instant triple talaq / Talaq-e-Biddat”.

#### Under this form:

- The husband pronounces the word “talaq” once (in a proper manner) in the first month while the wife is in a period of purity (i.e. not menstruating — “tuhr”). If the couple does not resume co-habitation until the next menstrual period, he again pronounces “talaq”. If after the third pronouncement (over three successive months) there is no resumption of co-habitation, the divorce becomes final and irrevocable.

If the couple reconciles (i.e., resumes co-habitation) after any of the first two pronouncements, the talaq is “revoked” / “revocable” — the marriage continues.

Historically, this system was considered a “thoughtful” or “restrained” method compared to instantaneous divorce, giving time for reflection and possibly reconciliation.

#### Other recognised forms under Islamic personal law include:

- Talaq-e-Ahsan — a single pronouncement followed by waiting period (“iddat”) during which reconciliation is possible, after which divorce becomes final.
- Mutual divorce by consent / separation by “Khula” (initiated by wife) or “Mubarat” (mutual).

In India, “instant triple talaq (Talaq-e-Biddat)” was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2017 and thereafter criminalised by the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019.

The 2019 Act, however, does not criminalise / declare void the method of divorce under Talaq-e-Hasan (or other recognised Sunnat-based divorce forms) — so those remained legally valid (as of before current challenge).

Thus, until very recently, Talaq-e-Hasan has been recognised under law / personal law as (arguably) a valid method of divorce among Muslims in India.

### Why It’s in News in 2025

- In November 2025 the Supreme Court of India (SC) began hearing a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of Talaq-e-Hasan.
- The lead petitioner is a Muslim woman, Benazeer Heena (2022 petition), who argued that the practice is discriminatory (since only men can unilaterally divorce), arbitrary, violates fundamental rights (Articles 14, 15, 21, 25 of the Constitution), and undermines dignity of Muslim women.

The Court also flagged a rising misuse: husbands authorising lawyers or third parties to send “talaq-notices” (rather than personally pronouncing talaq). This method creates serious procedural/ evidentiary issues — sometimes husbands later deny having issued talaq, leaving women in limbo.

The bench has indicated that the practice may have to be struck down or at least regulated — possibly referring the issue to a larger (five-judge) Constitution Bench, given the fundamental rights and societal implications involved.

The case has stirred national debate on personal law, gender justice, religious freedom, and the balancing of tradition with constitutional principles. Media, civil society, women’s rights groups are closely watching.

### **Legal & Constitutional Issues**

#### **1. Equality & Non-Discrimination (Articles 14, 15)**

Only Muslim men (not women) can invoke unilateral talaq → gender asymmetry. Petition argues this is discriminatory and violates right to equality and equal protection under law.

#### **2. Right to Dignity & Life (Article 21)**

Unilateral, arbitrary divorce may subject women to social stigma, denial of civil status, denial of matrimonial rights, property/maintenance uncertainty — affecting dignity and life with dignity (constitutional value).

#### **3. Freedom of Religion (Article 25) vs Constitutional Morality**

the practice is rooted in religious law/personal law. Petitioners assert that while religious practices enjoy protection, state and courts can intervene if practice violates constitutional morality, equality and dignity. The challenge tests limits of religious freedom.

#### **4. Procedural Validity & Rule of Law**

Use of third-party / lawyer-issued divorce notices (instead of personal pronouncement) is argued to violate procedural requirements under both Sharia (traditional) and civil law — leading to evidentiary confusion, misuse, denial of justice.

Women remarrying under mis-belief of divorce risk being accused of “polyandry” — serious social and legal consequences. SC flagged this risk.

#### **5. Uniform Civil Code / Personal Law Reform Debate**

The case revives broader debate on need for reform of personal laws (religious laws) to align with constitutional values of gender equality, justice, dignity. Outcome could shape future of Muslim personal law and personal law pluralism in India.

### **Historical & Legal Background — What Courts/Legislature Did Earlier**

- In 2017, SC struck down “instant triple talaq” (Talaq-e-Biddat) in the famous Shayara Bano v. Union of India judgment — as arbitrary and unconstitutional.
- Following that, Parliament passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 — criminalising instant triple talaq (voiding it, penalising it).
- However, the enactment and verdict did not address or abolish other forms of divorce recognised under Muslim personal law (like Talaq-e-Hasan, Talaq-e-Ahsan, khula, mubarat). These continued to be treated as legally valid.
- Some High Courts (e.g., Kerala, Himachal) had earlier refused to strike down valid Muslim divorce methods (Hasan / Ahsan), holding that the 2017/2019 changes applied only to instant triple talaq.

### Concerns, Criticism & Challenges — What Opponents & Observers Argue

- **Religious freedom & minority rights:** Some argue that interfering with religiously sanctioned divorce methods violates freedom of religion (Article 25) and threatens personal-law pluralism — which protects minority identities.
- **Intrusion into personal law — slippery slope:** Critics warn that striking down religious divorce norms might pave way toward a uniform civil code imposed by state — eroding community-based personal laws, cultural autonomy.
- **Unintended consequences for women:** If courts abolish unilateral talaq without offering equitable alternative (e.g. khula, divorce by mutual consent, maintenance safeguards), some women may get trapped in abusive marriages.
- **Implementation / evidentiary issues:** Even with reform, ensuring fair process in rural/remote areas with weak access to courts or documentation might remain challenge.
- **Potential backlash, communal polarization:** Reform attempts could provoke resistance from conservative community segments, leading to social tension.

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## “Constitutional Legacy of the Basic Structure Doctrine and the Call for Indianising the Constitution & Judiciary”

### 1. Introduction

The Basic Structure Doctrine (BSD) is one of India’s most important constitutional shields. Introduced in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), it limits Parliament’s power to amend the Constitution by prohibiting amendments that damage its essential features.

In recent years, a parallel debate has emerged around “Indianising” the Constitution and judiciary — i.e., interpreting constitutional principles in line with Indian civilisation, traditions, socio-cultural realities, and indigenous jurisprudence.

Both themes are central to contemporary constitutional discourse (2023–2025) as India balances constitutional continuity with demands for localised jurisprudence, police reforms, personal law reforms, and administrative restructuring.

### 2. Basic Structure Doctrine — Evolution & Legacy

#### Origins

In *Shankari Prasad* (1951) and *Sajjan Singh* (1965), SC held that Parliament could amend any part of Constitution, including Fundamental Rights. *Golak Nath* (1967) reversed this. *Kesavananda Bharati* (1973) established BSD:

- ▶ Parliament’s amending power under Article 368 is not absolute.
- ▶ Parliament cannot alter the basic features of Constitution.

#### What counts as “Basic Structure”?

Not explicitly listed, but judicially evolved:

- Supremacy of the Constitution
- Rule of law
- Judicial review

- Secularism
- Democracy
- Federalism
- Separation of powers
- Dignity of individual
- Independent judiciary
- Free and fair elections
- Balance between Fundamental Rights & DPSPs
- Parliamentary form of government

### Constitutional Legacy of the BSD

**1. Protection Against Authoritarianism-** BSD prevented legislative overreach during: Emergency period (1975-77), Attempts to dilute judiciary (e.g., NJAC case), Attempts at excessive centralisation of power. It ensures India remains a constitutional democracy, not a majoritarian one.

### 2. Foundation for Judicial Review of Amendments

- **BSD empowers courts to:** Strike down constitutional amendments, Maintain balance between Parliament and judiciary

**Examples:** Minerva Mills (1980) – limited amending power

### 3. Ensured Survival of Federalism

- **BSD protected:** State autonomy in matters like land reforms, Principles of cooperative federalism, Anti-defection safeguards. It prevented Parliament from converting India into a unitary State.

### 4. Protecting Rights & Liberties

- **BSD ensures:** Fundamental Rights cannot be permanently curtailed, “Reasonableness” and “Constitutional morality” guide amendments, Minority rights and secular fabric remain intact

### 5. Global Influence

- **BSD has inspired:** Bangladesh Supreme Court (8th Amendment case), Pakistan Supreme Court’s emerging jurisprudence, South African constitutional court academic discussions

### Criticisms of the Basic Structure Doctrine

- Not found in the text of the Constitution — seen as judicial innovation
- Gives judiciary upper hand over an elected Parliament
- Vague and subjective (no definitive list)
- Alleged judicial overreach in some cases (e.g., NJAC)

These critiques fuel the call for “Indianisation”.

### Meaning & Background

*The idea of “Indianisation” has been emphasised in recent years by:*

- Former CJI N.V. Ramana, Justice U.U. Lalit, Justice S. Abdul Nazeer

### It means:

1. Judicial interpretation grounded in Indian social realities
2. Moving away from colonial precedents and anglicised legal procedures
3. Ensuring court language, processes, bail norms, sentencing reflect Indian culture

4. Incorporating Indic philosophies like Dharma, Nyaya, Sarvodaya, Swaraj
5. Revisiting colonial laws (IPC, CrPC, Evidence Act — now replaced by 2023 Bharatiya laws)

## **6. Why Indianisation is Being Debated Now**

### **1. Personal Law Reform**

- Debates on UCC, Muslim divorce practices, marriage age, inheritance reforms
- Supreme Court examining compatibility of religious practices with constitutional morality
- Indianisation may support replacing colonial-era Anglo-Mohammedan & Anglo-Hindu law concepts

### **2. Criminal Justice Reforms**

- 2023 criminal law codes (BNS, BNSS, BSA) emphasise indigenous legal philosophy
- Move away from Macaulay's criminal codes of 1860
- Push for community-based justice and restorative mechanisms

### **3. Reducing Pendency & Making Courts Accessible**

- Simplification of procedures
- Allowing local languages in judicial processes
- Digitisation, mediation, Lok Adalats, Gram Nyayalayas

### **4. Decolonising Legal Education & Thought**

- Increasing pressure on removing colonial legal authors, replacing with Indian jurisprudence
- Teaching K.M. Munshi, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Dharmashastra-based legal philosophy

## **7. Relationship Between BSD and the “Indianisation”**

- BSD acts as a safety valve ensuring that reforms inspired by Indianisation do not destroy democracy or fundamental rights.
- It allows gradual, controlled evolution of Constitution— NOT drastic rewriting.
- Some argue: BSD reflects “Western liberal constitutionalism”, not Indian civilisation values
- Judiciary should evolve a basic structure based on Dharma, Nyaya, Samvidhan ke mool tattva (Indian foundational principles)

However, others warn: Diluting BSD in name of Indianisation may threaten rights of minorities, women, and dissenters.

