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UPSC / PCS

MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS NOVEMBER 2025

Topic Covered

1. WORLD FOOD DAY 2025
2. CONTEMPT OF COURT
3. INDIA'S MANUFACTURING MOMENTUM
4. FOODGRAIN PRODUCTIONAND STORAGE
5. URBAN TRANSPORT FOR VIKSIT BHARAT
6. INDIA'S PULSES REVOLUTION 2.0
7. BALANCING MARITIME DEFENCE WITH ISLAND ECOLOGY.



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Foreword

Dear Aspirants,

This magazine by the Plutus IAS team is designed in such a fashion that it holistically covers all the relevant and important topics for the Civil Services Exam to make aspirants exam-ready. Plutus IAS Current Affairs Magazine is a secondary source of information; the newspaper will remain the primary source for the preparation of Current Affairs.

Now, Current Affairs are no longer merely current; they are Contemporary Affairs. Questions asked in both Prelims as well as the Mains assess the conceptual clarity of an aspirant. This magazine is prepared with the aim of helping you understand the interlinkages of both Static and Dynamic news events and internalize the concepts required to crack this examination.

The Plutus IAS team wishes you all the best. Prepare for the UPSC Civil Services Examination with a calm, composed, or serene mind and some patience to crack this examination in one go.

Team
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Sources:
The Hindu | The Indian Express | The Economic Times | Press Information Bureau | PRS Legislative Research | IDSA: Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis | Yojana and Kurukshetra | Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Debates.



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REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT, 1951: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

WHY IN THE NEWS?



The Election Commission of India has announced the schedule for the Bihar Assembly Elections 2025, which will be held in two phases on November 6 and 11, with the counting of votes on November 14. With this announcement, the Model Code of Conduct has come into effect in the state. The elections will decide 243 assembly seats, and over 7.43 crore voters are expected to participate across more than 90,700 polling booths.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT (RPA), 1951

The Representation of the People Act, 1951, is a key legislation enacted by the Provisional Parliament of India under Article 327 of the Constitution. It was introduced by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to provide a legal framework for conducting free and fair elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures in India. The Act also defines the qualifications and disqualifications for membership, corrupt practices, election offences, and the mechanism for resolving election disputes. It complements the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which deals primarily with the preparation of electoral rolls and the allocation of seats.

KEY FEATURES OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT (RPA), 1951

Feature	Description
1. Conduct of Elections	Procedures for free and fair elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, including nomination, polling, and counting. Empowers the Election Commission of India (ECI).
2. Qualifications for Membership	Must be an Indian citizen. Age: 25 years (Lok Sabha/Assembly) and 30 years (Rajya Sabha/Council).
3. Disqualifications for Membership	Conviction of crimes, holding office of profit, unsound mind, undischarged insolvent, or engaging in corrupt practices.
4. Corrupt Practices & Election Offences	Includes bribery, undue influence, impersonation, promoting caste/religion enmity, booth capturing, and false statements.

5. Election Disputes	Election results can be challenged in High Courts; appeals lie with Supreme Court. Election Tribunals abolished by 1966 Amendment.
6. Registration of Political Parties (Sec 29A)	Parties must register with ECI, submit constitution & list of office-bearers. Recognition allows allocation of symbols.
7. Disqualification on Conviction (Sec 8)	Conviction for serious offences (corruption, rape, terrorism) leads to immediate disqualification. Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013) reinforced this.
8. Filing of Election Expenses (Sec 10A)	Candidates must submit detailed expenditure statements within prescribed time; failure can lead to up to 3-year disqualification.
9. Office of Profit (Sec 9A)	Legislators holding government posts for personal gain face disqualification.
10. Role in Democratic Accountability	Ensures transparency, fairness, and ethical conduct in elections; strengthens electoral integrity and democracy.

AMENDMENTS TO THE RPA, 1951

Year & Amendment	Key Provision / Change	Significance
1966 Amendment	Abolished Election Tribunals; transferred election disputes to High Courts; appeals to Supreme Court.	Simplified and strengthened judicial mechanism for election disputes.
2002 Amendment	Mandatory disclosure of candidates' criminal, educational, and financial background (based on SC directive in PUCL v. Union of India).	Increased transparency and informed voting.
2010 Amendment	Granted voting rights to overseas Indians (NRIs) by allowing voter registration.	Expanded the electoral base.
2013 Amendment & Validation Act	Attempted to protect convicted lawmakers from immediate disqualification; withdrawn after backlash following Lily Thomas case.	Reinforced immediate disqualification of convicted representatives.
2020 Finance Act-linked Amendment	Enabled Electoral Bonds for political funding.	Formalized donations but raised transparency concerns.

SUCCESS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT (RPA), 1951

1. **Ensured Free and Fair Elections:** Established legal framework for elections under the Election Commission of India (ECI). India conducted 18 General Elections (1952–2024) and numerous state polls peacefully.
2. **Strengthened Democracy:** Operationalized universal adult suffrage. Ensured every eligible citizen could vote, making democracy inclusive and participatory.
3. **Regulated Qualifications and Disqualifications:** Defined clear criteria for candidates. Maintained integrity of elected representatives and barred those convicted of serious crimes.

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4. **Controlled Corrupt Practices:** Penalized practices like bribery, undue influence, and booth capturing. Strengthened electoral ethics.

5. **Promoted Transparency and Accountability:** Introduced provisions on election expenditure and candidate declarations (amended in 2002). Increased public awareness and accountability of candidates.

6. **Registration of Political Parties:** Section 29A provides structured registration process for political parties. Ensures transparency and regulation in India's multi-party system.

7. **Judicial Oversight of Election Disputes:** 1966 Amendment allowed High Courts and Supreme Court to hear election disputes. Ensured speedier and fairer judicial review.

8. **Inclusion of Young Voters (18 Years):** 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 reduced voting age from 21 to 18. Example: 1989 General Elections saw millions of first-time voters aged 18–21 participate, empowering youth in democracy.

9. **Empowerment of Marginalized Sections:** Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Ensured representation and inclusivity in governance.

ISSUES WITH THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT (RPA), 1951:

1. **Criminalization of Politics:** Many candidates with criminal charges continue to contest elections despite disqualifications being limited to convictions. Delays in trial and appeals allow such candidates to remain active in politics.

2. **Election Expenditure Loopholes:** Caps on election expenses are often ignored. Political parties find ways to fund campaigns through unaccounted channels.

3. **Influence of Money and Muscle Power:** Wealthy and influential candidates dominate elections, affecting fairness. Corrupt practices like vote-buying still occur.

4. **Delayed Disqualification:** Disqualification for corrupt practices or illegal activities is often slow due to lengthy judicial processes.

5. **Representation of Women:** Despite provisions for inclusivity, women's political representation remains low. No direct reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures (except local bodies).

6. **Enforcement Challenge:** Monitoring violations like bribery, booth capturing, or misuse of official machinery is difficult. Electoral rolls sometimes have errors, leading to disenfranchisement.

7. **Political Party Regulation:** While Section 29A regulates party registration, internal democracy in parties remains weak. Parties can ignore internal elections and candidate selection is often opaque.

8. **Technological Concerns:** EVMs and VVPATs improved transparency, but doubts and controversies over tampering occasionally arise.

HOW THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT (RPA), 1951 CAN BE MADE MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND INCLUSIVE

1. **Strengthen Measures Against Criminalization of Politics:** Disqualify candidates immediately upon filing charges for serious crimes, not just upon conviction. Fast-track trials for politicians to prevent misuse of legal loopholes.

2. **Enhance Transparency in Election Financing:** Introduce stricter monitoring of campaign expenses and party funding. Make all donations above a minimal threshold publicly disclosed. Use technology to track political donations and expenditures in real-time.

3. **Promote Women's Representation:** Introduce reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures (similar to local bodies). Incentivize parties to field more women candidates through additional recognition or funding.

4. **Ensure Youth Participation:** Promote voter awareness campaigns targeting youth (18–25

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years). Include provisions for easier online voter registration and verification for young citizens.

5. **Strengthen Internal Democracy in Political Parties:** Mandate regular internal elections for party offices. Ensure transparency in candidate selection processes. Make party constitutions and election processes publicly accessible.

6. **Improve Electoral Roll Accuracy:** Use biometric and digital verification to remove duplicate, outdated, or fake entries. Periodic updating of rolls to ensure every eligible citizen can vote.

7. **Leverage Technology Further:** Expand secure digital voting options while maintaining EVM and VVPAT systems. Use AI and blockchain to detect anomalies or fraud in elections.

8. **Empower Marginalized Communities:** Consider reserved seats for underrepresented groups beyond SC/ST, including minorities and differently-abled citizens. Introduce targeted voter awareness campaigns in rural and tribal areas.

9. **Speedy Judicial Mechanism for Election Disputes:** Establish special fast-track benches for election-related cases to avoid prolonged litigation.

CONCLUSION

The RPA, 1951, has been fundamental in ensuring free, fair, and inclusive elections in India, strengthening democracy and electoral accountability. However, addressing criminalization, financial transparency, gender inclusivity, and technological improvements can make it more comprehensive, transparent, and participatory for the modern electoral landscape.

CONTEMPT OF COURT: BALANCING JUDICIAL AUTHORITY AND CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOMS

WHY IN THE NEWS?

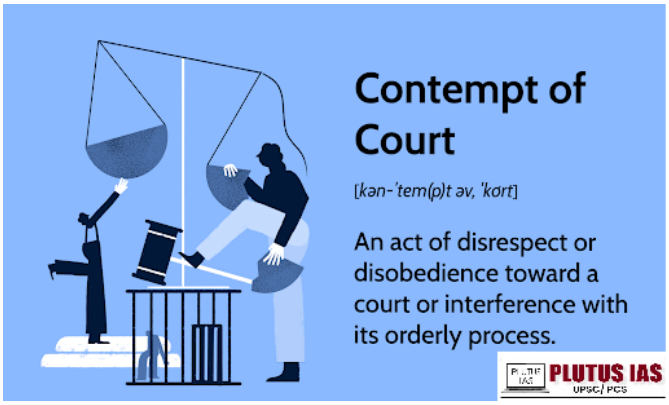
In October 2025, a dramatic incident unfolded inside the Supreme Court of India when Advocate Rakesh Kishore threw a shoe at Chief Justice B.R. Gavai during court proceedings. The incident stemmed from earlier comments made by the CJI in a case involving a Vishnu idol, which some people saw as mocking religious feelings. Despite the provocation, the CJI stayed calm, and no contempt charges were brought against the advocate. The action faced widespread criticism across political and legal circles, with the Prime Minister calling it "utterly condemnable."



CONCEPT AND MEANING OF CONTEMPT OF COURT

- **Definition:** Contempt of Court refers to any act that disrespects the authority, dignity, or functioning of a court, thereby hindering the administration of justice.

- **Key Idea:** It ensures that courts keep their respect and authority so that justice is not compromised by interference, criticism, or disobedience.



- **Scope:** Applies to judges, proceedings, lawyers, media, and citizens.

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- **Example:** Publishing false information about court proceedings can be considered contempt.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Article	Content / Relevance
Article 129	The Supreme Court is a court of record with power to punish for contempt of itself.
Article 215	High Courts are courts of record and have power to punish for contempt.
Article 141	Supreme Court judgments are binding; disobedience constitutes contempt.
Article 19(1)(a) vs 19(2)	Freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions, including contempt to maintain judicial authority.

WHY DO WE NEED CONTEMPT POWERS?

- **Preserve the authority of courts:** This protects the dignity and legitimacy of the judiciary. Example: Baradakanta Mishra v. Registrar of Orissa High Court (1973), which upheld contempt as essential for the rule of law.
- **Ensure compliance with judicial orders:** Courts do not have executive power, so contempt discourages disobedience. Civil contempt is invoked when government agencies fail to implement judicial directives.
- **Maintain public confidence:** This prevents harmful attacks that weaken trust in the judiciary. For instance, Prashant Bhushan's tweets were seen as undermining the Supreme Court's authority.
- **Protect judicial proceedings:** This prevents interruptions and biased commentary during ongoing cases. Media trials in high-profile cases can shape public opinion and impact justice.

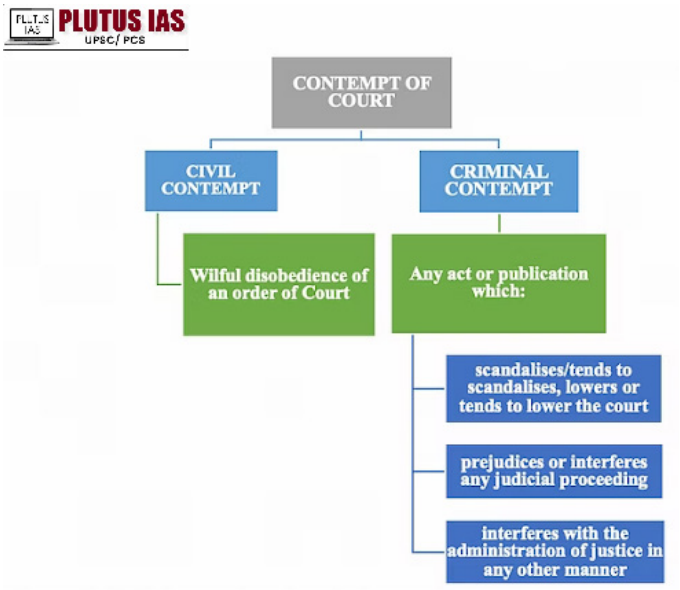
OBJECTIVES OF THE CONTEMPT OF COURTS ACT (COCA), 1971

1. **Preserve Dignity of Courts:** The Act aims to protect the authority, respect, and credibility of the judiciary. By punishing acts that insult or scandalize the courts, it helps maintain the essential prestige of judicial institutions. This is crucial for upholding the rule of law and ensuring public compliance with judicial decisions.
2. **Ensure Uninterrupted Administration of Justice:** Contempt powers stop disruptions in court proceedings, whether caused by individuals, lawyers, or media commentary. This allows the courts to operate smoothly and efficiently without interference, delays, or obstruction, preserving the integrity of the judicial process.
3. **Maintain Public Confidence:** Public trust in the judiciary is essential for a democratic society. The Act protects this trust by penalizing statements or actions that could mislead, misinform, or generate unwarranted doubts about the fairness and impartiality of judicial proceedings.
4. **Protect Judges from Intimidation:** Judicial independence is fundamental to democracy. COCA protects judges from threats or intimidation that could influence their decisions. This enables judges to carry out their responsibilities without fear or bias, ensuring fair adjudication.
5. **Regulate Media and Public Commentary:** While freedom of speech is guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a), the Act strikes a balance. It prevents reporting or commentary on ongoing cases that could bias outcomes or sway public opinion, especially in sub judice matters.
6. **Prevent Disobedience:** The Act mandates compliance with court orders, ensuring that judgments, directions, and commitments are followed. This is especially vital when executive or administrative authorities might otherwise delay or neglect judicial directives. Contempt serves as a deterrent against such disobedience.
7. **Provide a Legal Framework:** COCA clearly specifies what counts as civil and criminal contempt, establishes procedures for starting proceedings, and outlines the punishments that can be imposed. This framework brings clarity, reduces unpredictability, and ensures that contempt powers are used in a fair and structured way.

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TYPES OF CONTEMPT UNDER COCA, 1971

Type	Definition / Scope	Examples
Civil Contempt	Wilful disobedience of court orders or breach of undertakings.	Refusing to pay maintenance as ordered by court.
Criminal Contempt	Acts that scandalize the court, interfere with proceedings, or obstruct justice.	Publishing articles questioning a judge's impartiality during an ongoing case.



SUBTYPES OF CRIMINAL CONTEMPT:

1. **Scandalizing the Court –** Lowering the dignity of the judiciary.
2. **Interference with Judicial Process –** Obstructing or influencing proceedings.
3. **Disobedience of Court Orders –** Sometimes overlaps with civil contempt.

Example: Media reports revealing details of an ongoing high-profile trial to influence public opinion.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES WITH COCA

- Ambiguity in "Scandalizing Court," subjective interpretation risks misuse.
- Freedom of Speech vs Contempt, there is tension between Article 19(1)(a) and contempt jurisdiction.
- Delayed or Selective Action, inconsistent enforcement means high-profile figures sometimes escape.
- Overlap Between Civil and Criminal Contempt causes procedural confusion.
- Misuse Against Media & Activists, legitimate criticism is sometimes treated as contempt.
- Lack of Clarity in Punishment, wide discretion under COCA leads to inconsistent sentencing.

Limited Public Awareness is especially problematic in the social media era.

LANDMARK CASE LAWS

Case	Principle / Significance
In Re Arundhati Roy (2002)	The Supreme Court fined Roy for scandalizing the court through media criticism.
Re: K.K. Verma (1982)	Clarified distinction between civil and criminal contempt.
Re: Rajeev Shukla (2019)	Social media posts against judges highlighted the need for digital-age guidelines.
S. Mulgaokar vs State of Maharashtra (1979)	Contempt must involve intent to interfere with justice, not mere criticism.
Subramanian Swamy vs Union of India (2016)	Reiterated the balance between free speech and judicial dignity.

WAYS TO MANAGE AND PROTECT THE DIGNITY OF COURTS

- Public Awareness and Legal Literacy, Promote responsible criticism.
- Media Guidelines, Encourage self-regulation in reporting ongoing trials.
- Judicial Transparency, Reasoned judgments reduce misinformation.
- Legislative Review, Amend COCA to clarify vague provisions like "scandalizing the court."
- Training for Lawyers and Officials, Avoid inadvertent contempt.
- ADR for Minor Contempt, Decriminalize minor breaches.
- Balancing Article 19 and COCA, Judicial restraint in exercising contempt powers.

CONCLUSION

The Contempt of Court law is essential for maintaining the authority and operation of the judiciary, which is a key part of Indian democracy. However, its broad and subjective application, especially related to "scandalizing the court," creates challenges for free speech, media freedom, and democratic accountability.

The shoe-throwing incident in the Supreme Court highlights the need for strong measures to protect judicial dignity and clearer legal guidelines to prevent misuse.

Moving forward, India needs to find a balance between protecting courts from disruption and allowing room for legitimate criticism. The contempt law should reflect democratic values and modern realities.

WORLD FOOD DAY 2025: BUILDING A NOURISHED AND SUSTAINABLE NATION

WHY IN THE NEWS?

World Food Day, observed globally on 16 October each year, marks a collective commitment to ensuring food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. It serves as a powerful reminder of the persistent global challenge of hunger and malnutrition, despite significant advances in food production. Food is the foundation of life—essential for health, growth, and well-being—and yet millions worldwide remain food insecure. The day urges renewed focus on resilient food systems, equitable access, and sustainable agricultural practices.



INDIA'S PROGRESS IN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

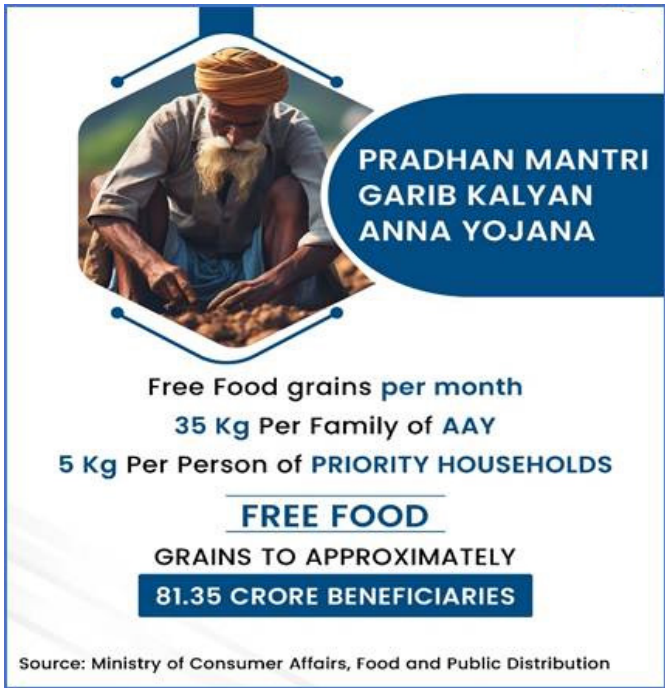
As one of the world's most populous nations, India has made remarkable progress in reducing hunger and improving nutritional outcomes through an integrated framework of policies and programmes. The country's efforts align with the World Food Day 2025 theme—"Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future", reflecting a holistic approach to food availability, affordability, and sustainability.

Over the past decade, foodgrain production in India has risen by nearly 90 million metric tonnes, while fruit and vegetable output has grown by more than 64 million metric tonnes. India ranks first globally in milk and millet production, and second in fish, fruit, and vegetable output. Honey and egg production have also doubled since 2014. Additionally, agricultural exports have nearly doubled over the past 11 years, strengthening India's position as a global food supplier.

KEY GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

1. **National Food Security & Nutrition Mission (NFSNM):** Originally launched in 2007–08 as the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), it aimed to increase rice, wheat, and pulse production and enhance soil fertility. Renamed the NFSNM (2024–25), it now combines food production with nutrition enhancement, linking agriculture to public health outcomes.

2. **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** The NFSA ensures equitable food distribution, covering 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population—about 81.35 crore beneficiaries—through Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Households (PHH). Together, NFSNM and NFSA form the twin pillars of India's food security—one driving production, the other ensuring distribution.



3. **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, PMGKAY provided free foodgrains to all NFSA beneficiaries. Its continuation from January 2024 to December 2028, with a financial outlay of ₹11.80 lakh crore, demonstrates India's long-term commitment to eradicating hunger and shielding the poor from economic distress.

4. **PM POSHAN (Poshan Shakti Nirman) Scheme:** Formerly the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, PM POSHAN provides nutritious cooked meals to children in government and aided schools, enhancing learning outcomes and promoting classroom attendance. In FY 2024–25, 22.96 LMT of rice and wheat were allocated under this programme.

5. **Rice Fortification Initiative:** To address micronutrient deficiencies, the government introduced fortified rice containing Iron, Folic Acid, and Vitamin B12. By March 2024, 100% of rice under schemes like PMGKAY, ICDS, and PM POSHAN was fortified. The initiative has been extended until December 2028 with ₹17,082 crore in funding.

MODERNIZING FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

To enhance transparency and efficiency, India has introduced SMART-PDS (Scheme for Modernisation and Reforms through Technology). It incorporates biometric authentication, e-KYC, and digital ration card management to ensure accountability.

The launch of Mera Ration 2.0 (2024) further improved accessibility by providing real-time entitlement information and location details for Fair Price Shops. Nearly 99.9% of ration cards are Aadhaar-linked, while the One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) initiative ensures portability of benefits nationwide.

SUPPLEMENTARY INTERVENTIONS

- **Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS-D):** Under OMSS(D), surplus foodgrains are sold in the open market to control inflation and ensure price stability. Products like Bharat Atta and Bharat Rice have been introduced at subsidised rates to maintain affordability.

- **Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–31):** Launched in October 2025, this mission aims to achieve self-reliance in pulse production by expanding cultivation by 35 lakh hectares, benefiting nearly 2 crore farmers and enhancing nutritional self-sufficiency.

INDIA'S GLOBAL FOOD LEADERSHIP

World Food India 2025: Organised by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, the event showcased India's potential as a global food hub, with participation from 90+ countries and 2,000 exhibitors. It emphasized innovation, investment, and sustainability in the food processing sector.

Indian Thali in Global Spotlight: India's traditional plant-based Thali was recognized by the WWF Living Planet Report for its nutritional value and environmental sustainability. The report highlighted that adopting India's dietary pattern could reduce global resource use to 0.84 Earths by 2050, proving its sustainability and climate-friendliness.

CHALLENGES IN ENSURING FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

1. **Persistent Malnutrition and Hidden Hunger:** Despite improved food availability, India still faces high levels of undernutrition, anaemia, and micronutrient deficiencies, especially among women and children.
2. **Climate Change and Agricultural Vulnerability:** Erratic rainfall, soil degradation, and rising temperatures threaten foodgrain yields and regional food security.
3. **Post-Harvest Losses and Supply Chain Inefficiencies:** Inadequate cold storage, transport infrastructure, and processing facilities lead to significant food wastage.
4. **Regional and Social Disparities:** Access to nutritious food remains uneven across states and socio-economic groups, with tribal and remote areas often left behind.
5. **Overdependence on Cereal-Based Diets:** While foodgrain security has improved, dietary diversity remains limited, affecting nutritional outcomes.
6. **Implementation and Leakages in PDS:** Despite digitisation, issues of inclusion and exclusion errors, and limited grievance redressal persist in some regions.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Promote Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture:** Encourage crop diversification towards pulses, millets, and biofortified crops to ensure balanced nutrition.
2. **Strengthen Climate-Resilient Farming:** Adopt technologies such as precision agriculture, drought-resistant seeds, and integrated water management to mitigate climate impacts.
3. **Enhance Post-Harvest and Food Processing Infrastructure:** Expand cold chains, logistics, and agro-processing clusters under schemes like PM Kisan Sampada Yojana and World Food India initiatives.
4. **Empower Women and Small Farmers:** Provide targeted credit, training, and market access to women farmers who play a key role in food production and household nutrition.
5. **Deepen Fortification and Biofortification Efforts:** Expand fortification beyond rice to cover other staples like wheat, oil, and salt while ensuring awareness and quality control.
6. **Improve Data and Monitoring:** Establish real-time monitoring of nutrition and food security indicators through integrated digital platforms at district and block levels.
7. **Strengthen Global and Regional Cooperation:** Collaborate with international organizations and neighbouring countries to share best practices in food security, trade, and sustainable agriculture

CONCLUSION

World Food Day 2025 reinforces the vision of achieving "Better Foods for a Better Future." India's holistic strategy—combining production enhancement, nutrition improvement, and digital reforms—demonstrates how food security can be both inclusive and sustainable. With flagship programmes such as NFSA, PMGKAY, NFSNM, SMART-PDS, and rice fortification, India is ensuring that no citizen goes hungry while paving the way for nutrition-led growth. Going forward, the focus must shift from food sufficiency to nutritional

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adequacy, climate resilience, and sustainability, thereby positioning India as a global model in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

GALLANTRY AWARDS IN INDIA: HONOURING BRAVERY BEYOND DUTY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Central Government has issued a Gazette notification listing gallantry award citations for defence personnel who displayed extraordinary courage during various operations, including Operation Sindoor. Among the awardees are Colonel Koshank Lamba, Lieutenant Colonel Sushil Bisht, Group Captain Ranjeet Singh Sidhu, and Group Captain Animesh Patni, who were honoured with the Vir Chakra for acts of exceptional bravery and leadership.

TYPES OF GALLANTRY AWARDS

A. Wartime Gallantry Awards

Award	Description	First Recipient	Latest Recipient (2025)
Param Vir Chakra (PVC)	India's highest military honour for valour in the face of the enemy on land, sea, or air.	Maj. Somnath Sharma (Posthumous, 1947 Indo-Pak War)	Capt. Anshuman Singh (Posthumous, 2024, Operation Kargil)
Maha Vir Chakra (MVC)	Awarded for conspicuous gallantry in the presence of the enemy.	Lt. Gen. Rajinder Singh Sparrow (1947–48 War)	Brig. Saurabh Singh Shekhawat (2024)

WHAT ARE GALLANTRY AWARDS?

