



THE HINDU



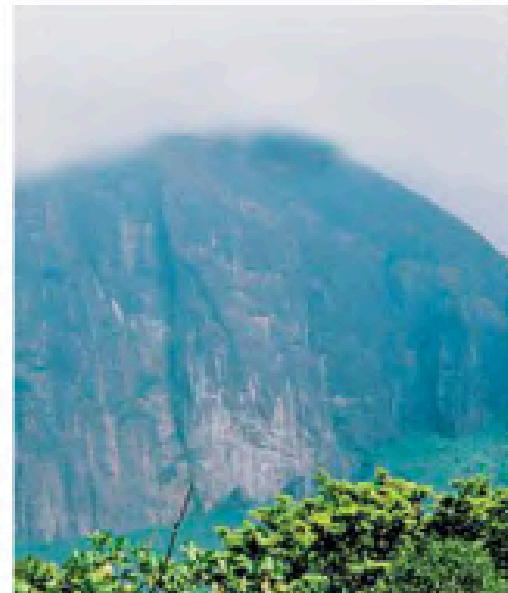
GS Paper 3-Environment

SC directs CEC to survey forests in Agasthyamalai for encroachments

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to conduct an extensive survey of the entire tropical forest ecosystems of the Agasthyamalai landscape in the southernmost Western Ghats to identify non-forestry activities and encroachments.

In a 16-page judgment, a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta termed the survey as an interim measure "to initiate the process of restoration of the pristine forest areas



Tropical forest: Agasthyamalai is a 3,500-km biosphere reserve within T.N. and Kerala.

The Agasthyamalai landscape is recognised by the UNESCO as a 3,500-km biosphere reserve falling within both Tamil Nadu

and Kerala. The judgment was pronounced on March 24 and published on Friday. The report would contain the comparative data pertaining to the forest cover as it existed earlier vis-à-vis the current position in order to gauge the extent of depletion and degradation in the forest area.

"The world at large is facing the calamities caused by climate change, and the primary culprit behind this is the depleting forest cover owing to a myriad of issues including rapid urbanisation, un-

checked deforestation, and encroachment made by its amicus curiae, senior advocate K. Parmeshwar, who submitted that plantations and systematic encroachments in the landscape for almost a century have depleted the forest cover.

The judgment came in separate petitions highlighting the immediate need to preserve the reserved forests, wildlife sanctuaries and tiger reserves in Tamil Nadu as well as the rehabilitation of workers who were evicted after the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation Limited tea estate at Singampattinam, Tamil Nadu, was de-



KEY POINTS

- The Supreme Court has ordered the Central Empowered Committee to survey the Agasthyamalai landscape in the Western Ghats to identify encroachments and assess forest degradation. The survey will focus on areas like the Periyar tiger reserve and Srivilliputhur sanctuary. The court stressed forest conservation's role in mitigating climate change.





THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-Social Justice

A people still waiting to move out of the margins

International Transgender Day of Visibility, which is observed on March 31, highlights the challenges that transgender individuals face. Despite legal advancements such as the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, social stigma, economic exclusion and discrimination persist. There are barriers to education, employment and health care. Workplace biases and financial discrimination hinder economic empowerment, while bullying and unsupportive environments restrict education. Health-care systems fail to address transgender-specific needs, worsening marginalisation. True inclusion requires strong policy implementation, anti-discrimination enforcement, and societal change. Governments, businesses and communities must ensure financial inclusion, equal opportunities and support, fostering empowerment beyond mere visibility.

Legal recognition versus ground reality

Weak implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, hampers access to welfare schemes. As of December 2022,



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to engage in sex work. A 2022 study reported a transgender unemployment rate of 48%, far above the national average of 7%-8%.

Discrimination starts at hiring, where biases lead to exclusion, and those employed face workplace hostility, a lack of gender-neutral facilities, and resistance from colleagues. While Tata Steel has hired over 100 transgender employees, the industry-wide adoption of such policies is limited. In 2024, the Finance Ministry clarified that LGBTQ+ individuals could open joint bank accounts and nominate partners as beneficiaries, yet broader financial exclusion persists. There need to be workplace inclusion policies, diversity hiring, targeted financial programmes, and government-backed loans to ensure economic empowerment.