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## **Judiciary on Acid Attack Survivor**

### **Why This Is in News**

- The Supreme Court of India (SC) described the 16-year delay in a 2009 acid-attack trial in Delhi as a “national shame” and a “mockery of the legal system.”
- The Court issued notices and asked for data from all High Courts on pending acid-attack trials nationwide — indicating a systemic problem.
- Simultaneously, the Court flagged serious lapses in care, compensation and free treatment for survivors — noting many private hospitals refuse to provide free critical care despite earlier judicial orders, and many victims have not received full compensation or after-care support even decades after their attacks.

- Thus the issue is not a single case — the Court’s intervention signals systemic, structural failures in the post-attack response mechanism across states.

### **Legal & Judicial Background: What Are the Legal Protections for Acid-Attack Survivors?**

- Under IPC after the 2013 Criminal Law (Amendment), acid attacks are covered under Sections 326A and 326B, making them cognizable, non-bailable offences punishable with rigorous imprisonment or life.
- Under judicial orders (beginning with the case of Laxmi, a teenage acid-attack survivor that triggered public outcry), the SC mandated:
  - Minimum compensation (often rs 3 lakh) for survivors — with a part of it (rs 1 lakh) to be given within 15 days.
  - Free and timely medical treatment (first aid, reconstructive surgeries, after-care) in both public and private hospitals — with costs borne by state or Centre.
  - Regulation of sale of acid (to prevent misuse) — and mechanisms for rehabilitation, psychological support, and legal aid for survivors.
  - In recent years the Court also allowed survivors to approach State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) or District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) if compensation or medical aid was delayed.

Yet, despite these protections, many survivors have faced neglect — prompting the present judicial outrage and call for systemic correction.

### **What Are the Loopholes & Failures Identified by Judiciary & Reports**

Based on recent SC hearings and investigations, the following major gaps stand exposed:

#### **1. Prolonged Delay / Pendency of Trials**

- Cases pending even 15–16 years after the attack. Example: 2009 Delhi case still unresolved in 2025.
- Backlogs across India: SC has directed High Courts to furnish data on all pending acid-attack trials — indicating that delayed justice is widespread.
- Such delays deny survivors timely justice, prolong trauma, and undermine deterrence value of law.

#### **2. Denial / Delay in Medical Treatment and After-care**

- Despite SC orders, many private hospitals refuse to admit acid-attack survivors or demand payment before treatment, violating the mandate for free care.
- Many survivors do not receive reconstructive surgeries, long-term medical/psychological care, or follow-up — even years after the accident.
- Delays aggravate physical, mental, social suffering — and can lead to disabilities, chronic health issues, social ostracism.

#### **3. Inadequate or Partial Compensation & Rehabilitation**

- The standard compensatory sum (rs 3 lakh) was fixed many years ago; SC itself noted this is now insufficient given rising medical costs and multiple surgeries required by survivors.
- Many survivors reportedly received only the initial amount (e.g. rs 1 lakh) but not further disbursements.
- Compensation mechanisms lack transparency — aggregated fund-flow / compliance reports are often furnished, but victim-wise data missing.

#### 4. Legislative / Administrative Gaps — Recognition, Social Security, Disability Status

- Survivors forced to ingest acid (internal injuries) are often not recognised as persons with disabilities — excluding them from many benefits under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act). The SC noted this as a “critical legislative gap.”
- Lack of uniformity across states: While some states or hospitals comply, many do not — leading to unequal treatment depending on geography.

#### 5. Lack of Accountability & Implementation

- Despite repeated orders over years (since mid-2000s), many state governments/hospitals/direct authorities failed to comply.
- Victims face cumbersome procedures to claim relief — poor monitoring by authorities; weak data-collection and supervision mechanisms.

#### What the Supreme Court Has Ordered Recently — Steps to Correct the Failures

- Directed High Courts to submit details of all pending acid-attack trials in their jurisdictions within 4 weeks — to enable systemic review.
- Asked Centre and the Ministry of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities to consider recognising acid survivors (especially ingestion-victims) as persons with disabilities under RPwD Act — entitling them to social security and disability benefits.
- Directed state Chief Secretaries and health authorities to ensure free and immediate medical treatment (critical care, reconstructive surgery), even in private hospitals; refusal to comply may attract criminal liability.
- Urged revamping of compensation norms: recommended revisiting the fixed quantum (rs 3 lakh) to account for current medical costs and multiple surgeries, so survivors get adequate long-term support.
- Suggested designation of special courts or fast-track courts for acid-attack cases to avoid undue delay and ensure speedy justice.
- Permitted survivors to approach state legal services authorities (SLSAs / DLSAs) when there is delay in compensation or care — making redress accessible through legal-aid bodies.

These steps reflect judicial insistence on system-wide accountability rather than case-by-case redress.

#### Broader Significance —

##### 1. Social Justice & Human Rights

- Acid-attack survivors — disproportionately women — represent one of the most vulnerable groups: physical disfigurement, social ostracism, economic marginalisation, mental trauma. Systemic failure means failure of social justice and human dignity.

##### 2. Governance & Institutional Accountability

- Repeated court orders over decades have not sufficed. The present SC intervention shows that judicial directives must be matched by institutional will — health departments, state administrations, legal services, hospitals must perform.

##### 3. Need for Legal & Policy Reforms

- Re-examine compensation and rehabilitation schemes.
- Recognise acid-attack survivors as disabled (for social security).
- Ensure uniform implementation: central guidelines + state-level compliance + monitoring.

- Strengthen laws on sale of corrosive substances, regulate/ban over-the-counter acid sale.
- 4. Role of Data, Transparency and Monitoring**
- Court's demand for detailed data from High Courts is important: only with reliable data (pending cases, disbursement, treatment, rehabilitation) can systemic failures be identified and addressed.
- 5. Judicial Oversight as a Tool**
- SC's move to supervise and direct day-to-day hearings in languishing cases, and to treat systemic neglect as "national shame," asserts principle that rights in statute / judicial order must be enforceable, not theoretical.

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## Pakistan- Constitution (Twenty-seventh Amendment) Act, 2025

### What is the 27th Amendment —

- The 27th Amendment was passed in November 2025 and signed into law on 13 November 2025 by the President of Pakistan.
- The Amendment package makes sweeping changes across several key areas: judiciary, military command structure, federal-provincial relations, and constitutional protections (immunities).
- Officially titled the Constitution (Twenty-seventh Amendment) Act, 2025.

### Key Provisions & Institutional Changes Under the Amendment

#### 1. Military Command Structure (Article 243 etc.)

- Abolishes the post of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC).
- Creates a powerful new post: Chief of Defence Forces (CDF).
- CDF becomes the single military head controlling Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- Existing Army Chief Asim Munir elevated to become the first CDF.
- Result: unprecedented centralisation of military power.

#### 2. Immunity / Legal Protection for Top Leadership

- Grants lifetime immunity from prosecution to:
  - The President, and
  - Top military leadership
- Immunity covers all actions performed in official capacity.
- Critics view this as removal of accountability mechanisms.

#### 3. Judicial Restructuring

- Creates a new Federal Constitutional Court (FCC).
- FCC gets exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional matters.
- Existing Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) loses constitutional jurisdiction.
- SCP becomes largely a civil, criminal, and statutory appeals court.
- Significance: major curtailment of Supreme Court's powers.

#### 4. Judicial Oversight & Appointments

- New mechanism gives executive and political branches greater control over:
  - Appointment of judges
  - Transfer of judges
- Reduces institutional safeguards for judicial independence.

- Risk of executive-influenced judiciary increases substantially.

### 5. Federal-Provincial Fiscal & Administrative Relations

- Amendment alters power distribution between federal and provincial governments.
- Possible changes in revenue allocation, administrative authority, and fiscal control.
- May reduce provincial autonomy and increase central dominance.
- The Amendment was passed rapidly by Pakistan's Parliament under the government of Shehbaz Sharif with support from ruling coalition parties.
- It significantly increases powers of the Army Chief Asim Munir—now Constitutionally recognized as CDF, with command over all services, nuclear command oversight, and legal immunity.
- By restructuring judiciary and limiting role of Supreme Court in constitutional matters, it effectively reduces institutional checks on the executive/military.
- The speed and manner of adoption — minimal debate, quick passage — have drawn widespread criticism from legal experts, civil society and international bodies.
- International concern has emerged: human-rights bodies warn that the Amendment undermines rule of law, judicial independence, and accountability.

**Thus, the 27th Amendment is seen by many analysts as a watershed — potentially reshaping Pakistan's political, judicial, and military governance for decades.**

### Major Criticisms & Risks —

#### 1. Erosion of Judicial Independence & Rule of Law

- Judicial restructuring — replacing SCP's constitutional jurisdiction with a new court — undermines institutional checks and may allow executive/military dominance over judiciary.
- Control over judge appointments/transfers by executive raises risk of politicised judiciary, compromising impartial justice.

#### 2. Militarisation of Governance & Loss of Civilian Supremacy

- Centralising all military power in one individual (CDF) — including command over nuclear assets — while granting immunity, consolidates vast power in unelected hands.
- Critics say this enshrines “military rule by constitutional means” — turning Pakistan's hybrid democracy further toward a “garrison state.”

#### 3. Weakening of Federalism and Provincial Autonomy

- Amendments affecting power distribution and fiscal relations may reduce provincial control over administration, centralising authority in the federal government / military-backed centre.