Gallantry Awards are conferred by the President of India to members of the Armed Forces, Police, and civilians for acts of exceptional bravery, valour, and distinguished service during wartime or peacetime. These awards symbolize India's deep respect for courage and sacrifice, reflecting the values of honour, duty, and patriotism.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF GALLANTRY AWARDS

India instituted its gallantry awards on 26 January 1950, three years after Independence, to recognize the bravery of soldiers who fought in the Indo-Pak War of 1947. Initially, there were three wartime gallantry awards:

- Param Vir Chakra (PVC)
- Maha Vir Chakra (MVC)
- Vir Chakra (VrC)

In 1952, to honour acts of courage during peacetime, three parallel awards were introduced:

- Ashoka Chakra (AC)
- Kirti Chakra (KC)
- Shaurya Chakra (SC)

Post-nominal letters (PVC, MVC, VrC, etc.) were approved in 1950 for wartime gallantry and in 1967 for peacetime awards. Over time, gallantry awards have evolved to include honours for personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and civilians, ensuring that acts of heroism in all forms are duly recognized.

Vir Chakra (VrC)	Conferred for acts of bravery in the battlefield.	Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai (Posthumous, 1947–48 War)	Col. Koshank Lamba, Lt. Col. Sushil Bisht, Gp. Capt. R. S. Sidhu, Gp. Capt. A. Patni (2025, Operation Sindoor)

B. Peacetime Gallantry Awards

Award	Description	First Recipient	Latest Recipient (2025)
Ashoka Chakra (AC)	Highest peacetime gallantry award for bravery or self-sacrifice away from battlefields.	Naik Nar Bahadur Thapa (1952)	Corporal Deepak Kumar (2024)
Kirti Chakra (KC)	For conspicuous gallantry in non-combat situations.	Naik Jadunath Singh (1952)	Subedar Sandeep Singh (2024)
Shaurya Chakra (SC)	For valour, courageous action, or self-sacrifice during peacetime operations.	Wing Commander Jag Mohan Nath (1952)	Major Amit Tomar (2025)

COMPARISON: GALLANTRY AWARDS VS. PADMA AWARDS

Feature	Gallantry Awards	Padma Awards
Purpose	To honour acts of valour and courage in war or peace.	To recognize exceptional service in various fields.
Instituted On	26 Jan 1950 (Wartime), 1952 (Peacetime)	1954
Categories	Wartime (PVC, MVC, VrC) & Peacetime (AC, KC, SC)	Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri
Eligibility	Armed Forces, Police, Civilians showing gallantry	All citizens (and select foreigners)
Conferred By	President of India (Ministry of Defence recommendation)	President of India (Home Ministry Committee)
Frequency	Twice yearly — Republic Day & Independence Day	Announced annually on Republic Day
Order of Precedence	Higher than civilian awards (PVC ranks above all Padma Awards)	Lower in order of precedence
Medal Design	Circular medals with national symbols & crossed swords (wartime)	Lotus-shaped or circular with “Padma” inscription

CONCLUSION

The Gallantry Awards of India stand as glowing testaments to the courage and sacrifice of the men and women who serve the nation beyond the call of duty. From the snowy heights of Kargil to covert operations like Operation Sindoor, their stories reflect India’s unwavering spirit of bravery and resilience. As the Centre continues to recognize new heroes, these awards not only honour individual valour but also embody the eternal motto of the Indian Armed Forces — “Service Before Self.”

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Prelims Question

Q1. Consider the following statements: [2020]

1. According to the Constitution of India, a person who is eligible to vote can be made a minister in a State for six months even if he/she is not a member of the Legislature of that State.
2. According to the Representation of People Act, 1951, a person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for five years is permanently disqualified from contesting an election even after his release from prison.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q2. Which of the following is/are the objectives of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971?

1. Preserve dignity of courts
2. Protect judges from intimidation
3. Regulate media and public commentary
4. Limit the powers of Parliament to make laws on contempt

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Q3. Consider the following pairs regarding Government initiatives related to food and nutrition security in India:

No.	Scheme / Mission	Objective (as per question)
1	PM POSHAN	Providing mid-day meals to school children
2	NFSA (National Food Security Act, 2013)	Ensuring free food distribution to all citizens
3	NFSNM (National Food Security & Nutrition Mission)	Enhancing foodgrain productivity and nutritional outcomes
4	Rice Fortification Initiative	Addressing micronutrient deficiencies

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

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

Answer: A

Q4. With reference to India's Gallantry Awards, consider the following statements:

1. The Param Vir Chakra and Ashoka Chakra were both instituted on 26 January 1950.
2. The Vir Chakra is India's third-highest peacetime gallantry award.
3. Gallantry awards can be conferred upon civilians as well as members of the Armed Forces.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

1. D	2. A	**3. A**	4. B

Mains Question:

Q1. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (UPSC 2022)

(250 words, 15 marks)

Q2. "Contempt of court powers are essential for the preservation of judicial authority and the

rule of law." Examine this statement with reference to the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971.

(250 words, 15 marks)

Q3. "Ensuring food security is not just about producing enough food but also about ensuring equitable access and nutrition for all." In light of this statement, discuss the role of India's recent initiatives, such as the National Food Security & Nutrition Mission (NFSNM), PMGKAY, and SMART-PDS in achieving sustainable food and nutritional security.

(250 words)

Q4. "Gallantry Awards in India not only honour acts of bravery but also reinforce the nation's collective spirit of service and sacrifice." Discuss.

(250 words)

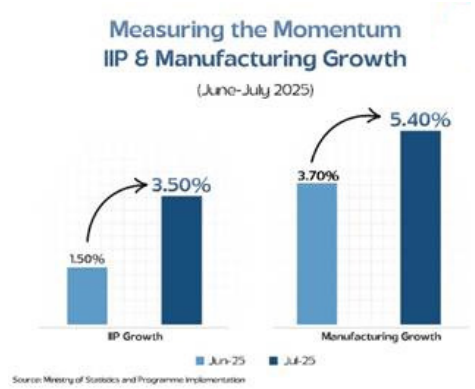




INDIA'S MANUFACTURING MOMENTUM: DRIVING GROWTH TOWARDS A $1 TRILLION ECONOMY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

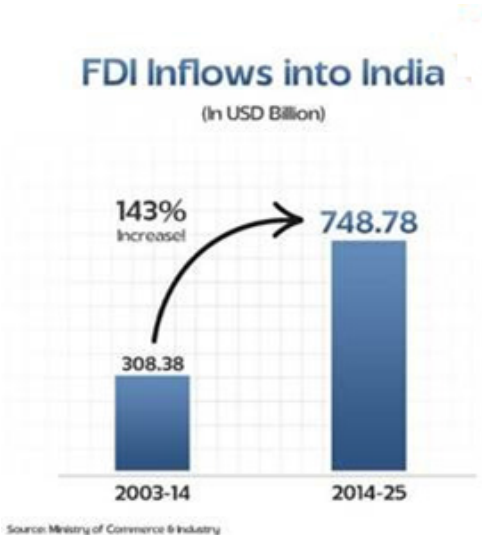
India's manufacturing sector has shown remarkable momentum in 2025, with the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growing 3.5% YoY in July, driven primarily by manufacturing growth of 5.4%. Key flagship initiatives such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, PM MITRA, National Manufacturing Mission, and Skill India Programme are strengthening domestic manufacturing, boosting exports, and creating employment. Electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and textiles are emerging as engines of growth, reflecting India's ambition to become a $1 trillion manufacturing economy by FY26 and a global manufacturing hub.





INDIA'S MANUFACTURING SECTOR: CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY

Component	Contribution / Data (2025)	Examples / Notes
GDP Contribution	Manufacturing contributes significantly to GDP growth	Automotive industry: 7.1% of GDP; Textiles: 2.3% of GDP
Industrial Output	IIP grew 3.5% YoY in July; Manufacturing 5.4% YoY	Basic metals (+12.7%), Electrical equipment (+15.9%), Non-metallic minerals (+9.5%)
Exports	Merchandise exports: US$ 184.13 billion (Apr–Aug 2025); 2.52% YoY growth	Electronics, pharma, automobiles driving export growth
Employment	17 crore jobs created in last decade; WPR 52.2%, Female WPR 32%	Skill India programmes training workforce for manufacturing
FDI Inflows	Manufacturing FDI: US$ 19.04 billion FY24–25	Maharashtra (39%), Karnataka (13%), Delhi (12%); Singapore top investor (30%)



KEY POLICY INTERVENTIONS: OBJECTIVES AND SUCCESS

Scheme / Initiative	Objective	Success / Example
Production Linked Incentive (PLI)	Boost domestic manufacturing & global competitiveness	Electronics exports ₹3.27 lakh crore; smartphone exports ₹2 lakh crore
National Manufacturing Mission (NMM)	Strategic roadmap for sustainable manufacturing	Promotes clean-tech industries aligned with India's Net-Zero 2070 target
PM MITRA Textile Parks	Integrated textile & apparel clusters	Dhar, MP park: 1,300 acres, 80 units, 3 lakh jobs projected
GST 2.0	Simplified slabs, reduced rates, ease of compliance	5% GST on textiles & leather; 18% on trucks & delivery vans
Skill India Programme	Build skilled workforce for modern manufacturing	₹8,800 crore outlay; includes PMKVY 4.0, apprenticeship schemes
Startup India	Promote entrepreneurship & innovation	1.91 lakh startups, 17.69 lakh direct jobs created
National Logistics Policy (NLP)	Reduce logistics costs, improve efficiency	Integrated with PM GatiShakti; digital systems & logistics parks

KEY CHALLENGES IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Sector	Challenge	Example / Data
Electronics	Dependence on imports for components	Reduced from 75% (2014-15) → 0.02% (2024-25)
Pharmaceuticals	Rising global competition, raw material sourcing	India supplies 50% global vaccines, 40% generics to US
Automobiles	Infrastructure & technology gaps	Need for EV & battery ecosystem; 3.1 crore units produced in FY25

Textiles	MSME clusters require modernization	80% capacity in MSME clusters; job creation challenge
Logistics & Supply Chains	High cost, fragmented connectivity	NLP aims to reduce logistics costs and improve India's LPI ranking
Skill Gaps	Shortage of skilled labor for advanced manufacturing	Skill India restructuring to meet modern industry needs
Regulatory Complexity	Compliance costs and delays	GST 2.0 simplification aimed at easing industrial processes







RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING INDIA'S MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Challenge / Area	Recommendation / Solution	Committee / Example
Skill Development	Demand-driven training for modern manufacturing	Skill India Programme, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)
Infrastructure	Develop industrial corridors, PM MITRA parks, logistics integration	National Industrial Corridor Development Programme, PM GatiShakti

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Technology & Innovation	Promote clean-tech, digital manufacturing	National Manufacturing Mission (NMM), PLI schemes for electronics, EVs, pharma
Ease of Doing Business	Simplify compliance, reduce GST burden	GST 2.0, Startup India reforms
FDI & Investment	Attract global investors, strengthen policy certainty	PLI Scheme, National Manufacturing Mission
Export Competitiveness	Improve quality standards, scale up production	Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs), pharma hubs
Sustainability	Green manufacturing & net-zero alignment	Clean-tech under NMM, renewable energy integration

CONCLUSION

India's manufacturing sector is increasingly the backbone of its economic transformation, creating jobs, fostering innovation, and positioning the country as a global export and investment hub. With sustained policy support, skilled workforce development, technological adoption, and green manufacturing focus, India is on track to become a $1 trillion manufacturing economy by FY26, laying a solid foundation for a Viksit Bharat and sustainable industrial future by 2047

FROM GRASSROOTS TO GROWTH: THE RISING ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN INDIA

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The cooperative movement is making headlines as India pushes for stronger, more inclusive cooperatives. The National Cooperative Policy 2025 aims to modernize governance and boost the sector's contribution to the economy. Punjab has lifted restrictions on new cooperative societies, empowering local communities. Digital reforms, like Aadhaar-enabled services in cooperative banks, are improving rural financial inclusion. Cooperatives are also driving women's empowerment, with thousands benefiting from milk producer organizations in Uttar Pradesh. Globally, 2025 has been declared the International Year of Cooperatives by the UN, emphasizing their role in sustainable development and poverty reduction.



CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The 97th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2011 was a landmark in recognizing the significance of cooperatives in India's governance framework. Key provisions include:

- **Article 19(1)(c):** Recognizes the right of citizens to form cooperative societies as a fundamental right.
- **Article 43B:** Directs the State to promote the formation and operation of cooperative societies.
- **Part IXB:** Introduces a new part in the Constitution dedicated to cooperative societies, detailing their incorporation, regulation, and winding up.

ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN INDIA

1. **Agricultural Support:** Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) and cooperative farming societies provide farmers with credit, seeds, fertilizers, and market linkages.
2. **Dairy and Livestock Development:** Cooperatives like AMUL have transformed milk production, improving rural livelihoods.

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3. **Financial Inclusion:** Urban and rural cooperative banks enable access to banking services for underserved populations.
4. **Women Empowerment:** Women self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives foster entrepreneurship and gender equality.
5. **Employment Generation:** Cooperatives create local employment in agriculture, handicrafts, handlooms, and fisheries.
6. **Consumer Services:** Consumer cooperatives ensure affordable goods and prevent exploitation by middlemen.
7. **Social Development:** Cooperatives promote education, healthcare, and skill development in rural areas.



POLICY MEASURES TO PROMOTE COOPERATIVES

1. **National Cooperative Policy 2025:** Focuses on expanding cooperatives, professional management, and cooperative exports.
2. **Financial Assistance:** Credit support and grants for capacity building and cooperative infrastructure.
3. **Legal Framework Strengthening:** Implementing provisions of the 97th Constitutional Amendment and Part IXB to protect cooperative autonomy.
4. **State-Level Reforms:** Examples: Punjab lifting restrictions on new cooperatives; Karnataka introducing caste and gender-based leadership quotas.
5. **Training & Education:** Cooperative training institutes and programs to improve governance and managerial skills.
6. **Technology Integration:** Encouraging digital platforms for marketing, accounting, and member communication.
7. **Promotion of Sector-Specific Cooperatives:** Emphasis on dairy, fisheries, handlooms, and housing to meet local needs.



ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS IN COOPERATIVES

1. **Political Interference:** Excessive involvement of local politics often leads to favoritism in elections, misallocation of resources, and undermines cooperative autonomy.
2. **Poor Management:** Many cooperatives lack trained managers and financial experts, leading to weak strategic planning, delayed project implementation, and inefficient operations.
3. **Financial Limitations:** Limited access to institutional credit, high dependence on government loans, and inadequate capitalization restrict growth and innovation.

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4. **Low Member Participation:** Members often remain passive, resulting in decisions that benefit a few rather than the cooperative as a whole, weakening accountability.

5. **Inefficient Governance:** Corruption, favoritism, and bureaucratic red tape impede transparency and operational efficiency.

6. **Regional Imbalances:** While some states like Gujarat and Maharashtra have strong cooperative sectors, others lag behind, creating uneven economic benefits.

7. **Market Challenges:** Cooperatives face intense competition from private companies, especially in dairy, agriculture, and consumer goods sectors, limiting profitability.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Professional Capacity Building:** Conduct regular training programs in management, finance, and digital tools to improve leadership skills. Encourage hiring professional managers where feasible.

2. **Enhanced Financial Support:** Provide easier access to institutional credit, microfinance, insurance, and grants. Encourage public-private partnerships to fund cooperative initiatives.

3. **Strengthening Autonomy:** Implement policy measures that reduce political interference, ensure democratic governance, and protect cooperative decision-making.

4. **Digital Transformation:** Promote the adoption of technology for accounting, e-governance, digital marketing, and mobile apps to improve transparency and reach.

5. **Inclusive Membership:** Actively promote participation of women, youth, marginalized communities, and small farmers to enhance equity and representation.

6. **Sectoral Diversification:** Expand cooperatives into emerging sectors like renewable energy, agro-processing, fisheries, handlooms, and rural tourism to increase sustainability and income sources.

7. **Awareness & Advocacy:** Conduct awareness campaigns to educate communities about the benefits of cooperatives and encourage membership and active participation.

CONCLUSION

The cooperative movement in India holds immense potential to drive inclusive and sustainable development. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging the supportive constitutional and policy framework, cooperatives can emerge as key players in India's socio-economic transformation. The recent policy initiatives and reforms indicate a positive trajectory towards realizing this vision.

FOODGRAIN PRODUCTION AND STORAGE: BACKBONE OF INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

WHY IN THE NEWS?



India's agricultural sector, a key pillar of the economy, has recently come into focus due to its critical role in food security, employment, and overall economic growth. With increasing discussions around sustainable agriculture, crop diversification, and nutritional security, the government and policymakers are emphasizing measures to strengthen the production of food grains like rice, wheat, millets, and pulses. These crops, rich in carbohydrates, proteins, and essential nutrients, are central to feeding India's large population and supporting rural livelihoods. Recent initiatives on improving crop yield, ensuring fair prices, and promoting millets for nutrition and climate resilience have further highlighted the

significance of the agricultural sector in national and global policy discourse.

According to the Third Advance Estimates for 2024-25, India has achieved a record foodgrain production of 353.96 million tonnes, including 117.51 million tonnes of wheat and 149.07 million tonnes of rice.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD GRAIN STORAGE

Effective storage infrastructure is crucial for managing India's food supply chain, minimizing wastage, and safeguarding the interests of both farmers and consumers.

KEY OBJECTIVES OF FOOD GRAIN STORAGE:

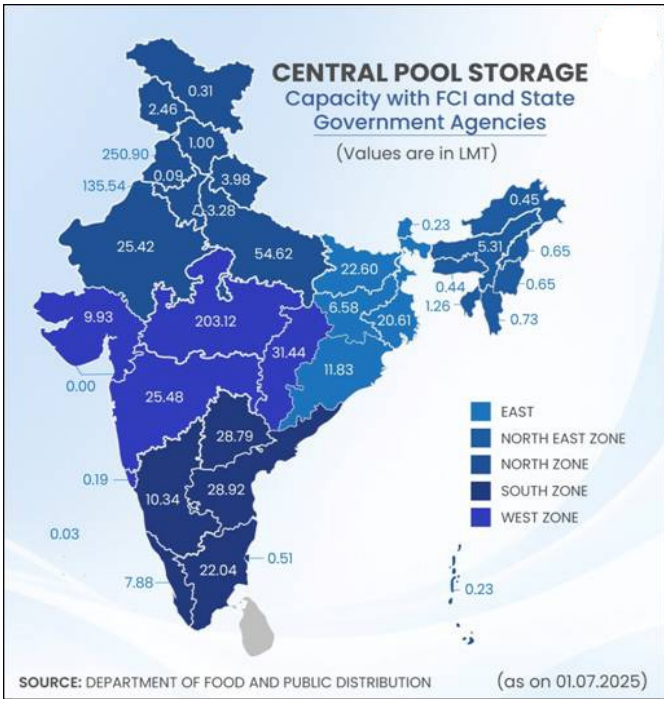
1. **Reducing Post-Harvest Losses:** Modern storage facilities, including cold storage and scientific warehouses, help significantly reduce wastage of agricultural produce.
2. **Ensuring Food Security:** Maintaining buffer stocks of food grains is essential for national food security and for distribution under schemes like the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
3. **Preventing Distress Sales:** Adequate storage allows farmers to retain their produce and sell it when market conditions are favorable, preventing distress sales and ensuring better income.
4. **Price Stabilisation:** Strategic buffer stocks help stabilize prices and protect consumers from extreme fluctuations in essential commodities.
5. **Maintaining Quality:** Scientific storage practices control factors such as moisture, pests, and temperature, ensuring that food grains remain safe and nutritious for consumption.

FOOD GRAIN STORAGE SYSTEMS IN INDIA

1. **Centralized Storage of Food Grains:** Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the primary agency responsible for centralized storage of food grains in India. Under the centralized procurement system, the procurement of food grains in Central Pool is undertaken either by FCI directly or by State Govt. Agencies (SGA). Quantity procured by SGAs is handed over to FCI for storage and the cost of the food grains procured by State agencies is reimbursed by FCI. The FCI manages this stock, storing it and subsequently issuing it for distribution through the Public Distribution System (PDS) or moving surplus stocks to other states as needed.

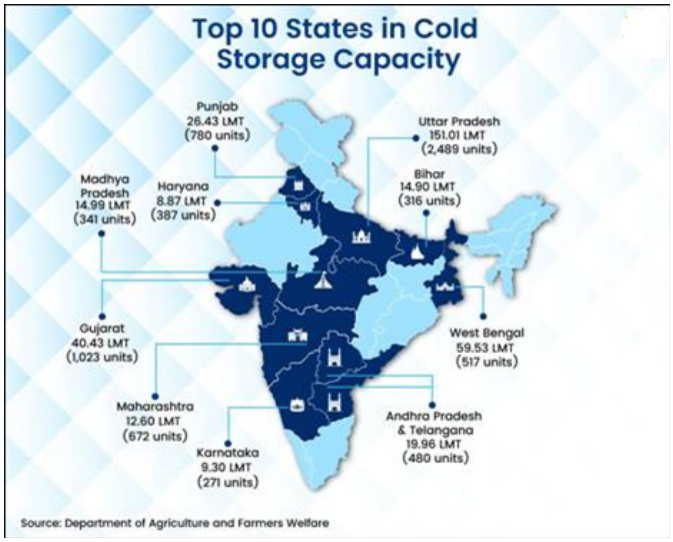
As of July 1, 2025, the Total Covered and CAP Storage Capacity available with FCI and State agencies for the storage of Central Pool foodgrains stood at 917.83 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT).

Covered storage capacity refers to the total quantity of foodgrains that can be stored in fully roofed and walled structures, such as godowns, warehouses, or silos. Foodgrains in 'Cover and Plinth' (CAP) storage are stored on elevated plinths and wooden crates are used as dunnage material.



2. **Cold Storage Infrastructure:** The cold storage infrastructure plays a vital role in preserving perishable commodities such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meat, and seafood. These temperature-controlled facilities help maintain freshness, quality, and nutritional value, reducing post-harvest losses. Cold chain infrastructure includes facilities for pre-cooling, weighing, sorting, grading, packaging, Controlled

Atmosphere (CA) storage, blast freezing, and refrigerated transport like reefer vans. These facilities are vital for extending the shelf life of perishable goods.



DECENTRALISED STORAGE AND PACS

Launched in 1997-98, the decentralised storage scheme allows states to procure, store, and distribute food grains under NFSA, reducing transit costs and promoting local procurement. The central government funds all operations. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), grassroots co-operative bodies, provide loans to farmers and handle distribution and marketing of grains. PACS create village-level storage (500–2000 MT), enabling local storage, reducing losses, and helping farmers get better prices. Acting as procurement centres and Fair Price Shops (FPS), they improve efficiency and cut transport costs. To strengthen PACS, the government approved computerisation (Rs. 2,516 crores). As of June 2025, 73,492 PACS are computerized, and 5,937 new PACS have been registered, expanding village-level support for farmers.

SCHEMES FOR STRENGTHENING FOODGRAIN STORAGE

A. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)

Launched in 2020, the AIF aims to strengthen agricultural infrastructure across India. It is a medium-to-long-term debt financing facility providing interest subvention and credit guarantee support for investments in post-harvest management and farm assets. The scheme focuses on farm-gate storage and logistics, helping farmers store produce effectively, reduce post-harvest losses, and sell at better prices. Infrastructure under AIF includes warehouses, cold storage, sorting and grading units, and ripening chambers, enabling farmers to access wider markets and improve income by reducing dependence on intermediaries.

B. Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI)

AMI scheme is a key component of the Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing (ISAM). The objective of this scheme is to strengthen agricultural marketing infrastructure across rural India by providing financial assistance for the construction and renovation of godowns and warehouses.

As of June 30, 2025, a total of 49,796 storage infrastructure projects has been sanctioned across 27 states in India. These projects collectively contribute to a storage capacity of 982.94 lakh MT and to support these initiatives, a total subsidy of Rs 4,829.37 crore has been disbursed.

AMI: State-wise Progress of Storage Infrastructure
(As on 30.06.2025)

	State	No. of Projects Sanctioned	Capacity Sanctioned (MT)	Subsidy Released (Rs. in lakh)
1	Madhya Pradesh	29,161,316	8,496	1,74,538.11
2	Maharashtra	9,570,046	4,499	35,400.19
3	Haryana	7,995,121	2,386	45,127.85
4	Punjab	7,144,351	1,839	25,354.88
5	Telangana	6,325,582	1,403	32,042.46
6	Gujarat	6,251,786	12,478	35,640.41
7	Andhra Pradesh	6,151,150	1,551	31,936.74
8	Uttar Pradesh	6,110,222	1,311	20,417.06
9	Karnataka	4,523,571	5,113	21,887.47
10	Rajasthan	3,952,114	1,931	15,142.22

Source: Department of Food and Public Districution

D. Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme for Cold Storages and Horticulture Products

This scheme aims to promote scientific storage infrastructure and reduce post-harvest losses of

perishable produce. Under the scheme, a credit-linked back-ended subsidy is provided at the rate of 35% of the project cost in general areas and 50% in North-Eastern, hilly, and scheduled areas for construction, expansion, or modernization of cold storages and Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storages with capacities between 5,000 MT and 20,000 MT. This initiative helps farmers and entrepreneurs improve storage, enhance shelf life, secure better prices, and strengthen the horticulture value chain.

E. Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme for Cold Storages and Horticultural Products

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F. World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector

In May 2023, the government approved the World's Largest Grain Storage Plan under the cooperative sector, supporting the vision of "Atmanirbhar Bharat". The scheme aims to create agricultural infrastructure at the PACS level, including godowns, custom hiring centers, processing units, and Fair Price Shops. It leverages existing schemes such as AIF, Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI), Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM), and PMFME, integrating resources for greater efficiency. The key objectives include expanding storage capacity, improving supply chains, reducing wastage, and empowering farmers.

CONCLUSION

Agriculture continues to be the lifeline of India, sustaining livelihoods, feeding millions, and driving economic growth. While record foodgrain production highlights the sector's strength, efficient storage and distribution are critical to ensure that every grain reaches consumers. The production and storage of food grains play a vital role in national food security. With a growing population and the challenges posed by climate change, it is essential to maintain adequate stocks, upgrade storage infrastructure, and minimize post-harvest losses to ensure year-round availability and price stability. Food grains, therefore, are not just crops—they form the backbone of agricultural growth, rural income, and the global food system.

INDIAN RAILWAYS: THE ENGINE DRIVING INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT

WHY IN THE NEWS?

On 7 October 2025, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, led by the Prime Minister, approved four multi-tracking projects from the Ministry of Railways. These projects are worth ₹24,634 crore and stretch over 894 km across Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh.

