

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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IMEC'S RELEVANCE TO INDIA AND ITS CHOKEPOINTS

Context

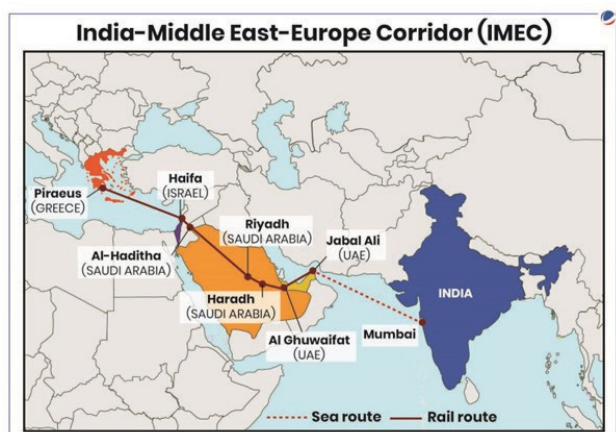
- The current **reciprocal tariff policies and protectionism by the US** is a bad sign for the development of a multi-state, multimodal transport and trade corridor like the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**.

About

- For almost all the participating nations except the US, **IMEC does not represent a geopolitical contest**.
 - Instead, it serves as **economic insurance** to future-proof global trade in an era marked by supply-chain shocks, geopolitical fragmentation, and climate stress.

India-Middle East EU Economic Corridor (IMEC)

- Background:** The IMEC is a proposed 4,800 km long route that was announced in **2023** on the sidelines of the G20 Summit.
- Members:** India, European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, UAE and US.
- Aim:** Integration of Asia, Europe and the Middle East.
- The IMEC will comprise of two separate corridors:**
 - The east corridor connecting India to the West Asia/Middle East and
 - The northern corridor connecting West Asia/Middle East to Europe.



Ports Which are Part of IMEC

- India:** Ports in Mundra (Gujarat), Kandla (Gujarat), and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (Navi Mumbai).
- Europe:** Piraeus in Greece, Messina in Southern Italy, and Marseille in France.
- Middle East:** Ports include Fujairah, Jebel Ali, and Abu Dhabi in the UAE, as well as Dammam and Ras Al Khair ports in Saudi Arabia.

- Israel:** Haifa port.
- Railway Line:** The railway line will link Fujairah port in the UAE to Haifa port in Israel, passing through Saudi Arabia (Ghuwaifat and Haradh) and Jordan.

IMEC's Relevance To India and Its Chokepoints

- Suez Canal Blockage (2021):** It was blocked by the massive container ship, leaving several vessels stranded.
 - This disruption impacted nearly **12 percent of global trade** until a major salvage operation successfully freed it.
- Red Sea Crisis (2023-24):** It was caused by the Houthis' attacks on commercial shipping, exposing the fragility of over-concentrated trade routes.
 - Nearly a quarter of India's cargo transiting the Red Sea faced delays.
 - Vessels were rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, adding around 3,500 nautical miles, increasing transit time by over a week, raising fuel costs by close to a million dollars per voyage.
- Impact on India-EU Trade:** With the largest EU-India trade concentrated in the Red Sea-Suez Canal corridor, Indian exporters chose to hold back shipments during the last quarter of 2023–24, leading to a decline in EU-India trade.
 - With the EU being one of India's largest trading partners, accounting for over 12 percent of total merchandise trade, the vulnerability is perceptible.
- IMEC directly responds to this structural risk:** It is not designed to replace existing maritime routes such as the Suez Canal corridor or the North-South Corridor (that goes through Russia), but to complement them.
 - For India, therefore, IMEC represents not a geopolitical provocation, but a strategy for economic risk management through diversification of trade routes.

Significance of IMEC for India

- Economic Development:** By linking Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and Europe through enhanced connectivity and economic integration, the corridor aims to give a boost to economic development in the regions.
- Enhances India's Connectivity and Trade Access:** IMEC provides India with a direct, faster, and safer trade route connecting Indian ports to Europe via the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean.
- Reduces dependence on the Suez Canal route,** cutting shipping time by up to 40% and costs by 20–30%.

