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Table of Content

DECLARATION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INDIA-THAILAND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

In News

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Thailand to attend the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok, at the invitation of Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

India-Thailand Strategic Partnership

- **Historical Background :** India and Thailand share a long history of warm and cordial relations, with diplomatic ties established in 1947.
  - Both countries celebrated the **75th anniversary of these relations in 2022**.
- **Cooperation areas :** bilateral ties cover a broad range of areas, including trade, investment, defence, security, connectivity, culture, tourism, education, science, and technology, as well as people-to-people exchanges.
  - Thailand's 'Act West' policy complements India's 'Act East' policy, and Thailand is an important maritime neighbor to India.
- **Multilateral framework :** Regionally, Thailand plays a key role in various multilateral frameworks with India, such as ASEAN, the East Asia Summit (EAS), BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and ACMECS, reinforcing their strong and strategic partnership.
- **Defence Cooperation**: India and Thailand's defence ties are formalized through the Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation, signed on January 25, 2012.
  - These include regular defence dialogues, joint maritime patrols, annual staff talks, training exchanges, and participation in trilateral/multilateral military exercises.
- **Economic & Commercial Cooperation:** Bilateral trade between India and Thailand has significantly increased in recent years.
  - In FY 2023-2024, Thailand was India's 21st largest trading partner, with a total trade value of approximately USD 14.94 billion.
  - In 2024, India became Thailand's 11th largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching around USD 17.5 billion.
- **Cultural and Tourism Cooperation and Connectivity:** The Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Bangkok, opened in 2009, promotes cultural ties.
  - The India-Thailand Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for 2022-2027 was signed in December 2022.

- **Tourism**: India and Thailand are closely connected by over 400 weekly flights across 15 Indian cities.
  - In 2024, around 2.1 million Indian tourists visited Thailand, making up 6% of the total foreign visitors.
  - To enhance people-to-people ties, India offers a 30-day e-tourist visa to Thai nationals, and Thailand has extended a 60-day visa-free entry for Indian passport holders.
- **Education Cooperation:** The MoU on Education Cooperation was signed in 2005. India offers about 75 scholarships annually to Thai nationals and 1,000 Ph.D. fellowships to ASEAN countries, including 100 for Thailand.
- **Indian Diaspora in Thailand:** The Indian-origin population in Thailand is estimated at 4-5 lakh, including over 25,000 NRIs.
- **Latest Developments:** Both countries discussed a wide range of bilateral issues, including defence, trade, education, health, culture, and security.
  - Several MoUs were exchanged, and a new India-Thailand Strategic Partnership was established, aimed at strengthening their relationship across various sectors.

Source :PIB

INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS, DEVELOPMENTS & ISSUES

Context

- Recently, on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok, the Prime Minister of India and Bangladesh's Chief Adviser held their first high-level talks since the regime change in Dhaka.

About India-Bangladesh Relations

Major Historical & Diplomatic Milestones		
Year	Milestone	Description
1971	Liberation of Bangladesh	India played a pivotal role in the Bangladesh Liberation War, leading to the creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan. India recognized Bangladesh on December 6, 1971.

1972	Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace	A 25-year treaty that laid the foundation for long-term cooperation.
1974	Indira-Mujib Accord (Land Boundary Agreement)	An agreement to resolve border disputes. However, full ratification and implementation happened decades later.
1996	Ganges Water Sharing Treaty	A 30-year water-sharing treaty signed for the Ganges at Farakka, ending a longstanding water dispute.
2010	Joint Communiqué	Both countries agreed on enhanced cooperation in trade, security, and connectivity.
2011	Teesta River Agreement (Drafted)	Though a draft was finalized, it remains unsigned due to political resistance in India.
2015	Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) Implemented	The 1974 agreement was ratified and implemented, resolving the issue of enclaves and adverse possessions.
2017	Defence Cooperation Agreement	India extended a $500 million Line of Credit for military hardware (significant step toward strategic partnership).
2021	50 Years of Diplomatic Relations	India and Bangladesh celebrated 50 years of friendship and the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's founding leader.
2022–2024	Rail and Water Connectivity Revival	Initiatives such as the reopening of old rail links (e.g., Chilahati–Haldibari) and improved inland water trade have been revived.