Project Section	Lines	Length (km)	States Covered
Wardha – Bhusawal	3rd & 4th	314	Maharashtra
Gondia – Dongargarh	4th	84	Maharashtra & Chhattisgarh
Vadodara – Ratlam	3rd & 4th	259	Gujarat & Madhya Pradesh
Itarsi – Bhopal – Bina	4th	237	Madhya Pradesh

- They will serve 18 districts and benefit 3,633 villages, with a total population of 85.84 lakh. This includes two Aspirational Districts, Vidisha and Rajnandgaon.
- The projects are expected to generate an additional 78 million tons per annum (MTPA) of freight. They will reduce oil imports by 28 crore litres and cut CO_2 emissions by 139 crore kg, which is like planting 6 crore trees.
- These initiatives are part of the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan. The plan focuses on improving multimodal connections, making logistics more efficient, and promoting tourism

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at sites like Sanchi, Bhimbetka, and Satpura Tiger Reserve.





INDIAN RAILWAYS AS THE BUILDER OF INDIA:

- **Vande Bharat Express:** 136 trains are operational. They connect major cities to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, cutting travel time. For example, the journey from Delhi to Varanasi takes 8 hours.
- **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme:** Upgrading 1,275 stations with modern facilities, including Wi-Fi, lifts, escalators, and making them accessible for everyone.
- **Northeast Connectivity:** This reached Meghalaya in 2014, Arunachal Pradesh in 2015, Manipur in 2016, and Mizoram in 2016. Imphal received its first train in 2024.
- **Freight Corridors:** The Eastern (1,337 km) and Western (1,506 km) Dedicated Freight Corridors are 97% operational. This will increase the frequency of freight trains from 247 in the year 2023-24 to 352 by February 2025.
- **Engineering Marvels:**
  - Chenab Bridge is the world's highest railway bridge, standing 359 meters above the river.
  - Bogibeel Bridge is India's longest rail-cum-road bridge, measuring 4.94 km.





IMPORTANCE OF RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

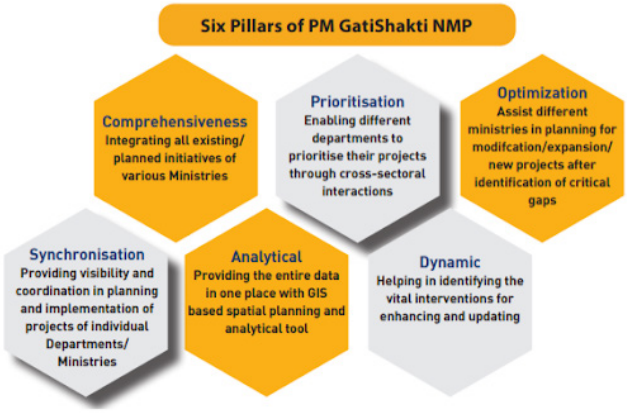
- **Economic Backbone**
  - Transports over 8 billion passengers each year.
  - Handles more than 3.5 million tonnes of freight daily, with coal accounting for about 50% of freight revenue (CAG 2021-22).
  - Lowers logistics costs, as India's logistics costs are 13-14% of GDP. Efficient rail can bring this down to 8-9%.

- **Social Integration & Inclusion**
  - Links rural and tribal areas to urban centers, providing access to education, healthcare, and jobs.
  - Examples include expansion into the Northeast and features for differently-abled passengers at upgraded stations.
- **Environmental Sustainability**
  - Electrified routes produce 80% less greenhouse gas emissions than road freight.
  - Electrification is ongoing in 14 states and Union Territories, with a goal of net zero carbon by 2030.
  - More than 80,000 coaches have bio-toilets, improving sanitation.
- **Strategic & Security Role**
  - Border rail projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh allow for quick troop movement.
  - Dedicated Freight Corridors support military logistics and emergency relief.
- Urban Mobility & Tourism
  - Over 1,000 km of metro lines are in operation, while suburban expansions ease city congestion.
  - Bharat Gaurav trains encourage cultural travel, featuring routes like Ramayana Yatra and South India Darshan.

KEY INITIATIVES BY INDIAN RAILWAYS

Indian Railways has launched a series of projects to modernize its infrastructure, improve efficiency, and enhance connectivity.

- **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan:** This initiative connects the railway network with ports, highways, and airports to allow smooth multi-modal connectivity. It also aims to speed up project implementation through better planning and quicker clearances.
- **National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP):** Under the NMP, Indian Railways is generating funds by monetizing assets like stations, freight terminals, and surplus land for infrastructure expansion and modernization.
- **Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs):** DFCs are being developed to relieve congestion on passenger routes, lower logistics costs, and boost the average speed of freight trains to 100 km/h, making rail freight more competitive.
- **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme:** This scheme aims to upgrade railway stations into modern transport hubs that offer better passenger amenities and improved integration with other forms of transport.
- **Technological Modernisation:** The railways are using modern technology such as the Indian-made Kavach Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system to improve safety. They are also implementing IoT-based asset monitoring and AI-driven predictive maintenance to enhance operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Green Initiatives:** Various steps are being taken to encourage sustainable operations. These include installing solar rooftops at stations, issuing green bonds, running pilot projects for hydrogen trains, and electrifying railway lines on a large scale.
- **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Models:** PPPs are being used for station redevelopment projects like Habibganj and Gandhinagar stations, developing logistics parks, and running private trains on selected routes.





ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Despite these initiatives, Indian Railways faces several structural and operational challenges.

- **Financial Stress:** The operating ratio stood at 107.39% in 2021, indicating that expenditures exceed revenues. Heavy cross-subsidization between passenger and freight services has made rail freight less competitive.
- **Aging Infrastructure and Safety Gaps:** Incidents like the Balasore triple train accident in 2023 exposed serious signaling failures. There is a significant asset renewal backlog amounting to ₹34,318 crore.
- **Slow Kavach Rollout:** The implementation of the Kavach safety system is limited to select routes, slowing down network-wide safety upgrades.
- **Freight Market Share Decline:** Railways' share in the freight market has dropped from 85% in 1951 to 27% in 2022, with an overreliance on coal as the primary commodity transported.
- **Environmental Gaps:** Despite efforts to electrify, diesel locomotives are still used in some areas, and waste management practices are inadequate.
- **High-Speed Rail Delays:** Projects like the Mumbai–Ahmedabad bullet train are progressing slowly, with only about 30% completion so far due to land acquisition issues and funding problems.
- **PSU Inefficiencies:** Public Sector Undertakings related to the railways have seen a decline in Return on Equity (RoE) from 9.17% in 2017 to 7.53% in 2019, reflecting operational shortcomings.
- **Crowd Management Issues:** The stampede at New Delhi Railway Station in February 2025 highlighted serious design flaws and poor crowd management at major stations.

WAY FORWARD

To tackle these challenges and reach its full potential, Indian Railways needs a reform strategy with multiple approaches.

- **Financial Reforms:** Implementing dynamic fare pricing, streamlining tariffs, monetizing land assets, and increasing public-private partnership participation, as recommended by the Bibek Debroy Committee, can improve financial health.
- **Accelerate Safety Modernization:** The rollout of Kavach should expand across the entire network. This should go hand in hand with signaling upgrades and predictive maintenance to improve safety.
- **Freight Diversification and Integration:** Railways must go beyond coal. They should promote containerization, develop automobile logistics, and improve port connectivity to regain freight market share.
- **Technological Leapfrogging:** Using new technologies like IoT and blockchain for freight operations, along with integrated digital platforms, can change operational efficiency for the better.
- **Sustainable Mobility:** More integration of renewable energy, the introduction of hydrogen trains, and green financing mechanisms will help support India's climate goals.
- **High-Speed Rail and Indigenous Manufacturing:** Speeding up the bullet train project and investing in Make-in-India rolling stock will increase domestic capacity and modern transport options.
- **Urban Rail Integration:** Smooth connectivity between Indian Railways, metro systems, Rapid Regional Transit Systems (RRTS), and bus networks is crucial for creating a unified urban mobility ecosystem.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Restructuring public sector undertakings, developing workforce skills, and decentralizing project implementation will enhance governance and delivery efficiency.

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CONCLUSION

Indian Railways represents India's unity, ambition, and resilience. It has transformed from colonial infrastructure into a driver of economic growth and green mobility. The recent approval of multi-tracking projects shows how rail infrastructure can enhance connectivity, boost freight, promote tourism, create jobs, and meet climate goals at the same time.

With structural reforms, technological adoption, and sustainable financing, Indian Railways can help propel India toward becoming a $5 trillion economy and a leader in global green logistics, truly reflecting the vision of "Railways as the Engine of New India."

URBAN TRANSPORT FOR VIKSIT BHARAT: CONNECTING CITIES, EMPOWERING PEOPLE

WHY IN THE NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated Phase 1 of the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA), which cost ₹19,650 crore and spans 1,160 hectares. This Greenfield project will relieve congestion at Mumbai's overloaded Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport and aims to be Asia's largest connectivity hub.

The airport will support regional economic growth by linking Maharashtra's farmers to markets in the Middle East and Europe. It will attract investments and connect the city to the global logistics network. This project reflects India's broader goal to update urban transportation infrastructure for a "Viksit Bharat."





WHAT IS URBAN TRANSPORTATION?

Urban transportation refers to the systems, methods, and infrastructure that allow people and goods to move within cities. This includes public transport, private vehicles, non-motorized options, and freight systems.

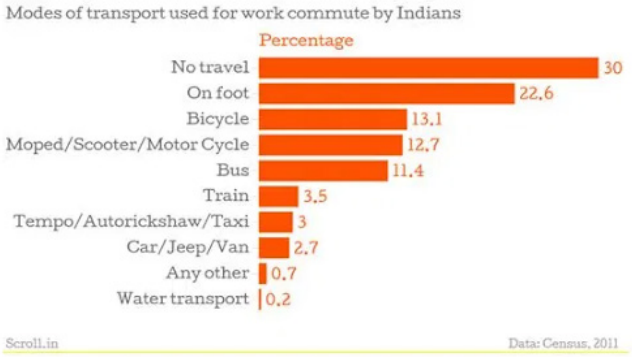
An efficient urban transport system is key for economic productivity, environmental health, and social inclusion. It directly impacts jobs, quality of life, and access to opportunities.

MAJOR MODES OF URBAN TRANSPORT IN INDIA

- **Buses:** Buses are the main option for both intra-city and inter-city travel, providing affordable mobility to millions. However, lower ridership due to overcrowding, delays, and competition from private vehicles has weakened their effectiveness.
- **Metro Rail:** Metro systems operate in 17 cities, with Delhi having the largest network. Metros offer fast, reliable, and congestion-free travel, significantly helping to reduce road traffic and promote sustainable urban mobility.
- **Suburban Rail & Trams:** Cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai have extensive suburban rail networks that serve daily commuters. Kolkata's tram system is the only functioning tramway in India, representing both heritage and sustainable transport.
- **Intermediate Public Transport (IPT):** Modes like auto rickshaws, taxis, shared vans, and cycle rickshaws fill essential connectivity gaps, especially for last-mile access. They are often

informal and flexible, making them critical despite regulatory hurdles.

- **Non-Motorized Transport (NMT):** Walking and cycling are important for short trips, especially for low-income groups. However, poor pedestrian infrastructure, unsafe roads, and a lack of dedicated lanes limit their use.



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN URBAN TRANSPORT

- **JNNURM (2005–2014):** Offers financial support for urban mobility plans, bus fleets, and infrastructure, forming the basis for modern city transport systems.
- **National Urban Transport Policy, 2006:** Aims to make urban transport safe, affordable, and sustainable through multi-modal systems and improved planning.
- **Green Urban Transport Scheme, 2016:** Promotes non-motorized transport, clean energy, and Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) to make cities more eco-friendly and accessible.
- **Metro Rail Policy, 2017:** Standardizes planning, financing, and execution of metro projects to ensure better collaboration and effective implementation.
- **BRTS (Bus Rapid Transit System):** Establishes dedicated bus corridors to speed up travel, decrease congestion, and enhance safety. Successful examples include Ahmedabad's BRTS.
- **Transit-Oriented Development Policy, 2017:** Promotes urban development around mass transit corridors to shorten travel distances and encourage compact cities.
- **Sustainable Urban Transport Project (SUTP):** Initiated with UNDP support to encourage environmentally friendly urban mobility through pilot projects and capacity building.
- **Public Bicycle Scheme (2011):** Assists cities in setting up public bike-sharing systems; Mysuru's Trin Trin was the first initiative in India.
- **Promotion of Electric Vehicles (FAME):** Provides subsidies and incentives for EVs and charging infrastructure to lessen reliance on fossil fuels and decrease urban pollution.



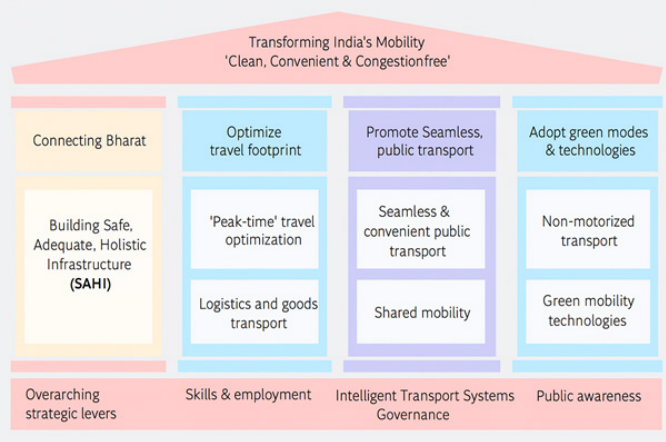
KEY ISSUES IN URBAN TRANSPORTATION

- **Explosive Motorization:** The number of registered vehicles soared from 5.4 million in 1981 to 210 million in 2015, greatly outpacing public transport infrastructure growth and leading to traffic jams and pollution.
- **Inadequate Public Transport:** Only 63 cities have formal bus systems, and India has just 1.2 buses for every 1,000 people. Public transport is often overcrowded, unreliable, and poorly integrated, pushing people toward private cars.

- **Urban Congestion & Pollution:** Cities like Delhi and Bengaluru rank among the most congested in the world, with average speeds in Bengaluru at just 17 km/h. Vehicle emissions are a major cause of air pollution, with 14 of the 15 most polluted cities globally located in India.
- **Road Safety Crisis:** In 2023, more than 172,000 deaths occurred on Indian roads—averaging 474 per day. Poor road maintenance, weak traffic management, and unsafe vehicles make Indian roads some of the most dangerous worldwide.
- **Equity & Affordability Gaps:** The urban poor often reside in outlying areas with long commutes and high transportation costs. The Delhi Metro ranks as the second least affordable system globally for low-income individuals, with 22% of their monthly income devoted to fares.
- **Gendered Mobility Challenges:** 79% of women report facing harassment in public spaces, creating safety issues. Overcrowded and poorly designed transport systems exacerbate insecurity.
- **Institutional Challenges:** Multiple agencies with overlapping roles create a fragmented governance system that delays projects. Issues with land acquisition, funding delays, lack of skilled workers, and insufficient data collection further hinder effective planning.

NITI AAYOG'S 3C FRAMEWORK: CLEAN, CONVENIENT, CONGESTION-FREE

- **Connect Bharat:** Focuses on creating safe, adequate infrastructure that integrates roads, railways, waterways, and ropeways to serve everyone, including women and the elderly.
- **Optimize Travel Footprint:** Stresses the need for integrated land use, data-driven traffic management, and Intelligent Transport Systems to reduce unnecessary travel and congestion.
- **Promote Seamless Public Transport:** Advocates for a modal hierarchy that prioritizes non-motorized transport, followed by public and then private transport. This encourages multi-modal integration and affordable systems, using tools like single smart cards for easy transfers.
- **Adopt Green Modes & Technologies:** Encourages quick EV adoption, better infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, and developing a domestic green mobility ecosystem to reduce pollution and oil imports.



WAY FORWARD

- **Strengthen Institutional Coordination:** Create unified metropolitan transport authorities to coordinate planning, streamline land acquisition, and ensure timely funding for projects.
- **Manage Demand and Discourage Private Cars:** Use parking regulations, congestion pricing, and low-emission zones to reduce car reliance and encourage public transport use.
- **Prioritize Safety and Inclusivity:** Build infrastructure that considers gender, such as dedicated spaces for women, helplines, surveillance, and bright station lighting to improve safety for everyone.
- **Enhance Non-Motorized Transport:** Create bike lanes, pedestrian-only areas, and integrate NMT with metro and bus systems to support short, eco-friendly journeys.
- **Ensure Multi-Modal Integration:** Provide seamless last-mile connectivity and interoperable payment systems like London's Oyster Card to make transfers between different modes simpler.

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- **Push for Green and Affordable Mobility:** Expand EV fleets, promote clean fuels, and ensure that pricing remains affordable for low-income groups to make transportation both sustainable and inclusive.

CONCLUSION

Urban transportation in India is changing quickly with metro expansions, airport projects like Navi Mumbai, and new policies. However, issues like congestion, pollution, safety problems, and fragmented institutions still pose major challenges.

By embracing NITI Aayog's 3C framework, integrating various modes, prioritizing green technologies, and focusing on inclusivity, India can build urban transport systems that are efficient, affordable, and ready for the future. The shift from congestion to clean, convenient mobility requires ongoing investment, strong governance, and planning centered around citizens' needs.

INDIA'S PULSES REVOLUTION 2.0: THE ROAD TO SELF-RELIANCE AND FARMERS' PROSPERITY

WHY IN THE NEWS?



The Prime Minister of India launched the Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–26 to 2030–31) on October 11, 2025, at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi. The mission, with a total outlay of ₹11,440 crore, aims to make India self-reliant in pulse production by scaling up output to 350 lakh tonnes and expanding the cultivation area to 310 lakh hectares by 2030–31. It also ensures 100% MSP procurement of Tur, Urad, and Masoor for four years, benefiting nearly 2 crore farmers through free seed distribution, quality inputs, and value chain support.

BACKGROUND

India has made remarkable progress in pulse production over the past decade. Under the National Food Security and Nutrition Mission (NFSNM), output rose from 192.6 lakh tonnes in 2013–14 to 252.38 lakh tonnes in 2024–25 (3rd Advance Estimates) — a 31% increase.



However, with domestic demand outpacing production, India still imported 47.38 lakh tonnes of pulses in 2023–24, even while exporting 5.94

lakh tonnes. This import dependence highlighted the urgent need for a structural shift toward self-sufficiency. To bridge this gap, the Government set an ambitious target to achieve complete Aatmanirbharta in pulses by December 2027, focusing on Tur (Arhar), Urad, and Masoor. The new Mission aligns with Vision 2047, emphasizing sustainable production, income assurance, and the use of modern, climate-resilient technologies to empower farmers Historically, India's journey in pulse development includes initiatives such as the All India Coordinated Pulses Improvement Project (1966), Accelerated Pulses Production Programme (A3P, 2010–14), and the National Food Security Mission, which laid the foundation for productivity growth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–31) aims to:

1. Achieve self-sufficiency in pulses and reduce import dependence.
2. Enhance farmers' income through MSP assurance and market linkages.



3. Expand pulses area by 35 lakh hectares, especially in rice fallows and drylands.
4. Promote intercropping, crop diversification, and climate-resilient farming.
5. Develop and distribute high-yielding, pest-resistant, drought-tolerant varieties.
6. Strengthen the seed system through 126 lakh quintals of certified seeds and 88 lakh free seed kits.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

1. **State Implementation and Monitoring:** States will prepare five-year rolling seed plans, monitored by ICAR. The SATHI Portal (seedtrace.gov.in) will ensure seed traceability and transparency.
2. **Integrated Farm Support:** Focus on soil health, balanced fertilizer use, mechanization, and plant protection. ICAR, KVKs, and State Departments will conduct large-scale field demonstrations.
3. **Procurement and Price Assurance:** Under PM-AASHA, NAFED and NCCF will ensure 100% procurement of Tur, Urad, and Masoor at MSP for four years. This guarantees timely payments, fair prices, and reduced market volatility.
4. **Value Chain Development:** Establish 1,000 processing and packaging units with ₹25 lakh subsidy per unit. Adopt a cluster-based model (as suggested by NITI Aayog) for efficient resource use and regional specialization.

SATHI PORTAL: THE DIGITAL BACKBONE

The Seed Authentication, Traceability & Holistic Inventory (SATHI) portal, developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and NIC, ensures a transparent and tamper-proof seed supply chain.

It automates the entire seed life cycle—from production and certification to sale and licensing—ensuring farmers receive authentic and high-quality seeds.

PM-AASHA: PRICE ASSURANCE FOR FARMERS

The Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA), launched in 2018, aims to provide income security for farmers growing pulses, oilseeds, and copra.

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It includes:

1. **Price Support Scheme (PSS):** Direct procurement at MSP.
2. **Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS):** Compensation for price gaps.
3. **Market Intervention Scheme (MIS):** Stabilization for perishables.

The scheme, continued in 2024, complements the new Mission by ensuring remunerative returns and encouraging diversification toward pulses.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NITI AAYOG (SEPTEMBER 2025)

1. Expansion of pulses into rice fallows and cluster-based diversification.
2. The "One Block–One Seed Village" approach to boost local seed systems.
3. Promotion of FPO-based seed hubs for timely, high-quality seed supply.
4. Strengthening procurement centers and local processing units to minimize middlemen.
5. Integrating pulses into PDS and Mid-Day Meal schemes to enhance nutrition.
6. Adoption of mechanization, efficient irrigation, bio-fertilizers, and climate-resilient varieties.
7. Use of data-driven early warning systems and SATHI-based monitoring for real-time responsiveness.



EXPECTED OUTCOMES BY 2030–31

Parameter	Target
Pulses Cultivation Area	310 lakh hectares
Total Production	350 lakh tonnes
Average Yield	1,130 kg/ha
Farmers Benefited	Nearly 2 crore
Certified Seed Distribution	126 lakh quintals
Free Seed Kits	88 lakh
Processing Units	1,000 (₹25 lakh subsidy per unit)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MISSION

1. **Nutritional Security:** Increases protein intake and reduces malnutrition through enhanced pulse availability.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Boosts rural incomes and provides stable returns through MSP-based procurement.
3. **Import Substitution:** Saves valuable foreign exchange by cutting dependence on imported pulses.
4. **Sustainability:** Improves soil fertility through nitrogen fixation and reduces environmental impact.
5. **Employment Generation:** Encourages agro-industries, processing units, and rural entrepreneurship.
6. **Climate Resilience:** Promotes drought-tolerant and pest-resistant varieties suited to changing climatic conditions.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Promote Research and Innovation:** Strengthen ICAR and State Agricultural Universities for developing high-yielding, short-duration, and climate-resilient varieties of pulses.
2. **Encourage Private Sector Participation:** Foster public-private partnerships (PPP) in seed production, processing, and marketing to scale operations efficiently.
3. **Expand Irrigation Infrastructure:** Enhance micro-irrigation coverage and water-use efficiency in rainfed pulse-growing regions.

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4. **Strengthen Extension Services:** Boost farmer awareness through KVKs, FPOs, and digital advisory systems for adoption of improved technologies.

5. **Integrate Pulses in Food Schemes:** Mainstream pulses into PDS, Mid-Day Meal, and ICDS to ensure nutritional security and stable domestic demand.

6. **Leverage Digital Agriculture:** Utilize tools like remote sensing, AI, and GIS-based monitoring for real-time crop forecasting and pest management.

7. **Sustain Market Stability:** Establish decentralized procurement networks and price stabilization funds to protect farmers during market fluctuations.

8. **Encourage Crop Insurance Coverage:** Ensure PMFBY coverage for pulses to mitigate weather and pest risks.

CONCLUSION

The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses represents a transformative step toward achieving nutritional self-sufficiency, farmers' prosperity, and sustainable agriculture. By integrating science, policy, and farmer welfare, the Mission not only seeks to end import dependence but also to build a resilient agri-economy aligned with Viksit Bharat @2047.Through sustained implementation, India can truly become the "Global Hub for Sustainable Pulses Production", ensuring both food security and farmer dignity.

Prelims question:

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:

The PLI scheme provides financial incentives linked directly to incremental production and sales.

1. It covers 14 key sectors, including electronics, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and drones.
2. The scheme aims to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce India's dependence on imports.
3. PLI benefits are only available to companies in the public sector.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Q2. With reference to 'Urban Cooperative Banks' in India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2021)

1. They are supervised and regulated by local boards established by State Governments.
2. They can issue equity shares and preference shares.
3. They were brought under the purview of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, through a 1966 Amendment.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Q3. With reference to India's agricultural storage systems, consider the following statements:

1. The total storage capacity under FCI and State agencies as of July 2025 is over 900 LMT.
2. PACS primarily function as village-level procurement centres and Fair Price Shops.
3. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) provides interest subvention and credit guarantees for post-harvest management.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

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Q4. With reference to recent infrastructure initiatives of Indian Railways, consider the following statements:

1. The multi-tracking projects approved in October 2025 will increase the railway network by over 800 km across four states.
2. The projects are aligned with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan to enhance multi-modal connectivity.
3. The Vadodara–Ratlam section is one of the approved railway line expansions under this initiative.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Q5. Consider the following statements about urban transportation in India:

1. The Green Urban Transport Scheme promotes non-motorized transport and use of clean energy in cities.
2. The Metro Rail Policy, 2017 aims to ensure standardized planning, financing, and execution of metro projects.
3. The National Urban Transport Policy, 2006 focuses on providing infrastructure mainly for private vehicle users.

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

Q6. With reference to the Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–31), consider the following statements:

1. The mission aims to make India self-reliant in pulse production by 2030–31.
2. It ensures 100% MSP procurement of Tur, Urad, and Masoor for four years.
3. The SATHI portal is used for seed authentication and traceability.
4. It is implemented under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

1. A	2. B	3. D	4. A	5. A	6. A

Mains Question:

Q1. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is a game-changer for India's manufacturing sector. Discuss

(250 words)

Q2. In the villages itself no form of credit organisation will be suitable except the cooperative society." – All India Rural Credit Survey. Discuss this statement in the background of agricultural finance in India. What constraints and challenges do financial institutions supplying agricultural finance face? How can technology be used to better reach and serve rural clients? (UPSC 2014)

(250 words)

Q3. Discuss the importance of food grain storage in India. Evaluate the role of centralized and decentralized storage systems, and key government schemes like AIF, PMKSY, AMI, and PACS in strengthening the country's food security and supply chain.