Hurdles in education, health-care access

Education is crucial for inclusion and the economic empowerment of transgender individuals in India, but systemic discrimination leads to significant disparities. The 2011 Census reported a transgender literacy rate of 56.1%, when the national average was 74.04%. In Kerala,

(between ₹2 lakh to ₹5 lakh) with limited insurance coverage. While the 'Ayushman Bharat TG Plus' card offers ₹5 lakh annual coverage, implementation gaps persist. The lack of trained health-care professionals results in substandard care, and mental health support is severely inadequate. Solutions include mandatory transgender health-care training; inclusion of gender-affirming treatments in insurance; dedicated transgender health clinics, and expanded mental health services.

Steps to help mainstream

Changing societal perceptions of transgender individuals in India requires genuine inclusion in the media, education, workplaces, and policies. While visibility has increased, portrayals often reinforce stereotypes. Deep-rooted prejudices in families, schools, and workplaces are another factor. Initiatives such as the 'I Am Also Human' campaign by the Humsafar Trust help, but broader efforts are needed. Gender sensitisation in schools, universities, and workplaces is essential. The media must depict transgender individuals in diverse roles, while cultural events

KEY POINTS

- International Transgender Day of Visibility highlights the ongoing challenges transgender individuals face, including discrimination, economic exclusion, and barriers in education and healthcare. Despite legal progress, such as the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, weak implementation hampers access to welfare.



GS 2-IR

UPI, energy links, trade in local currency: PM's BIMSTEC initiatives

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

UNDERLINING THAT BIMSTEC is a model for inclusive development and collective security and not merely a regional organisation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday announced more than 20 initiatives — from the mechanism of Home Ministers on security to UPI connecting payment mechanisms, an energy centre to a chamber of commerce.

Speaking at the 6th BIMSTEC

EXPRESS NETWORK



MODI MEETS NEPAL PM OLI, BOTH AGREE TO DEEPEN TIES

PAGE 8

confident that the Bangkok

KEY POINTS

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 6th BIMSTEC Summit hosted by Thailand, focusing on regional prosperity and resilience. He announced initiatives like BIMSTEC Centres of Excellence in India, the BODHI youth development program, and a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce.
- Cultural and youth initiatives, including the BIMSTEC Athletics Meet and Young Leaders' Summit, were also highlighted.

BIMSTEC SUMMIT

APRIL 2025 | BANGKOK, THAILAND



GS 2-Governance

Cabinet nod to Vibrant Villages Programme Ph-2

"The programme would help in the comprehensive development of the villages located in the blocks abutting international land borders (ILBs), other than the northern border already covered under VVP-I," an official statement said.



KEY POINTS

- The Union Cabinet approved the second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP-II) with a Rs 6,839 crore budget, aimed at developing villages along international borders. The program, covering 19 states, will improve living conditions, create livelihood opportunities, enhance border security, and integrate border populations by 2028-29.



GS 3-Environment

Govt: Star-rating system for state environment bodies 'given up'

System was introduced in 2022 to incentivise states for 'quickly and efficiently' giving green clearance

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

THE UNION Environment Ministry has "given up" a star-rating system it had introduced in January 2022 to evaluate expert environmental bodies in states on their efficiency and promptness in granting prior environmental clearances to industry and infrastructure projects, according to an order by the National Green

Thantai, represented by lawyer Ritwick Dutta and Stanly Hebzon Singh, had challenged the memorandum on the grounds that it was arbitrary and would result in a dilution of scrutiny of projects under the 2006 Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification. The Centre had introduced the star-rating system on January 17, 2022, to incentivise the states on the basis of efficiency and timelines in the grant of environmental clearances. "This is intended as

KEY POINTS

- The Union Environment Ministry has scrapped the star-rating system introduced in January 2022 for evaluating state-level environmental bodies, following a challenge by a Tamil Nadu fishermen's association.
- The National Green Tribunal declared the system "inoperative." The system, designed to incentivize timely environmental clearances, will be revisited with new criteria in the future.