Political and Strategic Cooperation

- There are nearly 70 ongoing bilateral institutional mechanisms between India and Bangladesh covering areas such as security, trade and commerce, power and energy, transport and connectivity, science and technology, defense, rivers, and maritime affairs.
- India has consistently supported Bangladesh's infrastructure, security modernization, border management, and counter-terrorism.

Trade and Economic Partnership

- Bangladesh is **India's biggest trade partner in South Asia** and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh in Asia.
    - In FY 2023-24, the total bilateral trade has been reported as USD 14.01 billion.
    - Bangladesh exported USD 1.97 billion of goods to India in FY 2023-24.
- **Key developments:**
    - Duty-free access of Bangladeshi goods to Indian markets under SAFTA.
    - Development of border haats and integrated check posts (ICPs).
    - Investments in power, transport, and logistics.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

- **Railway Connectivity:** Agartala - Akhaura; Haldibari - Chilahati; Petrapole - Benapole; Gede – Darshana; Singhabad - Rohanpur; Radhikapur – Birol.
    - Railway trains operating between the two countries:
        - Maitri Express (connecting Kolkata and Dhaka);
        - Bandhan Express (connecting Kolkata and Khulna); and
        - Mitali Express (between New Jalpaiguri and Dhaka).
- **Port Connectivity:** Both countries have operationalized the Agreement for the usage of **Chittagong and Mongla Ports** in 2023. It allows India to avail the services of these ports in Bangladesh for transit cargo between Northeast and mainland India.
    - Development of inland waterway transport under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT).

Energy Cooperation

- Joint ventures like **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL)** inaugurated in 2023 for diesel export from India to northern Bangladesh.
    - Collaboration on renewable energy (solar, hydro).

Cultural and People-to-People Ties

- Common linguistic and cultural bonds (particularly in West Bengal and Bangladesh) are reinforced through:
  - Cultural exchanges;
  - Celebrations like Maitree Diwas;
  - Academic and technical scholarships (e.g., ITEC);

Key Regional Groupings Common To India and Bangladesh

- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
- BIMSTEC: It aligns with **India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies.**
- **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Initiative (BBIN):**
  - Currently India, Bangladesh, and Nepal are working together, as Bhutan has opted out of implementation.
- **Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM)**: It is **part of China's BRI framework** and was conceptualized to improve trade and connectivity between the four nations.
  - Bangladesh has supported the corridor but is mindful of India's reservations.
- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** Focus on maritime security, blue economy, disaster risk management, and trade.
- **South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC):** A program under the Asian Development Bank (ADB), SASEC includes India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Myanmar.

Key Concerns and Challenges

- **Border Security:** The porous **4,096.7 km border** (the fifth-longest in the world) remains a hotspot for illegal crossings, smuggling, and trafficking.
  - Recent clashes between border guards have exacerbated tensions, highlighting the need for enhanced cooperation.
- **Teesta River Dispute:** It is a long-standing conflict over the fair sharing of the transboundary Teesta River's water, with Bangladesh seeking a greater share than it currently receives.
  - Beyond the Teesta, **over 54 rivers cross between the two countries.**
  - The Joint Rivers Commission has not met since 2010.
- **China's Growing Influence in Bangladesh:** Bangladesh's deepening ties with China, particularly in infrastructure and defense, is a

strategic concern for India. India perceives this as a potential dilution of its strategic space.

- **Cross-Border Migration and Demographic Shifts:** Historical and undocumented migration from Bangladesh to Indian states like Assam and West Bengal remains a politically sensitive issue.
- **Minority Rights:** India has expressed concerns over the safety of minorities in Bangladesh, particularly the Hindu community.
  - Bangladesh's interim government has emphasized its commitment to addressing these issues while asserting its sovereignty.
- **NRC and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA):** India's implementation of the NRC in Assam and the CAA has led to fears of a potential influx of Bengali-speaking Muslims into Bangladesh.
- **Trade Imbalances and Non-Tariff Barriers:** Bangladesh has long complained about non-tariff barriers imposed by India, and the slow progress in granting duty-free access to more Bangladeshi goods.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Dialogue:** Regular high-level talks can foster mutual understanding and address contentious issues.
  - The implementation of the **Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP)** has led to enhanced patrolling and joint efforts to reduce friction along the border.
- **Promoting Inclusivity:** Both nations must prioritize the welfare of marginalized communities, ensuring their safety and inclusion in development efforts.
- **Diversifying Partnerships:** Bangladesh can explore partnerships beyond India to assert its independence, while India can recalibrate its approach to avoid perceptions of favoritism.