- **Strengthens India's Strategic Partnerships:** Deepens India's ties with the U.S., EU, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel, all core IMEC participants.
 - ♦ Aligns with India's broader "Act West Policy" and encourages cooperation among traditional partners and new regional players.
- **IMEC creates a triangular economic architecture:** India as a manufacturing and services hub; the Gulf as a logistics, energy, and capital platform; and Europe as a technology and consumption centre.
- **Boost to Energy Security:** The corridor can integrate energy pipelines and green hydrogen networks linking India with Gulf producers and European consumers.
 - ♦ Facilitates diversification of India's energy imports and enhances collaboration in renewable and clean energy sectors.
- **Eco-friendly Infrastructure:** It places emphasis on developing environmentally friendly infrastructure.

Concerns

- **The security challenges** in the region have made other partners reluctant to invest in the project.
 - ♦ The instability in the Middle East has given a fatal blow to the project, the delay in the project could negatively impact the aspirations of India in the region.
- **Lack of Political Consensus:** Although signed during the G20 Summit 2023, the IMEC memorandum is not legally binding, relying on voluntary participation.
 - ♦ Divergent priorities among members slow coordination and execution.
- **Economic and Financial Viability:** Estimated project costs are high, involving ports, railways, pipelines, and digital infrastructure across multiple jurisdictions.
 - ♦ There is a lack of clarity on financing mechanisms whether it will be multilateral, public-private, or state-funded.
- **Infrastructure Gaps and Technical Challenges:** Significant infrastructure deficits in West Asian countries especially in cross-border railway connectivity.
 - ♦ Integration of different railway gauges, standards, and customs procedures remains unresolved.

Way Forward

- IMEC spans regions with uneven fiscal capacities and credit profiles, making traditional public funding or stand-alone public-private partnerships insufficient.

- IMEC requires a portfolio approach to financing combining public investment, multilateral guarantees, sovereign wealth capital, and private investment that can lower the capital cost and attract long-term institutional investments.

Source: ORF

SUPREME COURT DIRECTIONS ON STUDENT SUICIDES AND HEI FUNCTIONING

In News

- The Supreme Court of India has issued directions to Central and State governments under **Article 142 on Student Suicides and Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Functioning.**

Article 142 of the Indian Constitution

- It grants the Supreme Court a unique and extraordinary power to ensure "**complete justice**" in cases where existing laws or statutes may not provide an adequate remedy.
- As **per Article 142(1)**, the Court can pass any decree or make any order necessary for doing complete justice in matters pending before it, and such orders are enforceable throughout India, either as prescribed by law made by Parliament or, until such law exists, as directed by the President.
- The core idea is to enable the **Supreme Court to address instances of illegality or injustice** and deliver fair and equitable outcomes tailored to the facts of each case.

Major Issues Highlighted by Supreme Court

- **Rapid massification and privatization of higher education:** India now ranks second globally in student enrolment, has led to student distress, deaths, chronic faculty vacancies, and exploitation.
- **Student mental health:** The Supreme Court noted an epidemic of student suicides, with stressors including rigid attendance policies, overburdened curricula, exam pressures, faculty shortages, reliance on guest faculty, and non-transparent placement processes.
 - ♦ Medical and engineering students face extreme workload and exploitative academic culture.
- **Inadequate Strength: Public HEIs**, including the University of Madras, face severe staffing shortages, with **faculty strength at only 50% of sanctioned positions.**

- **Financial stress:** Delays in the disbursement of scholarships emerge as a significant source of financial strain.
- **Political Overhaul:** Research and teaching quality have declined, and Vice-Chancellor appointments are stalled due to ambiguity over the Governor's powers.
 - ♦ Filling vacancies requires UGC procedures, qualified faculty, and budgetary support, while corruption and **political appointments have impacted quality.**
- **Energy:** India signed a \$3 billion deal to buy liquefied natural gas from the United Arab Emirates, making it the UAE's top customer.
- **Bilateral Trade:** The two sides agreed to double bilateral trade to over US\$ 200 billion by 2032.
- **Nuclear Cooperation:** It was agreed to develop a partnership in advanced nuclear technologies, including development and deployment of large nuclear reactors and Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and cooperation in advanced reactor systems, nuclear power plant operations and maintenance.