#### 4. Democratic Backsliding and Risk to Fundamental Rights

- With weakened judicial oversight and strengthened executive/military powers, dissent, civil liberties, political opposition may face suppression. Many legal experts view this as a structural assault on constitutional governance and fundamental rights.

#### 5. Institutional & Political Stability Risks

- Concentration of power might alienate other branches (civil bureaucracy, judiciary, provincial governments), creating long-term institutional fragility.
- International backlash: concerns among human-rights bodies, foreign investors, and global community may affect Pakistan's diplomatic standing and economy.

### Arguments / Rationale Given by Government & Supporters of the Amendment

Supporters of the 27th Amendment — government and allied voices — claim:

- **Need for institutional modernisation:** Proliferation of constitutional petitions has slowed courts; a dedicated Constitutional Court (FCC) would speed up constitutional adjudication.
- **Streamlined military command:** Single CDF command ensures better coordination across services, clarity in chain of command, and strategic decision-making — particularly in a security environment with external threats.
- **Stability and unity of command for national security:** Combining command structures avoids fragmentation and ensures a unified strategic command, especially over nuclear and defence matters.
- **Legal certainty & clarity:** By rewriting the Constitution, the reforms are formalised, removing prior ambiguities in military-civil relations.
- **Government supporters argue that critics overstate the threat to democracy;** they view the changes as necessary given Pakistan's historic civil-military instability and institutional dysfunction.

#### What It Means for Pakistan & Region (including for India)

- The Amendment publicly formalises in the Constitution what many thought was de facto military dominance — institutionalising a new power structure. This may further erode civilian democratic governance.
- It raises strategic concerns internationally: command over all military branches and nuclear assets under one person with immunity — risk of decision-making without accountability, especially in crisis situations.
- For civil society, rule-of-law advocates, human rights bodies — this marks a major regression. The global community (UN human rights office, IBAHRI, rights organisations) have condemned the move.
- For regional geopolitics: potential increase in militarized decision making in Pakistan — affecting border, security and diplomatic dynamics.

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ANURAG BACHAN'S

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### Thorium Molten State Reactor (TMSR)

- China's experimental molten salt reactor, dubbed TMSR-LF1, built by the Shanghai Institute of Applied Physics (SIAP) under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, has successfully converted thorium into uranium fuel.
- Molten salt used as a coolant in TMSR .
- This is the **first time** a molten salt reactor (MSR) has been loaded with thorium fuel and achieved measurable experimental data on that process.
- **The technology promises:**
  - Use of abundant thorium rather than relying solely on uranium.
  - Molten salt coolant at lower pressure (inherently safer than typical high-pressure reactors).
  - Potential continuous refuelling without full shutdown (since fuel is dissolved in liquid salt) in this type of reactor design.
- **Relevance for India :**
  - **India's 3 stage nuclear programme** envisages to use rich thorium reserves (25% of the global reserves) derived from Monazite sand across the coastline.
  - **Challenge that remains :** High extraction cost of thorium.

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### National Geospatial Platform

- Survey of India (SoI) is developing a **National Geo-Spatial Platform (NGP)** to serve as a "robust and scalable system for standardising, sharing, and managing foundational geospatial datasets."
- The platform will provide seamless access via web services, APIs and mobile apps, enabling access to accurate & authoritative spatial data.
- **Key components include:**
  - A Geospatial Data Integration & Dissemination System.
  - An Integrated Geospatial Application Interface (IGAI) — APIs for accessing data from multiple sources.
  - A Spatial Data Registry (SDR) / metadata registry to keep track of datasets, sources, access.

#### Importance :

- The platform aligns with the National Geospatial Policy, 2022 which sets out to build geospatial infrastructure & services across India.
- It supports many sectors: agriculture (precision farming), logistics & transport (integrated infrastructure planning), urban planning & smart cities (3D digital twins etc).
- So it's a big step toward turning India's geospatial data into infrastructure-class data, enabling innovation, better governance and economic value.

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## CMS03 (also designated GSAT7R)

- CMS-03 is a **multiband communication satellite** developed by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for the Indian Navy.
- It is designed to provide **secure voice, video and data communication** links among naval ships, submarines, aircraft and shore-based stations across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) including the Indian landmass.
- It operates in multiple frequency bands (C-band, extended C, Ku band—and in some reporting UHF/S bands) to support high-capacity and resilient communication.
- CMS-03 also enhances India's ability to launch heavier satellites from its own launch vehicle, reducing dependence on foreign launches.

### Features :

- **Weight/Mass:** Approximately ~4,410 kg (4.4 tons) at launch.
- **Launch Vehicle:** Carried by ISRO's heavy-lift rocket LVM3M5 (also known by its nickname "Bahubali") from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
- **Orbit:** Inserted into **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)**, eventually to settle into **geostationary** orbit (35,786 km) to maintain fixed coverage region.
- **Purpose:** Replacement for the earlier GSAT-7/GSAT-7R series satellites used by the Indian Navy.
- **Importance:**
- **Maritime & strategic communications:** With this satellite, the Indian Navy gains a dedicated and indigenous communications backbone over the Indian Ocean. This enhances real-time situational awareness, fleet coordination, and secure data/video links for maritime operations.
- **Indigenous heavy-satellite capability:** This mission demonstrates India's growing ability to build and launch heavier satellites on its own launch vehicles—strengthening self-reliance in space infrastructure.
- **Dual-civil and strategic benefits:** Though built for the Navy, such a satellite also supports civilian uses—like remote communications, broadcasting, connectivity in remote/sea regions, and disaster management.
- **Geopolitical/Regional significance:** Given the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean Region and increasing maritime challenges, having a dedicated satellite gives India a stronger edge in communication and monitoring over its maritime domain.

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## ICMR to develop Monoclonal antibodies against Nipah Virus

**Monoclonal antibodies** are special lab-made proteins that act like the body's natural antibodies to fight diseases.

- They're designed to target one specific molecule (antigen) — for example, a virus protein or a cancer cell marker.
- Scientists make them by cloning a single type of immune cell, so all the antibodies are identical ("mono-clonal") and attack the same target.
- They're used to treat cancers, autoimmune diseases, and infections (like COVID-19).
- Think of them as custom-made missiles that precisely hit harmful cells without hurting most healthy ones.

- Nipah virus is a deadly zoonotic virus (spread from animals to humans) that can cause severe brain infection (encephalitis) and respiratory illness.
- It is mainly carried by fruit bats and can spread through contact with infected animals or people. There's no specific cure or vaccine, so prevention and early detection are key.

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### Alfvén waves

These are waves that travel through a plasma (ionized gas) along magnetic field lines. They occur when the magnetic field and charged particles interact, causing the plasma to oscillate — like waves moving along a stretched magnetic string.

- **Discovered by:** Hannes Alfvén (who won the Nobel Prize for it).
- **Importance:** They help explain how energy moves in the Sun's corona, solar wind, and space plasmas.

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### Typhoid conjugate vaccine (TCV)

Bangladesh became the 8<sup>th</sup> country in the world to introduce TCV.

#### About the vaccine :

Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine (TCV) is a newer type of vaccine that protects against typhoid fever, a serious infection caused by Salmonella typhi.

- It's called "conjugate" because the typhoid polysaccharide (Vi antigen) is linked to a carrier protein, which makes it work better—especially in young children.
- It provides longer-lasting immunity (up to 5 years or more) and can be given to children as young as 6 months.
- TCV is part of India's Universal Immunisation Programme to help reduce typhoid cases and antibiotic resistance.

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### Water found on comet 3I/ATLAS

3I/ATLAS is an object that came from outside our Solar System — an interstellar visitor, like 'Oumuamua and Borisov before it.

Recently, scientists found signs of water on it. When sunlight hit the object, it caused water molecules to break apart, releasing a gas that telescopes could detect. This proved that 3I/ATLAS has water ice on or beneath its surface.

#### Significance :

- It shows that **water exists even on objects from other star systems**, not just in ours.
- This means **water — a key ingredient for life — might be common in the universe.**
- It also helps scientists understand how comets and planets form in other solar systems.

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## VAIBHAV Scheme

Recently, Union Minister of Science and technology interacted with Vaishvik Bhartiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) fellows.

### About:

- It is a fellowship scheme launched in 2023 by the Department of Science & Technology (DST), India.
- The scheme is aimed at scientists/technologists of Indian origin (NRIs / PIOs / OCIs) who are working abroad, to collaborate with Indian research institutions.

### Features :

- The scientist (fellow) identifies an Indian Host Institution (a university or public research institute) and collaborates through short-term visits: up to **2 months per year**, for a maximum of **3 years**.
- The fellow receives a monthly fellowship grant ( $\approx$  ₹4,00,000 per month) plus support for travel (international/domestic), accommodation, and research contingencies.
- The scheme covers about **18 knowledge verticals** such as quantum technologies, health/biomedicine, electronics, agriculture, materials science, energy etc.

### Significance :

- It helps bring **global Indian talent** (diaspora scientists) into active collaboration with Indian institutions — thereby strengthening India's research ecosystem.
- It promotes **knowledge exchange** and the infusion of best practices, technology knowhow, and global networks into Indian research.
- It aligns with India's push for Atmanirbhar Bharat (selfreliant India) in science & technology: by leveraging both domestic and overseas expertise.

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## Quantum Gravity

A recent study has proposed that black hole "**morsels**" can give us insights into quantum gravity.

### What are morsels?

Black hole morsels is a popular-science term used to describe small amounts of matter or material that are being pulled into a black hole.

### About quantum gravity :

Quantum gravity is a field of physics that tries to combine quantum mechanics and general relativity to explain how gravity works at very tiny (atomic or subatomic) scales.

- Classical gravity (Einstein's theory) works for planets, stars, and galaxies.
- Quantum mechanics works for atoms and particles.
- Quantum gravity aims to unify them, describing how space, time, and gravity behave at the smallest scales, like inside black holes or the early universe.