(250 words)

Q4. Indian Railways has historically played a transformative role in nation-building. Evaluate how the recent infrastructure initiatives are reshaping India's economic geography. (250 words)

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Q5. **Urban transport is key to achieving the goals of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. Discuss the challenges faced by India's urban transport sector and suggest a strategy to overcome them.**

(250 words)

Q6. **The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–31) aims to transform India from a net importer to a self-reliant producer of pulses. Discuss its significance, operational strategies, and challenges, along with measures to ensure sustainable pulse production in India.**

(250 words)





BALANCING MARITIME DEFENCE WITH ISLAND ECOLOGY: THE GREAT NICOBAR DILEMMAL

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Great Nicobar Project (Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island), approved by the Union Cabinet in 2021, has once again come into focus due to its immense economic and defence potential, alongside serious ecological and indigenous concerns. Valued at around ₹72,000 crore, the project envisages the development of a transshipment port, airport, power plant, and township, spread over 166 sq. km, which accounts for nearly 10% of the island's area. While the government highlights its strategic importance in enhancing connectivity and national security, political leaders, environmentalists, and experts remain sharply divided, debating whether the long-term economic and defence gains outweigh the risks posed to biodiversity, fragile ecosystems, and the rights of indigenous communities.



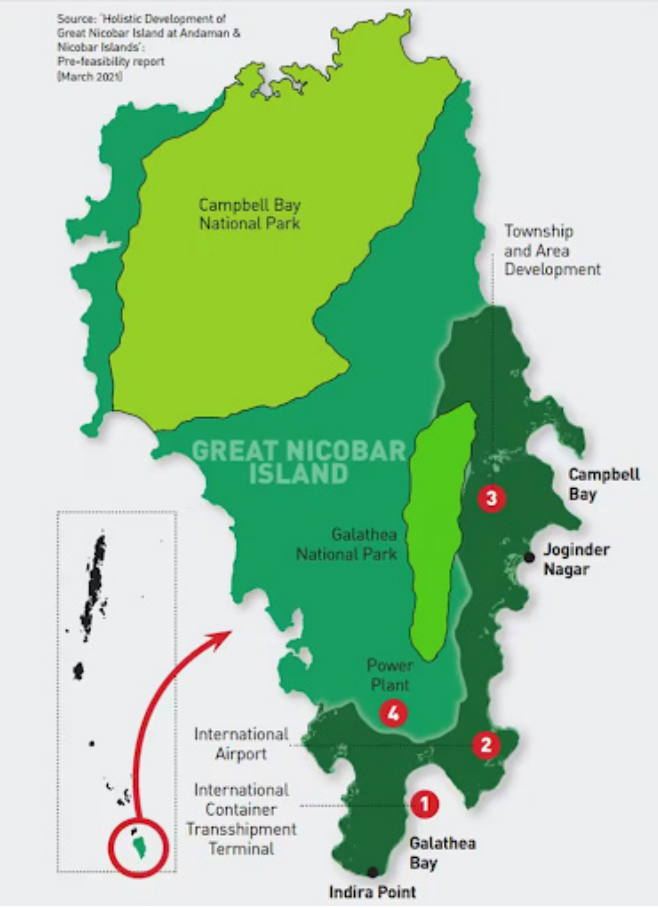
WHAT IS THE GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT?

Implemented by Andaman & Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO).

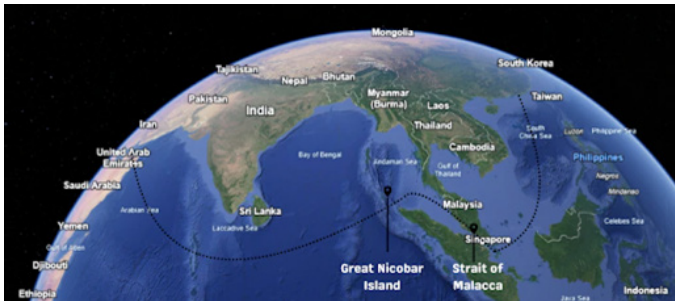
Spread over 30 years, phased construction beginning in 2024, partial operation by 2028.

Four Main Components:

1. Transshipment Port at Galathea Bay (14.5 million TEUs capacity)
2. Greenfield International Airport (3,300-metre runway for wide-body aircraft).
3. 450 MW Power Plant (gas + solar).
4. 16,569-hectare Township (for ~65,000 residents, workers, and migrants).



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SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

Dimension	Significance (with Data/Examples)
Strategic Location	Island lies near the Malacca Strait, through which ~25% of global trade and 80% of China's oil imports pass. Gives India a maritime chokepoint advantage.
Economic Growth	Expected to generate ₹30,000 crore annually by 2040 and create 50,000 jobs. Supports national initiatives like Sagarmala.
Port Infrastructure	A transshipment hub at Galathea Bay is planned to handle 14.5 million TEUs/year, positioning India as a competitor to Singapore and Malaysia.
Connectivity Boost	The development of an international airport will enhance tourism and make Great Nicobar a regional logistics hub.
Energy Self-Sufficiency	A 450 MW power plant (gas + solar) will meet industrial and civilian energy demand, ensuring self-reliance.
Defence & Security	Strengthens India's presence in the Indo-Pacific and improves surveillance over Sunda, Lombok, and Ombai-Wetar straits.
Regional Integration	Can emerge as a growth pole for BIMSTEC, boosting trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia.



CONCERNS OF SUCH MEGA PROJECTS

1. Ecological Concerns

Issue	Example / Impact
Loss of Biodiversity	Island is home to 200 bird species and endemic flora covering ~85% of land, risking irreversible ecological damage.
Threat to Leatherback Turtles	Galathea Bay is the world's most important nesting site for the giant leatherback turtle, which faces extinction risks.
Coral Reef & Seabed Destruction	Large-scale dredging for the port may destroy coral reefs, which support hundreds of fish species and marine livelihoods.

2. Indigenous & Social Concerns

Issue	Example / Impact
Displacement of Shompen Tribe (PVTG)	With a population of just 300–400, the tribe risks losing ~130 sq. km of ancestral land.
Health Risks	Uncontacted tribes are highly vulnerable to diseases like measles and flu, which historically have very high mortality rates.
Cultural Erosion	Sacred tribal sites and traditional knowledge systems could be lost permanently, weakening indigenous identity.

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3. Legal & Governance Concerns

Issue	Example / Impact
Violation of CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zone - 1A)	CRZ laws prohibit development in ecologically fragile areas, yet clearances were granted.
Questionable Environmental Clearances	The MoEFCC granted clearance despite objections from environmental experts and civil society.
Disaster Risks	The island lies in a seismic and tsunami-prone zone; the 2004 tsunami killed thousands, highlighting high disaster vulnerability.

WAY FORWARD: BALANCING DEVELOPMENT & ECOLOGY

1. **Strategic Phasing:** Prioritise defence & port infrastructure, while delaying large-scale township expansion until ecological safeguards are ensured.
2. **Eco-Sensitive Development:** Use green construction technologies, renewable energy, and limit dredging.
3. **Community-Centric Approach:** Respect rights of Shompen & Nicobarese tribes; include them in decision-making and livelihood generation.
4. **Environmental Safeguards:** Independent monitoring of impacts on turtles, corals, and forests with mitigation plans.
5. **International Best Practices:** Learn from Singapore's land-use balance and Costa Rica's eco-tourism for sustainable development.
6. **Legal Compliance:** Strict adherence to CRZ laws and Supreme Court guidelines on tribal protection.

GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF BALANCING DEVELOPMENT, ECOLOGY & SECURITY

Project / Location	Ecological Security Role	National Security Benefit	Management / Balanced Approach
Great Barrier Reef, Australia	Coral reefs act as natural barriers against coastal erosion, cyclones, and storm surges.	Protects coastal communities, naval bases, and vital shipping infrastructure along eastern Australia.	Naval routes restricted in core reef zones; large-scale reef restoration programs (~$1 bn) undertaken to preserve ecosystems.
Galápagos Islands, Ecuador	Marine biodiversity and mangroves reduce coastal vulnerability, maintain fish stocks, and regulate ecosystems.	Supports sustainable fisheries for food security and ensures strategic maritime presence in the Pacific.	Strict regulation of naval activities, controlled eco-tourism, and adoption of eco-friendly monitoring technologies.

CONCLUSION

The Great Nicobar Project represents India's ambition to emerge as a strategic and economic power in the Indo-Pacific. Its location gives India unmatched leverage over maritime chokepoints like the Malacca Strait. However, uncontrolled execution could irreversibly damage fragile ecosystems and tribal cultures. The way forward lies in phased, eco-sensitive development—where defence and connectivity goals are met without sacrificing ecological heritage and indigenous rights. Sustainable growth, not blind expansion, must guide India's approach to Great Nicobar.

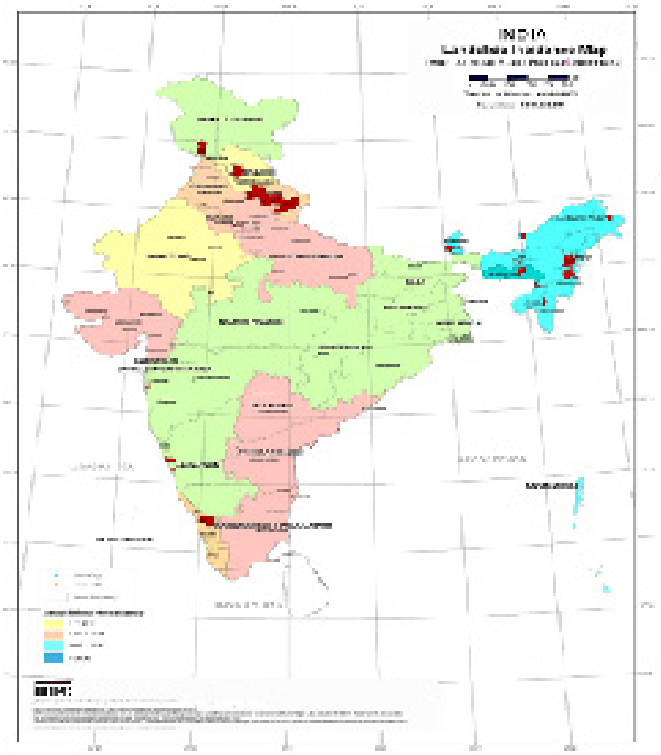
LANDSLIDES IN INDIA – A GROWING CHALLENGE IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

WHY IN THE NEWS?

In Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh, a severe landslide struck a private bus traveling through a hilly stretch, resulting in at least 15 deaths (some reports suggest 18) and multiple injuries. The incident occurred following days of intense rainfall that destabilized

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the hillside. Rescue operations were launched immediately by the NDRF and local administration.



In Darjeeling, West Bengal, torrential rainfall triggered multiple landslides across hill and foothill areas, leading to at least 24 deaths, destruction of houses, and massive damage to roads, bridges, and power infrastructure. The heavy downpour (over 300 mm in less than 12 hours) overwhelmed slope stability, causing widespread displacement and disruption of essential services.

DEFINITION (ACCORDING TO NDMA)

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) defines a landslide as: "The movement of a mass of rock, debris, or earth down a slope under the influence of gravity, often triggered by natural or human-induced factors."

It is classified under "Hydro-Meteorological and Geological hazards."

NDMA recognizes landslides as a recurring disaster in the Himalayan and Western Ghat regions.

India is among the most landslide-prone countries in the world, with about 12.6% of its total land area susceptible to this hazard.

CAUSES OF LANDSLIDES IN INDIA

Category	Cause / Activity	Description	Example / Region
(A) Natural / Geographical Factors	Heavy Rainfall	Intense monsoon rainfall increases pore pressure in soil, reducing cohesion and triggering slope failure.	Wayanad, Kerala (2024) – extreme monsoon rain caused multiple fatal landslides.
	Earthquakes	Seismic vibrations loosen rock mass, especially in fragile mountain regions.	2015 Nepal quake triggered massive slides in North Sikkim & Uttarakhand.
	Soil Erosion & Weathering	Continuous erosion by rivers and weathering weakens slope strength and stability.	Teesta Valley (Sikkim) – river undercutting led to repeated slope instability.
	Snowmelt & Glacier Retreat	Rapid melting causes water saturation in slope soils, reducing strength.	Kedarnath region (Uttarakhand) – 2013 disaster linked to glacial melt and slope failure.
	Steep Slope & Geological Structure	Faults, joints, and fractured rocks make slopes inherently weak and prone to movement.	Darjeeling Himalaya & North-Eastern hill ranges.

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(B) Anthropogenic (Human-Induced) Factors	Deforestation	Removal of vegetation cover destabilizes slopes and reduces root binding capacity.	Nilgiris (Tamil Nadu) – tea plantation expansion caused slope failures.
	Unplanned Construction	Road cutting, tunnelling, and hill slope encroachments disturb slope balance.	Joshimath, Uttarakhand (2023) – land subsidence and slope destabilization.
	Mining & Quarrying	Blasting and excavation induce vibrations, leading to cracks and loosening of slopes.	Jharia coal fields, Jharkhand.
	Poor Drainage & Urbanization	Blocked natural drains cause water accumulation, triggering slope instability.	Mumbai suburban slides (Ghatkopar, 2000).
	Agricultural Expansion on Hills	Terracing and irrigation practices increase infiltration, reducing slope stability.	Meghalaya – shifting cultivation areas.

CONSEQUENCES OF LANDSLIDES IN INDIA

Dimension	Impact / Description	Example / Evidence
Environmental	Destruction of forests, biodiversity loss, and river sedimentation.	Wayanad (2024) – destroyed 200+ ha of forest and altered local hydrology.
Economic	Damage to infrastructure such as roads, bridges, power lines, and farmlands; increases maintenance costs.	NH-44 (J&K) and NH-10 (Sikkim) frequently blocked, costing ₹650 crore annually in maintenance.
Social	Displacement of populations, loss of housing, and livelihood insecurity in affected areas.	Himachal Pradesh – several villages relocated after 2023 monsoon slides.
Health	Deaths, injuries, and disease outbreaks due to contaminated water and blocked health access.	Over 300 deaths annually in India (NDMA).
Mental Health	Trauma and long-term psychological stress among survivors, especially in hill communities.	Post-2023 Raigad slide, several families required psychological counselling.
National Security	Disrupts border roads, army logistics, and communication lines in sensitive regions.	Arunachal Pradesh & Ladakh – frequent slides obstruct Indo-China border movement.

MEASURES FOR PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

Category	Measure / Strategy	Implementing Agency / Example
Structural Measures	Construction of retaining walls, rock bolting, gabion walls, slope drainage systems, and afforestation.	BRO (Border Roads Organisation) in Sikkim & Himachal Pradesh uses bio-engineering for slope stabilization.
Non-Structural Measures	Hazard zonation mapping, early warning systems, and regulation of land use.	GSI's Landslide Susceptibility Mapping Project (2023).

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Policy & Institutional	Implementation of the National Landslide Risk Management Strategy (2019) focusing on mapping, mitigation, and awareness.	NDMA & MoEFCC executing integrated hill area planning.
Technology & Forecasting	Use of LiDAR, GIS, drones, and satellite data for slope monitoring and forecasting.	ISRO's Bhukosh platform integrates landslide inventory and vulnerability data.
Community-Based Preparedness	Awareness drives, mock drills, and training at panchayat levels to build resilience.	Himachal Pradesh & Sikkim – NDMA's Landslide Ready Hill Communities program.
Environmental Management	Regulation of quarrying, eco-sensitive zoning, construction of check dams, and afforestation.	Kerala & Uttarakhand governments (post-2018) introduced buffer zones around high-risk slopes.

CONCLUSION

Landslides represent a complex environmental disaster arising from the interaction of geological, ecological, and human factors. In India, regions like the Himalayan arc and the Western Ghats are natural hotspots due to their fragile terrain and high rainfall. However, the increasing frequency and intensity of landslides in recent years reflect deeper issues of poor slope governance, unplanned urban expansion, and unsustainable land use. Addressing this challenge requires a resilient and integrated approach that combines scientific mapping through collaborations between agencies such as ISRO and GSI, policy coordination involving the NDMA and State Disaster Management Authorities, and eco-restoration efforts supported by community awareness.

SEEDS OF THE FUTURE: CLEAN PLANT PROGRAMME DRIVING DISEASE-FREE HORTICULTURE IN INDIA.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Union Cabinet on 9th August 2024 approved the Clean Plant Programme (CPP) with the objective of supplying farmers with disease-free planting material. The programme is designed to combat systemic pathogens, particularly viruses, that are responsible for significant yield and quality losses in horticultural crops. It will be implemented by the National Horticulture Board (NHB), while the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) will provide technical support and capacity-building assistance. The initiative has a total outlay of ₹1,765.67 crore, which includes financial support through a $98 million loan sanctioned by the Asian Development Bank in December 2023.

CLEAN PLANT PROGRAMME (CPP):

1. Conceptualised by Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank.
2. Aims to provide healthy, virus-free and disease-free planting material of key fruit crops.
3. Focuses on preventive crop health management by starting with clean, certified planting stock.
4. Seeks to enhance farmers' productivity, income, and profitability.
5. Designed to boost India's global competitiveness in horticulture by ensuring quality standards.

Key Takeaways

- Under **Clean Plant Programme, 9 Clean Plant Centres** across the country to ensure disease-free, productive planting material.
- **3 to be set up in Maharashtra** at a cost of **₹300 crore.**
- **CPP website launched** as a central hub for resources, updates, insights to revolutionize horticulture.
- **8 crore disease-free seedlings** to be supplied to farmers annually by modern nurseries.
- On-ground actions like **hazard analysis, nursery checks, and lab improvements** are underway, with plans to expand certification, training, and crop protocols

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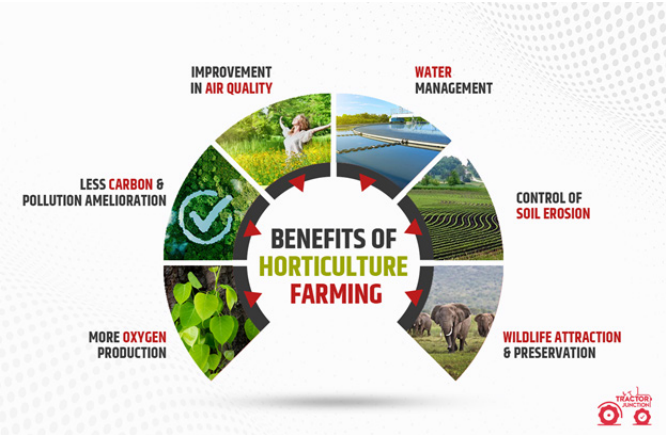
KEY BENEFITS OF CLEAN PLANT PROGRAMME (CPP)

1. **Boosts Farmers' Income –** Provides access to virus-free, high-quality planting material, leading to higher yields and better profitability.
2. **Strengthens Nurseries –** Introduces certification systems and infrastructure support to enable large-scale propagation of clean planting stock.
3. **Improves Consumer Experience –** Ensures superior quality fruits with better taste, appearance, and nutritional value.
4. **Enhances Export Competitiveness –** Positions India as a global leader in fruit exports through high-quality, disease-free produce.
5. **Promotes Equity and Inclusivity –** Makes clean planting material affordable for all farmers, engages women farmers, and develops region-specific solutions.



IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN HORTICULTURE

Area	Data	Example (Region)
Economy	Total horticulture output 367.72 million tonnes, up 3.66% vs last year.	Apple production in Himachal Pradesh
Farmers	Productivity: horticulture 12.5 t/ha vs food grains 2.23 t/ha.	Polyhouse floriculture in Pune
Government	Horticulture contributes 33% of Agriculture GVA using only 13% cropped area.	Clean Plant Programme in Telangana
Business / Private Sector	Rising exports of fruits, spices; investment in polyhouses & cold chains.	Mango processing units in Gujarat
Women Farmers	76.9% rural women engaged in agriculture (2024).	Women managing mango orchards in West Bengal
Foreign Policy / Exports	India is world's 2nd largest producer of fruits & vegetables.	Banana exports from Tamil Nadu to Middle East
Food Security / Nutrition	Vegetable production: 219.6 MT, higher than food grains.	Leafy vegetables in Uttarakhand
Ecology / Environment	Orchard plantations enhance carbon sequestration & climate resilience.	Citrus orchards in Madhya Pradesh (Central



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GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INITIATIVES:

Policy / Scheme	Key Area of Focus	Present Status (2025)	Success Stories
Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)	Holistic growth: planting material, area expansion, post-harvest infra	Implemented in all states; cluster-based approach strengthened	Kashmir saffron revitalization under MIDH boosted productivity and GI-tag exports.
Horticulture Cluster Development Programme (CDP)	Market-led competitiveness of clusters	55 clusters approved, focus on mango, banana, spices	Mango cluster in Uttar Pradesh improved exports to Middle East markets.
Clean Plant Programme (CPP)	Virus-free, high-quality planting material	₹1,765 crore approved; operational via ICAR & NHB	Banana plantations in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra revived with clean planting stock.
Operation Greens (TOP to TOTAL)	Price stabilization for Tomato, Onion, Potato; later expanded	Implemented in 22 states; subsidy support to FPOs	Tomato farmers in Andhra Pradesh received support during price crashes.
Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)	Micro-irrigation and efficient water use	72 lakh ha covered under drip/sprinkler irrigation	Grape farmers in Maharashtra reduced water use by 40% while raising yields.
Agri-Export Policy 2018	Export promotion of fruits, vegetables, and spices	46 product-district export hubs developed	Kerala spices export hub expanded black pepper exports globally.
Digital Agriculture Mission (2021–26)	Digital solutions, AI, blockchain for traceability	Pilots in 7 states, focus on horticulture monitoring	Andhra Pradesh using blockchain for mango traceability to EU markets.

KEY CHALLENGES IN THE HORTICULTURE SECTOR

1. Climate change impacts

- Erratic monsoon, rising temperatures, droughts, and floods reduce yields.
- **Example:** Heatwaves in 2022 reduced onion output in Maharashtra by 20%.

2. Post-harvest losses

- Around 20–30% wastage of perishable produce due to poor storage and transport.
- **Example:** Potato farmers in Uttar Pradesh face 25% loss due to inadequate cold chains.

3. Infrastructure gaps

- Limited access to organized markets, poor logistics, and inadequate warehousing.
- **Example:** Odisha's vegetable farmers forced into distress sales due to lack of cold storage.

4. Quality planting material

- Lack of disease-free seeds and planting material.
- **Example:** Banana bunchy top virus in Tamil Nadu lowered yields drastically before clean planting initiatives.

5. Market volatility

- High price fluctuations in crops like onion and tomato, impacting farmer income.
- **Example:** Onion prices in Nashik (Maharashtra) crashed from ₹25/kg to ₹2/kg in 2023.

6. Global competition

- Stiff competition in exports despite being the largest producer of spices and second in fruits/vegetables.
- **Example:** Indian grapes rejected in EU markets due to pesticide residues, reducing export earnings.

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7. Water stress

- Over-extraction of groundwater for crops like banana and sugarcane affecting horticulture sustainability.
- **Example:** Banana farming in Jalgaon (Maharashtra) consumes excessive groundwater.

SOLUTIONS

Way Forward Solution	Committee / Commission	Example
Climate-resilient farming practices	MIDH General Council; ICAR Climate Research Panel	Chhattisgarh: Solar irrigation and diversified cropping
Expand cold chain & reduce losses	National Horticulture Board (NHB) Project Approval	Uttar Pradesh: Cold chain expansion curtailed potato loss
Build market & logistics infrastructure	NHB Managing Committee; APEDA	Odisha: Improved access to e-NAM, new rural storage
Ensure quality planting material	Clean Plant Programme Committee; ICAR Seed Board	Tamil Nadu: Clean Plant Programme for bananas controlled virus
Tackle market volatility	State Price Stabilization Fund; APEDA	Nashik: Onion price support via Farmer-Producer Companies
Boost export competitiveness	Export Promotion Council; APEDA; NHB Board	Grapes: Adoption of standards improved EU exports
Adopt sustainable water-efficient cropping	ICAR Horticulture Panel; National Water Mission	Jalgaon: Drip irrigation saves water in banana cultivation

SCIENCE-DRIVEN CONSERVATION: INDIA'S VISION 2025–2030 FOR THREATENED SPECIES

WHY IN THE NEWS?



India, one of the world's 17 megadiverse nations, has taken a historic step toward systematic biodiversity assessment and conservation. At the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, the Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Kirti Vardhan Singh, launched India's National Red List Roadmap and Vision 2025–2030. This initiative marks a new phase in India's environmental governance, aiming to provide a scientific, data-driven framework for identifying, assessing, and conserving threatened species across the country.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL RED LIST ROADMAP

The National Red List Roadmap and Vision 2025–2030 is a comprehensive plan developed jointly by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Botanical Survey of India (BSI), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), along with the Center for Species Survival–India. It envisions a nationally coordinated, inclusive, and science-based mechanism to evaluate the conservation status of Indian flora and fauna in alignment with global IUCN standards.

The Roadmap seeks to publish National Red Data Books for both flora and fauna by 2030, which will serve as key reference documents for policymakers, researchers, and conservationists. The data generated will inform future conservation strategies, policy actions, and targeted protection efforts.

KEY OBJECTIVES AND VISION 2025–2030

The Vision 2025–2030 focuses on establishing a strong scientific foundation for biodiversity management in India. Its key objectives include:

1. Creating a comprehensive national database on threatened species.
2. Aligning India's conservation framework with IUCN's Red List methodology.
3. Building capacity among institutions and experts for systematic species assessment.
4. Ensuring integration of biodiversity data into national conservation planning.
5. Promoting community participation and regional cooperation in conservation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INITIATIVE

1. **Evidence-based conservation:** Strengthens policy-making by filling critical data gaps on species status.
2. **Biodiversity richness:** India hosts ~104,000 faunal species and 18,000 flowering plants, with 28% of plants and 30% of animals being endemic.
3. **Species prioritization:** Helps identify species at risk of extinction and focus protection efforts.
4. **Resource allocation:** Guides effective use of funds and efforts for habitat restoration and conservation.
5. **Global reporting:** Facilitates India's reporting obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
6. **International commitments:** Supports targets under the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) to halt biodiversity loss by 2030.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

India's biodiversity conservation is supported by a robust legal framework, including the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended in 2022), which extends protection to species listed under CITES appendices, the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

The National Red List initiative complements these efforts by providing the scientific backbone required to monitor species trends and the effectiveness of conservation policies. It also strengthens India's role as a responsible global partner in environmental protection and sustainable development.

GLOBAL CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

Globally, the IUCN Red List is recognized as the gold standard for assessing species extinction risk. Out of more than 163,000 species assessed worldwide, around 28% are threatened with extinction. India's National Red List initiative aligns with these global efforts and contributes valuable data to the international conservation community.

Moreover, this step positions India as a regional leader in biodiversity monitoring, offering a model for other developing countries in Asia and Africa that face similar challenges in biodiversity documentation and conservation planning.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

1. **Data gaps:** Many species, especially lesser-known ones, remain under-assessed due to limited taxonomic information.
2. **Field survey limitations:** Inadequate field surveys hinder accurate assessment of species populations and trends.
3. **Monitoring infrastructure:** Lack of robust monitoring systems reduces real-time tracking of biodiversity.
4. **Institutional coordination:** Multiple central and state agencies need better collaboration for effective implementation.
5. **Funding constraints:** Limited financial resources restrict large-scale biodiversity assessments and conservation projects.
6. **Human resource shortages:** Insufficient trained personnel for surveys, data collection, and analysis.