Conclusion

- Bangladesh-India relations are at a critical juncture, requiring both nations to navigate complex challenges with diplomacy and pragmatism.
- By fostering dialogue, promoting inclusivity, and diversifying partnerships, they can pave the way for a stronger and more resilient bilateral relationship.

Source: TH

BIMSTEC SUMMIT 2025

Context

- PM Modi attended the **6th BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical

and Economic Cooperation) Summit, hosted by Thailand, which is the current chair.

About

- **Theme: "BIMSTEC: Prosperous, Resilient, and Open"**
- **Focus on** shared growth amid global uncertainties.
- **The BIMSTEC Summit** is the first in-person meeting **in seven years**.
- The **chairmanship** of the regional grouping was **handed over to Bangladesh.**

India-led Initiatives:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi **proposed a 21-point action plan.**
- **Mitigation and Disaster Management:**
  - Establishing the BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Disaster Management in India to cooperate in disaster management, relief and rehabilitation.
  - Fourth joint exercises between BIMSTEC Disaster Management Authorities to be held in India this year.
- **BODHI Program for skilling youth:** BODHI [BIMSTEC for Organized Development of Human Resource Infrastructure] under which training and scholarships would be provided to professionals, students, researchers, diplomats and others.
  - **300 youths from BIMSTEC countries** in India every year.
- **To Strengthen people-to-people linkages:** India to host BIMSTEC Athletics Meet (this year).
  - First BIMSTEC Games in 2027
  - BIMSTEC Traditional Music Festival.
- **Youth-focused initiatives:** Young Leaders' Summit, Hackathon, Young Professional Visitors program.
  - Pilot study on Digital Public Infrastructure, cancer care capacity building.
  - Proposal for BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and Business Summit.
- **Proposed establishing connectivity** between **India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and the payment systems of BIMSTEC member states**.
  - Such integration would bring substantial benefits across trade, industry and tourism, enhancing economic activity at all levels.
- **Space Sector:** Build nano-satellites for the BIMSTEC member nations and also explore the setting up of ground stations and promote the use of remote sensing data.

- **Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre:** Proposed the establishment of a Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre in India to enhance coordination in capacity building, research, innovation and maritime policies.

Summit Outcomes:

- **BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030:** It's the first long-term plan to make BIMSTEC more prosperous, strong, and open by the year 2030.
  - The vision focuses on improving trade, transport links, and people's safety and well-being
- **Rules of Procedure for BIMSTEC:** This sets clear rules for how BIMSTEC will work, helping the group to function more smoothly and efficiently.
- **Report by the BIMSTEC Eminent Persons' Group**: This report gives helpful suggestions for how BIMSTEC should move forward, in line with the 2030 vision.
- **Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation**: A new agreement was signed to improve sea transport between South and Southeast Asia.
  - This will help reduce shipping costs, make trade faster, and make it easier for goods and people to move across the region

About BIMSTEC

- It is a regional cooperation organization formed in **1997** with the signing of the **Bangkok Declaration.**
  - It unites South and **Southeast Asian nations bordering the Bay of Bengal.**
- **Founding Members (1997):** Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand.
- **Current Members:** It comprises seven member states, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.
- **Objective:** To help countries in their economic growth, to support social development, and to encourage development in other areas, like science, technology and economic development.
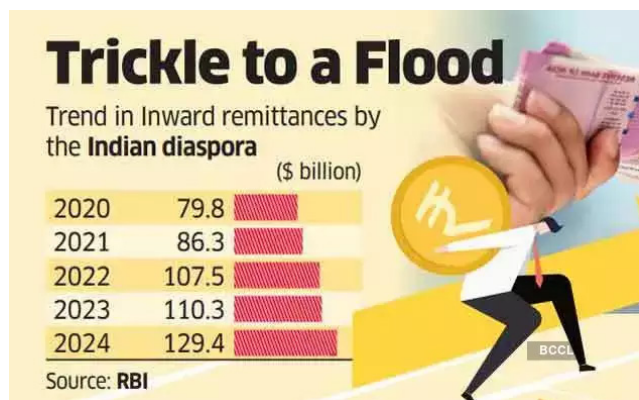
Source: MEA