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## AI Governance Guidelines

Ministry of Electronics and Information technology has released India AI (Artificial Intelligence) governance guidelines under India AI mission.

The guidelines set out how AI systems in India should be developed, deployed and governed so that they're safe, fair and beneficial for everyone.

- **Seven core principles ("Sutras"):**
  - Trust in AI systems
  - Peoplefirst
  - Fairness & Equity
  - Accountability
  - Understandable by design
  - Safety
  - Resilience & Sustainability.
- **Six governance pillars** covering areas like infrastructure & capacity building, regulation & risk mitigation, oversight & institutions.
- **Action plan** covering short, medium and longterm steps to roll this out.
- **Emphasis on humancentric design:** AI should serve people, not replace human judgement; transparency, user consent and data protection are key.
- **Lighttouch regulation:** Rather than creating many new heavy laws right away, the focus is on making use of existing laws, encouraging innovation, and then scaling oversight.

### Significance :

- Helps India unlock the benefits of AI — innovation, efficiency, economic growth — while managing risks (bias, discrimination, privacy violations).
- Protects users by ensuring data privacy, clarity on how decisions are made by AI, and that AI systems are fair and transparent.
- Puts India on the map for responsible and inclusive AI governance, aligning with global trends but tailored to Indian context (diversity, digital infrastructure, scale).

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## Quantum key distribution

Sterlite Technologies Ltd. (STL) in collaboration with Centre for Development of Telematics (CDOT) demonstrated India's first QKD transmission over 100 km using a 4core multicore fibre (MCF) network. Later, a startup (QNu Labs Pvt. Ltd.) demonstrated a QKD network spanning over 500 km.

### What is quantum key distribution?

Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) is a way to share encryption keys securely using the principles of quantum physics.

- It uses quantum particles (like photons) to send the key.
- If anyone tries to eavesdrop, the quantum state changes, and the sender & receiver can detect the intrusion.

### Significance :

- Will help build a secure communication infrastructure (defence and critical data)

- Impetus to National Quantum Mission
- Will help India in building its reputation as a global quantum technology player.

**Other quantum innovations in India :**

- QSIP (Quantum Random Number Generator System in Package)
- QSIP is a hardware-based quantum security chip developed in India under support from the National Quantum Mission (NQM).
- It is designed to provide quantum-certified randomness and secure key handling – i.e., making cryptographic systems resistant to future quantum computer attacks.
- **25-qubit QPU**
  - The Bengaluru-based startup QpiAI launched a quantum computing system named QpiAIIndus featuring 25 superconducting qubits.
  - It is described as a “fullstack” quantum computer—meaning it integrates quantum hardware (processor, cryogenics, control electronics), software (quantum/hybrid stack) and cloud/datacenter infrastructure.
  - It was officially announced on World Quantum Day (14 April 2025).

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**NexCAR19**

- NexCAR19 is a type of CART (Chimeric Antigen Receptor Tcell) therapy developed in India by ImmunoACT (incubated at IIT Bombay) in collaboration with Tata Memorial Centre.
- It is designed to treat **relapsed or refractory Bcell lymphomas and Bcell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia** in patients aged 15 years and above who have not responded to standard therapies.
- It works by extracting a patient’s own Tcells (part of the immune system), genetically modifying them to target the CD19 antigen on cancer cells, and then reinfusing them so they attack the cancer cells.

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**Neurotechnology**

Recently, United Nations has raised concerns regarding neurotechnology.

Neurotechnology refers to technologies that interact with the human brain and nervous system to monitor, influence, or enhance brain function.

- Examples include brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), neuroprosthetics, neural implants, EEG/MEG-based devices, and brain stimulation tools.
- Uses range from medical treatment (e.g., for Parkinson’s, paralysis, epilepsy) to cognitive enhancement, communication, and research.

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**Blockchain Technology**

Supreme court in Samiullah vs. State of Bihar suggested adopting Blockchain Technology in India’s Land registration system.

**What is Blockchain Technology?**

A blockchain is a digital, decentralized ledger that records transactions across many computers so that the record cannot be altered retroactively.

- Think of it like a **digital notebook** that everyone can see, but **no one can erase or tamper with** past entries.
- Each “**block**” contains transaction data and a unique code called a **hash**. Blocks are linked together in a **chain**, hence the name **blockchain**.
- **Key features :**
  1. **Decentralized** – No single person or organization controls it.
  2. **Immutable** – Once data is recorded, it cannot be changed.
  3. **Transparent** – Participants can verify transactions.
  4. **Secure** – Uses cryptography to protect data.

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**Biochemical Markers**

Indian researchers have identified biochemical markers in the blood that could help detect kidney complications in diabetic patients.

**What are biochemical markers?**

**Meaning:** They are **small molecules** (like

- sugars, amino acids, lipids) **produced during metabolic processes** in the body and are used by doctors **for ascertaining disease risks**.
- **For e.g.**, cholesterol tests are used to assess heart disease risk.

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**Sustainable aviation fuel policy soon****What is sustainable aviation (SAF) fuel?**

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is a low-carbon alternative to conventional jet fuel made from sustainable, non-fossil sources. It is designed to reduce the aviation sector’s greenhouse gas emissions while being fully compatible with existing aircraft and airport infrastructure.

**SAF can be produced from:**

- Waste oils and fats (e.g., used cooking oil, animal fats)
- Biomass (agricultural residues, forestry waste)
- Municipal solid waste
- Alcohols (ethanol, isobutanol)
- Captured CO<sub>2</sub> + green hydrogen (used for e-fuels / Power-to-Liquid SAF)

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**Rift Valley Fever (RVF)**

Between 20 September and 30 October 2025, countries Mauritania and Senegal reported a total of 404 confirmed human cases of RVF, including 42 deaths.

**What is RVF?**

- RVF is a viral disease that primarily affects livestock (such as cattle, sheep, goats and camels) and can also infect humans.
- Infection and symptoms : Humans usually get infected by mosquito bites or by direct contact with the blood, organs or fluids of infected animals. Symptoms in humans range from mild flu-like illness to, in rare cases, severe forms like haemorrhagic fever, encephalitis or ocular disease.

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**ESCAPADE Mission**

**ESCAPADE** (Escape and Plasma Acceleration and Dynamics Explorers) is a NASA dual-spacecraft mission designed to study how Mars' atmosphere is lost to space by investigating the planet's magnetosphere and its interactions with the solar wind. The two identical small satellites carry instruments to measure magnetic fields and charged particles, allowing them to take coordinated, simultaneous observations that reveal how plasma and magnetic processes strip atmospheric particles from Mars over time. By improving understanding of how Mars' once-thick atmosphere thinned into the cold, dry environment seen today, the mission provides key insights into planetary climate evolution and supports planning for future Mars exploration.

Launched in 2024 on Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket and expected to reach Mars in 2026, ESCAPADE will spend about a year in orbit gathering data.

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ANURAG BACHAN'S

## PLACES IN NEWS

### Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh has recently announced that Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary is being considered as the third habitat for cheetahs in the state, after Kuno National Park and Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary.

#### About Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary:

- **Location:** Madhya Pradesh
- **Year of Notification:** 1975
- **Status:** It is the largest wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.

The sanctuary lies on an elevated landform forming a section of the upper Vindhyan range. It has significant ecological connectivity, functioning as a corridor between the Panna Tiger Reserve and the Satpura Tiger Reserve, while it also maintains an indirect linkage with Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve through the Rani Durgawati Wildlife Sanctuary.

#### Biogeographical and Ecological Characteristics:

- It falls under the **Deccan Peninsula Biogeographic Zone**.
- It forms part of both the **Ganga (Yamuna)** and **Narmada river basins**.

#### Vegetation:

The region is predominantly covered by **Tropical Dry Deciduous forests**, which are representative of the **Central Indian monsoon forest ecosystem**.

#### Drainage System:

- About **75%** of the sanctuary drains into the **Yamuna (Ganga) basin**.
- The remaining **25%** drains into the **Narmada basin**.
- Major rivers flowing through the sanctuary include:
  - **Kopra River**
  - **Bamner River**
  - **Bearma River**

These rivers are **tributaries of the Ken River**.

#### Flora and Fauna:

**Flora:** Teak, Saja, Dhaora, Bhirra, Ber, Bel, Mahua, Tendu, Gunja, Amla, among others.

**Fauna:** The sanctuary supports a diverse range of wildlife such as:

- Tiger
- Leopard (Panther)
- Sloth Bear
- Indian Wild Dog (Dhole)
- Blue Bull (Nilgai)
- Chinkara
- Spotted Deer (Chital)
- Sambar Deer

**Practise Question: 2. Consider the following statements regarding the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary:**

1. It is the largest wildlife sanctuary in the state of Madhya Pradesh.
2. A major portion of the sanctuary's drainage flows into the Yamuna (Ganga) river basin.
3. The predominant vegetation type found here is Tropical Dry Deciduous forest.
4. It is located within the Trans-Himalayan Biogeographic Zone.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only  
(b) 1 and 4 only  
(c) 2 and 3 only  
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only**

**Explanation:**

- Statement 4 is incorrect because Nauradehi lies in the Deccan Peninsula Biogeographic Zone, not the Trans-Himalayan zone.
- Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct as per its size, drainage pattern, and forest type.

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## Sambhar Lake

This winter, Sambhar Lake has recorded a significant rise in migratory bird populations, with an increase of about 40% compared to the previous year, marking an exceptional seasonal influx.

**About Sambhar Lake:**

- **Location:** Situated across the Nagaur and Jaipur districts of Rajasthan.
- **Type:** It is the largest inland saltwater (saline) lake in India.

The lake has an elliptical shape, extending around 35.5 km in length and ranging from 3 km to 11 km in width. It spans over 200 sq. km, and is encircled by the Aravalli hill ranges.

**Hydrology:**

Sambhar Lake is primarily fed by:

- **Mendha River**
- **Runpangarh River**
- Numerous seasonal rivulets and surface runoff

These streams are ephemeral, meaning they flow only during particular seasons.