GS 3-Economy

A new pattern of remittances

There is a significant shift in India's remittances landscape — from the Gulf to Advanced Economies. What does it signify, what challenges does it present? Skill harmonisation and mobility agreements will be key



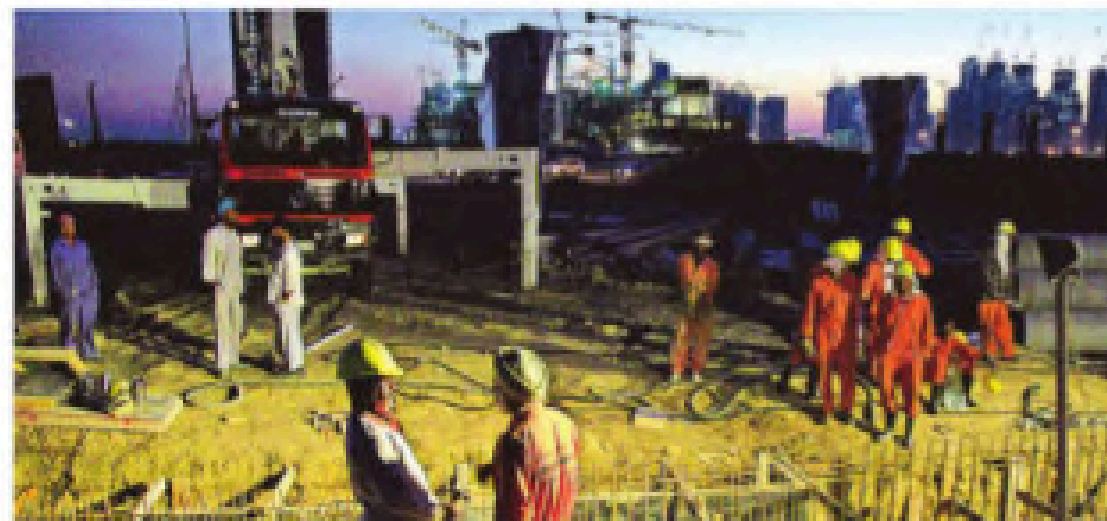
EXPERTS EXPLAIN

S IRUDAYA RAJAN &
AJAY P KARUVALLY

FINDINGS OF the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) latest Remittances Survey released last month show a significant shift in India's remittance sources.

The Advanced Economies (AEs) — particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Canada, and Australia — together accounted for more than half the total remittances in 2023-24, overtaking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which have traditionally contributed the largest share of remittances to India.

This shift allows India to further leverage



Workers at a construction site in Dubai in 2006. GCC nations have long been the biggest contributors to remittances to India. But that is changing. *The NYT*

THE DECLINE OF GULF REMITTANCES

Remittance source	2016-17 (%)	2020-21 (%)	2023-24 (%)
Advanced Economies (AEs)*	38.3	36.7	56.4
GCC** countries	46.7	31.6	37.9
Other countries	15	31.7	5.7

home over local investments.

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.

Role of Indian students

A significant factor in the rise of remittances from the AEs is the increasing number of Indian students pursuing higher education abroad.

While studying, they contribute to remittance inflows through loan repayments. After graduating and obtaining jobs, they might send remittances back home to their families.

However, an increasing number of Indian students have been encountering what may be described as wilful deskilling, in which highly educated graduates are compelled to accept low-skill jobs in retail, delivery services, or hospitality to qualify for permanent residency. Our research on Indian students in Canada and the UK, in addition to the results

KEY POINTS

- India's remittance sources are shifting, with Advanced Economies (AEs) like the US, UK, Canada, and Australia now contributing over half of total remittances, surpassing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This change is driven by higher wages and a growing number of skilled Indian professionals abroad. The US remains the largest contributor, and stricter immigration policies may further boost remittances.





PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



GS3-Defence

Ministry of Defence



DRDO & Indian Army conduct four successful flight-tests of Army version of Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile

Posted On: 04 APR 2025 5:43PM by PIB Delhi

KEY POINTS

- The DRDO and Indian Army successfully conducted four flight-tests of the Army version of the Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) on April 3-4, 2025, off Odisha's coast.
- The tests, which intercepted high-speed aerial targets at various ranges and altitudes, demonstrated the weapon system's operational capability. Developed with Israel Aerospace Industries, the MRSAM system includes radar, command posts, and mobile launchers.





GS Paper 2-IR

**India Ranks 10th With \$1.4 Billion Private Investment In AI:
UN**





KEY POINTS

- India ranked 10th in global private AI investments in 2023, with 1.4 billion USD, according to the 2025 UNCTAD report. It also improved its position in the Readiness for Frontier Technologies Index, rising from 48th in 2022 to 36th in 2024.