INDIA IS GETTING MORE REMITTANCES FROM ADVANCED ECONOMIES

Context

- Findings of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) **latest Remittances Survey** show a **significant shift in India's remittance sources.**

India's Remittances

- **India's remittances have more than doubled** from $55.6 billion in 2010-11 to $118.7 billion in 2023-24.

Trickle to a Flood
Trend in Inward remittances by the **Indian diaspora** ($ billion)

Year	($ billion)
2020	79.8
2021	86.3
2022	107.5
2023	110.3
2024	129.4

Source: **RBI**

- **U.S. and U.K. Contribution:** Remittances from the U.S. and U.K. nearly doubled to 40% of total inward remittances in FY24, up from 26% in FY17.

- **U.S. as Leading Contributor:** The U.S. became the top source of remittances in FY21, contributing 23.4%. This increased to nearly 28% in FY24.

- **UAE's Role:** UAE is still the second-largest remittance source, contributing 19.2%, with Indian migrants in blue-collar jobs like construction, healthcare, hospitality, and tourism.

- **Singapore's Rising Share:** Singapore's share reached 6.6% in FY24, up from 5.5% in FY17, marking its highest share since then.

- **State-wise Distribution:** Half of the remittances went to Maharashtra, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Other states like Haryana, Gujarat, and Punjab had smaller shares (below 5%).

- **Size of Remittances:** Remittances above 5 lakh accounted for 28.6% of total remittances, while 40.6% of the remittances were 16,500 or less.

Shift in Remittance Sources (2023-24):

- **Advanced Economies (AEs)** now account for over **half of India's remittances,** overtaking **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.**

- **Key AE contributors:** United States, United Kingdom, Singapore, Canada, Australia.

- **GCC countries' contribution has declined,** partly due to economic downturns and nationalisation policies.

- **Decline in GCC Remittances:**
  - GCC countries are historically major contributors (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait).
  - Impact of Covid-19, job losses, salary cuts, and "Saudisation" policies.

- UAE share fell from 26.9% (2016-17) to 19.2% (2023-24); Saudi Arabia and Kuwait's shares also decreased.

- **Growth of AE Remittances:**
  - The US remains the largest contributor, accounting for 27.7% in 2023-24 (up from 22.9% in 2016-17).
  - Other AEs (UK, Canada, Singapore) also showed steady increases in remittance share.
  - Higher wages and purchasing power in AEs lead to higher per capita remittances.

Reasons

- **For Decline in GCC: The economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic** resulted in widespread job losses and salary cuts, reducing the disposable income available for remittances.
  - Nationalisation" policies — such as the Saudi Nationalisation Scheme or Nitaqat, also known as "Saudisation" — which prioritise local employment over foreign workers.

- **Reason for Rise for AEs:** They send higher per capita remittances due to higher wages (including a higher minimum wage) and the greater purchasing power of the US dollar..
  - **Impact of Skilled Migration:** Increasing number of skilled Indian professionals in STEM, finance, and healthcare sectors in AEs.
  - **Role of Indian Students:** The growing number of Indian students abroad contributes to remittances (loan repayments, family support).

Possible Future Trends:

- Globally, the **rise of rightwing politics** is leading to increasingly restrictive immigration policies in several AEs.

- **This could make it more difficult** for **Indian migrants** to secure permanent residency, and nudge them to **spread out their financial risk by remitting larger sums home** rather than **committing to investments in their host countries**.

- India is expected to be the **world's leading supplier of labor until 2048** due to its growing working-age population.

Policy Recommendations:

- To maximise remittance inflows and improve the welfare of migrant workers, India must focus on skill harmonisation at the sending-country level.

- Protect low-skilled workers from exploitation and forced deskilling.
  - Engage in bilateral and multilateral agreements to regulate migration and secure better opportunities for Indian workers.