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7. **Goal alignment:** Addressing these challenges is crucial to meet the 2030 biodiversity targets under KMGBF effectively.

CONCLUSION

The National Red List Roadmap and Vision 2025–2030 marks a transformative step in India's conservation journey. It embodies the nation's shift toward science-based, data-driven, and globally aligned biodiversity governance. By prioritizing species assessment and integrating conservation science into policymaking, India is reinforcing its leadership in environmental stewardship.

As biodiversity faces mounting pressures from habitat loss, pollution, and climate change, this initiative will serve as a cornerstone for national and global sustainability efforts, ensuring that the rich natural heritage of India continues to thrive for future generations.

INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY CAPACITY SURGES OVER FIVEFOLD: TOWARDS A RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

WHY IN THE NEWS?



India's renewable energy sector has witnessed a dramatic transformation over the past decade, with installed capacity skyrocketing from 35 GW in 2014 to 197 GW in 2025, marking one of the fastest global expansions outside large hydro. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) highlights that India is now entering a "system integration" phase, focusing not just on capacity addition but also on making the grid flexible, reliable, and sustainable. The ultimate strategic goal is achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, aligning with India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) commitments under the Paris Agreement and the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" powered by clean energy.

INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY JOURNEY – KEY STATISTICS

Parameter	Current Data (2025)	Remarks/ Source
Total Renewable Capacity (excluding large hydro)	197 GW	MNRE, 2025
Total Renewable + Hydro Capacity	~260 GW	MNRE Estimates
Growth Since 2014	Over 5× increase (35 → 197 GW)	PIB 2025
Annual Capacity Addition	15–25 GW/ year	Among world's fastest globally
Ongoing RE Projects (Pipeline)	40+ GW	Under PPAs/PSAs/ transmission stage
Target by 2030	500 GW non-fossil	NDC, 2025
Investment in Transmission Plan	₹2.4 lakh crore	For grid connectivity of 500 GW

KEY DRIVERS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY GROWTH

1. **Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:** India's National Electricity Policy (2021) and the draft National Energy Policy provide a robust roadmap for a clean energy transition. Legal reforms, including the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2024, enable Virtual PPAs, open access, and green energy markets, allowing both corporate and residential consumers to access renewable energy efficiently.

2. **Institutional Support:** Agencies such as MNRE, SECI, NTPC Green, and IREDA provide technical, financial, and regulatory support, accelerating project commissioning and financing. Public-private partnerships are increasingly driving project scale-up.

3. **Financial Incentives & Industrial Push:** The PLI Scheme for Solar Modules and Batteries incentivizes domestic manufacturing, reducing import dependence. Similarly, hybrid and round-the-clock (RTC) projects aim to make renewable supply dispatchable and reliable.

4. **Infrastructure Expansion:** Schemes like Green Energy Corridor (Phases I–III), PM KUSUM, and PM Suryaghar expand rural solarization and strengthen transmission networks, enabling integration of renewable-rich states into the national grid.

5. **Global Collaboration & Technological Innovation:** India's engagement with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Green Hydrogen Mission fosters innovation in solar, wind, and hydrogen technologies, ensuring India remains at the forefront of the global energy transition.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN RENEWABLE ENERGY DEPLOYMENT

1. **Grid Bottlenecks:** Transmission infrastructure is lagging behind project commissioning, causing delays in integrating states like Rajasthan and Gujarat.

2. **Intermittency Issues:** Variability of solar and wind generation can cause instability, curtailment, and energy deficits during peak demand.

3. **Financial Stress of DISCOMs:** Weak balance sheets and delayed payments reduce investor confidence.

4. **Land Acquisition Hurdles:** Social and environmental conflicts slow down large-scale solar and wind park development.

5. **Supply Chain Volatility:** Post-pandemic global fluctuations in module and battery prices challenge project economics.

6. **Slow Storage Adoption:** Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) are still at pilot stages, requiring rapid scaling.

7. **Regulatory Uncertainty:** Frequent changes in ALMM, GST, and duty structures affect long-term planning.

8. **Geographical Concentration:** Majority of renewable capacity is concentrated in western and southern India, limiting regional diversification.

WAY FORWARD

Focus Area	Recommendations	Examples/ Impact
Strengthen Grid Infrastructure	Complete ₹2.4 lakh crore transmission plan; expand HVDC corridors	Green Energy Corridor Phase III in Rajasthan & Ladakh
Scale Up Storage Solutions	Accelerate BESS and pumped hydro projects; offer viability gap funding	SECI's 4 GWh battery tender underway
Promote Hybrid & RTC Projects	Combine solar, wind, and storage for 24×7 supply	NTPC RTC Renewable Project, Karnataka
Expand Distributed & Rural Solarization	Enhance PM KUSUM & PM Suryaghar schemes	Rooftop solar for 1 crore households by 2026
Deepen Green Hydrogen Ecosystem	Implement National Green Hydrogen Mission	Green Ammonia export projects in Gujarat
Enable Market-Based Instruments	VPPA, Carbon Credit Trading, Green Attribute Markets	Corporate procurement by Infosys & TCS via VPPA
Support Domestic Manufacturing	Continue PLI for solar PVs, batteries, and electrolyzers	Over 50 GW solar manufacturing capacity approved

Diversify Renewable Geography	Encourage NE, Central India & Islands for solar/ wind	Floating solar projects in Assam & Andaman

CONCLUSION

India's renewable energy trajectory reflects a shift from rapid capacity growth to system maturity. The focus now is on integration, reliability, and resilience, ensuring renewable energy becomes dispatchable, affordable, and geographically diversified. With strategic investments in grid infrastructure, storage, hybrid projects, and domestic manufacturing, India is poised to emerge as a global renewable energy leader by 2030, contributing to energy security, sustainable development, and climate action goals.

Prelims Question

Q1. With reference to Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) in India, consider the following statements:

1. ESZs are notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
2. The primary objective of ESZs is to create a "shock absorber" around Protected Areas.
3. Mining and hydroelectric projects are completely prohibited in ESZs.

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

Q2. With reference to landslides in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Himalayas are more prone to landslides due to their young fold mountain structure and high seismic activity.
2. The Western Ghats experience landslides primarily due to excessive rainfall and deforestation.
3. The Landslide Hazard Zonation (LHZ) maps are prepared by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

A. Only one B. Only two
C. All three D. None

Q3. Which of the following statements regarding the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) is/are correct?

1. MIDH is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented for holistic development of horticulture in India.
2. Under MIDH, the Government of India contributes 90% of the total outlay in all States.
3. The scheme covers fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, spices, flowers, coconut, and bamboo.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

A) 1 and 3 only B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 2 only D) 1, 2 and 3

Q4. Which of the following statements about India's National Red List Roadmap and Vision 2025–2030 is/are correct?

1. It aims to publish National Red Data Books for flora and fauna by 2030.
2. The initiative is implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in coordination with ZSI, BSI, and IUCN.
3. It focuses only on global reporting under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Q5. With reference to renewable energy development in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Green Energy Corridor project aims to strengthen transmission infrastructure for integrating renewable power into the national grid.
2. The PM-KUSUM scheme promotes solar energy generation in rural areas by providing support to farmers for installing solar pumps and panels.
3. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a global initiative launched jointly by India and France.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: D

1. A	2. B	3. A	4. A	5. D

Mains Question

Q1. The Great Nicobar Project highlights the growing tension between national security imperatives and ecological security needs. Discuss

(250 words)

Q2. Landslides are a recurrent disaster in India, especially in the Himalayan and Western Ghats regions." Discuss the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies for landslides in India.

(250 words)

Q3. Explain the main objectives of the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) and how it supports the holistic growth of India's horticulture sector.

(250 words)

Q4. Discuss the significance of India's National Red List Roadmap and Vision 2025–2030 in strengthening biodiversity conservation. Highlight its objectives, global relevance, and challenges. (250 words)

Q5. Discuss India's progress in the renewable energy sector. What are the key challenges in achieving the 500 GW non-fossil fuel target by 2030, and what steps are needed to ensure reliable and inclusive energy transition?

(250 words)





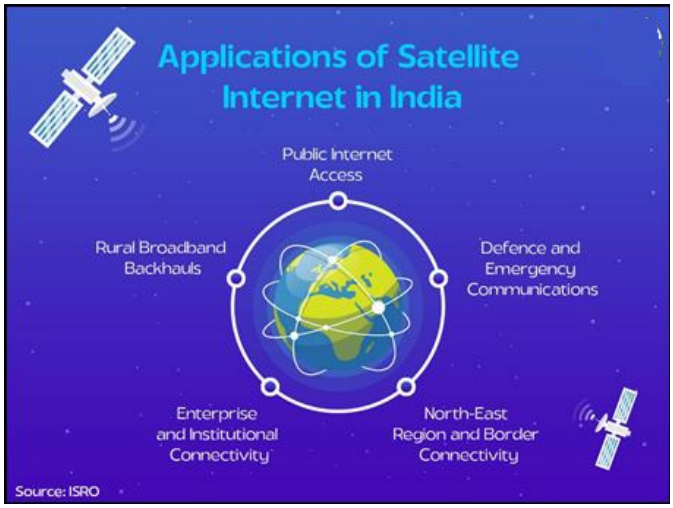
SATELLITE INTERNET IN INDIA: THE FUTURE OF INTERNET ABOVE US

WHY IN THE NEWS?

India's digital landscape continues to expand rapidly, with 1,002.85 million internet subscribers reported in April–June 2025, reflecting its status as one of the fastest-growing digital nations. Despite this growth, internet penetration remains uneven, especially in remote regions, highlighting the need for satellite-based connectivity to complement existing networks and ensure inclusive digital access.



WHAT IS SATELLITE INTERNET?



- Internet service provided via satellites in Geostationary Orbits (GSO) or Non-Geostationary Orbits (NGSO).
- Supports the Digital India vision, offering connectivity to any location.
- Crucial for remote and underserved regions where conventional internet cannot reach.

REGULATORY LANDSCAPE FOR SATELLITE INTERNET

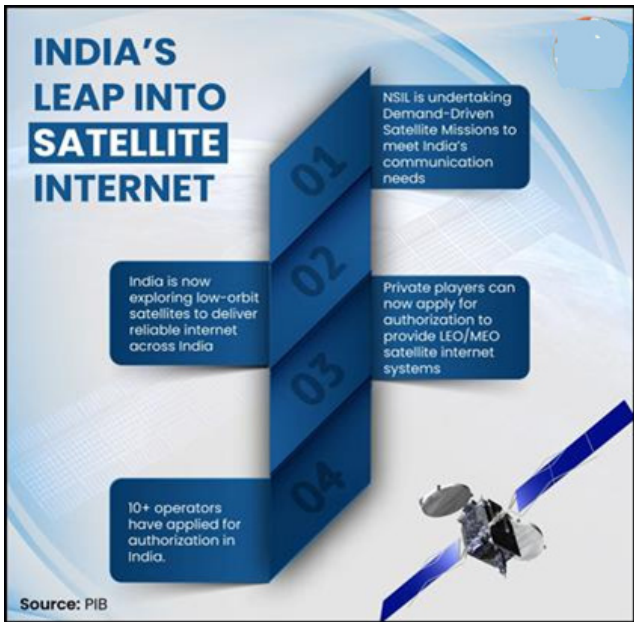
1. **Space Sector Reforms (2020):** Opened the sector for private participation.
2. **Indian Space Policy, 2023:** Provides a level playing field for Non-Government Entities (NGEs).
3. **Department of Telecommunications (DoT):** Grants authorizations under Unified Licence Regime. Services include Commercial VSAT, GMPCS, complementing terrestrial networks. Telecommunications Act, 202,3 allows spectrum assignment and regulation of satellite services.
4. **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI):** Recommendations in May 2025 for satellite spectrum assignment 5-year allocation, extendable by 2 years.
5. **IN-SPACe:** Interfaces between ISRO and private entities. Promotes and supervises non-government space activities.
6. **New Space India Ltd. (NSIL):** Commercial arm of ISRO; operates 15 in-orbit communication satellites. Manages demand-driven missions for DTH and broadband connectivity.

TRANSITIONING SATELLITE COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE

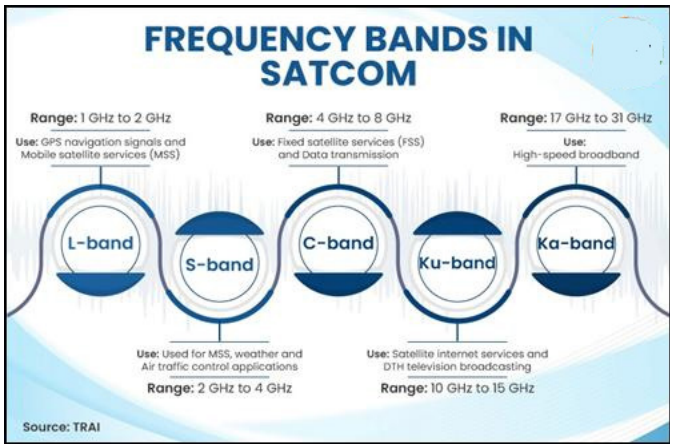
1. Shift from Geostationary Satellites (GSAT) to LEO and MEO systems.

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2. **LEO satellites:** 400–2,000 km altitude, low-latency, ideal for the internet.
3. **MEO satellites:** 8,000–20,000 km, larger coverage, slightly higher latency.
4. Policy reforms now allow up to 100% FDI, encouraging private participation.
5. **Licensed private operators:** Starlink, Jio Satellite Communication, OneWeb, among others.



UNDERSTANDING THE SATELLITE COMMUNICATION SPECTRUM



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR INCLUSIVE DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

1. **Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN):** Expands broadband through 4G towers in rural areas. Funds projects in underserved regions.
2. **Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan (CTDP)**

   Islands: Andaman & Nicobar capacity increased from 2 Gbps → 4 Gbps; Lakshadweep 318 Mbps → 1.71 Gbps.

   North-East: 2,485 mobile towers serving 3,389 locations.
3. **National Broadband Mission 2.0 (NBM 2.0):** Extends broadband to remaining 1.7 lakh villages.

   BharatNet Phase II: 2.14 lakh Gram Panchayats connected.
4. **PM-WANI:** Creates public Wi-Fi hotspots, over 3.73 lakh installed.
5. **GIS-based Decision Support System (DSS) – MoES:** Uses satellite and real-time data for early warning of extreme weather.

INDIA'S KEY BROADBAND-BASED SATELLITES

Fleet of 19 communication satellites, including GSAT-19, GSAT-29, GSAT-11, GSAT-N2.

Supports:

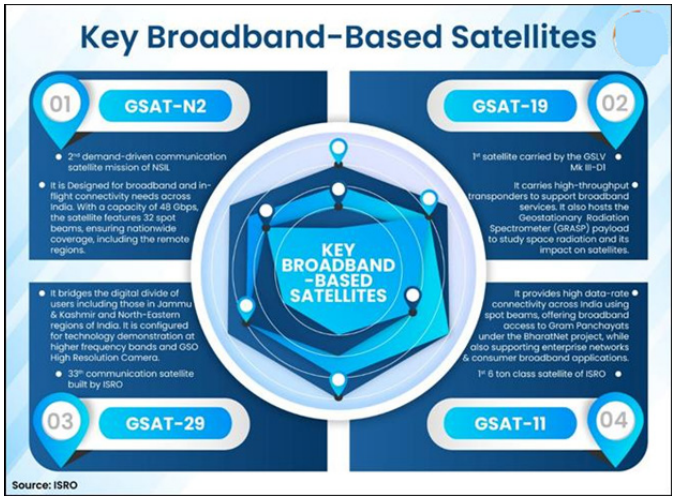
- High-speed broadband in underserved areas
- In-flight connectivity
- Defence networks
- Disaster management
- High-Throughput Satellites (HTS) with spot-beam technology ensure faster speeds and higher capacity.

INDIA'S KEY BROADBAND-BASED SATELLITES

India's broadband reach is steadily expanding through high-throughput satellites (HTS) developed by ISRO, which use advanced spot-beam technology to provide faster speeds and higher capacity. India has a fleet of 19 operational communication satellites, among which GSAT-19, GSAT-29, GSAT-11, and GSAT-N2 are specifically geared

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towards boosting India's broadband services. These satellites are designed to enhance internet connectivity in underserved areas, support in-flight communication, defence networks and disaster management. Together, they form the backbone of satellite-based broadband infrastructure in India, complementing ground-based networks like BharatNet.



CONCLUSION

India's satellite internet ecosystem is undergoing a transformative shift, combining LEO/MEO satellite systems, private sector participation, and robust policy support to bridge the digital divide. These initiatives support Digital India's goals, strengthen socio-economic development, and enhance resilience in defence, disaster management, and education. By 2047, satellite connectivity is set to play a pivotal role in ensuring inclusive, high-speed internet access across all corners of the country, realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Prelims question:

Q1. Which of the following statements about India's satellite internet initiatives is/are correct?

1. India has a fleet of 19 operational communication satellites including GSAT-19, GSAT-29, GSAT-11, and GSAT-N2.
2. LEO satellites operate at an altitude of 400–2,000 km and are ideal for low-latency internet.
3. The PM-WANI scheme is related to expansion of 5G services in urban areas only.

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A

Mains Question:

Q1. Discuss the significance of satellite-based internet in promoting inclusive digital connectivity, the role of private players and government initiatives, and the challenges in ensuring high-speed internet across remote areas. (250 words)





NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (NIA): INDIA'S FRONTLINE AGAINST TERRORISM AND EMERGING SECURITY THREATS

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has attached the immovable properties of Hizbul Mujahideen operative Tariq Ahmad Mir, who was charge-sheeted for supplying arms and ammunition to active militants of the banned outfit in Kashmir. The move, ordered by the NIA Special Court in Jammu, is part of the agency's ongoing crackdown on terror networks to disrupt activities threatening India's peace, stability, and harmony.



NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (NIA): ROLE, MANDATE, AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Background

1. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) was established under the NIA Act, 2008 in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, which exposed gaps in India's counter-terror framework.
2. It functions as the central counter-terrorism law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
3. The NIA has nationwide jurisdiction and can investigate without prior approval of state governments, unlike other central agencies.
4. It was created to ensure a professional, specialized, and coordinated response to terror threats.

COMPOSITION / ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

1. **Head:** Director General (DG) – IPS rank officer (same as DG of Police).
2. **Hierarchy:** DG → Special/Additional DG → Inspector General (IG) → Deputy Inspector General (DIG) → Superintendent of Police (SP) → Additional SP → Deputy SP.
3. **Branches:** Headquarters in New Delhi with branches in Hyderabad, Guwahati, Mumbai, Lucknow, Jammu, Kochi, Raipur, Chandigarh, Ranchi, Kolkata, Chennai, Imphal.
4. **Personnel:** Drawn from IPS, IRS, CAPF, State Police Services, and SSC recruitments.
5. **Special NIA Courts:** Established under Sections 11 & 22 of the NIA Act for speedy trials of terrorism-related cases.

MANDATE OF NIA

1. Investigate and prosecute offences with national and cross-border implications, especially terrorism and insurgency.

2. **Covers offences under laws such as:**

- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA)
- Atomic Energy Act, 1962
- Weapons of Mass Destruction Act, 2005
- Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982
- NIA (Amendment) Act, 2019 expanded jurisdiction to cover:
- Human trafficking
- Fake currency
- Manufacture/sale of prohibited arms
- Cyber terrorism
- Terror attacks on Indians abroad.

3. **Powers:** Search, seizure, arrest without warrant, asset attachment, and maintaining a terror database.

SUCCESSES OF NIA

1. **Individual Arrests:** Arrested Yasin Bhatkal (Indian Mujahideen founder, 2013). Extradition of Tahawwur Rana from the US (2025) for his role in 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Arrest of Abu Jundal (2012) from Saudi Arabia with Interpol support.
2. **Counter-Terror Operations:** Chargesheet filed against Hafiz Saeed and Syed Salahuddin (2019) in a terror funding case. Crackdowns on terror financing networks in J&K, including recent property attachments of Hizbul Mujahideen operatives.
3. **Tackling Naxalism:** Identified and targeted Naxalite commanders behind the Bastar ambush (2013).
4. **North-East Operations:** Exposed transnational conspiracy in Manipur violence (2023) involving Myanmar and Bangladesh-based groups.
5. **Judicial Outcomes:** High conviction rate in terror-related cases through Special NIA Courts

EMERGING THREATS FROM NON-STATE ACTORS

1. **Terrorism & Radicalisation:** Persistent challenges from cross-border terror groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and Hizbul Mujahideen that exploit religious and political sentiments to spread radical ideology.
2. **Terror Financing & Money Laundering:** Channels like hawala networks, narcotics trade, and counterfeit currency continue to fund terror outfits, destabilising India's financial system.
3. **Cyber Terrorism:** Use of hacking, online propaganda, encrypted communication apps, and social media recruitment by groups like ISIS to target India's youth and critical infrastructure.
4. **Lone-Wolf Attacks:** Radicalised individuals, often inspired remotely by global terror outfits, pose unpredictable and high-risk security challenges.
5. **Drone-based Terrorism:** Emerging use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to smuggle arms, ammunition, drugs, and IEDs across borders, particularly in J&K and Punjab.
6. **Transnational Conspiracies:** Cross-border linkages in Kashmir and Northeast India involving terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.
7. **Urban Naxalism:** Ideological radicalisation, covert recruitment, and formation of underground cells in urban centres to destabilise governance and fuel anti-state activities.

MECHANISMS TO TACKLE THREATS

1. **NIA Act, 2008 & Amendment, 2019:** Provided NIA with concurrent jurisdiction, enabling it to investigate scheduled offences across India and even abroad, covering cyber terrorism, human trafficking, and terror financing.
2. **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967:** Empowered the government to ban organisations and designate individuals as terrorists, cutting their funding and networks.

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3. **National Security Council (NSC):** Apex body for formulating and coordinating strategic national security policies.

4. **Multi-Agency Centre (MAC):** A 24/7 intelligence-sharing hub integrating central and state agencies for real-time response.

5. **Joint Task Forces:** Strengthen operational coordination between NIA, State Police, Armed Forces, and CAPFs to counter complex terror networks.

6. **Special NIA Courts:** Facilitate time-bound trials of terrorism-related offences, ensuring swift justice and deterrence.

7. **Asset Seizure & Financial Tracking:** Targeting terror funding channels through property attachments, freezing bank accounts, and monitoring cryptocurrency transactions.

MEASURES TO ENHANCE SECURITY

1. **Strengthening Intelligence Capabilities:** Investment in both HUMINT (Human Intelligence) and TECHINT (Technical Intelligence) for early detection of threats.

2. **Capacity Building:** Setting up modern forensic laboratories, cyber security cells, and specialised counter-terror units, along with advanced training for NIA officers.

3. **Border Security:** Deployment of drones, smart fencing, biometric surveillance, and satellite monitoring along porous borders with Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.

4. **International Cooperation:** Stronger collaboration with Interpol, FATF, UN bodies, and bilateral counter-terror agreements to track fugitives, extradite offenders, and dismantle transnational terror networks.

5. **Legal Reforms:** Tightening anti-terror financing laws, ensuring admissibility of electronic and digital evidence, and updating cyber laws to counter dark web activities.

6. **Community Engagement & Counter-Radicalisation:** Launching awareness campaigns, de-radicalisation programmes, and educational outreach to prevent youth from being lured into extremist ideologies.

7. **Technology Adoption:** Leveraging Artificial Intelligence, Big Data analytics, Blockchain, and Cyber Defence Systems to predict, detect, and neutralise emerging security threats.

CONCLUSION

The NIA has emerged as India's frontline defence against terrorism and non-state actor threats, ensuring national security through robust investigations, high conviction rates, and coordination across agencies. However, with evolving threats like cyber terrorism, drone warfare, and transnational radicalisation, the agency must constantly upgrade its legal, technological, and human resource capabilities. Strengthening international cooperation, modernising infrastructure, and ensuring federal coordination will be key to making the NIA a globally competitive counter-terrorism agency safeguarding India's sovereignty and integrity.

SHIELDING CITIZENS ONLINE: INDIA'S RESPONSE TO CYBER FRAUDS

WHY IN THE NEWS?



India's cyberspace is witnessing a dramatic rise in cyber frauds, making cybersecurity a national priority. With over 86% of households now connected to the internet, the Digital India initiative has significantly expanded access to online services. However, this growth has also widened the attack surface for cybercriminals. Recent data from the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) reveals a surge in cybersecurity incidents — from

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10.29 lakh cases in 2022 to 22.68 lakh in 2024. As of February 28, 2025, cyber frauds worth ₹36.45 lakh have been reported, reflecting both the rising scale of threats and improved reporting mechanisms.

TRACKING THE TRENDS IN CYBER FRAUD

Cyber fraud is rapidly evolving, with scams no longer limited to one technique but spreading across a variety of methods that continuously adapt to new technologies and changing user habits. Identifying and analyzing these trends is essential to develop effective prevention strategies. The massive financial losses seen globally highlight the international scale of these crimes, often driven by organized criminal networks, including so-called "fraud factories" operating in parts of Southeast Asia.



EMERGING CYBER THREATS

Cybercriminals are increasingly using spoofing, AI-powered deepfakes, and phishing scams to trick users by posing as trusted sources or sending deceptive messages. These evolving tactics are making digital frauds more widespread and harder to detect. India's popular payment system, UPI, has been targeted through compromised mobile numbers. To counter this, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) launched the Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI), which flags suspicious numbers as Medium, High, or Very High risk. Meanwhile, illegal online betting apps have emerged as another threat, luring users with fake promises of high returns. These scams have reportedly raked in over ₹400 crores in criminal profits.

INDIA'S CYBERSECURITY FRAMEWORK: STRENGTHENING DIGITAL DEFENCES

As India rapidly digitizes, the government has put in place robust cybersecurity measures to protect its growing online population. With the internet now integral to daily life—powering business, education, banking, and access to public services—the need for a secure digital ecosystem has never been greater. To bolster frontline capabilities, over 1,05,796 police officers have been enrolled on the CyTrain portal, with more than 82,704 training certificates issued, enhancing cybercrime investigation skills across the country.

KEY CYBER LAWS SECURING INDIA'S CYBERSPACE

1. **Information Technology Act, 2000:** The cornerstone of India's cyber law, this Act covers offences like identity theft, impersonation, online fraud, and distribution of obscene content. It also empowers authorities to block harmful websites and apps, helping curb digital financial crimes.

2. **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** These rules enforce accountability on social media platforms, digital services, and online marketplaces. They address the misuse of emerging technologies, including AI, and require prompt removal of unlawful content.

3. **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** This Act mandates the lawful and consent-based handling of personal data, enhancing privacy and security. It imposes strict responsibilities on data handlers to prevent unauthorized access or misuse, marking a significant step toward a safer digital India.