Directives of Supreme Court

- **Faculty and administration vacancies:** All vacant teaching posts must be filled within four months; Vice-Chancellors and Registrars must be appointed within one month.
- **Scholarships:** Pending scholarship disbursements must be cleared within four months, and future disbursements must follow clear timelines.
- **Healthcare access:** Residential HEIs must ensure 24x7 access to qualified medical help, either on campus or within 1 km.
- **Data and reporting:** HEIs must report all student suicides or unnatural deaths, on-campus or off-campus to the police.
 - ♦ The Sample Registration System and National Crime Records Bureau should maintain and distinguish data on student suicides by higher education level.
- **Institutional accountability:** HEIs are responsible for creating safe, equitable, inclusive, and conducive learning environments.
- **Implementation:** Union and State governments must ensure all directions are communicated and acted upon promptly.
 - ♦ The court stressed that quantitative growth in higher education must be matched with institutional support and student welfare measures to prevent ongoing distress.
- **Investment:** Letter of Intent on Investment Cooperation between Gujarat, India and the United Arab Emirates for Development of **Dholera Special Investment region.**
- **Establishment of a supercomputing cluster in India:** It has been agreed in principle that C-DAC India and G-42 company of the UAE will collaborate to set up a supercomputing cluster in India.
- **Space:** Letter of Intent between the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) of India and the Space Agency of the United Arab Emirates for a Joint Initiative to Enable Space Industry Development and Commercial Collaboration.

Significance of the Visit

- **Strategic & Geopolitical Significance:** It comes in the backdrop of the **sharp** escalation in tensions between the UAE and Saudi Arabia over Yemen.
 - ♦ Signals UAE's support for India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Economic & Trade Cooperation:** Builds momentum around the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). UAE is among India's top trading partners and major investors.
- **Regional Security Realignments:** The speculation of a new Islamic Nato comprising Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, along with Turkey, is also of great concern to the UAE.
 - ♦ This has left the UAE to look for an independent security partner in India.
- **Concerns Related to Iran:** The UAE has a strong interest in preventing further escalation involving Iran, as any military confrontation could destabilise the entire Gulf region.
 - ♦ India's balanced diplomacy and goodwill with regional stakeholders are seen as stabilising factors contributing to regional de-escalation.
- **Invitation to Board of Peace:** US has invited India to join the "Board of Peace", the body formed and led by the US to oversee peace and reconstruction in Gaza.

Source :TH

PRESIDENT OF UAE VISIT TO INDIA

Context

- President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan paid an official visit to India.

Major Outcomes

- **Defence:** Letter of Intent between India and the United Arab Emirates on the **Strategic Defence Partnership.**

- ♦ UAE is a part of this Board however India has not accepted the invitation, many view this visit as a way to convince India to join suit.
- **People-Centric Ties:** With 3.5 million Indian expatriates in UAE, this emphasis on labour mobility, skill exchanges, and cultural links.

Bilateral Ties Between India and UAE

- **Political:** India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established diplomatic relations in 1972.
 - ♦ Relationships were upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2017.
- **Economic & Commercial:** CEPA was signed in 2022, since the agreement, bilateral merchandise trade has nearly doubled from USD 43.3 billion in FY 2020-21 to USD 83.7 billion in FY 2023-24.
 - ♦ UAE is the second largest export destination of India (after the US) with an amount of nearly US\$ 31.61 billion for the year 2022-23.
 - ♦ Bilateral trade is expected to surpass \$97 billion, with targets to hit \$100 billion in non-oil trade.
- **Defence cooperation:** It is steered through a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) at the Ministry level, with the signing of Agreement on Defence Cooperation in 2003, which came into effect in 2004.
 - ♦ Extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties to combat transnational crime.
- **Space Cooperation:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the UAE Space Agency signed an MoU regarding cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes in 2016.
- **Indian Community:** Indian expatriate community of approximately 3.5 million is the largest ethnic community in UAE constituting roughly about 35% of the country's population.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** India and the UAE are currently part of several plurilateral platforms such as India-Middle East EU Economic Corridor (IMEC), I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) and UFI (UAE-France-India) Trilateral, etc.