- By proactively engaging with destination countries to establish such agreements, India can secure better opportunities for its workforce, while also ensuring a steady flow of remittances.

Remittance

- **Remittances** are a way to electronically send funds to people, often family, in another country.
  - Usually sent by individuals working in foreign countries, especially those employed in blue-collar or skilled jobs.
- **Impact:** Remittances are a significant source of income for many countries, contributing to their economic stability, supporting local economies, and sometimes helping to finance national trade deficits.
- **Modes of Transfer:** Remittances can be sent through banks, money transfer operators, or digital platforms.

Source: IE

INDIA'S COAL BOOM

Context

- India achieved a historic milestone as it crossed **one billion tonnes (BT)** of coal production in March in 2024-25, surpassing last fiscal year's 997.83 million tonnes (MT).

About

- India, with the **fifth-largest coal reserves** and being the **second-largest consumer,** heavily depends on coal.
- Coal contributes **55%** to the energy mix and powers over **74%** of electricity generation in India.

Growth in Coal Production and Dispatch

- India's coal production has reached **1047.57 MT** (Provisional) in FY 2024-25.
  - **Coal production** refers to the extraction of coal from mines.
- Coal dispatch has also crossed the **One BT milestone,** with total dispatch reaching 1024.99 MT (Provisional).
  - **Coal dispatch** refers to the process of transporting and distributing that coal to various consumers, including power plants and industrial facilities.
- **Coal imports fell 8.4%** to 183.42 MT in April-December 2024 in the same period of FY 2023-24, saving **$5.43 billion** in foreign exchange.

Government initiatives

- **Commercial Coal Mining** opened the sector to private players to boost production, efficiency, and competitiveness.
- **Mission Coking Coal** aims to reduce import dependence by enhancing domestic coking coal availability.
- **Safety measures:** Directorate General of Mines Safety revamped the Coal Mines Regulations 1957 into **The Coal Mines Regulations 2017**, addressing modernisation, mechanisation, emergency response, and evacuation planning.
- **Coal Mitra Portal** developed for flexible coal allocation to power plants, ensuring better coal supply management.

Economic significance of the coal sector

- **Railways & revenue:** Coal stands as the single largest contributor to railway freight, with an average share of nearly **49%** of total freight income amounting to **Rs. 82,275 Crore** in the fiscal year 2022-23 alone.
- **Government earnings:** The coal sector contributes over Rs. 70,000 Crore annually to the central and state governments through royalties, GST, and other levies.
- **Employment:** The sector provides jobs to over 239,000 workers in Coal India Ltd and thousands more in contractual and transport roles.

Coal gasification initiative

- Coal gasification **converts coal into syngas,** which can be used for producing methanol, ammonium nitrate, Synthetic Natural Gas (SNG), and fertilisers.
- The Government has undertaken the following coal gasification initiatives:
  - **Financial incentive:** The Government approved ₹8,500 crore for promoting coal/lignite gasification projects for PSUs and the private sector.
  - **Revenue share rebate:** A 50% rebate in revenue share for coal used in gasification has been introduced in commercial coal block auctions, provided at least 10% of the total coal production is used for gasification.

Concluding remarks

- The coal sector remains central to India's energy and economic goals. Rising production, clean coal initiatives, and tech-driven safety and sustainability efforts reflect its evolving role.
- With strong government support and workforce commitment, the sector is set to drive India's journey toward self-reliance and development by **2047.**

Source: PIB

═══ NEWS IN SHORT ═══

PAMBAN BRIDGE

In News

The new Pamban Bridge will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, replacing the century-old structure.

Historical Linkages

- The Pamban Bridge connects **Rameswaram to mainland India, spanning across the ocean.**

- It was originally **built in 1914** and served as India's first sea bridge, crucial for trade and pilgrimage.

- **The old bridge survived the 1964 tsunami,** which tragically washed away a train, but suffered extensive damage.

  - It was later restored by renowned engineer E. Sreedharan with the help of local fishermen.

- The new bridge was designed to overcome the limitations of the old structure, ensuring durability, improved maritime navigation, and future-ready capacity.

  - It aims to enhance regional connectivity and support economic growth.

New Bridge

- The New Pamban Bridge was constructed by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), a Navratna PSU under the Ministry of Railways.