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INDIA'S CYBERSECURITY ECOSYSTEM AT A GLANCE

Initiative / Agency	Role / Objective	Key Highlights
CERT-In	National agency for cyber incident response	- 109 mock drills conducted (till Mar 2025) - 1,438 organizations participated
NCIIPC	Protects critical infrastructure (banking, power, telecom, transport)	- 24/7 monitoring - Sector-specific threat assessments and guidelines
I4C (Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre)	Coordinates cybercrime investigations & builds LEA capacity	- 3,962 Skype IDs & 83,668 WhatsApp accounts blocked - Supports tools, training, and info-sharing
CFCFRMS	Portal for reporting financial cyber frauds	- ₹5,489 crore saved - 17.82 lakh complaints processed
Budget 2025 Allocation	Financial support for cybersecurity initiatives	- ₹782 crore allocated
Cybercrime Portal (cybercrime.gov.in)	Public reporting platform for cybercrimes	- Helpline 1930 for real-time fraud assistance - Focus on crimes against women & children
NM-ICPS	R&D mission promoting cybersecurity and AI innovations	- Supports tool & platform development - Boosts collaboration across sectors
CCPWC Scheme	Focuses on cybercrime prevention against women and children	- ₹132.93 crore funded - 33 labs set up - 24,600+ personnel trained
CCMP (Cyber Crisis Management Plan)	Ensures preparedness for cyberattacks & coordinated recovery	- 205 workshops conducted nationwide

Samanvaya Platform	Links cybercrime investigations across states using analytics	- 12,987 arrests made - 1.5+ lakh criminal linkages - 70,584 investigation assists
Sahyog Portal	Enables fast takedown of unlawful online content	- Centralized removal notices - Unified platform for all authorized agencies

CYBERSECURITY EXERCISES

The Bharat National Cybersecurity Exercise 2025 was held from 21st July to 1st August, reinforcing India's commitment to enhancing cyber resilience. The event gathered over 600 participants, including cybersecurity experts, regulators, and policymakers. The centerpiece was STRATEX, a simulated national cyber breach that tested real-time coordination and decision-making across agencies.

Cybersecurity Spotlight at India Mobile Congress 2025

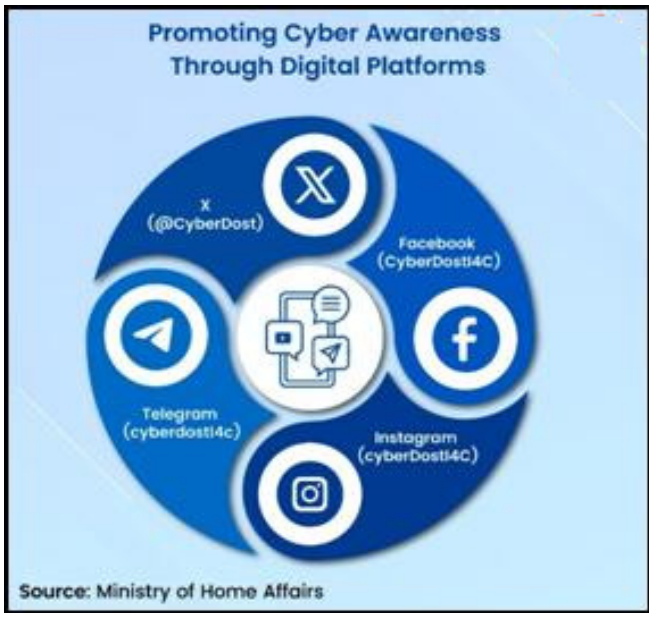
At the upcoming 9th India Mobile Congress (IMC 2025), cybersecurity will be a major focus, underscoring India's efforts to safeguard digital networks and emerging technologies. The event, themed "Innovate to Transform", will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi from October 8–11 at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi. IMC 2025 will host six global summits, including the Cybersecurity Summit and Bharat 6G Symposium, highlighting India's leadership in next-generation digital technologies. Key themes include 6G, cybersecurity, satellite communications, AI, IoT, and telecom manufacturing. The congress is expected to attract over 1.5 lakh visitors, 7,000+ international delegates, and 400+ exhibitors, showcasing more than 1,600 cutting-edge use cases. With 100+ sessions and 800+ speakers, IMC 2025 will serve as a premier platform for global collaboration and innovation.

India's Digital Momentum

As India celebrates its rapid 5G rollout, with 1.2 billion mobile subscribers and 970 million internet users, the focus on building secure, inclusive, and scalable digital ecosystems strengthens the country's standing as a global hub for trusted and transformative digital infrastructure.

FORWARD PATH: CYBER AWARENESS

To strengthen public awareness on cyber-crimes, the Government has taken a multi-platform outreach strategy.



The government has rolled out citizen-focused awareness campaigns via radio, newspapers, and metro announcements to educate the public on cyber fraud prevention. To enhance national vigilance, the National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC), established by CERT-In, monitors existing and emerging cybersecurity threats to provide real-time situational awareness. Public engagement is further strengthened through Cyber Safety and Security Awareness Weeks conducted on the MyGov platform, encouraging active participation. A dedicated handbook for adolescents and students has also been released to promote safe digital practices among youth.

CONCLUSION

India is at the crossroads of digital transformation and cyber threats, where it has become both an iron pillar of progress and a magnet for cyber fraudsters.

Realising the vision of Digital India, the government's multi-layered cyber response team is facilitating fraud prevention and disrupting thousands of scam operations. Advanced forensics, big data analytics, and indigenous tools have bolstered national cyber resilience. Yet, securing India's cyberspace is a shared responsibility where the government and citizens must act together in this combat against cyber frauds.

INDIA NEARS COMPLETE ELIMINATION OF NAXALISM: LWE-AFFECTED DISTRICTS DROP TO 11 AHEAD OF 2026

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Central Government announced a significant decline in Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India, with the number of Naxal-affected districts reduced to 11 in 2025, down from 18 in March 2025 and 126 in 2013. The number of "most-affected districts" has also decreased from six to three within the last seven months.

Home Minister Amit Shah hailed this as a "historic milestone in eliminating Naxalism", stating that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a terror-free India, continued counter-insurgency efforts and people-centric development have significantly weakened the movement. The government aims to completely eradicate Naxalism by March 31, 2026.



DATA ON LWE AND THE RED CORRIDOR

The 'Red Corridor' refers to regions where Left-Wing Extremism has traditionally held sway, covering parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal.

1. In 2010, about 223 districts were LWE-affected; by 2023, this fell to around 70, with only 25 showing significant activity.
2. According to MHA reports, LWE-related violence has declined by nearly 77% since 2010, with a sharp fall in civilian and security force casualties.
3. The worst-affected states remain Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, especially the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh.
4. As per PIB (December 2024), only 38 districts remain affected by LWE, showing substantial improvement.
5. In the last five years, 60 districts have been freed from Maoist influence.
6. Between 2014 and 2023, LWE-related incidents declined by 52%, and deaths by 69%, compared to the decade prior (2005–2014).
7. In 2022, for the first time in three decades, LWE-related casualties fell below 100, marking a major success in India's counter-insurgency strategy.

CAUSES OF LEFT-WING EXTREMISM

The persistence of LWE arises from deep-rooted socio-economic, political, and administrative imbalances:

1. **Economic Disparities:** Widespread poverty, landlessness, and unemployment, especially in tribal belts, have fueled resentment. Resource extraction without fair compensation or rehabilitation has alienated locals.
2. **Political Alienation:** Tribal and marginalized groups often feel excluded from mainstream politics and local governance, driving them toward extremist ideologies.
3. **Administrative Lapses:** Poor governance, corruption, and inadequate law enforcement have created a governance vacuum exploited by Maoists.

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4. **Social Injustice and Human Rights Violations:** Displacement, police excesses, and lack of rehabilitation have fostered anger and mistrust toward the state.
5. **Failure of Land Reforms:** Ineffective redistribution and illegal land acquisition by elites have worsened inequalities.
6. **Exploitation by Middlemen:** Tribal farmers and forest dwellers face chronic exploitation in markets due to absence of institutional support.
7. **Weak Law Enforcement:** Difficult terrain, limited police presence, and logistical challenges hinder effective operations.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES TO ADDRESS LWE

1. Security Measures

- **Operation SAMADHAN:** A holistic strategy combining intelligence-based operations, coordinated action by central and state forces, and fortified police infrastructure.
- **Deployment of CAPFs:** CRPF and elite units like CoBRA battalions play a key role in neutralizing Maoist groups.
- Establishment of 175 new security camps (since 2019) in LWE zones to fill security vacuums.

2. Developmental Initiatives

- **Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS):** Enhances road, telecom, and service connectivity.
- **Aspirational Districts Programme:** Targets socio-economic development in backward districts.
- **Skill Development and Employment:** Expansion of MGNREGA and livelihood programs to create local job opportunities. Construction of 13,620 km of roads and installation of 13,823 telecom towers in affected areas.
- Financial inclusion via 4,903 post offices, 955 bank branches, and 839 ATMs in 30 most affected districts.

3. **Surrender and Rehabilitation:** Comprehensive rehabilitation policies offering financial aid, housing, and vocational training to surrendered cadres. Successful examples in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand highlight the impact of humane reintegration measures.
4. **National Policy and Action Plan (2015):** Integrates security, rights-based development, and good governance to address both the symptoms and root causes of extremism.
5. **Financial and Logistical Control:** Choking of funds through tracking extortion networks and illegal mining revenues used to finance Maoist operations.

CHALLENGES IN LWE ELIMINATION

1. **Geographical Barriers:** Dense forests and poor connectivity provide natural shelters for Maoists.
2. **Local Support:** Deep-rooted socio-economic grievances sustain limited support among marginalized communities.
3. **Security Force Losses:** Over 12,000 lives lost since 2000; IEDs remain a major threat.
4. **Maoist Financing:** Continued extortion and illegal mining sustain insurgent logistics.
5. **Slow Development Implementation:** Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles delay on-ground impact.
6. **Advanced Warfare Tactics:** Use of drones, encrypted messaging, and cyber propaganda complicates counter-operations.
7. **Human Rights Concerns:** Excessive force and wrongful detentions can alienate locals and bolster Maoist narratives.

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RECENT TRENDS IN LWE

1. **Declining Influence:** Sharp fall in Maoist strongholds and violence; many senior leaders neutralized.
2. **Shift in Tactics:** Increased use of IEDs and digital propaganda instead of direct confrontation.
3. **State-Level Successes:** Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have virtually eliminated LWE; Odisha and Jharkhand have achieved major gains.
4. **Attacks on Infrastructure:** Targeting roads, telecom towers, and development projects to resist state penetration.
5. **Rise in Surrenders:** Large-scale desertions due to amnesty schemes and internal Maoist divisions.

FURTHER COURSE OF ACTION

Focus Area	Key Actions
Strengthening Security	• Enhance inter-state coordination and joint intelligence sharing. • Use technology-based surveillance (drones, AI, satellite mapping). • Expand specialized counter-insurgency forces with community engagement components.
Accelerating Development	• Ensure timely and transparent implementation of welfare schemes. • Strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions for local problem-solving and accountability.
Winning Hearts and Minds	• Deepen trust-building through participatory governance and grassroots education and skill programs. • Empower local youth as agents of peace and development.
Rehabilitation and Reintegration	• Improve livelihood support and incentives for surrendered Maoists. • Establish follow-up mechanisms for long-term social integration and monitoring.
Addressing Root Causes	• Guarantee fair compensation and rehabilitation in resource extraction projects. • Promote inclusive governance, protect human rights, and ensure timely justice delivery in tribal regions.

CONCLUSION

Left-Wing Extremism has long been one of India's toughest internal security challenges, but the steady decline in its intensity and spread demonstrates the success of the government's balanced approach combining security, development, and rehabilitation.

While military and policing strategies have curtailed Maoist violence, sustainable peace will depend on inclusive growth, responsive governance, and community empowerment.

A continued focus on addressing structural inequalities, ensuring justice for tribal populations, and using technology for governance and security will be crucial for achieving the ultimate goal — a Naxalism-free India by 2026, leading to lasting peace and prosperity in the heartlands once marred by extremism.

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Prelims question:

Q1. Consider the following statements about the National Investigation Agency (NIA):

1. It was established under the NIA Act, 2008 in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.
2. NIA requires prior approval of State Governments before taking up investigations.
3. The NIA (Amendment) Act, 2019 expanded its jurisdiction to crimes like human trafficking and cyber terrorism.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India:

1. The term "Red Corridor" refers to regions with a high presence of Maoist activities.
2. LWE is primarily concentrated in north-eastern states of India.
3. The number of LWE-affected districts has decreased over the years due to government interventions.

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

Q3. With reference to India's cybersecurity initiatives, consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) works under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. The Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI) is a tool launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
3. CERT-In is the national nodal agency for responding to cybersecurity incidents.
4. The CyTrain platform is designed to train judicial officers in cyber laws.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

1. B	2. B	3. C

Mains Question:

Q1. Indian government has recently strengthened the anti-terrorism laws by amending the Unlawful Activities(Prevention) Act, (UAPA), 1967 and the NIA Act. Analyse the changes in the context of the prevailing security environment while discussing scope and reasons for opposing the UAPA by human rights organisations. (UPSC 2019)

(250 words)

Q2. Discuss the role of security forces and community engagement in countering LWE. How can a balanced approach between force and development be achieved?

(250 words)

Q3. With the rapid digitalisation of services under the Digital India initiative, cyber frauds have emerged as a major threat to citizens, institutions, and national security. Discuss the evolving nature of cyber frauds in India and critically evaluate the government's multi-pronged strategy to tackle them.

(250 words)

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INDIA–USA TIES: FROM NON-ALIGNMENT TO COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

WHY IN THE NEWS?

U.S. President Donald Trump signed a proclamation increasing the H-1B visa processing fee by nearly 60 times to $1,00,000. The White House stated that the move aims to curb abuses that displace American workers and threaten national security. A brief concern was eased when Washington clarified that the revised fee would apply only to new applications from September 21 onwards, not to current visa holders or renewals.

WHAT IS THE H-1B VISA?

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant work visa issued by the United States.



It allows U.S. companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations requiring theoretical or technical expertise (IT, engineering, mathematics, medicine, etc.).

Indian IT professionals are the largest beneficiaries: every year, Indians account for 60–70% of total H-1B approvals.

The visa is valid for 3 years (extendable to 6 years) and often serves as a pathway to permanent residency

WHAT IS THE U.S. DECISION?

The U.S. has decided to impose a one-time $100,000 fee on future H-1B visa applications.

This fee directly increases the cost of hiring Indian professionals by U.S. companies

EVOLUTION OF INDIA–USA TIES

1. **Cold War Era:** India maintained non-alignment, while the US was aligned with Pakistan. Relations were cautious.
2. **Post-1991 Liberalization:** India's economic reforms and globalization created space for stronger US–India trade and investment ties.
3. **2000s Strategic Partnership:** The 2005 Civil Nuclear Deal marked a breakthrough, recognizing India as a responsible nuclear power.
4. **Defence & Security:** India is now a Major Defence Partner (2016), with foundational agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA) strengthening interoperability.
5. **Technology & Innovation:** Collaboration in IT, space (NASA–ISRO), AI, semiconductors, and clean energy has expanded.
6. **Indo-Pacific Convergence:** Both nations share interest in countering China's assertiveness, visible in the Quad grouping.

7. **People-to-People Links:** With 4.5M+ Indian diaspora in the US, remittances, and H-1B professionals, human capital binds ties.

LIKELY IMPACT ON INDIA

1. **Services Exports:** India's IT industry (Infosys, TCS, Wipro, etc.) earns ~$250 billion annually, of which the U.S. accounts for over 60%. Higher visa costs will reduce the competitiveness of Indian firms in the U.S. market.IT services exports may slow down in growth, especially in consulting and outsourcing.

2. **Remittances:** Indians working in the U.S. send back large remittances (over $120 billion annually, the world's largest). Fewer H-1B workers → lower remittance inflows in the medium term.

3. **Employment in India:** If U.S. clients cut outsourcing deals due to costlier Indian labour, Indian IT companies may hire less, affecting youth employment in India's IT sector. Domestic ripple effects: reduced income → lower consumption.

4. **Alternative Markets Challenge:** India is trying to expand IT services in Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia-Pacific, but these are still under development. Dependence on U.S. remains very high in the short run.

5. **Bilateral Trade Tensions:** This decision adds to trade frictions (like tariffs on goods, digital taxation issues). It may strain India–U.S. economic relations, especially as India pushes for more services exports access.

6. **Macroeconomic Impact:** Short-term: Manageable, since firms may absorb costs. Long-term: If restrictions persist, could impact GDP growth, exports, employment, and foreign exchange reserves.

7. **Modi's 2025 U.S. Visit & "Mission 500":** In February 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the U.S. (Feb 12–15). During that visit, India and the U.S. launched "Mission 500", a plan to raise bilateral trade to US $500 billion by 2030. They also discussed energy, defence, and tech cooperation during the bilateral meetings.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

1. **Trade Tensions:** Tariff disputes and new US measures like the proposed $100,000 H-1B fee affect Indian IT exports.

2. **Geopolitical Divergences:** India's energy ties with Russia and cautious stance on global conflicts (Ukraine, West Asia) sometimes contrast with US expectations.

3. **Protectionism:** US tightening of visas and technology transfer restrictions could slow India's services sector.

4. **China Factor:** While both align against China, their approaches differ — US is more military-forward, India prefers strategic autonomy.

WAYS TO MANAGE THE SCENARIO

1. **Institutional Dialogue:** Expand 2+2 Ministerial dialogue and high-level summits to resolve trade and visa frictions.

   Example: 2023 PM Modi–Biden State Visit announcing new semiconductor & defense collaborations.

2. **Trade Rebalancing:** Push for a limited trade deal covering IT services, agriculture, and digital trade rules.

3. **Technology Partnerships:** Deepen collaboration in semiconductors (Micron in Gujarat), critical minerals, and AI governance.

4. **Defence Co-production:** Expand Make in India–Make for World through joint fighter jet engines (GE–HAL deal) and drones.

5. **Energy Cooperation:** Diversify LNG, green hydrogen, and nuclear energy collaboration to reduce supply shocks.

6. **People Mobility:** Negotiate smoother visa and student pathways, ensuring Indian professionals continue contributing to the US economy.

7. **Global South Cooperation:** Align on climate finance, development assistance, and digital public infrastructure to present a united leadership.

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CONCLUSION

India–US ties have matured into a comprehensive global strategic partnership. While short-term challenges like H-1B visa fees or tariff disputes may create friction, sustained dialogue, technology collaboration, and shared Indo-Pacific goals can anchor the relationship in the long run.

INDIA'S AIR DEFENCE MODERNIZATION UNDER MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Indian Army, under Mission Sudarshan Chakra, has issued a tender to procure six AK-630 30mm air defence guns from a state-owned firm. These will be deployed to protect civilian areas and religious sites near the Pakistan border. The move is seen as a significant step towards building India's multi-layered security shield.



WHAT IS MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA?

Mission Sudarshan Chakra is an Indian Army initiative aimed at strengthening air defence preparedness along sensitive border regions, especially against hostile aerial threats from Pakistan. It focuses on creating a multi-layered, modern, and responsive air defence shield to secure both strategic assets and civilian populations in forward areas.

OBJECTIVES OF MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA

1. To modernize India's ground-based air defence system.
2. To safeguard vital civilian areas, religious sites, and military assets near the India–Pakistan border.
3. To integrate new-generation air defence platforms for layered protection against drones, aircraft, and missiles.
4. To build deterrence against cross-border aerial strikes witnessed during past conflicts.

IMPORTANCE OF MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA

1. **National Security Shield:** Ensures protection against air-borne threats like drones, fighter jets, and missiles.
2. **Civilian & Cultural Protection:** Safeguards border villages and religious shrines, often vulnerable to enemy strikes.
3. **Strategic Advantage:** Enhances India's deterrence posture against Pakistan and builds confidence in forward deployments.
4. **Multi-Layered Defence:** Complements other systems like S-400 Triumf, Akash, and Spyder, strengthening India's air defence grid.
5. **Indigenization Push:** Encourages domestic manufacturing and self-reliance in defence. Learning from Past Operations: Draws lessons from conflicts such as Operation Sindoor, where civilian areas were targeted.

FEATURES OF MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA

1. **Procurement of Advanced Systems:** Includes AK-630 30mm air defence guns, missile-based interceptors, and radar systems.
2. **Layered Defence Architecture:** Combines short, medium, and long-range systems to provide 360-degree protection.
3. **Indigenous Defence Industry Participation:** Involves state-owned and private firms under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.
4. **Rapid Deployment Capability:** Designed for quick mobilization and flexible deployment in border zones.

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5. **Protection of Critical Infrastructure:** Emphasis on securing civilian habitations, religious sites, and strategic installations.

6. **Technology Integration:** Use of radar, fire-control systems, and electronic warfare to detect and neutralize threats.

WHY MISSION SUDARSHAN CHAKRA IS IMPORTANT FOR INDIA'S DEFENCE SYSTEM

1. **Strengthens Multi-Layered Security:** Provides 360-degree air defence coverage by integrating guns, missiles, and radars. Acts as the first line of defence against low-flying aircraft, drones, and missiles.

2. **Protects Border Civilian Areas & Religious Sites:** Pakistan has often targeted border villages and cultural/religious sites. The mission ensures safety of civilian populations and heritage structures close to conflict zones.

3. **Counter to New-Age Threats:** Adversaries increasingly use armed drones, precision-guided munitions, and loitering ammunition. Sudarshan Chakra helps India detect and neutralize these low-cost but dangerous threats.

4. **Supports Long-Term Defence Modernization:** Complements advanced systems like S-400, Akash, and Barak-8. Creates a layered defence umbrella from short-range to long-range intercepts.

5. **Boosts Deterrence Against Pakistan:** Enhances India's credibility and deterrence posture along the western front. Reduces Pakistan's ability to carry out cross-border aerial strikes or surprise offensives.

7. **Promotes Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence:** Procurement from state-owned firms and the Indian private sector strengthens the domestic defence ecosystem. Reduces reliance on costly imports and builds self-sufficiency.

8. **Lesson from Past Conflicts:** During incidents like Operation Sindoor, Pakistan targeted civilian areas with aerial firepower. This mission ensures India is better prepared for future contingencies.

CONCLUSION

Mission Sudarshan Chakra represents a strategic leap in India's air defence modernization, blending indigenous capability, layered protection, and rapid deployment. By protecting not just military assets but also civilian populations and cultural heritage sites, it highlights the Army's focus on comprehensive national security. It also aligns with Atmanirbhar Bharat, ensuring reduced import dependence and long-term resilience in defence preparedness. In the evolving landscape of drone warfare and precision strikes, Sudarshan Chakra will serve as a decisive shield and deterrent, strengthening India's defensive as well as strategic posture against external threats.

INDIA, RUSSIA RELATIONS: STRATEGIC DEPTH, CULTURAL CONNECTION, AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

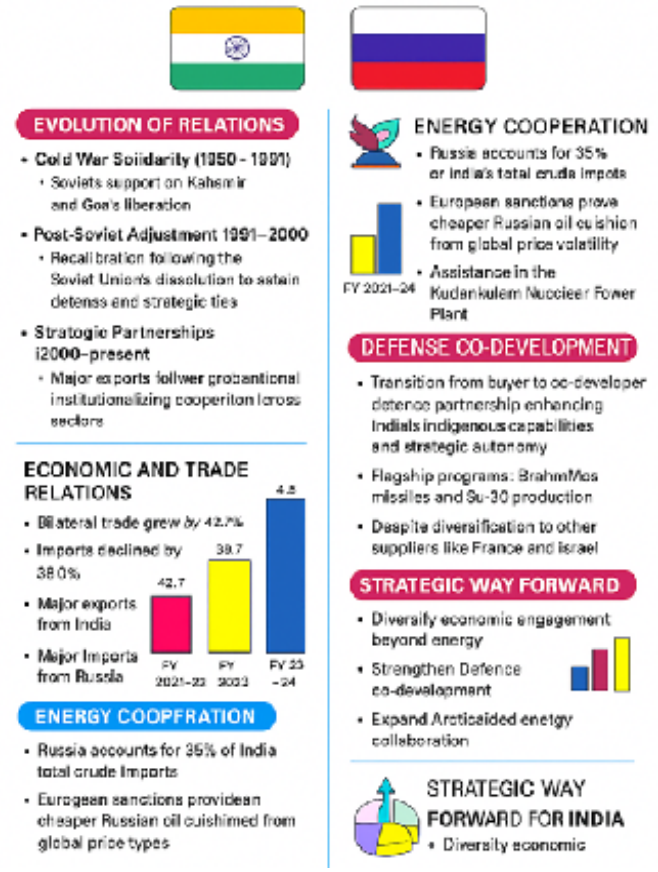
WHY IN THE NEWS?

Speaking at the Valdai Discussion Group in Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his love for Indian films. He noted that Russia likely has the only TV channel in the world that focuses exclusively on Indian cinema. He also highlighted that India and Russia share cultural and humanitarian ties in addition to their political links. This underscores the ongoing soft power aspect of India-Russian relations, often overshadowed by defense and strategic discussions.



AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND RUSSIA

Area of Cooperation	Key Points
Defence & Security	- 60–70% of India's legacy military equipment from Russia - Joint development of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile - Production of AK-203 rifles in Amethi, UP - Annual INDRA military exercises (Army, Navy, Air Force) - INS Chakra nuclear submarine leased under trust-based arrangement
Nuclear Energy	- Russia building Units 3–6 of Kudankulam NPP, Tamil Nadu - Cooperation on nuclear safety, reactor tech, and fuel supply - Collaboration on civil nuclear liability frameworks and long-term fuel agreements
Space Cooperation	- Gaganyaan mission: Roscosmos provides astronaut training & tech support - Historical cooperation since 1970s, including Indian satellites launched on Russian vehicles - Future prospects: satellite navigation, deep space exploration, space situational awareness
Trade & Energy	- Bilateral trade $65 billion in 2023–24 - Russia became India's largest crude oil supplier in 2023 - INSTC corridor to reduce cargo travel time by 40% - Discussions on Rupee-Rouble trade, digital settlements, alternative payments to bypass Western sanctions
Health & Education	- Over 18,000 Indian students, mostly in medicine, enrolled in Russian universities (2024) - Collaboration on COVID-19 via Sputnik V trials, production, and distribution in India - Regular academic exchanges and scholarship programs strengthen people-to-people ties
Cultural & People-to-People Ties	- Bollywood icons like Raj Kapoor remain cultural symbols in Russia - Russia actively celebrates International Yoga Day - Dedicated Indian cinema TV channel airs Bollywood films - Tourism and language learning programs gradually increasing



CONSTRAINTS IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Challenge	Details	Implications
Geopolitical Divergences	The Russia-China-Pakistan axis contrasts with the India-US Quad partnership.	Creates strategic discomfort
Sanctions and Strategic Pressures	Post-Ukraine Western sanctions complicate financial transactions and defense deals.	Leads to payment delays and supply chain issues
Economic Underperformance	Trade is heavily reliant on energy, showing low diversification.	Limits economic depth
Defense Diversification	India is purchasing more from the US, France, and Israel.	Leads to a gradual decline in Russian military supplies
Connectivity Bottlenecks	The INSTC is still underdeveloped with no direct land route.	Creates challenges in trade logistics
Private Sector Absence	There are few joint ventures outside defense.	Results in missed opportunities for innovation

WAY FORWARD

1. **Maintain Strategic Autonomy:** Engage responsibly with all major powers.
2. **Diversify Cooperation:** Explore options in green energy, digital economy, pharmaceuticals, AI, and agriculture.
3. **Cultural Diplomacy as a Bridge:** Use cinema, education, and tourism to strengthen people-to-people ties.
4. **Enhance Connectivity:** Fully operationalize INSTC and explore Arctic shipping routes.
5. **Innovative Financial Channels:** Develop Rupee-Rouble trade, local currency settlements, or digital payment platforms to avoid sanctions.
6. **Capacity Building:** Encourage Indian private sector involvement in Russian markets and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

India-Russia relations are well-established, multidimensional, and increasingly focused on people. Putin's admiration for Indian cinema symbolizes the soft power bonds that complement strategic ties. As global power dynamics shift, both nations must modernize and diversify their partnership. Strategic trust, energy collaboration, and cultural connections can form a solid base to adapt to new geopolitical realities. A practical approach can ensure this historical friendship remains relevant and mutually beneficial in the years to come.