Challenges

- **Trade Imbalances:** India has a trade deficit with the UAE, primarily due to high oil imports from the UAE, which makes the economic relationship uneven despite growing non-oil trade.
- **Geopolitical Tensions in the Region:** Political instability in the Middle East and the Gulf region affect bilateral relations, especially with India's strategic interests in the region.
- **Labor and Migration Issues:** India is one of the largest sources of migrant labor in the UAE, and

issues related to the welfare and rights of Indian workers have been a point of concern.

- **Foreign Policy of UAE:** India's relations with countries like Iran and Pakistan sometimes complicate its relations with the UAE, which maintains different strategic priorities in the region.

Way Ahead

- The visit aims to strengthen trade, defence, energy, technology, and people-to-people ties.
- Both the countries focus on scaling up defence ties, including training exchanges and increased collaboration between defence industries.
- Strengthened ties through the large Indian diaspora in the UAE, facilitating cultural exchange and collaboration in various sectors.

Source: MEA

CHILD TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

Context

- Child trafficking continues to be a grave human rights challenge in India, despite a robust constitutional framework and multiple statutory protections.

What is Child Trafficking?

- **The Palermo Protocol** (UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children), 2000 defines child trafficking as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.'
- **Section 143 of Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023** defines trafficking as; recruitment, transportation, harbouring, transfer or receipt of persons for exploitation.
 - ♦ **The means** include threats, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or inducement.
 - ♦ **Scope of exploitation** includes, physical and sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude and forced labour, forced removal of organs.
 - ♦ The definition covers trafficking irrespective of consent.

Reasons for Child Trafficking

- **Poverty:** Individuals and families living in poverty are more susceptible to the false promises of traffickers who offer better opportunities and livelihoods.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Low literacy levels and limited awareness make people, especially in rural areas, more vulnerable to deception and exploitation.

- **Migration:** Unregulated migration, both domestic and international, creates opportunities for traffickers to target individuals who are disconnected from their support networks.
- **Inadequate training of law enforcement agencies,** and corruption exacerbate the challenges of effectively addressing trafficking.

Constitutional Safeguards in India

- **Article 21:** Ensures the right to life and personal liberty, which has been interpreted to include the right to live with dignity.
- **Article 23:** Prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labor.
- **Article 24:** Prohibits employment of children below 14 years in hazardous industries.
- **Article 39(e):** The state should ensure that the health and strength of workers and children are not abused, and that citizens are not forced to take jobs that are not suitable for their age or strength.
- **Article 39(f):** Mandates opportunities for children to develop in conditions of freedom, dignity, and protection from moral and material abandonment.

Judicial Intervention against child trafficking

- In **Vishal Jeet versus Union of India, 1990** the court held that trafficking and child prostitution are serious socio-economic problems and hence a preventive and humanistic approach is essential to deal with them.
- In **M. C. Mehta versus State of Tamil Nadu, 1996**, the Court issued guidelines with a view to prohibiting employment of children in hazardous industries.
- In **Bachpan Bachao Andolan versus Union of India, 2011**, the Supreme court issued directions to address widespread exploitation and trafficking of children.
- The Supreme Court in **K. P. Kiran Kumar versus State** has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Laws governing anti-trafficking crimes

- **The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956** is targeted at stopping immoral trafficking and sex work. It went through two amendments, in 1978 and 1986.
- **The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**, prevents children from partaking in certain employments and regulates the conditions of work for children in other fields.
- **The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976**, prohibits systems of labour where people,

including children, work under conditions of servitude to pay off debt, and also provides a framework for rehabilitating released labourers.

- **The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015**, which governs laws relating to children alleged and found to be in conflict with law.
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**, which seeks to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Way Ahead

- **Enhance digital surveillance and awareness** to counter online recruitment.
- **Improve investigation and prosecution quality** to raise conviction rates.
- **Ensure victim-centric rehabilitation**, including psychological care, education and livelihood support.
- **Deepen Centre-State coordination** through joint task forces, shared databases and capacity building.

Source: TH

RBI PROPOSES LINKING BRICS DIGITAL CURRENCIES TO EASE CROSS-BORDER TRADE

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended that the **linkage of BRICS Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs)** be placed on the agenda of the **2026 BRICS Summit** to simplify **cross-border trade, tourism, and payment settlements**, which India will host later this year.