- It features a **72.5-meter lift span** that can rise 17 meters to allow ships to pass.

- **It is 3 meters higher than the old bridg**e and is designed to accommodate both heavy freight trains and advanced semi-high-speed trains, like Vande Bharat.

- It spans 2.08 kilometers and has an expected lifespan of 58 years.

- It is India's first Vertical Lift Railway Sea Bridge and is built with advanced materials to withstand harsh marine conditions.

Salient features of **New Pamban Bridge**

Objective
Construction of a new Pamban bridge with Navigational Lift Span

Location
Located in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, the new Pamban Bridge will connect Rameswaram island with the Main land

Year of sanction
2019

Anticipated cost
Rs.550 cr

Span configuration
99 x 18.3 m + 1 x 72.5m

Length of the bridge
2.08 Km

Superstructure
72.5m Steel Through Girder for Navigational span & 18.3 m Steel Plate Girders for approach spans

Navigational span
One Vertical lift span of 72.5 m with provision for two tracks

Approach spans
99 Spans of 18.3m Steel Plate Girders fabricated for Single line

Significance

- The old bridge was a critical link for trade, particularly with Sri Lanka, and survived challenging conditions like the 1964 tsunami.

- The restoration of the old bridge in 1964 by Sreedharan was a significant achievement, completed in just 46 days.

- The new bridge continues the legacy of facilitating trade and pilgrimage while providing a modern solution to operational challenges posed by corrosion and high maintenance of the old bridge.

Source :IE

OTTAWA CONVENTION

In News

Poland, Finland, and all three Baltic states have announced plans to withdraw from the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines, citing growing security threats from Russia.

- Countries leaving the treaty can resume the production, stockpiling, and use of landmines.

Ottawa Convention

- It is formally known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

- It is an international agreement that **bans anti-personnel landmines**.

- It was adopted in 1997 during a diplomatic conference in Oslo and opened for signature in Ottawa later that year.

    ◆ The treaty came into force on March 1, 1999.

Progress

- It has significantly reduced the production and use of anti-personnel mines, leading to the destruction of over 40 million stockpiled mines.

- It has also **facilitated assistance for survivors** and **communities** affected by landmines, as well as the clearing of mine-contaminated areas.

- This has resulted in a substantial decline in casualties.

Importance

- It has been crucial in advancing global mine clearance efforts and framing victim assistance in the broader context of disability, contributing to safer, more productive land use in affected regions.

Do you know ?

- Anti-personnel landmines disproportionately affect civilians, with over 80% of victims being non-combatants.

- The UN reported that Ukraine became the most mined country in 2024, with over 1,200 civilian casualties. Some countries, such as Lithuania, are also considering withdrawing from the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which is another controversial weapon that has been used in Ukraine's defense.

Source :IE

150TH ASSEMBLY OF INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)

In News

Lok Sabha Speaker, Shri Om Birla is leading a Parliamentary Delegation to the 150th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), being held in Tashkent from 5 to 9 April, 2025.

About

- The theme of the assembly will focus on "Parliamentary action for social development and justice," addressing issues like poverty eradication, decent work promotion, social inclusion, and the participation of marginalized groups in decision-making.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

- It is a global organization of national parliaments, founded in 1889 with 181 Members and 15 Associate Members.

- It promotes peace, democracy, and sustainable development by facilitating parliamentary diplomacy and empowering parliaments to address global issues.

- Its mission is to support democratic governance, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment, climate action, and sustainable development through political dialogue and cooperation.

- It is funded mainly by its Members and has **headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, with offices in New York and Vienna.**

Source :PIB

VIBRANT VILLAGES PROGRAMME-II (VVP-II)

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) to boost development in strategic border areas.

About Vibrant Villages Programme-II (VVP-II)

- **It** is a **Central Sector Scheme** (100% Centre-funded) with a total outlay of **₹6,839 crore**.

- **Implementation and Timeline:** It will be implemented in select strategic villages across the following States/UTs till FY 2028–29:
    - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir (UT), Ladakh (UT), Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

- **Objective:** The programme aims to create better living conditions and adequate livelihood opportunities to ensure prosperous and safe borders, control trans-border crime, assimilate the border population with the nation, and inculcate them 'as eyes and ears of the border guarding forces'— vital for internal security.