**Conservation Status:**

- **Ramsar Site:** Designated in 1990 as a wetland of international importance.

**Salt Production:**

The lake is renowned for:

- Brine and salt extraction
- Hosting one of India's largest salt production operations

**Avifauna Significance:**

Sambhar Lake is among the **most crucial wintering sites** for migratory birds in India.

**Key Species:**

- It is the primary winter habitat for flamingoes outside the Rann of Kachchh, including:
  - Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*)
  - Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

**Other notable migratory birds frequently observed here include:**

- Pelicans
- Common Shelduck
- Redshank
- Common Sandpiper
- Black-winged Stilt
- Kentish Plover
- Ringed Plover
- Ruff
- Sociable Lapwing

**Practise Question: 3. With reference to Sambhar Lake, consider the following statements:**

1. It is the largest inland saltwater lake in India and lies across the Nagaur and Jaipur districts.
2. The lake is mainly fed by perennial rivers which flow throughout the year.
3. It is recognized as a Ramsar Site, signifying its international ecological importance.
4. It serves as one of the most important wintering grounds for flamingoes outside the Rann of Kachchh.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (b) 1, 3 and 4 only**

**Explanation:**

- Statement 2 is incorrect because the lake is fed by ephemeral rivers (Mendha and Runpangarh) and seasonal runoff, not perennial rivers.
- Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct as Sambhar is the largest inland saltwater lake, a Ramsar Site (1990), and a key wintering site for flamingoes outside the Rann of Kachchh.

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## **Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary**

Tucked away in the rolling landscapes of Latehar district, Jharkhand, the Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary remains one of India's most distinctive yet relatively lesser-known wildlife areas.

**About Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary**

- Located in Latehar district, Jharkhand.

- It is India's only dedicated wolf sanctuary, established specifically for the protection of the Indian grey wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*).
- Covers nearly 63 sq. km, and was declared a sanctuary in 1976.
- Forms a key component of the Palamau Tiger Reserve.
- The sanctuary lies in a region inhabited predominantly by tribal communities, where over 80% follow Sarna Dharma, a nature-revering belief system that emphasizes the sacredness of forests, rivers, and natural elements.

**Landscape and Ecology:**

The sanctuary features a dynamic mix of sal forests, scrublands, rocky plateaus, and small river valleys. This diverse terrain is ideal for wolves, which typically occupy open and semi-arid environments for denning and hunting.

The Chechari (Mahuadanr) Valley forms the ecological core of the region.

**Drainage:**

The sanctuary is drained by the **Burha River**, which later joins the **Aksi River**, and subsequently flows into the **North Koel River**, near **Kujrum**.

**Associated Wildlife:**

Besides wolves, the region also supports:

- Leopard
- Sloth bear
- Hyena
- Jackal
- Wild boar
- Spotted deer (Chital)

**Key Facts About the Indian Grey Wolf:**

- One of the smallest wolf subspecies globally.
- A subspecies of the grey wolf, distributed across the Indian subcontinent and Southwest Asia.
- Prefers grasslands, scrublands, and semi-arid agro-pastoral habitats, thriving in warmer climates.
- Lives in smaller packs, is generally less vocal, and exhibits mainly nocturnal hunting behavior.

**Conservation Status:**

- **IUCN Red List: Endangered**  
(Indian population estimated at approx. 2,000–3,000 individuals)

**Practise Question : 4.**With reference to the Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

1. It is the only notified sanctuary in India specifically dedicated to the conservation of the Indian Grey Wolf.
2. It forms part of the Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand.
3. The Indian Grey Wolf commonly forms large, highly vocal packs similar to those found in cold temperate regions.
4. The Burha River draining the sanctuary ultimately joins the North Koel River system.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only**

**Explanation:**

- Statement 3 is incorrect: The Indian Grey Wolf forms smaller, quieter packs and is less vocal, unlike wolves in colder regions.
- Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct as per sanctuary status, ecological linkage, and drainage.

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## Gogabeel Lake

Gogabeel Lake, located in the Katihar district of Bihar, has recently been recognized as a **Ramsar Site**, gaining global attention as a wetland of international significance.

### Geographical Context

- Situated in the trans-Gangetic plains of Bihar, Gogabeel is a classic oxbow lake, formed due to the meandering of rivers.
- It lies between the Mahananda River (North-East) and the Ganga River (South).
- It holds the distinction of being Bihar's first Community Reserve, reflecting strong local participation in its conservation.

### Cultural Importance

- The wetland is closely linked to regional cultural identity, as festivals such as **Sirva, Adra, and Chhath** are traditionally celebrated here.

### Biodiversity Profile

- **Vegetation:** The surrounding landscape comprises tropical dry deciduous forests.
- **Faunal Diversity:** Gogabeel serves as a crucial wintering ground for migratory birds and shelters numerous species of high conservation value.
- Notable species include:
  - **Smooth-coated Otter** (*Lutrogale perspicillata*)
  - **Helicopter Catfish / Walago attu**, a Vulnerable fish species that breeds here.

### About Ramsar Convention

- The Ramsar Convention, signed in 1971, is a key international treaty aimed at the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- It encourages cooperative national and global efforts to ensure wetlands contribute to ecological balance and sustainable development.

### MCQ (Moderate–Difficult, UPSC Pattern)

**Q. With reference to Gogabeel Lake, recently in news, consider the following statements:**

1. It is an oxbow wetland located between the rivers Ganga and Mahananda.

2. It is the first Community Reserve declared in Bihar.
3. Walago attu, a Vulnerable fish species, uses this wetland as a breeding ground.
4. The surrounding ecosystem is dominated by moist evergreen forests.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (a)**

**Explanation:**

Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct. The region is characterized by tropical dry deciduous, not moist evergreen, forests, making Statement 4 incorrect.

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## Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

Environmental groups and wildlife experts in Assam have appealed for the Roumari-Donduwa Wetland Complex, situated within the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, to be listed as a Ramsar Site. The demand highlights its ecological value and significant role in supporting diverse migratory and resident bird species.

**About Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary :**

- **Geographical Setting:** The sanctuary is located **south of the Brahmaputra River** in the **Nagaon district** of Assam.
- **Area:** It spans approximately **70.13 sq. km.**
- **Ecological Linkage:** Laokhowa forms a crucial part of the **Laokhowa–Burachapori ecosystem** and functions as a **buffer zone** to the **Kaziranga Tiger Reserve.**
- **Physiographic Region:** It lies within the **Brahmaputra Valley.**
- **Surroundings:** Except for the northern side, the sanctuary is **encircled by human settlements**, which poses conservation challenges.

**Vegetation Types :**

The sanctuary supports diverse plant communities, including:

- **Alluvial grasslands**
- **Alluvial forests**
- **Moist deciduous forests**
- **Tropical semi-evergreen forests**

**Faunal Diversity :**

Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary hosts iconic and threatened species, such as:

- **Indian One-horned Rhinoceros**
- **Asian Elephant**
- **Royal Bengal Tiger**

- **Asiatic Water Buffalo**

It is also known for its rich avifauna, with over 225 bird species recorded. Common sightings include:

- Spot-billed Pelican
- Little and Large Cormorants
- Egrets
- Open-billed Stork
- Brahminy Kite
- Pond Heron, among others.

**Practise Question: 6.** With reference to Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

1. It acts as a designated buffer area of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve.
2. The sanctuary is located north of the Brahmaputra River in Upper Assam.
3. Its vegetation includes alluvial grasslands and tropical semi-evergreen forests.
4. It is part of the Laokhowa–Burachapori ecosystem.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

**Correct Answer: (d)**

**Explanation:**

- Statement 2 is incorrect because Laokhowa is situated **south** of the Brahmaputra River.
- Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct.

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## **Pampadum Shola National Park**

Pampadum Shola National Park in Kerala is undergoing a notable ecological revival. The area, which had long been invaded by Australian wattle species, is now witnessing systematic restoration of its native shola-grassland ecosystem. This renewal is contributing to the recovery of natural water streams and the return of indigenous flora and fauna.

**Location and Significance:**

The national park is situated in the eastern sector of the Southern Western Ghats in Kerala. Recognized as the smallest national park in the state, it shares boundaries with the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. The region forms the southernmost shola–grassland mosaic in the Western Ghats—an ancient mountain range older than the Himalayas.

**Establishment:**

It was officially designated as a national park in 2004.

**Ecological and Geographical Features:**

- The park forms part of the Palani Hills system, extending up to the Vandaravu peak.

- It functions as a crucial ecological corridor connecting Eravikulam National Park with the Palani Hills, allowing unhindered movement of wildlife.
- The terrain is characterized by rolling hills with elevations between 1600 m and 2400 m.
- The region receives substantial rainfall from the Northeast Monsoon.

**Vegetation:**

The landscape comprises shola forests interspersed with montane grasslands, known to harbor various medicinal plants, orchids, ferns, and other endemic flora.

**Wildlife:**

Species commonly observed include the Nilgiri marten, Kerala laughing thrush, and the black-and-orange flycatcher, among others, reflecting the park's high conservation value.

**Practise Question: 7. Consider the following statements regarding Pampadum Shola National Park:**

1. It represents the southernmost shola-grassland ecosystem of the Western Ghats.
2. The park serves as a natural corridor linking Eravikulam National Park with the Palani Hills.
3. It receives its highest rainfall during the Southwest monsoon.
4. It is the largest national park in Kerala.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 4 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 2 only
- (d) 3 and 4 only

**Correct Answer: (c)**

**Explanation:**

- Statements 1 and 2 are correct.
- The park receives heavy rainfall mainly from the Northeast monsoon, making Statement 3 incorrect.
- It is the smallest, not the largest national park in Kerala, so Statement 4 is incorrect.

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## Nagarjunasagar-Srisaïlam Tiger Reserve (NSTR)

**Nagarjunasagar-Srisaïlam Tiger Reserve (NSTR)** is set to undergo a new phase of tiger population assessment, as the State Forest Department prepares to initiate the next round of the tiger census.