Background: Linking CBDCs to BRICS Nations

- **Rio de Janeiro BRICS Declaration (2025):** It emphasized interoperability among member nations' payment systems.
- India has long advocated for **digital payment integration** through its digital rupee (e₹), already tested in **offline transactions, programmable payments, and fintech wallet integration**.

Objectives The Proposed BRICS CBDC Linkage

- **Facilitate Cross-Border Payments:** Enabling instant, low-cost transactions across member nations for trade, tourism, and investment.
- **Reduce Dollar Dependence:** Offering an alternative settlement mechanism that bypasses the US dollar-dominated global system.
- **Strengthen Financial Sovereignty:** Enhancing each member's control over its monetary policy and cross-border financial flows.

- **Promote Technological Cooperation:** Building shared digital infrastructure and setting global standards for CBDC interoperability.
- It envisions a **digitally connected ecosystem** where the central banks of **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**, along with **newer BRICS members** such as **Iran, the UAE, and Indonesia** can settle trade and tourism payments seamlessly through their respective CBDCs.
 - ♦ If approved, this would be the **first formal proposal to interlink digital currencies among BRICS members**, signaling a new era of financial collaboration.
- **Interoperability Standards:** Ensuring that different CBDC systems can communicate seamlessly.
- **Governance and Regulation:** Defining oversight mechanisms and data-sharing protocols.
- **Trade Settlement Imbalances:** Managing uneven trade flows, possibly through **bilateral foreign exchange swaps**.
- **Cybersecurity and Privacy:** Safeguarding transactions across multiple national jurisdictions.
 - ♦ **Technological sovereignty concerns** may slow down progress, as some nations might hesitate to adopt digital platforms designed by others.

Technical Framework and Implementation Challenges

Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDCs)

- It is a **digitally issued legal tender**, equivalent in value to cash and traditional bank deposits.
 - ♦ It exists purely in electronic form and is directly controlled by a nation's central bank.
- CBDCs are designed to **improve payment efficiency, financial inclusion, and monetary control**, unlike cryptocurrencies.

Types of CBDCs

- **Retail CBDCs:** Designed for **public use**, allowing individuals and businesses to conduct daily transactions.
 - ♦ Example: India's *e-rupee*, China's *Digital Yuan (e-CNY)*.
- **Wholesale CBDCs:** Used by **financial institutions** for interbank settlements, cross-border payments, and high-value transactions.
 - ♦ Example: Projects run by the **Bank for International Settlements (BIS)** and **Singapore's Project Ubin**.

Global Developments in CBDCs

- Nearly **130 countries**, representing over **98% of global GDP**, are exploring CBDCs in some form.
- Key examples include:
 - ♦ **European Union:** The *Digital Euro* is under development to ensure payment sovereignty within the Eurozone.
 - ♦ **Bahamas:** The *Sand Dollar* was the first fully launched CBDC in the world.
 - ♦ **Nigeria:** The *eNaira* aims to strengthen domestic and international financial inclusion.

State of Digital Currencies in BRICS Nations

- None of the BRICS members have **fully launched** their CBDCs till now, but all are running **pilot projects**:
 - ♦ **China:** The *Digital Yuan* is the most advanced among major economies, tested across cities for retail and public use.
 - ♦ **India:** The *Digital Rupee (e₹)* has entered pilot phases for both wholesale and retail transactions.
 - ♦ **Brazil, Russia, and South Africa** are conducting **pilot programs** for their respective CBDCs.

CBDCs vs. Stablecoins: India's Position

- India continues to promote the **e-rupee as a safer alternative** while global enthusiasm for CBDCs has moderated amid the rise of **stablecoins**.
- Recently RBI has warned that **stablecoins** 'raise significant concerns for monetary stability, fiscal policy, and systemic resilience', emphasizing that

CBDCs are state-backed, regulated, and more transparent.

Learning from Past Currency Collaboration Attempts

- Past efforts by BRICS countries to settle trade in local currencies, particularly between **India and Russia** have met obstacles.

- Russia's accumulation of surplus rupees with limited usability led to **regulatory adjustments by the RBI**, allowing the investment of rupee balances in **Indian government securities**.
- The CBDC framework may involve **regular (weekly or monthly) settlements through swap arrangements**, ensuring liquidity balance among participants to avoid similar issues.