- **Key Features:**
    - Infrastructure development within the village or a cluster of villages,
    - Support for value chain development (via cooperatives, SHGs, etc.),
    - Border-specific outreach activities,
    - Education infrastructure like SMART classes,
    - Tourism circuit development and
    - Works/projects to create diverse & sustainable livelihood opportunities.

- **Significance:** VVP-II along with VVP-I, is a transformative step towards making border villages self-reliant, resilient, and vibrant—crucial for national security and inclusive development.

Source: PIB

AFRICAN GIANT POUCHED RAT

Context

- **A giant African pouched rat,** set a world record by detecting **109 landmines and 15 other unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in Cambodia.**

About

- It made the **Guinness World Record** for most landmines detected by a rat.

- The **rats are trained to sniff out chemicals** that are found in landmines and other weapons abandoned on battlefields.
    - **Because of their small size,** the rats are not heavy enough to detonate the mines.
    - The rats can check an area the size of a tennis court in about 30 minutes, whereas a metal detector might take four days to clear the same land.

- **They can also detect tuberculosis** far quicker than it would be found in a lab using conventional microscopy.

- **Cambodia** remains one of the **most heavily mined countries** due to decades of war.
    - The country aimed to be **mine-free by 2025,** but the deadline was **extended to 2030** due to funding challenges and new minefields discovered.

The African Giant Pouched Rat

- **Scientific name:** Cricetomys gambianus, it is a large rodent species native to sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Appearance:** They have greyish-brown fur, with large ears and a distinctive pouch-like cheek where they store food.

- **Habitat:** These rats are found in a range of habitats, including savannas, forests, and agricultural areas in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Diet:** They are **omnivores** and mainly feed on fruits, seeds, insects, and small animals.
- **Intelligence:** These rats are highly intelligent and trainable, which makes them ideal candidates for work like landmine detection and medical alert services.
- **Conservation Status:** It is classified as "Least Concern" by the IUCN Red List.

Source: TH

AGASTHYAMALAI LANDSCAPE

Context

- The Supreme Court has directed the **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** to **survey the entire Agasthyamalai landscape** to identify non-forestry activities and encroachments.

About

- The ruling aims to **initiate restoration of pristine forest areas and protect tiger habitats** and **wildlife sanctuaries.**

- **Survey Scope:** The CEC survey will include Periyar tiger reserve, Srivilliputhur sanctuary,

Meghamalai sanctuary, and Thirunelveli sanctuary.

- **Comparative Data:** The survey will compare current forest cover with historical data to assess depletion and degradation.

> **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)**
> - The CEC was formed in **2002** (and reconstituted in 2008) by the Supreme Court under the **T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs. Union of India judgement.**
> - The Committee functions under the **administrative control of the Central Government in the Ministry of Environment.**
> - **Composition:** A member secretary, and the remaining three expert members, who are civil servants appointed by the Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Agasthyamalai

- **Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve** is located in the southern Western Ghats in South India, spanning the **Kerala-Tamil Nadu border.**
- **UNESCO Recognition:** Added to UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves in **2016**.
- The reserve includes three wildlife sanctuaries, Shendurney, Peppara and Nayar, as well as the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger reserve.
- The reserve is home to **Kani tribes from both Tamil Nadu and Kerala,** which number in total approximately 30,000 inhabitants.
- **The Agasthyamala peak** rises to **1,868 meters** within the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- **Cultural Significance:** It is named after the Hindu sage **Agasthya Muni,** with his statue situated at the top of the peak; a popular pilgrimage site.
- **Flora & Fauna:** Home to a diverse range of species, including rare and medicinal plants; about 2,000 medicinal plants used in Ayurvedic treatments.
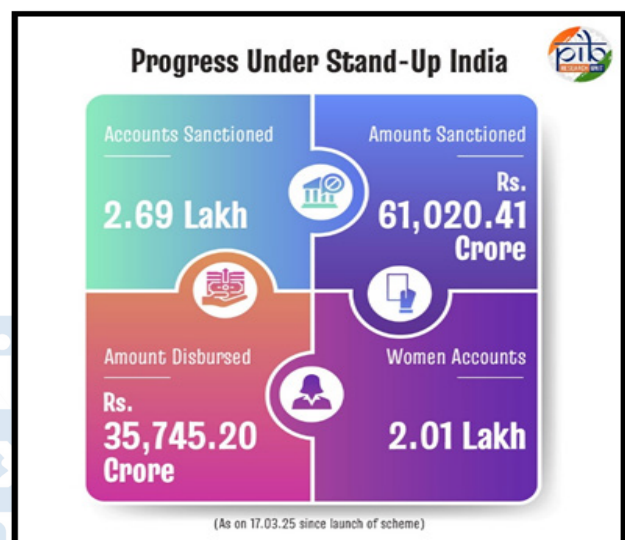
Source: TH