INDIA–AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS ENTER A NEW PHASE: TALIBAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S FIRST VISIT TO NEW DELHI

WHY IN THE NEWS?



Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi is set to hold talks with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and other senior officials in New Delhi. The discussions will focus on political, economic, and trade issues. This marks a significant step as India, which had shut its embassy in Kabul following the 2021 U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power, gradually re-engages with Afghanistan

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through limited diplomatic and humanitarian channels despite not officially recognizing the Taliban government.

BACKGROUND

India and Afghanistan have shared traditionally friendly and culturally rich ties. However, after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Taliban's return to power, India shut down its embassy in Kabul due to security concerns. In 2022, New Delhi cautiously reopened a "technical mission" to facilitate humanitarian aid, medical support, and trade assistance, marking a limited diplomatic return without officially recognizing the Taliban regime.

PURPOSE OF THE VISIT

1. Enhancing bilateral cooperation and political engagement
2. Expanding trade exchanges and exports of Afghan dry fruits
3. Discussing healthcare cooperation and consular services
4. Exploring port facilities and regional connectivity opportunities

India's Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and senior officials will hold discussions with Muttaqi on political, economic, and trade issues.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VISIT

Dimension	Key Points
1. Political and Diplomatic Dimensions	- The visit symbolizes a tentative thaw in India–Taliban relations. - Despite not recognizing the Taliban government, India is engaging pragmatically to protect its regional interests. - The UN Security Council Committee temporarily lifted the travel ban on Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, facilitating the visit. - Indicates the Taliban's increasing outreach to regional powers for legitimacy and recognition.
2. Economic and Trade Dimensions	- Afghanistan aims to diversify trade partners and reduce dependency on Pakistan by accessing Indian markets and ports like Chabahar (Iran). - India continues to provide humanitarian assistance — wheat, medicines, and COVID-19 vaccines. - Enhanced trade in dry fruits, saffron, and minerals can help Afghanistan's struggling economy.
3. Regional and Strategic Dimensions	- The visit follows a regional conference in Moscow attended by India, Pakistan, Iran, China, and Central Asian countries, where participants opposed foreign military bases — indirectly referring to U.S. presence. - India's engagement seeks to maintain regional stability and counter threats such as terrorism and narcotics trafficking. - The dialogue helps India safeguard its developmental projects in Afghanistan like the Salma Dam and Kabul Parliament building.
4. International Context	- Russia is the only country to have officially recognized the Taliban government, while China, Iran, and Pakistan maintain working relations. - India's cautious approach reflects a policy of "functional engagement without formal recognition." - The visit indicates the Taliban's desire for broader diplomatic acceptance beyond its traditional allies.

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CHALLENGES

1. **Security and Terrorism Threats:** India remains wary of anti-India terror groups like LeT and JeM operating from Afghan soil. The risk of Afghanistan again becoming a terror haven threatens regional stability.
2. **Lack of Political Legitimacy:** The absence of an internationally recognized government makes formal agreements and long-term cooperation difficult for India.
3. **Human Rights and Gender Concerns:** Restrictions on women's education, work, and public life under Taliban rule clash with India's democratic and humanitarian values.
4. **Diplomatic Tightrope:** India must balance engagement with the Taliban while maintaining ties with the U.S. and Western allies that oppose official recognition.
5. **Trade and Connectivity Hurdles:** Poor infrastructure, banking barriers, and Pakistan's denial of land access hinder India–Afghanistan trade, making Chabahar Port crucial.
6. **Pakistan's Influence:** Islamabad's deep ties with the Taliban limit India's strategic space and affect its regional outreach efforts.
7. **Uncertain Future of Indian Investments:** India's $3 billion worth of projects—like the Salma Dam and Kabul Parliament—face risks due to Afghanistan's political and security instability.

INDIA'S APPROACH

1. **Pragmatic and Cautious Engagement:** India maintains limited engagement to protect strategic interests without officially recognizing the Taliban government.
2. **Humanitarian Assistance:** Provides food security support and essential supplies to vulnerable Afghan populations.
3. **Health and Education Support:** Offers healthcare aid and educational opportunities, especially for Afghan students in India.
4. **Regional Dialogue Participation:** Takes part in regional forums to promote stability and prevent extremism spillover into India.
5. **People-Centric Focus:** Prioritizes initiatives that directly benefit Afghan civilians, strengthening goodwill and humanitarian credibility.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Gradual Expansion of Engagement:** India can increase economic and humanitarian assistance while maintaining political distance from the Taliban.
2. **Strengthen Regional Cooperation:** Collaborate with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia to promote stability and counter security threats.
3. **UN-Mediated Engagement:** Engage through the United Nations to address governance, human rights, and accountability issues.
4. **Conditional Normalization:** Full diplomatic normalization should depend on the Taliban's adherence to international norms, gender rights, and inclusive governance.
5. **Protect Development Projects:** Safeguard India's investments in infrastructure, education, and energy projects to ensure continuity and long-term impact.
6. **Promote People-Centric Initiatives:** Focus on programs that directly benefit Afghan civilians, such as health, education, and food security, to strengthen goodwill.
7. **Monitor Security Risks:** Maintain vigilance against terrorism and narcotics trafficking, ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a launchpad for anti-India activities.

CONCLUSION

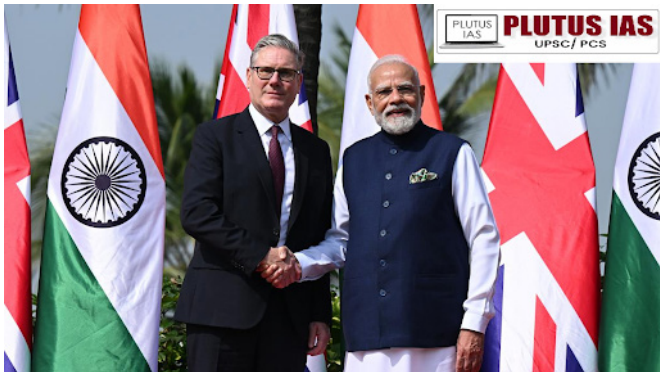
Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India reflects a shift towards pragmatic diplomacy in South Asia. While India remains cautious, the engagement signals its recognition of Afghanistan's geopolitical importance and the need to maintain open channels of communication. For the Taliban, the visit serves as a platform to seek economic cooperation and diplomatic legitimacy in a rapidly evolving regional order.

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INDIA AND UK STRENGTHEN DEFENCE AND TRADE TIES DURING PM KEIR STARMER'S FIRST INDIA VISIT

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Keir Starmer, undertook his first official visit to India after assuming office. During the visit, India and the U.K. strengthened their defense and trade partnerships by signing key agreements under the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) and finalizing a £350 million missile supply contract from the U.K. to India. Mr. Starmer was accompanied by a high-level delegation of entrepreneurs, cultural representatives, and university leaders, highlighting the growing cooperation in economic, defence, education, and cultural sectors between the two nations.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE VISIT

1. Largest UK Trade Mission to India:

- A 125-member delegation, including global companies like Rolls-Royce, British Airways, BT, Diageo, and London
- Stock Exchange Group, accompanied PM Starmer on a two-day visit to Mumbai.

2. Building on the UK–India Trade Deal (CETA):

- The July 2025 CETA, hailed as the best deal ever secured by any country with India, reduces India's average tariffs on UK goods from 15% to 3% and simplifies customs procedures to promote faster trade.

3. Sectoral Gains:

- Whisky tariffs cut from 150% to 75% immediately, to further reduce to 40% within 10 years.
- Soft drinks, cosmetics, cars, and medical devices to see easier market access.
- SMEs gain from digital trade facilitation and dedicated support channels.

4. Economic Impact:

- Expected to raise UK GDP by £4.8 billion per year and UK exports to India by nearly 60%.
- Projected to add £2.2 billion to UK wages and create jobs through increased exports.

5. Defence and Connectivity:

- Alongside trade, a £350 million defence deal for missile supply was signed, complementing cooperation in maritime security and defence technology.
- British Airways also announced plans to launch a third daily flight between Delhi and London Heathrow by 2026, signaling deepening connectivity.

6. Leadership Remarks:

- PM Keir Starmer described the trade deal as "a launchpad for growth", highlighting India's role as a key partner in global economic expansion.
- UK Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle emphasized that the deal "places British businesses at the front of the queue to access India's booming market."

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UK FOR INDIA

1. **Strategic Partner:** As a P5 and G7 member, the UK supports India's global aspirations and partnership in international diplomacy.
2. **Investment & Trade Hub:** The UK is a major investor in India's economy, particularly in financial services, green energy, and technology sectors.

3. **Technology & Research Collaboration:** India benefits from R&D partnerships in advanced technologies, pharmaceuticals, and higher education institutions.

4. **Education & Workforce Opportunities:** The UK remains a preferred destination for Indian students and skilled professionals.

5. **Gateway to Europe and Global Finance:** Despite Brexit, London continues to serve as a global financial hub and gateway for Indian businesses expanding into Europe.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA FOR THE UK

1. **Economic Growth Partner:** India is among the world's fastest-growing major economies, offering vast investment and trade opportunities.

2. **Strategic Indo-Pacific Partner:** India's presence enhances the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy, countering security challenges and ensuring maritime stability.

3. **Technology & Innovation Hub:** India's expanding digital and startup ecosystem complements the UK's innovation-driven economy.

4. **Skilled Human Resource:** Indian professionals play a key role in the UK's IT, healthcare, and financial sectors, addressing workforce shortages.

5. **Cultural & Diaspora Bridge:** The Indian diaspora strengthens bilateral understanding and serves as a cultural bridge connecting both nations.

WAY FORWARD

1. Fast-track the India–UK FTA to enhance trade, investment, and market access.

2. Expand cooperation in emerging technologies such as AI, space, quantum computing, and digital security.

3. Deepen defence partnerships through joint R&D, co-production, and military training programs.

4. Enhance climate collaboration via green hydrogen, renewable energy, and climate finance initiatives.

5. Ease visa and migration policies to promote greater mobility of students and professionals.

6. Address diaspora and political sensitivities (e.g., Khalistani extremism) through constructive engagement.

7. Align Indo-Pacific strategies to strengthen maritime and regional security cooperation.

CONCLUSION

PM Keir Starmer's 2025 visit to India marks a new chapter in India–U.K. relations, transforming the partnership from negotiations to actionable cooperation under the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). With enhanced trade, defence, and technological engagement, the partnership aligns with the India–U.K. Roadmap 2030 vision. Both democracies now stand poised to build a modern, growth-driven, and strategic alliance, shaping a stronger global partnership anchored in mutual prosperity, innovation, and shared democratic values.

ISRAEL–HAMAS PEACE DEAL: A NEW HOPE FOR LASTING PEACE AND RECONSTRUCTION IN GAZA

WHY IN THE NEWS?



The United Kingdom has announced it will host an international summit on Gaza's recovery and reconstruction as part of global efforts to secure lasting peace after years of conflict. The move comes ahead of a multi-nation peace conference in Egypt's Sharm el-Sheik, attended by UK Prime

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Minister Keir Starmer and former U.S. President Donald Trump, to finalize a truce and plan Gaza's rebuilding. The UK has also redirected £20 million in aid toward water, sanitation, and hygiene projects in Gaza, to be delivered through UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT

The Israel–Hamas war, which erupted on October 7, 2023, following Hamas's large-scale attacks on Israeli territory, has led to immense destruction and humanitarian suffering in Gaza. Israel's military response resulted in widespread casualties, displacement, and infrastructure collapse.

Over the past two years, several international attempts — including those by Egypt, Qatar, and the United Nations — failed to achieve a lasting ceasefire, largely due to disagreements over hostages, border control, and political authority in Gaza.

DETAILS OF THE PEACE PLAN

1. **Ceasefire:** A temporary halt in hostilities between Israel and Hamas to create conditions for humanitarian relief and negotiations.
2. **Hostage–Prisoner Exchange:**

   Hamas will release 20 living Israeli hostages.

   Israel will free 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, including 250 serving life sentences and 1,700 others detained since October 2023.

   The exchange will take place within 72 hours of the agreement's activation.
3. **Humanitarian Access:** The truce will allow the entry of aid, water, and medical supplies into Gaza through international agencies such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the Norwegian Refugee Council.
4. **Next Phases:** The deal is designed as a multi-phase peace process, with future stages expected to address Gaza's reconstruction, governance reforms, and long-term regional security guarantees.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION AND ROLE OF KEY PLAYERS

1. **United States:** Led diplomatic efforts; President Trump called the truce a "decisive step toward permanent peace."
2. **Egypt:** Hosted preparatory meetings in Sharm el-Sheikh; facilitated dialogue between Israel, Hamas, and global leaders.
3. **United Kingdom:** Announced a West Sussex summit for Gaza's recovery; reaffirmed global commitment to reconstruction.
4. **Qatar:** Supported humanitarian engagement and diplomatic coordination with both sides.
5. **Over 20 Countries:** Participated in peace talks to ensure a multilateral approach to the truce.
6. **International Financial Institutions:** Included to aid reconstruction, governance reforms, and funding.
7. **NGOs and UN Agencies:** Coordinated humanitarian assistance and ensured effective aid delivery.

UK'S HUMANITARIAN AND RECONSTRUCTION SUPPORT

The UK government has pledged £20 million in redirected aid to focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in Gaza. This assistance will be channelled through UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

In addition, the UK Foreign Office's Wilton Park agency will host a three-day conference with participation from the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Germany, Italy, and major financial institutions such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to discuss Gaza's long-term reconstruction strategy.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGREEMENT

1. **Humanitarian Relief:** The ceasefire will enable the flow of critical supplies and medical assistance to millions of civilians in Gaza who have been living under siege conditions.

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2. **Confidence-Building Measure:** The exchange of hostages and prisoners is expected to build trust and open the door for sustained peace negotiations.

3. **Diplomatic Breakthrough:** After months of failed ceasefire attempts, this deal marks the first concrete step toward ending the Gaza war.

4. **Regional Stability:** A truce in Gaza could ease tensions in the broader Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, Syria, and the Red Sea region, where the conflict has had spillover effects.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

1. **Fragile Trust:** Deep-seated mistrust between Israel and Hamas may threaten the sustainability of the truce.

2. **Internal Politics:** Both sides face domestic political pressures that may limit flexibility in further negotiations.

3. **Exclusion of Hamas from Governance Talks:** The UK and other Western nations have emphasised "no role for Hamas" in Gaza's reconstruction, which could complicate implementation on the ground.

4. **Reconstruction Funding:** Rebuilding Gaza will require substantial financial commitments and transparent governance, which remain uncertain.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Empower the Palestinian Authority:** Strengthen Gaza's governance and institutional capacity to effectively manage reconstruction, public services, and security.

2. **Ensure Humanitarian Access:** Facilitate timely delivery of food, water, medical aid, and sanitation services while protecting civilians under international humanitarian law.

3. **Promote Inclusive Dialogue:** Engage regional powers, international organizations, and local stakeholders to foster political consensus and prevent marginalization of key actors.

4. **Monitor Ceasefire Compliance:** Establish independent verification mechanisms to ensure adherence to the truce and build confidence between parties.

5. **Oversee Aid Distribution:** Implement transparent systems to manage funds, resources, and reconstruction projects efficiently, preventing diversion or misuse.

6. **Prevent Relapse into Violence:** Address security, political, and social risks proactively through coordinated diplomacy, conflict-resolution initiatives, and early warning mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The Israel–Hamas peace deal represents a historic opportunity to end one of the most devastating conflicts of recent years. While the road ahead remains uncertain, the combined efforts of global leaders — particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and Egypt — reflect a renewed international determination to achieve a lasting peace and rebuild Gaza. For the millions affected, this moment offers a glimmer of hope that diplomacy can triumph over destruction.

INDIA HOSTS UN TROOP CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES' CHIEFS' CONCLAVE IN NEW DELHI

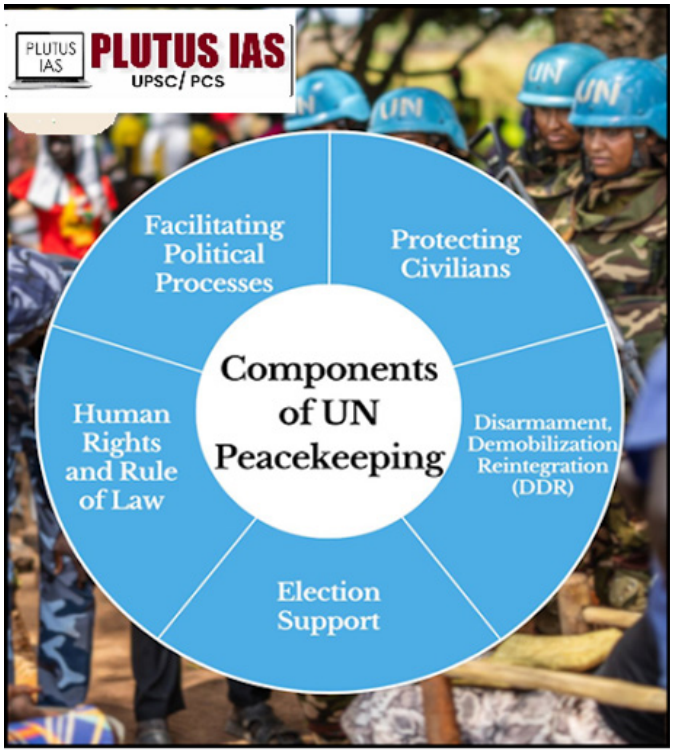
WHY IN THE NEWS?

India as Host Nation: India is hosting the United Nations Troop Contributing Countries' Chiefs' Conclave in New Delhi, reaffirming its leading role in global UN peacekeeping operations.

WHAT IS UN PEACEKEEPING?

UN peacekeeping is a global initiative established by the United Nations to maintain peace and

security in conflict-affected areas. Peacekeepers, often called "Blue Helmets," consist of military, police, and civilian personnel who help to monitor ceasefires, protect civilians, disarm combatants, assist in elections, and rebuild institutions. The operations are guided by the Security Council and are designed to support nations transitioning from conflict to peace.



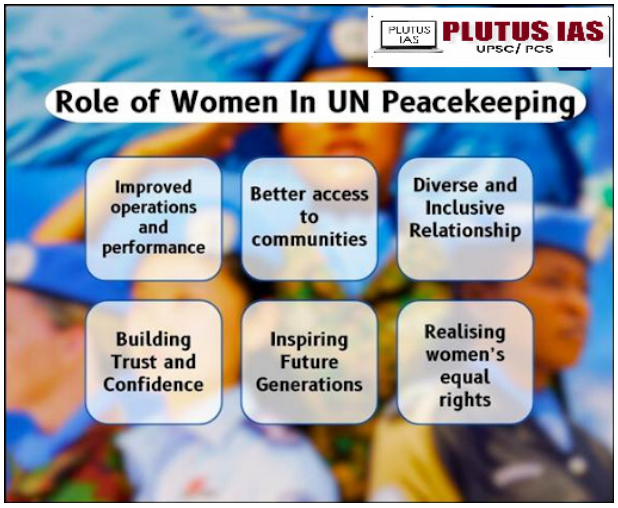
SUCCESS STORIES OF UN PEACEKEEPING



1. **Namibia (UNTAG, 1989–1990):** Facilitated the country's peaceful transition to independence and organized free elections.
2. **Mozambique (ONUMOZ, 1992–1994):** Oversaw the end of civil war, disarmament, and peaceful elections.
3. **Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL, 1999–2005):** Disarmed over 75,000 fighters and restored democratic governance.
4. **Liberia (UNMIL, 2003–2018):** Ensured national stability, conducted elections, and supported post-war reconstruction.
5. **Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI, 2004–2017):** Facilitated reconciliation, elections, and security sector reform after years of civil strife.

INDIA'S ROLE IN UN PEACEKEEPING: FIVE MAJOR OPERATIONS

1. **Congo (ONUC, 1960–1964):** One of India's earliest and most significant missions, maintaining peace amid political turmoil.
2. **Somalia (UNOSOM, 1993–1994):** Focused on humanitarian relief and maintaining local security amidst violent unrest.



3. **Liberia (UNMIL, 2007–2018):** Deployed the first all-women police unit, ensuring safety and empowering local communities.
4. **South Sudan (UNMISS, since 2011):** Provided medical, engineering, and infantry units for civilian protection and infrastructure recovery.

5. **Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO, since 1999):** Indian troops have played a critical role in stabilizing the region and protecting vulnerable populations.

INDIA'S PARTICIPATION IN UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

Mission Name	Location	Year	India's Contribution
UN Assistance Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	2014–Present	Formed Police Units (FPUs) and military observers
UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	2012–Present	Infantry battalion, medical personnel, engineering units
UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2010–Present	Infantry battalions, medical units, support staff
UN Mission in the Golan Heights (UNDOF)	Golan Heights	2006–Present	Logistics Battalion (188 personnel) for logistics security
UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS/UNMISS)	Sudan / South Sudan	2005–Present	Battalion groups, engineer company, signal company, hospitals, MILOBs, and staff officers
UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC/MONUSCO)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2005–Present	Infantry brigade group (three battalions including RDB), hospital, MILOBs, SOs, and two FPUs
UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	1998–Present	Infantry battalion group (762 personnel and 18 staff officers)

SUGGESTIONS BY COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS



1. **Define Realistic and Focused Mandates:** Align missions with clear, achievable goals.
2. **Ensure Adequate Funding and Logistics:** Reliable and timely resource allocation is essential.
3. **Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms:** Enforce professional discipline and address misconduct decisively.
4. **Promote Local Ownership:** Integrate community actors to ensure sustainable peacebuilding.
5. **Enhance Training and Technological Support:** Modernize peacekeeping forces for emerging challenges.
6. **Improve Coordination with Regional Organizations:** Strengthen partnerships with African Union, EU, and regional blocs for effective deployment.

CONCLUSION

UN peacekeeping remains an indispensable instrument for maintaining global peace and stability. Despite facing operational, financial, and ethical challenges, it continues to save lives and foster reconciliation. Integrating reforms that improve accountability, responsiveness, and cooperation can fortify its legitimacy. India's steadfast contribution and leadership reflect its longstanding commitment to global peace. Strengthening collective efforts will ensure that UN peacekeeping continues to be a beacon of hope in conflict-torn regions.

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INDIA–ASEAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

WHY IN NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will participate virtually in the upcoming 47th ASEAN Summit (October 2025), citing ongoing Deepavali celebrations for not travelling to Malaysia. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will represent India at the East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The MEA reiterated that "ASEAN is a key pillar of India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision."



EVOLUTION OF INDIA–ASEAN RELATIONS

Phase	Period	Highlights
Initial Engagement	1967–1990s	Limited contact due to Cold War politics; India's economic policies and ASEAN's Western tilt kept ties lukewarm.
Look East Policy	1992 onwards	India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner (1992), Full Dialogue Partner (1995), and Summit-level Partner (2002).
Strategic Deepening	2010–2017	2012: 20 years of Dialogue Partnership & 10 years of Summit-level partnership → ASEAN–India Strategic Partnership.
Act East Policy Era	2014–present	Focus shifted from "Look" to "Act" East—emphasizing connectivity, commerce, culture, and capacity-building in the Indo-Pacific.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ASEAN FOR INDIA

1. Economic Gateway to East Asia

- ASEAN is India's 4th largest trading partner.
- India–ASEAN trade stood at USD 131.6 billion (2023–24), accounting for ~11% of India's total trade.
- Investment flows: ASEAN accounts for nearly 18% of FDI inflows into India (2023).

2. Strategic & Geopolitical Importance

- ASEAN lies at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, connecting Indian and Pacific Oceans—vital for India's maritime strategy.
- Forums like East Asia Summit, ADMM+, and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) enable India's strategic outreach.
- Shared goal of maintaining free, open, and rules-based maritime order vis-à-vis China's assertiveness in the South China Sea.

3. Connectivity & Cultural Links

a. Projects:

- India–Myanmar–Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway (to be extended to Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam).
- Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project connecting India's northeast with Myanmar ports.

b. Cultural diplomacy: Buddhism, Ramayana, and ancient maritime trade form strong civilizational ties.

4. People-to-People Contact

- **Tourism:** Over 2 million people travel annually between India and ASEAN.
- Education & skill exchange through ASEAN–India Network of Think Tanks, ASEAN–India Students Exchange Programme, etc.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

1. **Trade Imbalance –** India faces a trade deficit of nearly USD 40 billion with ASEAN due to

import-heavy trade, especially in electronics and machinery.

2. **Connectivity Delays –** Slow implementation of IMT Highway and Kaladan project due to funding, land acquisition, and insurgency issues in Myanmar.

3. **Limited Integration in Supply Chains –** India's exit from RCEP (2020) limited its access to regional value chains. ASEAN's deeper economic integration with China and Japan (ASEAN plus Three) marginalizes India's role.

4. **Maritime and Security Complexities –** Divergent ASEAN responses to South China Sea tensions and China's Belt and Road Initiative make it difficult for India to secure a unified ASEAN stance.

5. **Political Transitions in the Region –** Myanmar's instability and differing political regimes within ASEAN hinder consistent engagement.

WAY FORWARD

1. Recalibrate Trade Ties

- Review ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) to address tariff barriers and boost export competitiveness.
- Encourage Indian MSMEs to integrate with ASEAN's manufacturing networks.

2. Accelerate Connectivity Corridors

- Fast-track completion of IMT Highway and operationalize Kaladan project to link Northeast India with Southeast Asia.
- Expand digital connectivity via fintech, cybersecurity, and e-commerce partnerships.

3. Enhance Strategic Cooperation

- Strengthen joint maritime patrols, intelligence sharing, and blue economy initiatives under the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
- Align India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) with AOIP to ensure synergy.