Looking Ahead: A Long Road to Integration

- Though still at a conceptual stage, the **BRICS CBDC linkage** could redefine how emerging markets conduct international trade. If successfully implemented, it would:
 - ♦ Enhance **transactional efficiency**;
 - ♦ Support **currency diversification**;
 - ♦ Strengthen **regional economic integration**;
- However, its realization depends on **political will, technical collaboration, and regulatory harmonization** among a diverse group of economies.

Source: TH

RBI STRENGTHENS PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING (PSL) OVERSIGHT

In News

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a comprehensive set of amendments to the **Priority Sector Lending (PSL) – Targets and Classification Directions, 2025**.

About Priority Sector Lending

- It is an RBI-mandated policy that requires banks to direct a **portion of their lending to key development sectors** such as agriculture, education, housing, and small industries to support national growth.
- The latest revision enhances credit flow to key sectors such as Renewable Energy, Social Infrastructure, Education, and MSMEs, and strengthens support for vulnerable groups.

Key Features of the PSL Directions, 2025

- **Enhanced Compliance Framework:** Banks must secure external auditor certification (or CAG-empanelled auditors for entities like NCDC) to verify PSL claims and prevent double-counting of exposures between originating banks and intermediaries like NBFCs or cooperatives.
- **Revised targets for Small Finance Banks:** The PSL requirement for Small Finance Banks (SFBs) has been rationalised from 75% to 60% of Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC), reflecting a calibrated regulatory approach to balance inclusion goals with financial stability.

- **Inclusion of NCDC for rural credit:** Loans extended by banks to the National Cooperative Development Corporation for on-lending to cooperative societies are now formally recognised as Priority Sector Lending, strengthening cooperative-based rural and agricultural credit.
- **Co-lending flexibility:** Banks are permitted to enter co-lending arrangements with other financial intermediaries to meet PSL targets, promoting risk sharing and improved last-mile credit delivery.
- **Export credit as PSL:** Export credit provided to agriculture and MSMEs can be treated as PSL, aligning priority sector policy with export promotion and employment generation objectives.

Source :FE

NEWS IN SHORT

BAGURUMBA DANCE

Context

- The Prime Minister visited **Assam** and attended the **Bagurumba Dhou 2026**.

About

- **Bagurumba**, often referred to as the “**butterfly dance**”, is one of the most **significant and graceful folk dances of Assam**.
 - ♦ It is a **mass folk dance** of the **Bodo community**.
- It was **traditionally performed by young women**, the dance symbolises harmony with nature, celebrating themes of fertility, peace and joy.
 - ♦ The **fluid hand movements and gentle footwork** mirror the flight of butterflies, reflecting the community's close bond with the natural world.
- The dance is closely associated with the **Bwisagu festival**, which marks the **Bodo New Year and the advent of spring**.
- Its **music**, led by the **bamboo flute-like Sifung**, the **rhythmic Kham drum** and the **resonant Serja**, adds depth and emotion to the performance.

Source: TH

KAMCHATKA PENINSULA

In News

- A severe winter storm has brought life to a standstill across the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's Far East, with heavy snowfall burying streets and homes.

About

- Kamchatka forms part of Russia's Far Eastern Federal District and constitutes Kamchatka Krai, with a sparse population of about 322,000.
- It is 1,250-km-long peninsula located between the Sea of Okhotsk (west), Pacific Ocean, and Bering Sea (east), featuring the Sredinny (Central) and Vostochny (Eastern) Ranges with 29 active volcanoes in the UNESCO-listed Volcanoes of Kamchatka.
- The Kamchatka River flows through a central valley.



Source: TH

RESPONSIBLE NATIONS INDEX (RNI)**In News**

- India has recently introduced the Responsible Nations Index (RNI)

About

- The Responsible Nations Index (RNI) is a global benchmarking framework that shifts the focus from mere economic power to ethical governance, sustainability, and global responsibility in assessing national performance.
- The index evaluates countries across four core dimensions ethical governance, social well-being, environmental stewardship & global responsibility
- It is developed by World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) & Indian Institute of Management Mumbai.
- Singapore, Switzerland & Denmark topped the list & India ranks 16th globally.