9 YEARS OF STAND-UP INDIA

Context

- The Stand-Up India Scheme, launched on 5th April 2016, has completed nine years of its implementation.

About

- The Stand-Up India Scheme is an initiative of the **Ministry of Finance** aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among **Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women.**

- The scheme facilitates bank loans ranging from **₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore** for setting up **greenfield enterprises** in manufacturing, services, trading, or activities allied to agriculture.

- **Eligibility Criteria:**
  - The borrower must be SC/ST and/or a woman entrepreneur, aged above **18 years.**
  - In case of non-individual enterprises, **at least 51%** of the shareholding and controlling stake must be held by either an SC/ST or a woman entrepreneur.

Source: PIB

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION REPORT 2025

Context

- The 2025 Technology and Innovation Report, entitled: **Inclusive artificial intelligence for development,** has been issued by **United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD).**

About The Report

- **It aims to guide policymakers** through the complex AI landscape and support them in designing science, technology and innovation policies that foster inclusive and equitable technological progress.

- **The US** leads the world in terms of private investment in AI, at **67 billion US dollars** in 2023, or 70 percent of global AI private investment.

- **China** was in second position, with **7.8 billion US dollars**, and India in tenth position, with **1.4 billion dollars.**

- **India** has been ranked **10th** in the world with significant private investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 2023.
  - According to the Report India ranked **36th** in 2024 on the **Readiness for Frontier Technologies Index,** improving its position from 48th in 2022.

Concerns

- The report shows that just 100 companies, mostly in the United States and China, are behind **40 percent of the world's private investment in research and development**, highlighting a sharp concentration of power.
- At the same time, **118 countries** – mostly from the Global South – are missing from global AI governance discussions altogether.
- The report estimates that up to **40 percent of global jobs** could be affected by AI.

Suggestions

- Governments should prioritise **reskilling, upskilling, and workforce adaptation** to ensure that AI augments employment opportunities rather than replaces them.
- To avoid being left behind, developing countries need to strengthen the **three key leverage points;**
  - **Infrastructure:** Ensuring access to affordable internet and computing power.
  - **Data Ecosystems:** Building frameworks for data collection, sharing, and privacy.
  - **Skills Development:** Promoting digital literacy and problem-solving abilities.
- The report proposes establishing a **shared global facility** to give all countries equitable access to computing power and AI tools.
- It also recommends creating a **public disclosure framework for AI,** similar to existing **environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards,** to boost transparency and accountability.

Source: AIR

HAMARI PARAMPARA HAMARI VIRASAT INITIATIVE

Context

- The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the Government of Jharkhand, organized a national-level event under the initiative 'Hamari Parampara Hamari Virasat' in New Delhi.
  - The event also marked the 150th Birth Anniversary Year of Bhagwan Birsa Munda (Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh).

About the Hamari Parampara Hamari Virasat

- **Launched:** On **26th January 2025** by the Department of Panchayati Raj, Government of Jharkhand, with support from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the campaign has seen participation from over **3,000 villages** pledging to preserve traditional self-governance and cultural practices.
- **Objective:** To preserve, enhance, and transmit to future generations the cultural heritage, folk songs, festivals, and worship practices integral to the traditional governance systems of various Scheduled Tribe communities in Scheduled Areas.
  - The program aims to document the vibrant history and cultural practices of villages across Jharkhand.
- **Alignment with PESA Act (1996):** This initiative aligns closely with the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act), which empowers Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to safeguard tribal customs, traditions, and self-governance.

Source: PIB

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