**Location and Extent:**

Situated in the Nallamala hills, an extension of the Eastern Ghats, the reserve is located in Andhra Pradesh. Covering about 3,728 sq. km, it is one of the largest tiger reserves in India and supports the highest tiger density in the Eastern Ghats region.

**Nomenclature and Protected Areas:**

The reserve derives its name from the **Nagarjuna Sagar Dam** and **Srisaïlam Dam**, two prominent hydrological structures in the area.

**It integrates two wildlife sanctuaries:**

- Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary
- Gundla Brahmeswaram Wildlife Sanctuary (GBM)

**Hydrology and Cultural Significance:**

The Krishna River flows through the reserve for roughly 270 km, shaping its landscape and ecosystems. Besides ecological importance, the reserve also hosts culturally and historically significant sites, including the Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple at Srisailem and archaeological remnants from Nagarjuna Konda, associated with Buddhist heritage.

**Terrain and Vegetation:**

The landscape is composed of plateaus, hill ridges, steep gorges, and deep valleys. The vegetation primarily consists of tropical dry deciduous forests, with bamboo and grasses forming the main undergrowth.

**Biodiversity:**

- **Floral endemics** include: *Andrographis nallamalayana*, *Eriolaena lushingtonii*, *Crotalaria madurensis* Var., *Dicliptera beddomei*, and *Premna hamiltonii*.
- **Key predators:** Tiger, Leopard, Wolf, Wild Dog (Dhole), and Jackal.
- **Herbivore and prey base:** Sambar, Chital, Chowsingha, Chinkara, Mouse Deer, Wild Boar, and Porcupine.
- **Aquatic species of River Krishna:** Muggers (Crocodiles), Otters, and freshwater turtles.

**Practise Question: 8.** With reference to the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve, consider the following statements:

1. It is situated in the Nallamala ranges which form part of the Eastern Ghats.
2. The reserve is formed by combining the Rajiv Gandhi and Gundla Brahmeswaram Wildlife Sanctuaries.
3. The Krishna River flows through the reserve for more than 200 km.
4. It hosts the largest tiger population in the Western Ghats landscape.

**Which of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only  
(b) 2 and 4 only  
(c) 1 and 3 only  
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Correct Answer: (a)**

**Explanation:**

- Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct.
- Statement 4 is incorrect because NSTR has the largest tiger population in the Eastern Ghats, not the Western Ghats.

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## Bandipur Tiger Reserve

Following a directive from Eshwar B Khandre, Karnataka's Minister for Environment, Ecology and Forests, the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) has suspended one late-evening safari in both jeep and bus categories as part of the initial phase of new management measures.

### About Bandipur Tiger Reserve:

- **Location:** Southern Karnataka, across Mysore and Chamarajanagar districts.
- **Geography:** Situated at the tri-junction of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, Bandipur serves as an ecological bridge between the Western and Eastern Ghats.
- **History:** Formerly a hunting ground for the Mysore royalty, it is now part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Surrounding Protected Areas:**
  - Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (Karnataka, NW) – separated by Kabini Reservoir
  - Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (Tamil Nadu, S)
  - Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala, SW)
- **Hydrology:** Bounded by the Kabini River in the north and the Moyar River in the south.
- **Climate:** Tropical with distinct wet and dry seasons.
- **Vegetation:** Dry deciduous and tropical mixed deciduous forests, including rosewood, sandalwood, Indian kino, Indian laurel, clumping bamboo, and giant clumping bamboo.
- **Fauna:** Bandipur shelters South Asia's largest population of wild Asian elephants. Other species include Bengal tigers, gaur, sloth bears, golden jackals, dhole, and four-horned antelope.

**Practise Question:11. Which of the following statements regarding Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) is/are correct?**

1. Bandipur Tiger Reserve forms part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
2. The reserve is located at the confluence of Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and the Deccan Plateau.
3. Rivers Kabini and Moyar flow through the reserve.
4. Bandipur is home to the largest population of wild Asian elephants in South Asia.

### Options:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) All of the above

**Correct Answer:** b) 1, 3, and 4 only.

- 1 : Bandipur is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 2 : It links Western and Eastern Ghats, but not the Deccan Plateau.
- 3 : Rivers Kabini (north) and Moyar (south) flow through/along the reserve.
- 4 : It hosts the largest wild Asian elephant population in South Asia.

## Khangchendzonga National Park.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has recently rated Khangchendzonga National Park as “good” in its global review of natural World Heritage Sites, highlighting its ecological and cultural significance.

### About Khangchendzonga National Park:

- **Location:** Northern Sikkim, along the Sikkim–Nepal border.
- **Biosphere Reserve:** Part of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR), India’s first “mixed” UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognized in 2016 for its combination of natural beauty and cultural heritage.
- **Mountains:** Home to **Mt. Khangchendzonga**, the third highest peak globally.
- **Area:** Covers **1,784 sq. km** with one of the **widest altitudinal ranges** among protected areas worldwide, spanning **1,220 m to 8,586 m**.
- **Landscape:** Features plains, valleys, lakes, glaciers, snow-capped mountains, and ancient forests. The park has **18 glaciers**, with **Zemu Glacier** being the largest in Asia.
- **Cultural Significance:** Contains settlements of the **Lepcha tribe**, one of the few places preserving this indigenous community.
- **Flora:** Ranges from subtropical to alpine vegetation, including oak, fir, birch, maple, and rhododendron.
- **Fauna:** Key species include the **snow leopard, Tibetan wolf, red panda, blue sheep, Himalayan tahr, and mainland serow**. Nearly **half of India’s bird diversity** is found here, making it a biodiversity hotspot.

**Practise Question:13. Which of the following statements about Khangchendzonga National Park is/are correct?**

1. Khangchendzonga National Park is India’s first “mixed” UNESCO World Heritage Site.
2. It has the largest altitudinal range of any protected area in the world, spanning over 7 km.
3. The park is home to flagship species like the snow leopard, red panda, and blue sheep.
4. Zemu Glacier, located in the park, is among the largest glaciers in Asia.

### Options:

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 2 and 4 only
- d) All of the above

**Correct Answer:** d) All of the above

### Explanation (Concise):

- 1: KBR is India’s first “mixed” UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 2 : The park spans from 1,220 m to 8,586 m, over 7 km vertical sweep.
- 3: Snow leopard, red panda, and blue sheep are key flagship species.
- 4: Zemu Glacier is one of Asia’s largest glaciers.

## Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary.

The Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary has recently witnessed the arrival of thousands of migratory birds, marking the beginning of the seasonal migration period.

### About Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary

- **Location:** Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu.
- **Historical Significance:** One of the oldest bird protected areas in both India and Tamil Nadu. The sanctuary is a people-protected wetland, with locals historically safeguarding the heronry in return for the nutrient-rich water (liquid guano effect) that enhances agricultural productivity.
- **International Recognition:** Designated as a Ramsar Site in 2022 and recognized as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) under the Coromandel Coast biotic province.
- **Flora:** Includes *Alangium salviflorum*, *Acacia nilotica*, thorn forests, and dry evergreen scrub.
- **Fauna:** Key bird species include black-headed ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Eurasian spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), and painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*).

**Practise Question:14. Which of the following statements regarding Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary is/are correct?**

1. It is located in the Chengalpattu District of Tamil Nadu.
2. The sanctuary was designated as a Ramsar Site in 2022.
3. The flora includes *Alangium salviflorum*, *Acacia nilotica*, and dry evergreen scrub.
4. It is primarily known for housing tigers and leopards along with migratory birds.

### Options:

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 2 and 4 only
- d) All of the above

**Correct Answer: a) 1, 2, and 3 only**

### Explanation:

- 1: Correct location in Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu.
- 2: Declared a Ramsar Site in 2022.
- 3: Flora includes *Alangium salviflorum*, *Acacia nilotica*, thorn forests, and dry evergreen scrub.
- 4: Tigers and leopards are not found in this bird sanctuary; it is specifically for avifauna.

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## Greater Flamingo Sanctuary, Dhanushkodi.

### In the News:

- **Issue:** Environmentalists and ornithologists have raised concerns over a proposed wind farm project near the Greater Flamingo Sanctuary in Dhanushkodi, Tamil Nadu.
- **Reason for Concern:** The proposed project site lies close to the Central Asian Flyway, a major migratory route for thousands of birds.

- **Impact Feared:** Wind turbines and associated infrastructure could disrupt bird flight paths, cause collisions, and affect mangrove and mudflat ecosystems critical to migratory species.

**About the Greater Flamingo Sanctuary:**

Feature	Description
<b>Location</b>	Dhanushkodi, Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu
<b>Biosphere Zone</b>	Lies within the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, one of India's richest coastal ecosystems
<b>Ecosystem Types</b>	Mangroves, mudflats, salt marshes, sand dunes, and coastal wetlands
<b>Ecological Role</b>	Serves as a vital stopover along the Central Asian Flyway for thousands of migratory birds
<b>Biodiversity</b>	Supports over 128 bird species, including Greater & Lesser Flamingos, herons, egrets, sandpipers, and plovers
<b>Marine Life</b>	Habitat for fish, crustaceans, molluscs, and nesting sea turtles (notably Olive Ridley)
<b>Flora</b>	Dominated by mangrove species like <i>Avicennia marina</i> and <i>Rhizophora mucronata</i> , which stabilize the coast and act as natural barriers against erosion

**About the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*):**

Feature	Description
<b>Common Name</b>	Greater Flamingo
<b>Scientific Name</b>	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
<b>Distribution</b>	Found in Africa, western Asia, southern Europe, and parts of India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh)
<b>Habitat</b>	Prefers shallow, saline and alkaline wetlands — salt lakes, lagoons, and intertidal mudflats
<b>Appearance</b>	Tall wading bird with pink feathers, long legs, and down-curved bill used for filter-feeding on algae and small invertebrates
<b>Breeding</b>	Breeds in large colonies; constructs mud nests in shallow water bodies
<b>Feeding Adaptation</b>	Uses a filter-feeding mechanism to separate food from water and mud
<b>Migratory Behaviour</b>	Partially migratory — large flocks arrive in India seasonally via the Central Asian Flyway

**Conservation Status:**

Classification	Status
<b>IUCN Red List</b>	Least Concern
<b>Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972</b>	Schedule II (provides legal protection against hunting and trade)
<b>CITES</b>	Not listed in Appendix I; international trade monitored

**Question: 23. Recently, the Greater Flamingo Sanctuary was in the news due to environmental concerns related to:**

- Expansion of salt pans in the Gulf of Mannar region
- Establishment of a wind farm project near Dhanushkodi
- Coral bleaching events in the Gulf of Mannar
- Oil spill from a nearby coastal refinery

**Answer: b)**

**Explanation:** The controversy pertains to a proposed wind farm near the Greater Flamingo Sanctuary that may threaten migratory bird habitats.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Pilibhit Tiger Reserve

A 45-year-old farmer recently lost his life in a suspected tiger attack near the Barahi range of the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR), raising fresh concerns about human-wildlife conflict in the region.