Source: PIB

SOCIAL COMMERCE**Context**

- In India, despite strong potential, social commerce contributes only **1–2%** of total e-commerce revenue, compared to 30–40% in China and 20–25% in Indonesia.

What is Social Commerce?

- Social commerce refers to the **buying and selling of goods directly through social media platforms**.
 - ♦ Consumers discover products while browsing social media and complete the purchase without shifting to traditional e-commerce platforms.
- It combines **social interaction** (influencers, live videos, community groups) with online shopping.
 - ♦ **Influencer-led selling:** Products are promoted by creators whom consumers trust.
 - ♦ **Live-stream shopping:** Sellers demonstrate products in real time and interact with buyers.
 - ♦ **Community-based selling:** Products are sold through WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, or regional social networks.

Difference Between E-commerce and Social Commerce

- Traditional e-commerce is **search-driven and platform-centric**, whereas social commerce is **discovery-driven and trust-centric**.
- E-commerce involves **planned purchases**, whereas social commerce encourages **impulse buying**.

Key Challenges Hindering Growth in India

- **Weak authenticity checks** in India's influencer ecosystem, unlike China's strict credibility norms, undermine consumer trust.
- High dependence on **cash on delivery** strains platform finances.
- **Weak logistics and digital infrastructure** restrict scale and speed.
- **Fragmented retail market** and low order values reduce profitability.

Source: LM

INDIA'S FIRST OPEN-SEA MARINE FISH FARMING PROJECT**Context**

- India's first open-sea marine fish farming project was launched at **North Bay in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

About

- **Objective:** The primary goal is to transition towards a **commercially viable model for open-sea farming**, reduce pressure on traditional coastal fishing, and generate sustainable livelihoods for local fishing communities.
- **Target Species:** The initiative focuses on cultivating high-value marine finfish species like

Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*) and Seabass (*Lates calcarifer*), alongside experimental deep-water seaweed cultivation.

- **Implementing Agencies:** The project is a collaboration between the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands administration.
- **Technology:** The project uses advanced, indigenously developed open-sea cages designed by NIOT to withstand natural oceanic conditions.

About Andaman Sea

- The Andaman Sea, a marginal sea in the **northeastern Indian Ocean**, holds historical trade significance and strategic value for maritime routes and regional biodiversity.
- It controls key chokepoints like the **Ten Degree Channel and Six Degree Channel**, vital for 25% of global trade via Malacca Strait.

Source: PIB

NEW STATE OF MATTER IS A SOLID-LIQUID HYBRID

Context

- **Scientists** have reported a new state of matter appears to be a **solid-liquid hybrid**.

About

- It is a **new nanoscale state of matter** where a **single metal nanoparticle** simultaneously exhibits **solid-like and liquid-like atomic behaviour**, challenging the sharp solid-liquid distinction.
 - ♦ The **nanoparticle** displays the **properties of solids and liquids both**, but also unique behaviours that neither a **pure liquid nor a pure solid would display on its own**.
- The team used a technique called **high-resolution transmission electron (HRTE)** microscopy to observe nanoparticles.

- **The findings suggest** that the boundary between solid and liquid phases at the **nanoscale isn't as distinct** as scientists have thought it to be.
 - ♦ The most significant novel property the nanoparticle exhibited was the ability to **remain liquid at temperatures far below the normal freezing point**.
- **Practical significance:** This behaviour could revolutionise heterogeneous catalysts (e.g., platinum-on-carbon), improving durability by preventing particle clumping and poisoning while retaining highly active liquid or amorphous states—vital for fuel cells, hydrogen vehicles, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and pollution control.

Source: TH

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND

In News

- The Union Government has formally notified **comprehensive rules governing the administration and utilisation** of the Environmental (Protection) Fund.

About Environmental (Protection) Fund

- The Environmental (Protection) Fund is a **statutory**, dedicated fund under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, meant to channel monetary penalties from environmental violations into pollution control, restoration, monitoring, research, and capacity building.
- It is **administered by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** or any body notified by the Central Government
- **75% of penalty proceeds transferred to the Consolidated Fund** of the State/UT, 25% retained by the Centre.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) to audit the Fund.

Source: TOI