4. Boost Cultural and Academic Diplomacy

- Establish an ASEAN–India Cultural Corridor highlighting Buddhist heritage routes.
- Promote student exchanges and joint research on sustainable development and green technologies.

5. Collaborate on Global Challenges

- Climate action, pandemic preparedness, supply chain resilience, and AI ethics can become new pillars of cooperation.

CONCLUSION

India–ASEAN ties have evolved from economic pragmatism to strategic partnership—anchored in shared values of peace, prosperity, and inclusivity. As ASEAN celebrates over five decades of integration and India marks three decades of engagement, the relationship must move from "dialogue" to "delivery."

By deepening connectivity, recalibrating trade, and aligning Indo-Pacific visions, India and ASEAN can together shape a multipolar, rule-based Asian order that ensures growth and stability for the entire region.

Prelims question:

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the H-1B visa:

1. It is a non-immigrant visa allowing foreign workers in specialty occupations.
2. Indians account for nearly 60–70% of H-1B visa approvals annually.
3. The visa is valid for 10 years.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only (d) All of the above

Q2. With reference to Mission Sudarshan Chakra, consider the following statements:

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1. It is an Indian Army initiative aimed at creating a multi-layered air defence shield along sensitive border areas.
2. The mission involves the procurement of AK-630 30mm air defence guns from a state-owned firm.
3. It focuses only on the protection of military assets, excluding civilian areas and cultural sites.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. India and Russia conduct the INDRA military exercise.
2. Russia is India's largest trading partner in Asia.
3. India and Russia jointly developed the BrahMos missile system.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Q4. Consider the following countries :

1. Azerbaijan 2. Kyrgyzstan
3. Tajikistan 4. Turkmenistan
5. Uzbekistan

Which of the above have borders with Afghanistan

A. 1, 2 and 5 only B. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
C. 3, 4 and 5 only D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q5. With reference to India-UK relations, consider the following statements:

1. India and the UK are negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to enhance bilateral trade.
2. The UK-India Technology Security Initiative (TSI) focuses on emerging technologies like AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.
3. The Young Professionals Scheme between India and the UK allows the free movement of workers without restrictions.

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

A. Only one B. Only two
C. All three D. None

Q6. With reference to the recent international peace efforts in Gaza, consider the following statements:

1. The United Kingdom will host an international summit on Gaza's recovery and reconstruction in West Sussex.
2. The first phase of the peace plan includes a temporary ceasefire and an exchange of hostages and prisoners between Israel and Hamas.
3. The United Kingdom's aid for Gaza will be delivered through agencies such as UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

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

Q7. With reference to India–ASEAN relations, consider the following statements:

1. India became a full dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1995.
2. The India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway aims to connect India's Northeast with Singapore.
3. The ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) was signed in 2009.

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Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 3 only (b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q8. Which of the following statements about India's participation in UN Peacekeeping is/ are correct?

1. India was among the first countries to contribute troops to UN peacekeeping operations.
2. India deployed the world's first all-women police unit in Liberia under UN peacekeeping.
3. India currently contributes no personnel to UN peacekeeping missions.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

1. B	2. A	3. B	4. C
5. A	6. D	7. A	8. A

Mains Question:

Q1. Discuss the evolution of India–USA ties from the Cold War era to the present. Highlight major milestones in trade, defence, technology, and strategic partnerships.

(250 words)

Q2. What is the significance of Indo-US defence deals over Indo-Russian defence deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region. (UPSC 2020)

(250 words)

Q3. "India-Russia ties have stood the test of time, but new geopolitical realities demand recalibration." Discuss. (250 words)

Q4. "Discuss the significance of the recent visit of Afghanistan's Taliban Foreign Minister to India. How does it reflect India's evolving approach towards Afghanistan and the broader regional dynamics in South Asia?"

(250 words)

Q5. Examine the significance of India-UK bilateral relations in the context of trade, strategic partnerships, and technological cooperation. What are the key challenges, and how can both countries strengthen their engagement? (250 words)

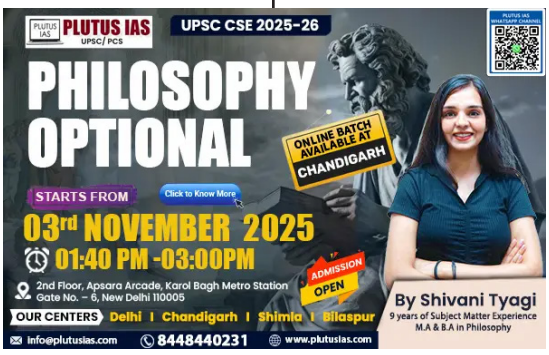
Q6. "The Israel–Hamas peace deal marks a crucial step toward ending one of the most protracted conflicts in recent history." Discuss the significance of the agreement, the role of international mediation, and the challenges that lie ahead.

(250 words)

Q7. Discuss the evolution and significance of India–ASEAN relations in the context of India's Act East Policy. (250 words)

Q8. Discuss India's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations and highlight the challenges and reforms needed to strengthen global peacekeeping efforts.

(250 words)



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NAVYA – SKILLING YOUNG WOMEN FOR INDIA'S VIKSIT BHARAT@2047 VISION

WHY IN THE NEWS?

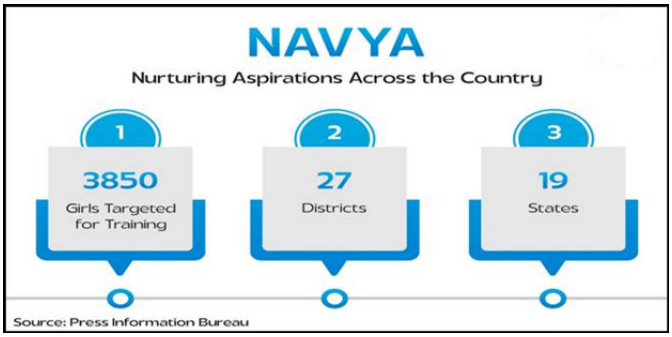
The Government of India launched the NAVYA (Nurturing Aspirations through Vocational Training for Young Adolescent Girls) initiative on June 24, 2025, in Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh. It is a joint effort of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) to provide skill training to adolescent girls (16–18 years, minimum Class X pass), especially in underserved and tribal regions. The programme will cover 3,850 girls, equipping them with vocational skills for emerging sectors along with training in personal hygiene, communication, workplace safety, financial literacy, and fostering confidence, employability, and entrepreneurship.

KEY OBJECTIVES

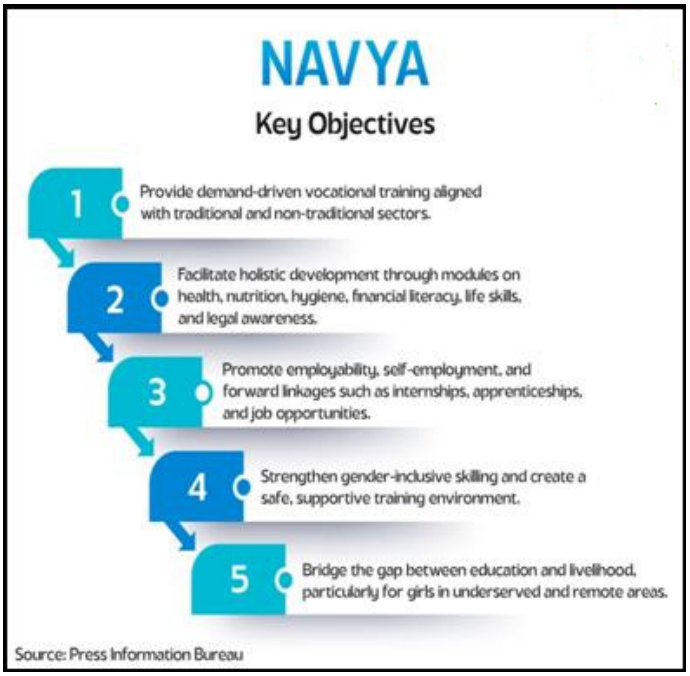
"Navya will be a milestone in making adolescent girls self-reliant. Our shared commitment is to equip girls with skills that enable them to become independent and empowered citizens. This initiative will help them live a life of dignity and confidence." ---- (Mrs. Savitri Thakur, Minister of State for Women and Child Development)

The NAVYA initiative imparts technical skills to young women, thereby enabling them to develop the confidence and resilience needed to thrive in competitive job markets or pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Through this holistic approach, NAVYA ensures that participants are well-prepared to achieve socio-economic independence and contribute meaningfully to their communities. The initiative ensures access to standardised, industry-aligned training and certifications, fostering employability.

Implemented as a pilot across 27 Aspirational and North-Eastern districts in 19 states, and with a target to train 3,850 girls under PMKVY 4.0 the NAVYA initiative aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.



SOME OF THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE INITIATIVE INCLUDE:



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1. **Provide demand-driven vocational training aligned with traditional and non-traditional sectors:** NAVYA offers tailored training in fields like technology, healthcare, and crafts, blending traditional skills with modern roles like AI and digital marketing. Courses are designed to meet current industry demands, ensuring relevance and employability.

2. **Facilitate holistic development through modules on health, nutrition, hygiene, financial literacy, life skills, and legal awareness:** NAVYA integrates comprehensive training modules to empower adolescent girls with essential life skills. These include health and nutrition education, financial literacy for economic independence, and legal awareness to navigate rights and protections.

3. **Promote employability, self-employment, and forward linkages such as internships, apprenticeships, and job opportunities:** The program connects trainees to job markets through internships and apprenticeships in high-demand sectors. It also fosters entrepreneurship by providing resources and mentorship for self-employment ventures.

4. **Strengthen gender-inclusive skilling and create a safe, supportive training environment:** The initiative prioritises safe, female-friendly training spaces with stipends and flexible schedules. It promotes gender equity by encouraging girls to enter non-traditional, fields like cybersecurity.



- **Bridge the gap between education and livelihood, particularly for girls in underserved and remote areas:** Targeting girls in Aspirational Districts and North-Eastern States, NAVYA links education to sustainable livelihoods. It provides certifications and job placements to overcome socio-economic barriers in remote regions.

- A specially designed 7-hour supplementary training module further enhances the program's impact, focusing on four critical areas:

- **Interpersonal Skills:** Covering hygiene, self-presentation, and conflict management to build professional demeanour;

States and districts covered under NAVYA Initiative

States Name	Districts Name
Arunachal Pradesh	East Siang
Andhra Pradesh	Parvathipuram Manyam
Assam	Barpeta
Bihar	Gaya
Chhattisgarh	Mahasamund, Bastar
Gujarat	Dahod, Narmada
Haryana	Nuh
Himachal Pradesh	Chamba
Jammu And Kashmir	Baramulla
Jharkhand	Giridih, Palamu, West Singhbhum
Karnataka	Raichur
Madhya Pradesh	Barwani, Vidisha
Maharashtra	Gadchiroli, Nandurbar
Odisha	Dhenkanal, Rayagada
Punjab	Moga
Rajasthan	Dholpur
Tamil Nadu	Virudhunagar
Uttar Pradesh	Fatehpur, Sonabhadra
Uttarakhand	Haridwar

Source: Press Informationa Bureau

- **Communication Skills:** Emphasising active listening and effective communication to enhance workplace interactions;

- **Workplace Safety:** Providing knowledge of the POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) and POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) laws to ensure a safe working environment;

- **Financial Literacy:** Teaching budgeting, earnings management, and basic financial concepts to promote economic empowerment.

- This comprehensive framework ensures that NAVYA participants are equipped with both technical expertise and essential life skills, positioning them as catalysts in India's inclusive growth story.

Currently, the initiative is being piloted in 9 districts across 9 states — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh. These districts have been identified as 'aspirational' by NITI Aayog.

CONCLUSION

The NAVYA initiative represents a transformative step toward empowering adolescent girls in India's Aspirational and North-Eastern districts. Through the integration of vocational training under PMKVY 4.0 with holistic life skills development, NAVYA empowers young women with the tools to attain socio-economic independence and actively contribute to India's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047. Through its focus on emerging fields like digital marketing and cybersecurity, alongside essential skills such as financial literacy and workplace safety, the initiative bridges the gap between education and sustainable livelihoods. The pilot implementation across nine states demonstrates its potential to create inclusive, gender-equitable opportunities, fostering resilience and entrepreneurial spirit among participants. As NAVYA continues to grow, it serves as a symbol of hope, empowering young girls to become confident, skilled, and self-reliant drivers of India's inclusive development.

RISE IN INDIA'S FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION MAKE IT GOOD HEADING

WHY IN THE NEWS?

India has achieved a major milestone in women's economic engagement, with its female labour force participation rate rising sharply from 23% in 2017–18 to around 42% in 2023–24. This significant growth has also earned India global recognition, as World Bank data confirms the country has recorded the highest increase in women's workforce participation among all BRICS nations over the past decade.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

1. **Record Growth in Female Labour Force Participation (LFPR):** India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) has nearly doubled from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24, as per the Ministry of Labour and Employment, marking a transformative inclusion of women in the workforce.
2. **BRICS Comparative Surge:** According to the World Bank (2025), India recorded the most significant rise among BRICS nations, with a 23% increase over the last decade, while Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa either stagnated or showed marginal gains.

KEY DRIVERS AND PERSISTENT CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Part 1: Key Drivers of Rising Female Workforce Participation

Driver	Aim/Purpose	Example & Data
1. Skill Development Initiatives	Equip women with market-relevant and digital skills.	PMKVY – 45% of trainees are women; NAVYA trains girls (16–18) in emerging sectors like cybersecurity.
2. Financial Inclusion	Promote women-led entrepreneurship and access to credit.	PMMY – 68% of beneficiaries are women; Stand-Up India – 2.01 lakh women accounts (2025).
3. Maternity and Workplace Support Laws	Create family-friendly workplaces and ensure job retention.	Maternity Benefit Act (Amended 2017) provides 26 weeks leave, the second highest in BRICS.

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4. Safety and Redressal Mechanisms	Ensure secure and harassment-free work environments.	POSH Act (2013) & SHe-Box Portal ensure grievance redressal for working women.
5. Government Employment and Policy Reforms	Encourage women's participation in public sector jobs.	Fee exemptions in competitive exams; 730 days Child Care Leave for govt employees.
6. Digital and Informal Sector Opportunities	Enable flexible work modes through the digital economy.	Rise in gig and platform jobs – women form 36% of the e-commerce delivery and online teaching workforce.
7. Social and Mission-Based Empowerment	Combine safety, training, and livelihood under one umbrella.	Mission Shakti (2024) integrates safety (Sambal) & empowerment (Samarthya) programmes.

Part 2: Persistent Issues and Challenges

Issue	Description	Example / Data / Group Affected
1. Gender Wage Gap	Women earn significantly less than men in formal jobs.	Women earn 30–35% less; India ranks 120th globally in gender pay equity.
2. Informal Sector Vulnerability	Women are concentrated in unprotected, low-security jobs.	85% of working women are in informal jobs (e.g., domestic workers, agricultural laborers).
3. Rural-Urban Divide	Urban workforce participation is lower due to specific structural barriers.	Urban female LFPR is 25%, while rural is 45%.
4. Occupational Segregation	Women are relegated to a narrow range of low-paying sectors.	Concentrated in textiles, care economy, teaching, and health aides.
5. Social and Cultural Norms	Gendered expectations often force women to withdraw from work.	NCRB data: 60% of women drop jobs post-marriage.
6. Lack of Childcare Infrastructure	Limited access to crèche facilities for working mothers.	Only 30% of organized sector workplaces have crèche facilities.
7. Technological and STEM Exclusion	Low representation in high-growth, technical, and leadership roles.	Only 14% of R&D roles and 18% of startup founders are women.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACHIEVE 50% FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

	Committee/Commission	Major Recommendation
1.	NITI Aayog (Women@Work Framework 2047)	Achieve 50% workforce participation through sectoral gender parity and support for women-led startups.
2.	Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women (2024)	Enforce equal pay audits and mandatory corporate gender reporting.
3.	Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE)	Launch Skill HER India initiative targeting rural women in digital and green sectors.
4.	Ministry of Labour & Employment (2025 Draft Policy)	Expand maternity & paternity leave parity and formalize gig work protections.
5.	BRICS Women's Development Forum (2025)	Promote cross-country exchange on gender-balanced economic policies.

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6.	Economic Advisory Council to PM (EAC-PM)	Incentivize private firms achieving >40% female hiring through tax benefits.
7.	16th Finance Commission (Proposed 2025)	Recommend Gender-Responsive Budgeting allocations to states achieving LFPR milestones.

CONCLUSION

India's surge in women's labor participation is not just a statistic—it's a social revolution redefining growth. From rural artisans to tech entrepreneurs, women are the new engines of India's economic transformation. The rise from 23% to 42% LFPR demonstrates that policy, opportunity, and mindset shifts can unlock half of India's untapped human capital. As India moves towards Viksit Bharat@2047, ensuring 50% workforce participation by women will be pivotal. Empowered, educated, and employed women are not only the heart of inclusive growth but also the architects of a more equitable and globally competitive India.

Prelims question:

Q1. With reference to the NAVYA initiative recently launched by the Government of India, consider the following statements:

1. It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
2. It is implemented under PMKVY 4.0 with a pilot target of training 3,850 adolescent girls.
3. The initiative focuses only on traditional skill sectors like handicrafts and excludes emerging fields like digital marketing and cybersecurity.
4. It is initially being piloted in aspirational districts identified by NITI Aayog.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Female Labour Force Participation in India:

1. India's female labour force participation rate increased from around 23% in 2017–18 to over 41% in 2023–24.
2. India has recorded the fastest rise in female LFPR among BRICS countries in the last decade.
3. The Maternity Benefit Act, 2017 Amendment, reduced maternity leave duration to 12 weeks to promote flexible employment.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

1. A	2. A

Mains Question:

Q1. The NAVYA initiative is a transformative step towards bridging the gap between education and sustainable livelihoods for adolescent girls in India. Discuss its objectives, significance, and potential contribution to the vision of Viksit Bharat@20

(250 words)

Q2. Discuss the key factors driving the recent rise in female labour force participation in India. How can policy interventions ensure sustained inclusion towards achieving Viksit Bharat@2047?

(250 words)

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SALIENT ASPECTS OF ART FORMS, LITERATURE, AND ARCHITECTURE FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES

WHY IN THE NEWS?

India's traditional ritual theatres have once again entered the cultural spotlight after UNESCO reaffirmed their place as vital elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Four forms—Kutiyattam and Mudiyettu of Kerala, Ramman of Uttarakhand, and Ramlila of North India—have already been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List, giving them international recognition. The recent emphasis on intangible heritage in policy debates and cultural platforms has brought ritual theatres to the forefront of India's cultural discourse, making them both a matter of pride and a responsibility for future generations.

Key Takeaways

- **Cultural Significance:** Ritual theatres like Kutiyattam, Mudiyettu, Ramman, and Ramlila blend sacred rituals with performance, preserving India's spiritual and cultural heritage.
- **Community Involvement:** These traditions thrive on collective participation—villagers act, sing, make costumes, and perform rituals—strengthening social cohesion and identity.
- **Transmission & Tradition:** Knowledge is passed through oral traditions and apprenticeship (guru-shishya), ensuring continuity across generations.
- **UNESCO Recognition:** Inclusion in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list has raised global awareness, secured institutional support, and highlighted the need for preservation while safeguarding authenticity.

WHAT IS RITUAL THEATRE?

Ritual theatre may be described as a performance that emerges at the intersection of devotion, community, and art. It is not merely meant to entertain, but to sanctify and celebrate collective faith. Performances usually blend multiple artistic elements: dialogue, song, dance, percussion, pantomime, puppetry, and visual symbolism.

A key difference from mainstream theatre is that ritual theatre is staged in sacred or communal spaces such as temple courtyards, village squares, or specially constructed stages (like Kerala's kuttampalam). The performers are not just actors but also ritual participants, bound by rules of purity and discipline. The audience, too, is part of the sacred process—witnessing, responding, and often participating. In this sense, ritual theatres are "living embodiments" of culture, transmitted orally and experientially through generations.

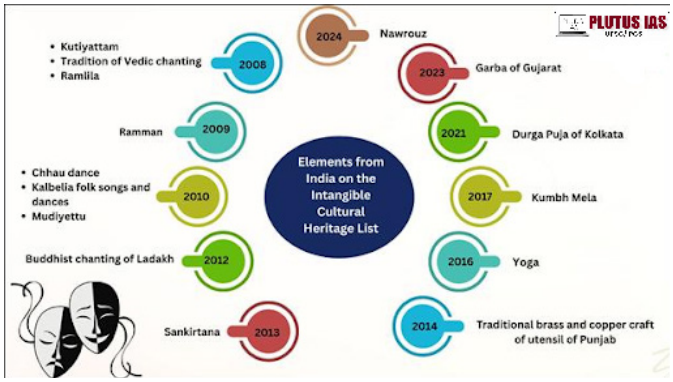


INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

It is both traditional and contemporary, encompassing inherited traditions as well as current rural and urban practices. It is inclusive, shared across communities and evolving through generations, giving people identity, continuity, and social cohesion. It is representative, valued not for exclusivity but for its role in communities, sustained by knowledge and skills passed on over

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time. Presently, 15 elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) have been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List, granting them international recognition and a global platform.



UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines five broad domains of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):

- Oral Traditions & Expressions Including Language as a Vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- Performing Arts
- Social Practices, Rituals & Festive Events
- Knowledge & Practices Concerning Nature & the Universe
- Traditional Craftsmanship

RITUAL THEATRES OF INDIA IN UNESCO'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH) LIST

India has 15 elements inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of ICH, and ritual theatres form an important cluster within this recognition. They include:

1. **Kutiyattam (Kerala) –** India's oldest surviving Sanskrit theatre, over 2,000 years old. It combines classical texts with stylised acting, using highly codified eye and hand gestures (abhinaya). A single act can take days to perform, and entire plays may extend to 40 nights. Traditionally performed in temple theatres, Kutiyattam retains its ritual purity with a sacred lamp symbolising divine presence.



2. **Mudiyettu (Kerala) –** A ritual dance-drama depicting Goddess Kali's victory over the demon Darika. Performed annually in Bhagavati Kavus (temple precincts) after the harvest, it involves the entire village—from mask-makers to musicians—making it a true community theatre. The ritual begins with the drawing of a sacred kalam (floor painting of the goddess) and is accompanied by chants, drums, and stylised gestures.



3. **Ramman (Uttarakhand) –** A unique village festival celebrated in Saloor-Dungra to honour Bhumiyal Devta. The performance fuses masked dances, epic recitations, ritual songs, and community feasts. Every caste in the village has a role, whether as priests, mask-makers, or drummers, ensuring the social fabric is reinforced. Instruments like the dhol, damau, jhanjhar, and bhankora form the soundscape of this festival.

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4. **Ramlila (North India) –** Perhaps the most widespread form of ritual theatre, Ramlila enacts episodes from the Ramayana, especially during the Dussehra festival. Some famous Ramlilas, like those at Ramnagar in Varanasi or Ayodhya, last for weeks and involve elaborate stagecraft, music, and dialogue. Based on Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, these performances democratized access to the epic, as the Sanskrit Ramayana became accessible through vernacular performance.



ROLE OF THE SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI

The Sangeet Natak Akademi, established in 1953, is the apex institution for performing arts in India. Its role in preserving ritual theatres is multi-dimensional:

- **Documentation and Archiving:** It maintains national audio-visual archives of performances, making them accessible for research and posterity.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Through workshops, seminars, and guru-shishya programmes, the Akademi ensures knowledge transfer. For instance, young Kutiyattam students are supported with fellowships.
- **Recognition and Awards:** The Akademi honours masters of ritual theatre with awards like the Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar and the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar.
- **Festivals and Platforms:** It organizes the National Theatre Festival, Folk Theatre Festivals, and regional showcases, ensuring visibility for local art forms.
- **Collaboration with UNESCO:** It coordinates India's nominations to UNESCO's ICH list and partners with state governments for local preservation, as in the case of Ramman in Uttarakhand.
- **Financial Assistance:** Provides stipends and grants to artists, helping them overcome resource constraints.

By blending tradition with modern tools of preservation, the Akademi acts as a bridge between ritual theatres and contemporary audiences.



CHALLENGES IN PRESERVATION

1. **Erosion of Sacredness:** Commercialisation for tourism often strips performances of their ritual essence.
2. **Decline in Patronage:** Urban migration and the collapse of joint community systems reduce participation.
3. **Generational Gaps:** Young people often view the long training (10–15 years for Kutiyattam) as unviable in today's fast-paced world.
4. **Financial Constraints:** Costumes, masks, and musical instruments are expensive, and returns are low.

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5. **Documentation Deficits:** While UNESCO-listed forms are protected, hundreds of local ritual theatres remain undocumented and at risk of fading.

6. **Digital Competition:** The allure of cinema, OTT platforms, and social media draws audiences away from traditional performances.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Community-Led Preservation:** Empower local communities as custodians, not just performers, ensuring their economic and social stakes.

2. **Integration in Education:** Introducing modules on ritual theatres in schools and universities will nurture awareness and respect among youth.

3. **Digital Archiving and Innovation:** AI, VR, and 3D technologies can recreate immersive experiences, allowing global audiences to engage while safeguarding the original.

4. **Funding and Policy Support:** Central and state governments should expand schemes like the Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojana to cover ritual theatres.

5. **Tourism with Sensitivity:** Promote ritual theatres as part of cultural tourism circuits, but in a way that does not distort their ritual character.

6. **Youth Incentives:** Scholarships, fellowships, and artist residencies can attract younger generations.

7. **Global Collaborations:** Learning from other countries—such as Japan's Noh theatre or Bali's ritual dances—India can adopt best practices in preservation.

CONCLUSION

Ritual theatres of India are not relics of the past but living traditions that carry the pulse of community life and faith. They weave together myths, music, movements, and moral values into vibrant expressions of identity. From the subtle abhinaya of Kutiyattam to the fiery battle scenes of Mudiyettu, from the community cohesion of Ramman to the epic grandeur of Ramlila, these theatres embody India's cultural pluralism and continuity.

Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Sangeet Natak Akademi:

1. It is India's apex body for the performing arts and plays a key role in safeguarding ritual theatres.
2. It coordinates India's nominations to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage lists.
3. It was established after Independence in 1965 as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

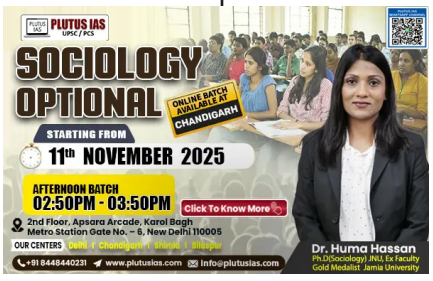
(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

ANSWER: A

Mains Question

Q. Ritual theatres in India are more than just performances. Examine the significance of ritual theatres in preserving India's intangible cultural heritage. (250 words)



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