### About Pilibhit Tiger Reserve:

Pilibhit Tiger Reserve is located across the districts of Pilibhit and Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh. It forms a crucial part of the Terai Arc Landscape within the Upper Gangetic Plains biogeographic zone. Positioned along the India-Nepal border, the reserve lies at the base of the Himalayan foothills.

- **Area:** The reserve covers 730 sq km, which includes a core area of 602 sq km.
- **River Systems:** The Gomti River originates within PTR. The landscape also serves as a catchment for several other rivers, such as the Sharda, Chuka, and Mala Khannot.
- **Terrain & Habitat:**

The landscape features dense sal forests, extensive tall alluvial grasslands, savannah-type vegetation, and marshy swamps. These ecosystems are shaped and sustained by seasonal flooding brought by the adjoining rivers.

The Sharda Sagar Dam, stretching nearly 22 km, forms part of the reserve's boundary.

PTR experiences a **hot and dry climate**, giving rise to forest zones dominated by **dry teak species** and soil characteristics associated with the **Vindhyan ranges**.

### Vegetation Profile:

The reserve is home to diverse forest types, including:

- **Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests**
- **Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests**
- **Seasonal Swamp Forests**
- **Tropical Semi-evergreen Forests**

**Sal trees** dominate the region, covering nearly 76% of the reserve with vigorous natural regeneration. Scattered grasslands support species like Saccharum, Sclerostachya, Imperata, Themeda, Bothriochloa, Vetiveria, Apluda, Dichanthium, Digitaria, and Cyperus.

### Wildlife Diversity:

Pilibhit Tiger Reserve shelters a rich array of fauna:

- **Flagship Species:** Bengal tiger, swamp deer, hog deer, leopard, and the critically endangered Bengal florican.
- **Birdlife:** The reserve is known for exceptional avian diversity, hosting species such as the Swamp Francolin, Great Hornbill, Bengal Florican, Lesser Florican, Black Francolin, Jungle Bush Quail, Red Junglefowl, and the Asian Openbill stork.

**Q. The river Gomti, which flows through parts of Uttar Pradesh, originates from which of the following protected areas?**

- a) Dudhwa National Park
- b) Pilibhit Tiger Reserve
- c) Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary
- d) Corbett Tiger Reserve

**Correct Answer: B.**

**Explanation:**

- The Gomti River, an important tributary of the Ganga and a major river flowing through Uttar Pradesh, originates inside the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR).
- PTR is located in Pilibhit and Shahjahanpur districts of Uttar Pradesh, forming part of the Terai Arc Landscape.
- The source of the river lies in the swampy, forested areas of the reserve, where underground springs emerge and gradually form the Gomti.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary.**

A recent incident near the Kakraha Range of Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary claimed the life of a 55-year-old farmer, who was attacked by a leopard while working in fields close to the forest boundary.

#### **About Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary**

Located in the Terai belt of Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh, the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary forms part of the Upper Gangetic plains.

It was integrated into Project Tiger in 1987, and, along with Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Dudhwa National Park, it constitutes the larger Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. The sanctuary spans 400.09 sq km.

Bordering Nepal, the sanctuary was originally established to ensure the conservation of the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) population. Its landscape provides an essential ecological corridor connecting tiger habitats of Dudhwa and Kishanpur in India with Bardia National Park across the border in Nepal.

#### **Vegetation and Flora**

Katarniaghat features a blend of terai grasslands, mixed deciduous, and moist deciduous forests, with Sal (*Shorea robusta*) being the dominant species.

Its forests also include several notable associates such as:

- **Terminalia alata (Asna)**
- **Lagerstroemia parviflora (Asidha)**

- **Adina cordifolia (Haldu)**
- **Mitragyna parviflora (Faldu)**
- **Gmelina arborea (Ghamhar)**

### **Fauna**

The sanctuary shelters a variety of rare and endangered fauna, including:

- **Tiger**
- **Gharial**
- **Rhinoceros**
- **Gangetic Dolphin**
- **Swamp Deer**
- **Hispid Hare**
- **Bengal Florican**
- **White-backed and Long-billed Vultures**

The Gairwa River, flowing through the sanctuary, has been declared a dedicated habitat for Mugger crocodiles and Gharials. It also supports multiple species of turtles, freshwater fish, and diverse aquatic organisms. Katarniaghat is one of the few regions in the country where Gangetic dolphins thrive in their natural environment.

**Practise Question: Consider the following statements about the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary:**

1. It forms a part of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve along with Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Dudhwa National Park.
2. The Gairwa River inside the sanctuary is a notified habitat for both Mugger crocodiles and Gharials.
3. Katarniaghat is one of the few natural habitats of the Gangetic Dolphin in India.

**How many of the above statements are correct?**

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

**Correct Answer: C. All three**

**Explanation:**

- **Statement 1 is correct:** KWS, Kishanpur WLS, and Dudhwa NP together form the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The Gairwa River is designated as a sanctuary for Mugger and Gharial species.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** KWS is among the limited places in India where the Gangetic Dolphin is found naturally.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

After several decades, a wild tiger has returned to Gujarat, establishing a stable presence in the Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary located in Dahod district—marking a significant development for the state’s wildlife conservation efforts.

### About Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Location:** The sanctuary is situated in Gujarat, adjoining the border with Madhya Pradesh.
- It was officially designated as a Wildlife Sanctuary in March 1982.
- Ratanmahal is popularly referred to as the “Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary” because it supports the largest population of sloth bears in the entire state.

### Physical Features

- **River System:** The sanctuary forms part of the catchment area of the Panam River, one of Central Gujarat’s important river systems.
- **Vegetation:**
  - The foothill zones are dominated by dry teak forests.
  - The outer regions include mixed deciduous forests with extensive dry bamboo brakes.
  - The landscape also hosts a substantial population of Mahudo trees, along with pure stretches of Sadad and Timru forests on hilltop plateaus.

### Flora

The sanctuary’s vegetation diversity includes species such as: **Teak, dudhlo, sadad, timru, amla, bamboo, dhavdo, kakadiyo, mahuda, tanach, charoli, ber, jamun, and khakhro.**

### Fauna

Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary is home to various wildlife species, including:

- **Leopard**
- **Palm civet**
- **Indian civet**
- **Four-horned antelope**
- **Loten’s sunbird**
- **Large green barbet**
- **Yellow-cheeked tit**

**Q. With reference to the Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade (IFCCT), consider the following statements:**

1. It is institutionally linked to both the UNFCCC and the WTO for coordination on climate-trade issues.
2. The Forum aims to support developing countries in influencing emerging global trade rules related to climate action.
3. The IFCCT has the mandate to negotiate binding outcomes and interpret existing trade agreements.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

- a) 2 only

- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 3 only

**Correct Answer: A. 2 only**

#### **Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect:** The IFCCT is *institutionally independent* of both the WTO and the UNFCCC.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** One of its key objectives is to help developing nations gain a stronger voice in shaping climate-related trade rules.
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect:** The Forum will not negotiate binding outcomes, interpret existing agreements, adjudicate disputes, or review national measures.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Kuno National Park**

In a significant development for India's cheetah reintroduction efforts, Mukhi, the first cheetah born in India after the species was reintroduced, has recently given birth to five cubs at Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.

#### **About Kuno National Park**

- **Location:** The park is situated in Sheopur district, in the state of Madhya Pradesh.
- It lies close to the Vindhyan Hills, adding to its natural scenic landscape.
- Initially notified as Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in 1981, it was elevated to the status of a national park in 2018.

The park holds historical importance due to its selection for the **Asiatic Lion Reintroduction Project**, aimed at relocating a second population of Asiatic lions in India.

- **Area:** Kuno National Park spans 750 sq. km.
- The park is named after the Kuno River, a major tributary of the Chambal River, which flows from south to north, bisecting the park into two parts.

The park's landscape features plateaus, valleys, and seasonal streams, contributing to diverse ecosystems and rich biodiversity.

#### **Vegetation and Flora**

Kuno National Park supports a wide variety of vegetation types, including:

- **Tropical dry deciduous forests**
- **Savannah grasslands**
- **Riverine forests**

The dominant tree species in the region include:

- **Khair (Acacia catechu)**
- **Salai (Boswellia serrata)**
- **Ber (Ziziphus mauritiana)**

#### **Fauna**

The protected area is home to several carnivores and other wildlife species such as:

- Jungle cat
- Indian leopard
- Sloth bear
- Indian wolf
- Striped hyena
- Golden jackal
- Bengal fox
- Dhole

Additionally, the park hosts more than 120 species of birds, reflecting its ecological richness.

Kuno has been chosen under the 'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India'.

As part of this ambitious project:

- 8 cheetahs were translocated from Namibia in September 2022.
- 12 more arrived from South Africa in February 2023.

In total, 20 cheetahs were introduced under the Cheetah Project to restore the species in India.

**Practise Question: With reference to Kuno National Park, consider the following statements:**

1. The park derives its name from a river that is a major tributary of the Narmada River.
2. It was originally designated as a wildlife sanctuary before being upgraded to a national park.
3. Under the Cheetah Project, more cheetahs were brought from South Africa than from Namibia.

**Which of the above statements are correct?**

- a) 2 and 3 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 3 only

**Correct Answer: A. 2 and 3 only**

**Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect:** Kuno National Park is named after the Kuno River, which is a tributary of the Chambal River, not the Narmada.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** The area was first declared Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in 1981 and later upgraded to a national park in 2018.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** A total of 12 cheetahs came from South Africa, while 8 were brought from Namibia, meaning South Africa contributed more.

\*\*\*\*\*

## AWARDS & PRIZES

### National Gopal Ratna Awards.

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has recently declared the recipients of the National Gopal Ratna Awards (NGRA) 2025.

#### About the National Gopal Ratna Awards

The NGRA represents one of the highest national recognitions in India's livestock and dairy sector. The award was instituted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, which functions under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Launched in 2021 as part of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission, the award seeks to promote excellence and best practices among stakeholders involved in milk production and dairy development.

#### Objective

The main purpose of NGRA is to encourage outstanding contributions from:

- **Milk-producing farmers**
- **Dairy Cooperatives**
- **Milk Producer Companies (MPCs)**
- **Dairy Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**
- **Artificial Insemination Technicians (AITs)**

#### Award Categories

The National Gopal Ratna Awards are presented in the following categories:

1. Best Dairy Farmer rearing registered indigenous cattle or buffalo breeds.
2. Best Dairy Cooperative Society (DCS) / Milk Producer Company (MPC) / Dairy Farmer Producer Organization (FPO).
3. Best Artificial Insemination Technician (AIT).

Additionally, a Special Award is reserved for participants from the North Eastern Region (NER) and the Himalayan States to promote dairy development efforts in these areas.

#### Award Components

- **For the Best Dairy Farmer and Best DCS/MPC/FPO categories:**
  - ₹5 lakh for 1st place
  - ₹3 lakh for 2nd place
  - ₹2 lakh for 3rd place
  - ₹2 lakh for the Special Award (NER)
  - Along with a Certificate of Merit and a memento
- **In the Best Artificial Insemination Technician (AIT) category:**
  - The award comprises a Certificate of Merit and a memento.

**Practise Question:** With reference to the National Gopal Ratna Awards (NGRA), consider the following statements:

1. The awards were instituted under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and are administered by the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.
2. The NGRA includes a dedicated Special Award category exclusively for the Himalayan States.
3. The Best Artificial Insemination Technician (AIT) category carries a monetary reward similar to other categories.

**How many of the above statements are correct?**

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

**Correct Answer: a) Only one**

**Explanation**

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** NGRA was launched under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and is managed by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect:** The Special Award is meant for both the North Eastern Region (NER) and the Himalayan States, not exclusively for Himalayan States.
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect:** The AIT category does not include a cash prize; it only provides a certificate and a memento.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Indira Gandhi Peace Prize

Former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet has been conferred the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2024.

### About the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize

The award was established in 1986 by a trust named after Indira Gandhi, commemorating the legacy of the former Prime Minister of India.

Commonly referred to as the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development, it is among India's most prestigious international honours.

The prize includes a cash award of ₹25 lakh along with an official citation.

It is presented each year to an individual or organization—regardless of race, nationality, or religion—in recognition of exemplary contributions in the following areas:

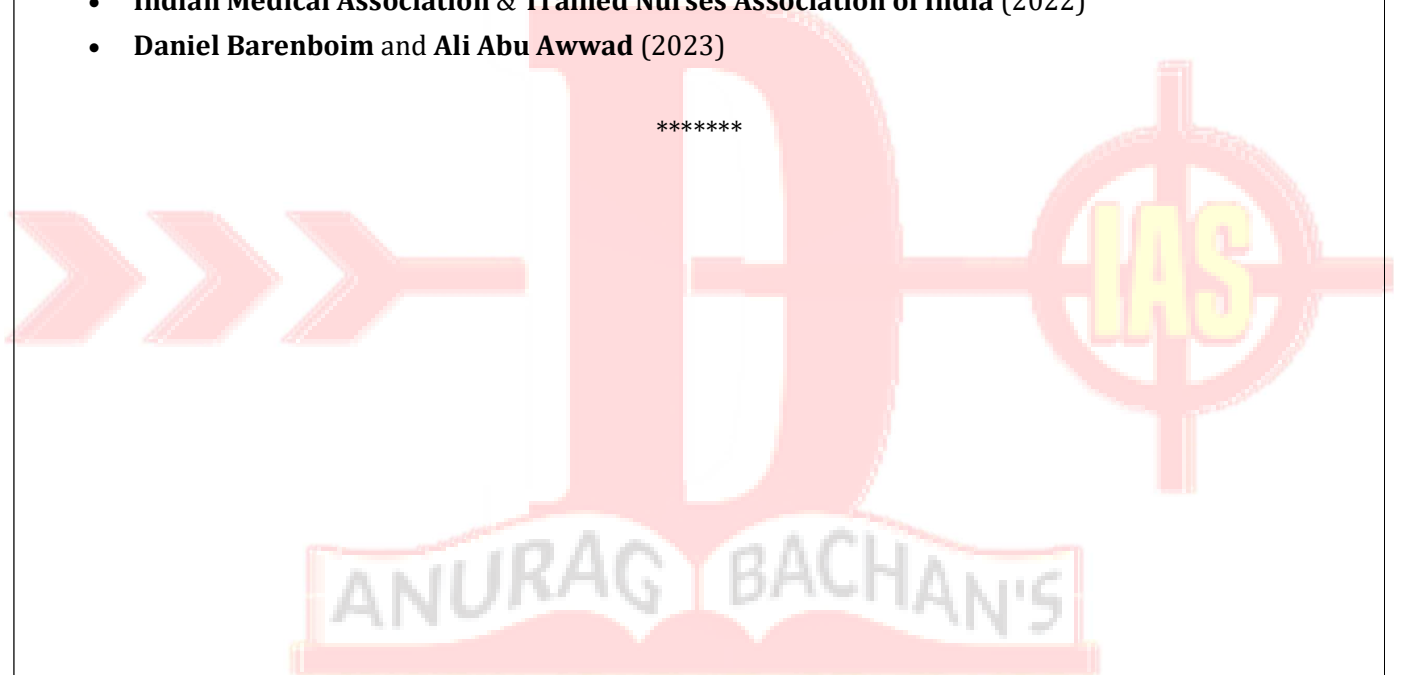
- Promoting economic cooperation and advancing a new international economic order
- Supporting the comprehensive progress of developing countries
- Ensuring that scientific and technological advancements are harnessed for the betterment of humanity
- Expanding the frontiers of freedom and uplifting the human spirit

### **Notable Past Recipients**

Some prominent awardees over the years include:

- **Mikhail Gorbachev** (1987)
- **UNICEF** (1989)
- **Jimmy Carter** (1997)
- The **United Nations** and Secretary-General **Kofi Annan** (2003)
- **Angela Merkel**, former Chancellor of Germany (2013)
- **ISRO - Indian Space Research Organisation** (2014)
- **Manmohan Singh**, former Prime Minister of India (2017)
- **Sir David Attenborough** (2019)
- **Pratham NGO** (2021)
- **Indian Medical Association & Trained Nurses Association of India** (2022)
- **Daniel Barenboim and Ali Abu Awwad** (2023)

\*\*\*\*\*



## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

### Cyclone Ditwah

Cyclone Ditwah formed over the southwest Bay of Bengal on 26 November 2025 and first made landfall in Sri Lanka, causing catastrophic flooding and deadly landslides. Sri Lanka was the worst affected, with hundreds of deaths, massive displacement, destruction of homes, roads, and agricultural land, making it one of the country's most severe natural disasters.

After crossing Sri Lanka, the system re-entered the Bay of Bengal, regained strength, and moved northwards along the east coast of India, bringing heavy rains and strong winds to Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and parts of Andhra Pradesh. These regions saw waterlogging, crop losses, transportation disruptions, and closure of schools.

Although the cyclone weakened into a depression later, its rain bands continued to cause heavy rainfall. Both countries launched large-scale rescue and relief operations, with Sri Lanka facing long-term economic and humanitarian impacts.

The name of the help operation launched by India for Sri Lanka in response to Cyclone Ditwah is Operation Sagar Bandhu.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Hayli Gubbi Volcano

Hayli Gubbi is a shield-type volcano located in the Afar region of Ethiopia, part of the Erta Ale volcanic range.

On 23 November 2025, Hayli Gubbi erupted — what is described as its first major eruption in roughly 12,000 years.

The eruption sent a massive plume of volcanic ash and gases (including sulfur dioxide, fine rock/glass particles) up to ~14 km into the atmosphere.

High-altitude winds carried this ash cloud across the Red Sea, over parts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Sea, eventually reaching South Asia and drifting over much of northwestern India — including Delhi-NCR.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Hong Kong Fire Incident

In late November 2025, a massive fire broke out at the Wang Fuk Court residential complex in Hong Kong's Tai Po district. The blaze, intensified by flammable scaffolding materials and renovation nets, spread rapidly across seven high-rise buildings and burned for nearly 40 hours.

It became one of Hong Kong's deadliest fires, claiming around 160 lives, injuring many, and displacing more than 2,600 residents. Investigations revealed serious safety lapses, including the use of unsafe renovation materials and failure of fire alarms in several units.

Following public outrage, the government launched a large-scale probe, made arrests related to negligence, and ordered the removal and review of similar scaffolding across the city. The incident also sparked debates on accountability, regulatory failures, and restrictions on public expression, as some calls for justice faced pressure under local security laws.

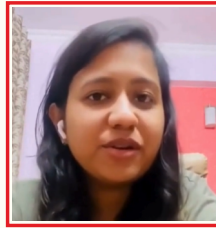


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